

Grow Strong Relationships – with Community, Partners, and Decision-Makers

- Growing strong and trusting relationships is the spark to community change. It is ongoing action that takes time and attention to connect with partners and in real and authentic ways.
- Authentic Relationship Building (ARB) is a way think about your relationships before, during, and after connecting to think about how you want to build be with neighbors, partners, decision-makers, and community.
- Build Strong Relationships with those who [2]:
 - Will be most **impacted**
 - Have **experience and expertise** with the problem you're trying to solve
 - Will likely anticipate **risks and problems** that you might miss
 - Have **desires or considerations** that might be in the minority or be different from yours
 - Have **personal identities, experiences, or roles** that may be on the margins of your team
 - Have been historically **left out** of similar decision-making processes

River point: Current – clarifying out roles and responsibilities for coalition members and partners is important to pull any Lever.

Strengths & Skills that can pull lever:

- Relationship Building & Feeling
- Influencing & Motivating
- Thinking & Strategy
- Doing & Executing

Decision-Making Power: Community

Relationship building is the foundation of community change. It is an ongoing process that takes time and investment, as well as connection with community partners and members in real and authentic ways. Whether it is a new-to-you community, or a community that you are a part of, it takes time, care, and intentionality. Here are our tips for building relationships:

- Create a realistic timeline which accounts for the time needed to build relationships - even in your community.
- Create concrete goals and build time into your schedule for explicit relationship-building activities.
- Map out who you want to be relationships with, including community members, nonprofit and other community-based organizations, businesses and other local influencers, and municipal decision-makers. Check out the next page to help you map out your relationships.

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Map your relationships across the [Seven Vital Conditions for Health & Wellbeing](#) to move your vision to action, thinking about who you should have trusting, authentic, and reciprocal relationships with. Across all of the categories, think about **Community Members; Organizations, Faith-Groups, and Nonprofits; Influencers** (medical facilities, colleges, local businesses), and **Decision-Makers**.

	Who is most impacted by your vision & goals?	Who has experience and expertise with your vision & goals?	Who has identities, experiences, or roles that may be different than you or your team?	Who has historically been left out of similar decision-making processes?
<p>Work & Wealth: meaningful local work, good paying jobs, financial security.</p> <p>Examples: workforce development, local businesses, unions, social service/basic needs orgs)</p>				
<p>Housing: safe, affordable housing; safe neighborhoods; robust community.</p> <p>Examples: local housing agency; local (good) landlord; community gardens person, neighborhood alliances)</p>				
<p>Belonging & Civic Muscle: social support, community engagement, healthy community.</p> <p>Examples: faith, senior centers, community centers, YMCAs & YWCAs racial justice groups.</p>				

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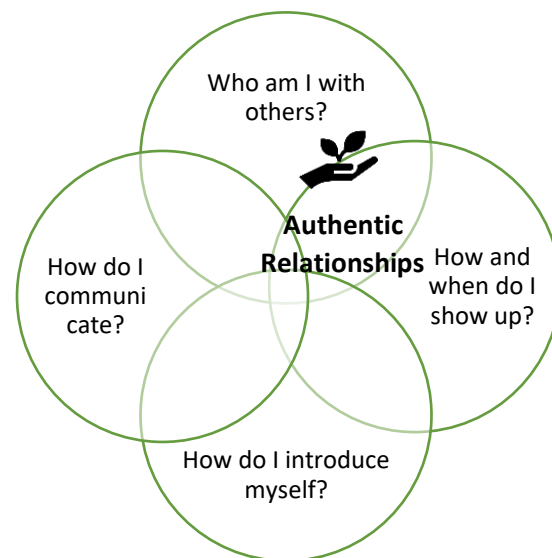


<p>Lifelong Learning: cradle to career learning opportunities; career training; higher education.</p> <p>Examples: PTAs, post-secondary, libraries, workforce, boys & girls clubs.</p>				
<p>Thriving Natural World: clean air, clean water, clean land.</p> <p>Examples: environmental justice nonprofit, waterkeepers, tree or community gardens.</p>				
<p>Health & Safety: freedom from trauma, violence, and addiction; public health care; food.</p> <p>Examples: public health, local health center, addiction or mental health services, domestic violence shelters.</p>				
<p>Transportation: safe walking; safe biking; access to public transit.</p> <p>Examples: biking advocate; walking club; local transit.</p>				

Build Authentic Relationships

Authentic Relationship Building (ARB) [1] is a reflective practice that can be used before, during, and after connecting with others to think intentionally about how you want to build relationships with individuals, partners, and community.

- It involves ideas to internally reflect upon, and active steps to take, say, and do to build strong, reciprocal and respectful relationships with community partners and members.
- ARB allows you to share layers of yourself to form connections with others, helps you be aware of your own needs and the needs of community members, helps you facilitate conversations effectively, and helps navigate power dynamics while being aware of your own safety and levels of support present.
- The layers of yourself that you share may look different from relationship to relationship



Who you are with others: How you choose to define yourself, including your identities, personality, culture(s), spirits, or character, when building relationships. Reflect upon:

- What role(s) do you hold?
- What relationships do you have or have had with the person you are talking to, and how you have tended to those relationships previously?
- What perceptions of your organization are present?
- What parts of yourself do you want to share?
- Are there parts of yourself that you do not want to share – for your own safety or personal needs?
- Are there parts of yourself that will be noticed regardless of if you want to share them or not? What are ways you can feel safe and supported around these?

How you introduce yourself: The immediate pieces of yourself you share to create connection. Reflect upon:

- What values, identities, histories, or experiences do I share with this group that will lead to trust and connection right away?

How you communicate: Think about the important values and characteristics of the audience you are talking to - not only what you say but how you say it. Consider the communication methods you prefer and those that the community members you are communicating with prefer, the words you choose, formality, etc. Reflect upon:

- Different learning styles, literacy levels, ages, culture(s), values, customs, languages, trauma, accessibility considerations, and other needs that the group may have.

How and when you show up: Showing up on an ongoing basis for partners, participants, and community can lead to a true connection and deepen relationships over time. This means physically showing up to support community events, work, or advocacy needs, as well as being invested in other ways. Reflect upon:

- How do you support the work of your partners on an ongoing basis?
- How do you continue to stay engaged beyond this specific project?
- How can you speak up for common goals or intersecting issues?
- Are there people or communities that are missing from your partnerships? In what ways can you begin to build authentic relationships with them?

Engage your Relationships and Community

- Growing strong and trusting relationships is the spark to community change. It is ongoing action that takes time and attention to connect with partners and in real and authentic ways.
- Community engagement is the next step of relationship building. Once you have a big, bold, and diverse table, it's time to engage those relationships to move the issue and energy forward!

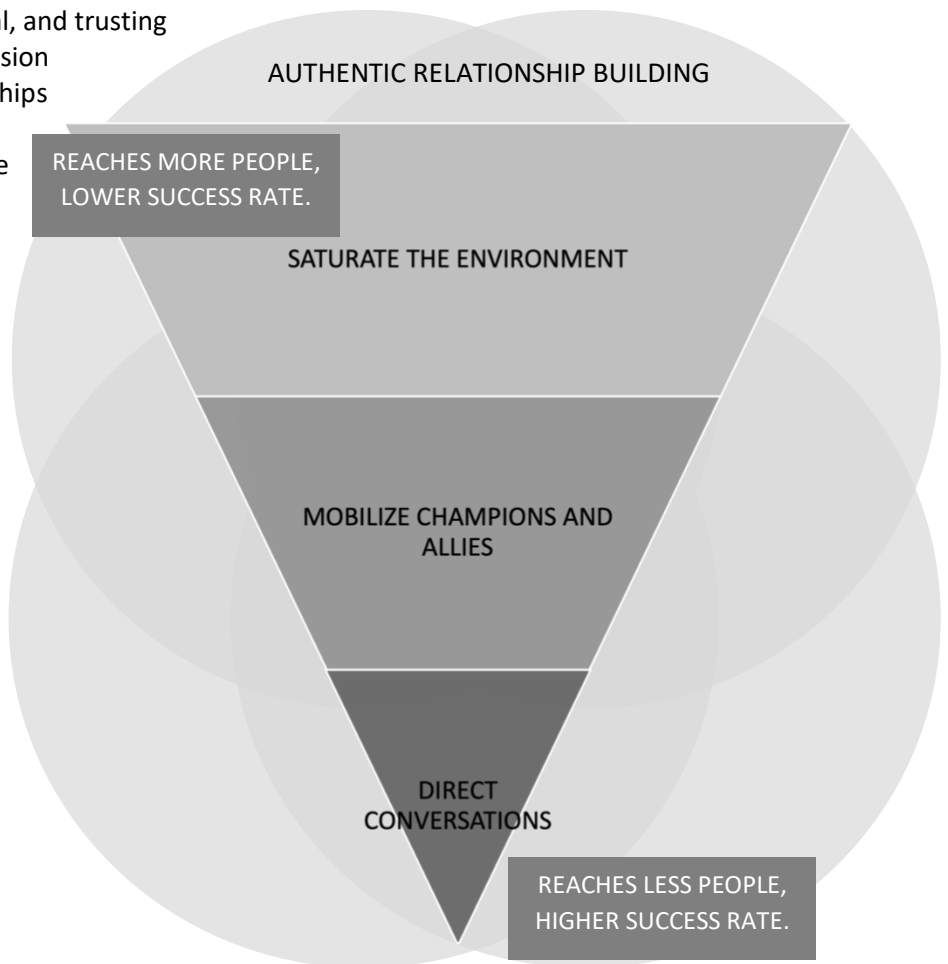
River point: Current – clarifying out roles and responsibilities for coalition members and partners is important to pull any Lever.

Strengths & Skills that can pull lever:

- **Feelings & Relationship Building**

Decision-Making Power: Community

Once you have authentic, reciprocal, and trusting relationships, you can move your vision forward by bringing those relationships into the issues and vision you care about. It can often feel like you are "swimming" in engagement - constantly trying all sorts of outreach but not feeling much success. The Engagement Pyramid (1) can provide some structure to your efforts. At all levels of the pyramid, authentic relationship building (2) is that foundation that reinforces and strengthens community engagement and energy.



Saturate the Environment

The first level of the engagement pyramid includes activities to ensure that all members in the community know about your vision and work - even those who may not be your direct audience. The more familiar communities are with your vision, the more likely they are to listen when they hear someone talking about it in the future. Saturation makes it more likely that potential community members respond to the activities on the lower levels of the pyramid - it's a primer. Saturation is important, but on its own leads to few community members ultimately engaged in your work.

Examples include: radio announcements, social media campaigns, posting flyers, tabling at community events, announcements on school intercoms, and blurbs in newspapers and TV.

Mobilize Champions and Allies

Finding a community champion and a great partner who put the "stamp of approval" on your vision and work is one of the best engagement strategies that leads community to engage with your vision and work.

Who are the strongest champions?

- Neighbors and other community members
- Principals, Counselors, Teachers
- Religious leaders
- Community or cultural leaders or elders
- Direct service providers
- Medical providers
- Business leaders
- Youth
- Coaches

What are the strengths of champions?

- Involved
- Passionate
- Trusted
- Respected
- Connected
- Enthusiastic
- Believe in the same vision and goals

Engage and support champions by:

- Growing strong relationships and trust.
- Ensuring reciprocal partnerships - participating in, volunteering with, and uplifting the work they are doing.
- Meeting with them in person for face-to-face time.
- Giving them printed and/or electronic information they can easily share.
- Making a specific request & giving them a time frame.
- Leaving a very small gift or like bringing coffee, or other goodies.
- Following up to ask how their outreach went and providing additional support or tools.
- Sending a thank-you note and sharing an outcome of their support.

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Direct Conversations

Sharing your passion, stories, and knowledge is another very successful strategy to get people engaged. Asking questions and getting to know those you are talking with is an important part of engaging potential participants, as is responding directly to their experiences and needs and continuing to build authentic relationships.

You can set up a fun table at a community location, host a lunch-time pizza party, and talk with larger groups to share pictures, treats, and lots of great stories about how your vision could support their family and the larger community. One last important lesson learned: remember to collect contact information from anyone who shows any interest so you can continue the conversation later.

Locations for direct conversations included: Faith-based institutional gatherings, sporting events, at local restaurants and supportive businesses, community fairs, mini-presentations (such as a short art, activity, storybook, or game) in classrooms or with youth groups, community hubs, or cultural events.

The Sign-Up List & Follow-Through

It is very important to stay in touch with those people who expressed interest in your vision. Follow up with interested individuals after the initial contact through phone, text, and email. A few tips:

- Follow through on anything you said you would do.
- Create a contact list of anyone who shows interest in joining, making sure to include multiple ways to get in touch with them.
- Build reciprocity - show up and support their interest, passions, and work.
- Engaging for specific event(s):
 - Follow-up 2-3 times through phone calls, text, or email, plus a final text, call or email the day before the event.
 - Gauge their level of commitment, set the expectation that they will be there, and preempt barriers by using some of the following prompts:
 - "I know that folks are busy! How can I help you be able to come?"
 - "We will be ordering lunch for everyone. What food requests/dietary needs do you have?"
 - "Most folks ask us to text/email/call a few days before with a reminder. What type of reminder do you want from me?"
 - "Text/call/email me back with your favorite candy and a Y/N to confirm that you'll be there!"

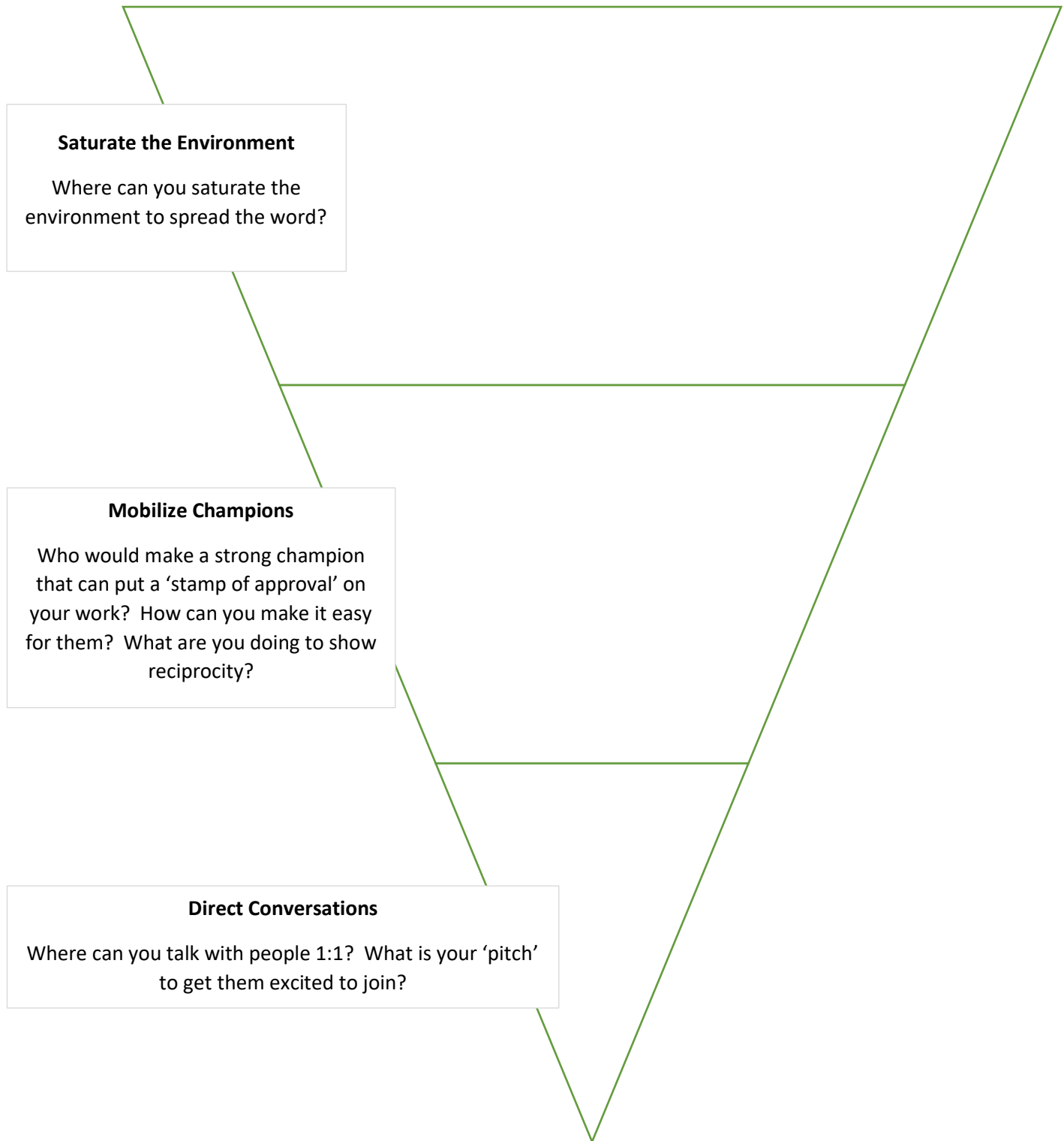
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Use this blank engagement triangle to plan your engagement activities. Make sure to continue [growing strong relationships](#) with new partners as part of your pyramid.



References and Resources

1. Authentic Relationship Building was developed by Grace Caligtan, Linda Guijosa, with additional credit to Faster than 20 (<https://fasterthan20.com>) and Dr. Sara Flowers as part of the Linking Families and Teens program.
2. Using Fair Process to Make Better Decisions. (Oct 21, 2021). The Management Center. https://www.managementcenter.org/resources/using-fair-process-to-make-better-decisions-a-quick-start-guide/?utm_source=Management+Center+Resources&utm_campaign=d9ba32c8bb-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_05_06_01_02_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c9e85c2aa3-d9ba32c8bb-410504448
3. Linking Families and Teens was developed by Planned Parenthood of the Great Northwest and the Hawaiian Islands with the goal of increasing family connection in rural communities in the Pacific Northwest. More information can be found at: <https://sparked.net/lift/>.