



SYSTEMS APPROACHES FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Community Perspectives Quick Guide

BACKGROUND

Using this *Community Perspectives Quick Guide*, participants in a group activity take on designated community member roles and participate in a mock community meeting. Participants are encouraged to see health promotion challenges in their community from a fresh perspective.

Annette Shepardson, a SNAP-Ed educator in Minnesota, developed this activity to show how each individual brings unique resources to a group. This activity aims to help participants learn how to identify these resources and bring an asset-based approach to their work with community partners for the common good.

Facilitators may use this activity with a variety of audiences, such as community networks, focus groups, and collaborative partners in health promotion. This activity is an engaging way to explore new ways of thinking in a safe environment.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By participating in this activity, participants will practice:

- Embracing and valuing differences in a group.
- Identifying resources and assets that can contribute to reaching common goals.
- Developing better listening skills.

MATERIALS

As a facilitator, you will need the following materials for this activity:

- “Community Perspectives Character cards”
- Paper flipcharts, at least one sheet per group.
- Markers, three per group.
- Chairs for all participants.
- Enough floor space to accommodate the necessary number of groups, as described below.

PREPARATION BEFORE THE ACTIVITY

Complete the following tasks to prepare for this activity:

- Determine the number of groups to prepare for, based on the total number of participants you expect to join the activity. Each group for this activity can have up to 11 participants. You may

have as many or as few groups as needed, and may leave out cards for smaller groups. The following instructions describe preparing for 33 participants in three groups.

- Print three sets of Character cards and fold each sheet in half along the dotted line.
- Set up space for three groups around the room by arranging three circles of 11 chairs for each group.
- Provide each group with a sheet of flipchart paper. Using a marker, write “Community Insights” at the top of each sheet. Label each group’s sheet with a number 1, 2, or 3.
- Provide each group with a set of Character cards.

Note: You may adapt this activity to meet your needs. The following “Facilitator Instructions” are based on the topic of food insecurity, but you may focus on any topic that is relevant to your audience. Depending on the size of your group, this activity should take about 15 to 20 minutes.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS

Follow these steps to conduct the activity:

- Divide the full group into three smaller groups by counting off 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3. The groups do not need to be the same size.
- Ask participants to go to their numbered station, take a Character card, and sit down.
- Ask one person in each group to serve as note-taker and record participants’ comments on their group’s “Community Insights” flipchart.
- Before getting started, explain the activity to the full group, saying something like: “Today we are going to gather as members of a fictional community. We will get to know each other and share what assets we bring to the table and what barriers we are facing. Our topic for discussion will be food insecurity. After listening to each other, please share any thoughts, observations, or insights with your small group. The idea is simply to engage with each other and build relationships.”
- Allow about 5 minutes for each participant to read information on their Character card and share their character with their small group. For example, a participant drawing the “Farmer” card would say: “I am an organic farmer. Assets I have are growing a variety of organic produce and hosting educational tours on my farm. A barrier I face is difficulty distributing my produce locally at places other than at the farmers market. I’d like to distribute my produce to more people in the community so they have healthy food.”
- After all participants have read their cards, allow 10 minutes for each small group to discuss food insecurity from the perspective of the fictional character on their cards. Ask a note taker to document the conversation in each group, writing any insights on the flipchart paper. For example, the food shelf director who lacks computer skills to promote fresh produce via social media learns that the high school honors student in the group is willing to help with this.

- Next, instruct all participants to “step out” of their character roles and talk about insights they gained from discussing food insecurity as their character. Give each group about five minutes to have this discussion.
- As the facilitator, listen in on each small group. If a group is quiet about offering insights, provide the following discussion prompts. You may also choose to post these prompts in the room.
 - How has your understanding of food insecurity in this fictional community changed as a result of hearing these diverse community perspectives?
 - Did standing in a fictional character’s shoes help you see where you can be an asset and help someone else in the community overcome barriers?
 - How might your view of a community’s ability to address challenging issues change as a result of who is invited to share information about their assets and barriers?
 - If time allows, ask each small group to share one brief insight with the full group.