

FACILITATOR'S NOTES

Authentic Interactions

Scene Study

Meeting Participants

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| Kim | Asian-American woman, director of programs with the organization for the past 2 years |
| Darron | African American man, volunteer with the organization for 3 years |
| Tracey | White woman, volunteer with the organization for 7 months |
| Jose | Latino man, ad hoc volunteer, community member |
| Gloria | White woman, staff with the organization for the last 2 years |

SECTION ONE

- 1 - Kim: Thank you all for coming. Now that we've had a chance to check in with each other for a few moments, I'd like to move to our agenda. Tonight's meeting is focused on our upcoming community event, the family film night. There's a lot that we need to do, so let's get started. One agenda item has to do with some community feedback.
- 2 - Darron: Yes, I've been hearing some people concerned about our planning process and outreach.
- 3 - Tracey: Well, I, for one think we've been doing a really good job at bringing community voices in. I mean, Jose has been coming regularly and we've been really responsive to what he's had to say.

Notice how quickly Tracey jumps to a defensive posture. A specific criticism hasn't even been suggested yet. But, Tracey is anticipating receiving difficult feedback and is trying to create a protective barrier against it at the start.

- 4 - Jose: I'm not the only important voice in the community though.

When Tracey names Jose as the way the group has been responsive, she puts him into a position of being the speaker of the community...as though one person represents the whole.

- 5 - Tracey: Of course, I know. But, I mean, we can only respond to issues that we hear.

She's right of course. But, hearing issues had a lot to do with our openness to receiving difficult messages. Also, there's a question around who is thinking about creating channels/systems for getting the feedback. Is it possible that better systems would be in place if someone more sensitive to the community were in charge? Does it seem that Tracey is likely to hear that message?

- 6 - Darron: Well, that's just it. There are things that we're hearing. And, one of the things we're hearing is that we've missed quite a lot that we could have known if we had asked the community for their ideas way in advance.

SECTION TWO

- 7 - Tracey: I'm just not sure how productive it is to worry about making every single person happy. I've talked to a lot of people who are really excited about this event. I've been the one who took up responsibility for outreach, remember, and I think we're going to have a really successful event.

Notice that Tracey has only been part of the group for 7 months and yet she did take up responsibility for outreach. She likely did that with really great intentions...But this exchange is demonstrating that there is more she needs to learn about doing this work effectively. This aspect of the meeting is intended to help her learn new skills, but she is highly resistant and her defensiveness leads her to dismiss voices from the community which could be the very ones she needs for her own development.

8 - Kim: The point of this part of the meeting is to hear what feedback is available so that we can do things better as we move forward. Darron has some things to share that we should listen to.

It is fair to say that Tracey was allowed to take up a big job and perhaps needed some more training before she took up a leadership position. That responsibility would rest with the director. Yet, as we are seeing, the director is trying to offer a learning opportunity here and is being met with resistance. This can be a challenging dynamic when an organization wants to make use of volunteer efforts, but must balance that with the need for skills building for those volunteers.

9 - Gloria: Yeah. It's really important to know what Darron's hearing. I mean if there's anything we can do better to get more people involved and comfortable with what we're doing, we've got to do it. I mean the people living in this community have so little to look forward to that it would be a shame for them to miss out on really great events because we didn't listen well enough.

Notice how Gloria is trying to bring Tracey back to the point of the agenda item and break through her defensiveness. Yet, the language she uses to describe the community would likely be highly offensive to anyone from the community itself. It has a strong "savior complex" flavor to it.

10 - Kim: Darron, why don't you go ahead and share what you have heard.

11 - Tracey: First, though, I just want to say that I understand why this process is necessary, but if we could just wait for a minute. I want to understand, if there's so little that the community has in terms of safe, healthy family community activities, then why would the community be so quick to criticize? I mean, shouldn't we really be spending our time continuing to get the word out instead of using our valuable time this way?

Here, Tracey is picking up on the point that Gloria has made --- which helps make this conversation really guided and led by the two white women --- as she continues to deflect the critiques that are about to come.

12 - Jose: The issue is not that there aren't good, fun things for people to do.

Notice how Jose's comments are brief, but in defense of his community. It is likely that this conversation is raising a lot of internal feelings regarding how his community is being perceived and treated by the two white women.

SECTION THREE

13 - Gloria: Let me clarify what I meant. I know the people who live around here have a lot of really rich cultural traditions. But, part of our job is to help offer things that aren't already part of their norm, you know, expanding awareness of what kinds of activities can support family and learning and all

that. So, whatever we need to do in order to be more effective, it's really important. And, that starts today with hearing what Darron has to say.

Again, there is something positive about how Gloria is responding, and yet, her approach betrays a sense of superiority that would be difficult for many people to listen to.

14 - Kim: Tracey, I understand that you've been doing the outreach, and so I can understand why you'd be sensitive about what must feel like criticism. But, we haven't even heard what Darron has to say yet, and I really feel that listening to community members is at the heart of what makes this organization successful and valuable.

Here we can see Kim taking a fairly soft approach to Tracey, ignoring Gloria's comments for the time being. We can imagine what type of frustration Kim might have if this were a pattern.

15 - Darron: Trust me on this, if we can't find more ways to bring community voices in to our planning process we are going to end up with a bad reputation and lose whatever energy we've got going.

16 - Jose: I think that's true. Although I've been part of the planning, that doesn't mean I speak for all parts of the community.

17 - Gloria: Besides, inviting the community to play a stronger role in our planning is also a way to help empower them. And that's really important too, since so many of them feel powerless in so many areas of their lives.

Here again we notice Gloria's framework for seeing the community betrays a sense of paternalism that likely plays out in many ways. She's trying to help...but doing some serious damage at the very same time.

18 - Kim: Ok, so I think we've spent enough time on this right now. While I think the issue of empowerment is far more complicated than you just stated, Gloria, I think it's time for Darron to go ahead and tell us what he's heard. Darron, you're up.

So, after all this, we are just now getting to the heart of the matter...maybe. Kim is in a challenging position, as she needs the help of volunteers AND she needs to be sure that those volunteers are able to do their service effectively without doing damage to the organization. Some training experiences are certainly required. But, one of the difficulties may be offering those in a way that doesn't trigger the kind of defensive reactions we see in this dialogue.

Another important issue is the need to provide training to a staff member, Gloria, who likely believes that she's already doing a really good job with the organization. If she is not able to hear that her perspective needs some alteration, her expressions could be toxic for meetings.