

# **We Are Church Together for the Sake of the World: Tools to Identify and Create a Community Project Version 1.0 - April 21, 2020**

## **1. Listen and Learn**

Now is a wonderful time to connect with local community leaders and discover what sort of assistance would be truly helpful. You may discover that you have the gifts, skills, and competencies within your congregation to make an impact in your community.

### **Steps to Listen and Learn**

- **Identify potential community leaders and gather contact information** – Work with a team of three to five people and think about your community. Who are the key leaders that are trying to respond to the pandemic? Here are a few examples of leaders you might contact:
  - school principals
  - first responder organizations
  - health care organizations
  - local government officials
  - food banks
  - shelters
- **Ask what is needed instead of telling others what you'd like to do** – It is important to make sure that we are providing help that is actually helpful, not simply doing what we think needs to be done. For many leaders, time and resources are in short supply during a crisis, so you may need to assure the leader that you are gathering information on how your church can help, not asking for assistance from them. When members of your team talk to a community leader, try asking questions like:
  - How are you and your organization doing?
  - What challenges are you trying to manage in responding to COVID-19?
  - What opportunities to make a difference do you see emerging as our community responds to COVID-19?
  - If our congregation wanted to do something to truly make a difference in our community right now what do you think that look like?
- **Establish a time when you will follow-up with the leader to let them know if/when your congregation will be able to assist.** – No one will expect you to have immediate answers or responses. Take notes during conversation and pay particular attention to needs that may match up with congregational talents and resources. Tell the leader that you will contact them by a specific time to update them on your plans.
- **Say “Thank You”** – Make sure you thank the leader for their time and assistance at the end of the conversation.

## **2. Opportunities and Assets**

- a. **Review what you have learned and create a list of possible opportunities to impact your community**
  - Focus on the needs identified by the community.

- Look for trends or common themes that emerge.
  - Look for opportunities and projects that are achievable.
  - b. Gather a new group of people who know individuals in your congregation well and invite them to help create a list of congregational assets**
    - Gather 3-5 people who know a cross section of your congregation. This meeting could easily happen by Zoom.
    - Do not share the list of opportunities identified by the community until the next step. This conversation needs to focus on assets/gifts/talents.
    - Share examples of assets/gifts/talents you see in the congregation. For example:
      - classroom space in the church building
      - people who like to sing
      - farming skills
      - computer skills
      - financial resources the church could access
      - connections to other community groups
    - Create as detailed a list as possible including names of individuals next to the asset/gift/talent identified
  - c. Look for connections where community opportunities and congregational assets align**
    - Once the list of assets/gifts/talents is complete, then share the list of community opportunities developed by the first group with the group that helped identify assets/gifts/talents
    - As a group look for connections between the lists. Create as many possible matches as you can.
    - Worry less at this point about achievability and focus on possibility
- 3. Design a Project**
- a. Start with 1 project, not 5**
    - With individuals from the research groups, begin to narrow the list of possible projects down to 1-3 that seem like realistic possibilities
    - Double check to make sure that what you are considering actually meets the need identified by the community in a helpful way
    - There will be a temptation to want to do all the good projects, pick one. Doing one project well and then considering doing another project is more helpful than doing three projects poorly.
  - b. Communicate with the community organization to confirm that your project will provide help that is helpful**
    - Check back with the organization with whom you wish to do a project to check your project idea and confirm that it is indeed helpful
    - Your community partner knows the needs and can provide valuable assistance in determining how to proceed.
    - Remember this is a partnership, not a one-way transactional relationship.
  - c. Define an achievable goal**
    - Establish a clear definition of success for your project. For example, if you are providing food, set the number of items you hope to collect or the number of individuals you intend to assist.

- In the description of your goal, avoid words like ‘more’ or ‘better’ since those create open-ended scenarios
- Even if you ultimately don’t completely achieve your goal, having a goal helps translate ideas into action.

**d. Determine the steps needed to achieve your goal**

- Once you have your goal established, work backwards to determine the steps needed to achieve your goal.
- Pick the date you want the project completed first.
- Outline the steps you will need to reach your goal and then assign completion dates to those steps based on when you want your project completed
- Assign who will be responsible for completing each step by the assigned date
- Establish a way to check progress and have accountability for completing the steps

**e. Communicate with the community organization to get feedback on your plan**

- Remember this is a partnership. Before moving forward, make sure your community partner is onboard with the plan.
- Listen to the community partner’s feedback and trust that they may see holes in your plan or issues that have not occurred to you yet.
- Adjust as needed

**4. Invite Participation**

**a. Prepare publicity materials**

- Create materials to tell the story of the project.
- Use fewer words than you think you need, use pictures, and use simple lists to invite participation
- Make it clear what you are inviting people to do
- Use whatever platforms best match the communication platforms in your community
- Share your publicity materials with your partner for feedback before you publish and adjust as needed based on their response

**b. Share invitation to participate with clear response pathway**

- Once you put out a call to action, make it easy for people to respond
- Provide clear directions for how to respond. For example, if you are asking people to provide food donations, publish a list of the exact items you need and how to deliver them to you
- *A Note about Donation Request Lists:* Sometimes it is more helpful to publish and share three different lists with 4 items each than to publish one list with 12 items. A shorter list makes it clear what people need to purchase and a long list can lead to indecision and inaction because the the number of requested items seem overwhelming.

**5. Thank**

**a. Thank the community partner for their support**

- Say “Thank You” at each step of this process
- At the end of the project, look for a public way to acknowledge the partner in your context

- b. Thank participants for helping with the project**
    - Say “Thank You” as donations arrive.
    - Where possible translate the gift given into the ministry accomplished, for example: “Thank you for your gift of \$10. Your gift will provide food for one student for one week.”
    - If financial donations are made, be sure to follow IRS guidelines for how to acknowledge gifts.
- 6. Deliver the Assistance**
  - a. When the project is complete or almost complete deliver the assistance to the community organization**
    - Work with your partner to make sure that assistance is delivered to the proper place
    - Remember the assistance we share is a response to God’s grace, not a transactional relationship designed to make us feel better about ourselves, so allow the partner to determine the best way to deliver assistance.
    - *Note:* To respect the privacy and dignity of others, it is often not possible to meet those directly receiving assistance.
  - b. Ask permission to share the story internally and in the community**
    - Make sure you have permission from your community partners to share the story of what you have accomplished together.
    - Consider working together to issue a joint story to local media or on social media.
    - Take and share pictures carefully. Examples of potentially appropriate photos: A photo of collected supplies gathered at the altar, photos of community partner staff and congregational leaders, photos of large groups working on a project where faces are not easily identified
- 7. Tell**
  - a. Share the story of the project with your congregation**
    - In the story, focus on the partnership between organizations and individuals to accomplish a shared mission and avoid telling the story from the perspective of “Look what we did for them”.
    - Use whatever means of communication work best for your context
    - Tell the story multiple times in multiple settings
  - b. Share the story of the project with the wider community**
    - Use whatever means of communication work best for your context
    - Work with your community partner to get wider distribution of the story
    - Tell the story multiple times in multiple settings
- 8. Celebrate**
  - a. Celebrate the ministry that has been accomplished with the whole congregation**
  - b. Celebrate the ministry that has been accomplished with the community partner**