



COLLECTIVE INSIGHT

Newsletter

Volume One, Issue Six
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May Newsletter Topics:

- Good Problems to Have
- Engagement Tip of the Month
- Engagement Spotlight

Making Engagement Work

Topic of the Month: Good Problems, Part 2

In our April Newsletter, we discussed “good problems to have” and how these problems can be barometers of meaningful engagement. This month we discuss another “good problem to have” -- conflict. Many people who shy away from engagement are actually shying away from conflict. Conflict is hard. It is unpredictable, and it is often unkind. On top of that, who wants to be told what they are doing isn't working? Who even has the time?

As perfectionists in our own work, we get it. Even so, there are a couple of issues with this thinking. First, people are going to tell you what isn't working, regardless—just through more costly and more painful ways. For instance, they will tell you by calling political leaders or by advocating that your funding be invested elsewhere.

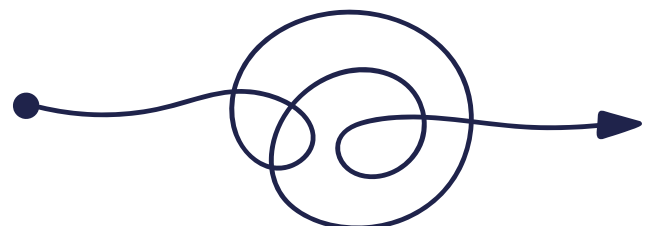
Second, you (or someone who replaces you) will have to fix what is broken, eventually. Community engagement is a more direct strategy to address unavoidable conflict. It simply allows you to have a say in how this experience feels and to be a part of the solution.

Conflict is a natural and productive part of engagement, when addressed constructively. It happens when those you engage have the skills, confidence, investment, and trust to tell you their truth, even if it feels uncomfortable.

If conflict isn't occurring in your engagement efforts, it is time to ask why. Maybe you have left little opportunity for partners to share their informed opinions. Maybe people don't even know why they are there or how they can help.

So, grab the conflict 'bull' by the horns and run towards new learning. Doing so will save you time and money while also minimizing the risks of conflict in the long run. And the BONUS? You will gain new knowledge and value your experiences for years to come.

Learn four new strategies for managing conflict on page 2.



There is a difference between conflict that makes everyone feel uncomfortable and constructive conflict that can be heard and moves towards better, collectively-defined outcomes. There are some concrete ways you can prepare for and manage conflict so it is actually a good problem to have:

Develop Meeting Guidelines. Develop Meeting Guidelines that recognize the importance of kindness, even when opinions differ. The best Meeting Guidelines are co-created with leaders from the community and then reviewed, agreed upon, and improved upon by meeting participants throughout your process. This provides the space for everyone to advocate for constructive conversations.

Recognize Conflict is Okay and Listen. Do not hide from contentious topics, but rather call them out diplomatically. Sometimes simply recognizing differences in opinions without showing emotion is all a group needs to move forward. Also, do not try to solve problems during hot topic meetings. On-demand consensus building sometimes sways to the most dominant viewpoint while missing the more subtle nuances of the conversation. Sometimes consensus is not the goal, but understanding is.

Consider What is Said. If you prioritize listening and documenting during the meeting, you can organize the various points made into themes. Like magic, you will see common ground. You will see how views build on each other, rather than conflict with one another. Consider drafting broad-based principles based on these themes that the entire group can get behind. Then, use these principles to advance decision making, not just for one topic, but for many topics.

Follow-Up. Check in with individuals one-on-one to see how they are doing and how you can make future conversations work for them. Also, share your thematic notes with the group and any principals that came from the discussions. Allow people a chance to validate what you heard and build on this learning to demonstrate how diverging opinions and experiences lead to better tools and resources.

Engagement Tip of the Month:

Synthesize the Conflict

Don't let conflict leave a sour taste in people's mouths. When managed constructively, conflict is a meaningful part of the engagement process that allows for trust-building and continued learning.

Organize your notes into themes. Challenge the tendency to disregard comments that feel "unrelated." Try to find a home for every comment. If "unrelated" comments are commonplace, ask yourself if "a lack of clarity on purpose" is actually one of your themes...

Create a simple summary product. A simple summary product can make sense of chaos. Highlight key themes and lessons learned from the conversation to demonstrate how differing opinions actually lead to new learning. This will remind everyone (including you) why engagement is so important.

Send your thematic notes to the group within one week. Reflect on what was learned in your follow-up email. Be prepared to discuss, in your next meeting, how this new learning is influencing change.



Engagement Spotlight!

Hear older adults discuss the value of engagement!

The [Aging PCOR Learning Collaborative](#) Student Blog Series goes behind the scenes of the project's [Podcast Series](#) to dig deeper into engagement topics.

In "Ageism and intersectionality: A Conversation Between Older Adults and Researchers (Pt. 2)," Podcast guest, Dr. Paul Nash, a faculty member in the Leonard Davis School of Gerontology at the University of Southern California, chats with members of the project's Older Adult Subcommittee about the rich experiences and neglected diversity

among those who are aging. In the subsequent podcast blog, student bloggers opened up the floor for comments from the Older Adult Subcommittee. Members offered candid advice to researchers about the diversity within the older population, the need to engage older people with complex support needs, and the value in engagement.

Find the blog [here!](#)

Ageism and Intersectionality: A Conversation Between Older Adults and Researchers (Pt. 2)



Top: (left to right) Dr. Paul Nash, Sophia Webber, Taylor Gray



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