Reflections: Creating the ENACT Power & Partnership Ladder

ENACT Team: After utilizing the Power and Partnership Ladders well into the second year of their project, the ENACT Team reported finding both tools useful.

For purposes of this exercise, the project team defined “residents” as the emerging New American leaders who volunteered to take part in the 1.5-year leadership program. Of the Resident Power Ladder, they report: “It is a great tool to see the net change over the life of a project. It distills how much power residents and partners gained (or didn’t) in a concise, quick reflection. We set out to take ENACT fellows on a journey all the way up the ladder and this helped us confirm that in many ways we were successful.”

From the onset of their project, the ENACT team succeeded in bringing numerous and diverse community partners in to help produce the program. Partners range from large, established nonprofits to small, grassroots organizations which in some cases operated like voluntary resident associations. The team found that the Organizational Partnership Ladder distilled their experience around the work of engaging these partners. “We were hoping to bring several partners closer from information sources to advocates. It was tough work based on the size of the institutions with which we were partnered. It was also challenging because every partner was starting at their own location on the ladder and with their own willingness to move up it.”

For museums or libraries who’d like to use this tool to support their community catalyzing work, the team advises, “If you and your organization can’t learn to give up control, it will be reflected on this tool and in the results of your work.”

ABCD Team: In working with the ENACT Team on their Power and Partnership Ladders, ABCD Site Consultant Joe Erpenbeck writes:

- One of the first shifts came in how the [New American ENACT] participants wanted to be recognized. They changed from “participants” to “Fellows.”
- This discussion identified the impact that the conversation on gifts and assets had on the project. As the Fellows identified their gifts you could see the shift in possibility and control. It was now in the hands of each of them to design what they wanted to do and to build on the assets in their own community. Ben and Ibrahima commented this was the hope in the initial design and were happy to see how the Fellows took control, enlisted others and were leaders around what they care about in their neighborhood.
- This conversation solidified how much Ben, Ibrahima and the Ohio History Museum grasped and wrestled with the principles of ABCD as the project progressed. A Museum as I learned is typically not a nimble institution and can be set in its ways. There were the tensions that community builders within institutions often must navigate. This conversation pointed out how from the start the Museum was committed to this and some of the ways Ben and Ibrahima learned to operate and be flexible.
- For me this conversation solidified how much Ben, Ibrahima and the Ohio History Museum grasped and wrestled with the principles of ABCD as the project progressed. A Museum as I learned is typically not a nimble institution and can be set in its ways. There were the tensions that community builders within institutions often must navigate. This conversation pointed out how from the start the Museum was committed to this and some of the ways Ben and Ibrahima learned to operate and be flexible.
- This exercise and our conversation have impact for institutions and the organizers we sometimes refer to as “gappers” [individuals working “in the gap” between communities and institutions.]
Design, build and implement a community advocacy project.

Identified their gifts, community assets and ideas.

Define project topic, time, location, recipients and goals.

Develop worksheets and budgets.

Implement ideas with freedom.

Manage funds for projects before project launches.

E.N.A.C.T.

“Residents” are defined as...
The emerging New American leaders who volunteered to take part in the 1.5-year leadership program.

IN YEAR ONE

After day of advocacy, began to advocate around community challenges they were merely informing about before.

Share information with Project Staff via “pulse check” surveys to ensure the program and planning committee were creating a program that benefited them.

During the first year, their voice was a source of information to those teaching partners.

Renamed themselves “Fellows”.

AT PROJECT LAUNCH

Ask presenting organizations about the organization and about existing problems between their community and the institution.

Receive information from community institutions / organizations at workshops.
“Our planning committee partners helped us shape and build this program from the beginning. We benefited from having existing relationships so we could go to them with a very loose framework and trust them to be honest and open from the beginning. They were there from the beginning to hold us accountable and act as an advocate for the interests of the communities and fellows. Since OHC retained control of final decisions, we didn’t put them in the control area, but realistically, they had de facto veto power on decisions if they were concerned with the direction of the program.”

—Ben Anthony, OHC Staff

“We hope that these partners’ interaction with the fellows and New American Communities in Columbus encouraged them to move up the ladder to become advocates for immigrants and refugees in Central Ohio, but if that happens, it happens due to proximity and as a byproduct of engaging with these up and coming advocates rather than being a core goal of the program. Each partner comes into the grant at their own place on the ladder. Some are strictly information sources, while some are closer to being advocates in their daily work.”

—Ben Anthony, OHC Staff