

## Naming Perceptions: Growing Coalitions

**Type of activity:** Relationship building for groups that are exploring working together more closely.

**Length:** 1 - 1 ½ hours

**Purpose:** To help groups build strong and honest relationships through making their perceptions of one another overt. Doing so makes this material available for the group to work with. Naming thoughts and opinions about one another as 'perceptions' acknowledges that these ideas are not necessarily accurate, which in itself often enables participants to hold their perceptions more lightly. In our experience, this exercise supports group to find common ground and become more open in their approach to one another.

**Group:** This tool is designed for working with two groups that are exploring working together more closely. This can be broad groups (e.g. trade unions and community groups) or two particular organisations. This tool could also be amended to include more groups – if you give this a go, please let us know how you get on.

This tool can be used effectively with groups of varying size. Groups of 4-8 are best for the small group work. If you have more than four small groups (e.g. 16-32 people all together) you will need to allow more time for the full-group conversations.

This tool is best used for groups that are in the early stages of working together. We have not used this tool with groups for whom there is established conflict. It may prove useful in such situations, but should only be attempted by skilled and experienced facilitators.

**Facilitator knowledge and skills:** The facilitator needs to be comfortable at holding conversations about 'negative' perceptions. In our experience, if the facilitator is confident and relaxed about this conversation, the group will be comfortable and relaxed as well. If you are anxious about trying this tool, we would recommend starting with relationship building tools that you feel more comfortable with.

**Resources needed:** Tables set up for small group work. 1 table per small group with newspaper, marker pens and a piece of card with the perception questions.

### Instructions:

- 1) Divide the group into the two groups that are already identified and have come together to work together more closely (e.g. social justice groups and environmental groups, unions and community groups, organisation X and organisation Y, older generation and younger generation, etc.)

If each group has more than 8 people, divide them into smaller groups. You need an even number of groups from each umbrella group (e.g. 2 or 4 small groups) and an equal

number of small groups from each umbrella (e.g. 4 small social justice groups and 4 small environmental groups). It's okay for the small groups from each umbrella to be made up of different numbers of people. For example, You could have 2 small social justice groups made up of 6 people each and 2 small environmental groups made up of 5 people each.

- 2) Ask each small group to go to one of the tables and answer the following perception questions.
  - In your experience what are the negative perceptions that your group (e.g. social justice groups, your organisation, younger generation) hold of the other group (e.g. environmental groups, the other organisation, the older generation).
  - What are the positive perceptions?
  - What are the reasons you would like to work together?
  - What are your perceived barriers to working together?
- 3) Each of the groups divide themselves in half. Half of each group stays where they are, the other half goes to join one of the 'other' groups. Those that are staying where they are get to keep the paper on which their perceptions are recorded. Each group has 5-10 mins to share their group perceptions. The group at whose table the two combined groups are sitting at shares first. Once the first 5 or 10 minutes is up, facilitators collect paper and redistribute them so that all the people who moved to a new group now have their original paper. It is now their turn to share their groups perceptions.
- 4) Bring everyone back into a full group and facilitate reflection on the exercise, beginning with how people felt while completing the exercise. Where there any surprises?
- 5) Move the full group reflection into a conversation about what people noticed in terms of commonalities and differences between the groups perceptions. Any key insights?
- 6) Finish the full group conversation by inviting ideas about how this knowledge of the two groups perceptions of one another could help with building a stronger relationship between the groups.
- 7) Ask people to pair up with someone else from their own group. Take five minutes to share one step you are going to take to strengthen a positive perception or shift a negative perception about your organisation/group in the coming week.
- 8) Thank everyone for their honesty and bravery in sharing their perceptions

**Facilitation tip:** If you know the number of people in your large group and in the two umbrella groups, it is helpful to think through the logistics before beginning this exercise. Decide how many small groups will be formed from each umbrella and how many people will be in each and arrange the table/workstations accordingly.

**Acknowledgements:** This tool was designed by Tanya Newman from Kotare Trust. We give acknowledgements and thanks to all the educators and facilitators around the world whose collective learning has shown that it is often helpful to address unsaid thoughts, opinions and feelings that are present in a group. Sometimes our job is to design processes that encourage their expression.