

# The Art of Effective One to Ones:

## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS & GROWING TRUST

Building relationships with participants is crucial for a successful family engagement and leadership effort. Trust takes time to acquire and the way to reach that level within a relationship is by a series of direct communications where the mentor deliberately makes contact with the participants and gets to know them. Ideally the series of communication will consist of potential recruitment for the program, an introductory to the program one to one, brief check-ins with the participants before and after each meeting, another thorough one to one to take place at some point during the program, and one last one to one at the end of the program.



It is important to acknowledge that there is an art to doing one to ones. There will be successful interactions and unsuccessful interactions. The consistency of positive one to ones comes with time and practice. We have found that some of the most successful one to ones happen once a shared self-interest is discovered.

The first one to one you will have with a participant sets the tone for the relationship you have with them throughout the program. (No pressure!) We have all heard about the importance of first impressions and this is your chance to start building a healthy relationship with the participant. It is important to keep a few things in mind for the initial one to one:

**The tone of your voice** will shape power dynamics. Family leaders are most likely to feel comfortable if you approach them as a peer. If you come in with an authoritative tone, the participant may not feel as comfortable sharing with the group or be willing to make themselves available in the future. If you approach the participant with a submissive tone, they may not believe their time is best spent in this space.

**Expressing vulnerability must be made by both parties present.** Keep in mind that a one to one is mainly to get to know the other person. However, that person will not be as willing to open up to you if



you do not open up to them. The conversation needs to be a give and take. When you ask the participants questions, also be prepared to answer them yourself. This creates a safe environment for the participant when sharing information.

**Being aware that past experiences with groups and organizations may reflect the participants willingness to open up.** These elements can often be tricky when a participant may have had negative experiences working with previous groups. Ask if they have participated in similar efforts before, how those went, and what could have been done differently.

**This first meeting is an investment.** The more time spent building the relationship with the participant, the less likely you are to feel the pressure of wondering if you are making the right impression. The first one to one can be nerve-wracking but with time it will get easier.

**Not everyone expresses themselves or processes the same way.** Any chance you have to share materials with participants should be taken. Sending information about the program ahead of your first one to one allows for more opportunities to have discussion and identify potential barriers.

**Relational not transactional.** Our goal is to recruit participants for programs like these but to also maintain the relationship so they will continue to be active.

**How to begin a one to one** After the selection of family leaders, reach out to each participant one on one. Ideally the first one to one should be done in-person. However, that is not always possible. A Zoom meeting would be the next best option then a phone call. Text messaging should be used for follow up “touches” but never the initial.

When you meet with the participant, think about some questions that can help you learn more about them. There are many foundational questions to ask that can easily build into an organic conversation. The goal is to reach this comfortable discussion naturally. Some examples are:

- Where did you grow up?
- Have you lived in your current location your whole life?
- Ask about their family and/or who they live with. Partner, children etc
- Did their family originate from this country?
- What was their interest in this program?
- What do they hope will come from their participation?

One goal of this meeting is to start to identify what barriers might prevent the family leader from fully engaging and potentially lead you to realize what supports you might be able to provide to the family leader. For example: When asking where the person lives, you may discover that transportation or broadband access is a barrier. This may lead you to consider where and how you schedule meetings.

The benefits of these interactions are tremendous and can help identify barriers your participants may be facing, find potential stories related to the issues you may be working on, and also provide support in creating a comfortable environment where the participant will be more likely to engage with the group.