

THE SOLUTIONS EXCHANGE

A Facilitation Technique for New Insights

Creating new systems requires new ways of thinking and doing. Using the **Solutions Exchange** technique is a simple-to-execute method for inviting in the expertise and experiences of your peers in a constructive, co-creative manner to yield new paths forward.

Solutions Exchange Explained

The **Solutions Exchange** offers the opportunity to exchange ideas, share knowledge, and gain solutions via a facilitated peer learning process. Through small group discussions, “solutions seekers” share a specific and current work challenge with a sounding board of peers. These peers can have direct or related experience with the challenge at hand.

Using the wisdom of the invited professional community, participants dig deeply into the challenge presented, ask key questions that explore different opportunities, and share experiences and ideas. This process can be used within an organization or for Food Policy Councils, collaborative groups, and regional networks.

This method is ideal for the following areas:

- You are stuck or stalled in your program or project trajectory
- You want to create a solution that is functional, sustainable, and or scalable
- You need a new set of eyes on your goals
- You want to have a deeper collaboration with your colleagues and community of professional peers

Adapted by [Kitchen Table Consulting, LLC](http://www.kitchentableconsulting.com) and [Resist Reimagine](http://www.resistreimagine.com) from the Village Square Model, the **Solutions Exchange** premiered at the 2020 NGFN Conference in New Orleans, LA to feature a powerful approach to problem solving that leverages the expertise within particular communities.

- The following documents for hosting and participating in a Solutions Exchange are attached:
 - **SolEx Preparation Agenda** – how to prepare for the session
 - **SolEx Sample Presentation Poster**
 - **SolEx Facilitator’s Agenda** - facilitation guide for the session

The Nuts & Bolts of a Solutions Exchange

Participants:

- Facilitator(s) to lead the process
- Challenge Presenter(s) to share a specific challenge to their community
- Participants (colleagues and professional community) to bring insights and ideas

Objectives Include:

- Focus a group's expertise on a specific challenge
- Build a support network
- Make new connections for resources and ideas, etc.

Solutions Exchange Overview

Facilitators solicit between 1-3 projects that align with a central focus (thematic examples include: local and regional food systems as a driver of community economic development, equity, and ecological improvement, market-based solutions to local food and equity, scaling up to impact community benefit, etc.).

Selection Criteria for Challenges

The challenge should be related to something you or your organization are actively working on. Solutions Exchange challenges can be evaluated based on how well they meet the following criteria:

- How you describe the learning edge/newness of your challenge
- How a chosen theme is represented in your challenge
- The extent to which this is an organizational or systems level challenge
- How the challenge provides opportunities for peer support and crowdsourcing

How to Prepare for a Solutions Exchange

Facilitators will choose a set of criteria for the presenters and choose the best 1-3 projects for discussion. They will then prepare a facilitation plan, prepare presenters in advance and facilitate the Solutions Exchange. **See attached Agendas.**

Presenters pre-prepare a poster that assists presenters in focus on the essence of their challenge and illustrates their challenge and goals for those that need a visual and can't as easily retain facts and figures, names and ideas in their heads. The poster can be a simple drawing, or a more elaborate design, the key is to keep it to one-page and simple information. **See attached Sample Poster.**

Presenters spend approximately 20% of the Solutions Exchange session telling the story of their challenge, using the poster as a visual aide, and 80% of the time in a facilitated discussion with participants around burning questions. Facilitators coach the presenters beforehand so that there is clarity in the presentation and objective and they take notes during the Exchange and guide the conversation.

Ready to take your problem solving to the next level? Download the documents, put out the call for Challenge Presenters and start your first Solutions Exchange! Pass it on!