

3 STEPS TO DESIGNING EMERGENT STRATEGIES



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What

In Connected Communities, we look at emergent strategies as “where momentum meets opportunity”:

- Momentum: the passions, concerns and energy in the community (however you define it)
- Opportunity: the things that can fuel the momentum into making change

Why

Context is foundational to creating conditions for equitable and meaningful strategies to thrive. Community contexts are complex and ever changing, so the tools we might use to plan in a relatively stable environment may not work in community building. Community building can be likened to raising a child: there is no instruction manual, but like in child rearing, in community building, there are philosophies, principles and practices that can help guide you in a positive direction.

Learning to work in emergence is a practice that will allow you to deal with the complexities and ever changing environment of your own context.

How

1. Identifying the momentum:

where is the energy and passion for a strategy coming from? The way to identify momentum is to listen to people. Momentum can be found in the stories people tell, what people talk about, and the questions people ask. In Connected Communities, listening to people is not a one off activity, to be done at the beginning of a project, but an ongoing part of any and all strategies. To listen to people, you can:

- a.** Go where people gather, get to know them, learn about what they care about (cultural celebrations, political rallies, festivals, town halls etc)
- b.** Get to know people with whom you can have ongoing conversations, making sure that the people you are building relationships with include people from groups often left on the margins of mainstream society (e.g. Black, Indigenous, newcomers, people with disabilities etc)
- c.** Convene conversations like [Community Speaks](#) to better understand the pulse of your community

Listening is a skill. Listening to understand where momentum is requires using that skill in a specific way that includes:

- a.** paying attention to what we are excited about (problems that elicit anger, ideas that elicit enthusiasm)
- b.** noticing patterns of discussion (what issue or idea gets referenced across multiple forums or discussions)



2. Identify the opportunities you have access to:

Community momentum can swell and grow into a powerful community building initiative or strategy, or it can remain an undercurrent that has no positive outlet. A key difference between these two outcomes is whether or not the momentum is able to connect to opportunity.

Opportunity takes various shapes and forms, the most common of which are:

- a.** resources (funding),
- b.** opportunities to influence bigger systems (invitations/opportunities to speak truth to power) or
- c.** research (opportunities to leverage local knowledge as evidence in published research).

What opportunities can you leverage that will help fuel the momentum in your community context?

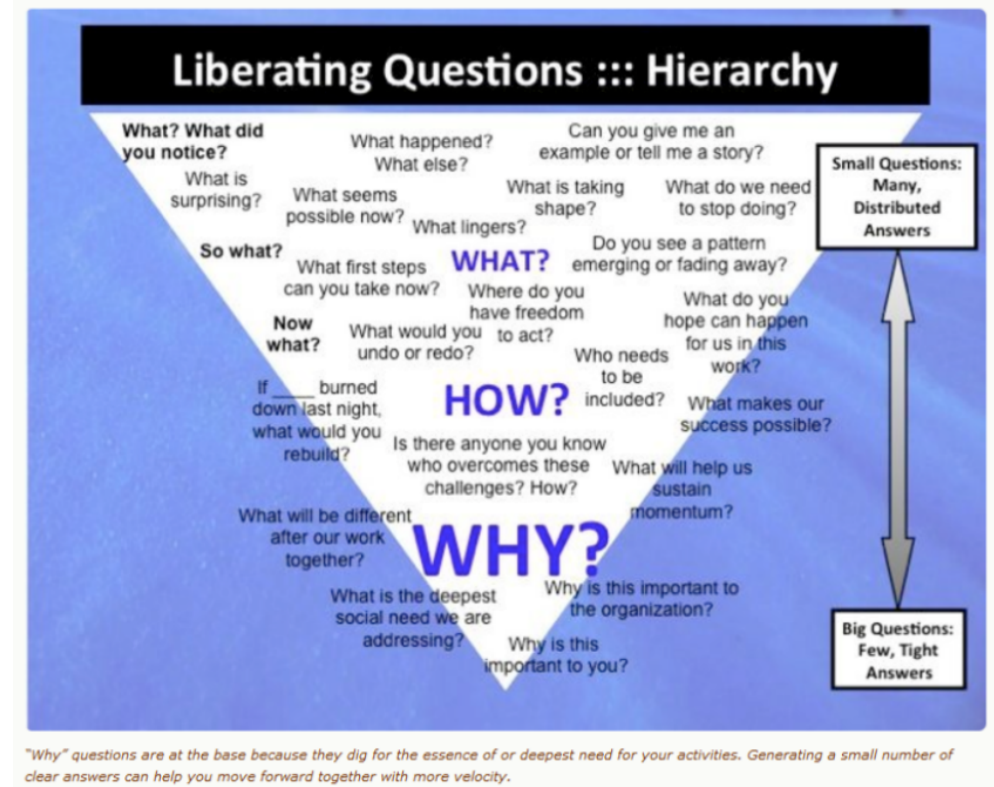


3. Link momentum to opportunity:

[Cross-pollinating activities](#), especially those at multiple scales (finding synergies between what is happening at the community scale to larger issues and systems), can be the connection that links opportunities to the momentum in the community.

Once you get adept at listening for passion and patterns, and have scanned your own access to opportunities, you can begin to explore possible links. To do that, make sure that you are looking at not just “what” people are passionate about, or “what” people want to do, but “why”. Liberating structures [9 whys activities offer ways](#) and means of uncovering the “why” in a structured environment.

Once you’ve linked momentum to opportunities, you can design your strategy accordingly, making sure that you have engaged in a process that defines your collective purpose and the principles that will guide you as the strategy evolves.



Your Theory of Change will help you to ground your strategies in shared purpose and your organizational principles should guide you to in “how” to make decisions relative to your strategy

If your strategy is well grounded in purpose, values and principles, [interval planning](#), can help you to adapt to context on an ongoing basis. Ongoing questions to keep your strategy emergent include:

- Where is the energy in this strategy going? What has changed?
- What new opportunities are emerging?
- Can they be authentically linked to the strategy?
- Are we adapting “what” we do (our strategies) in ways that continually connect momentum to opportunity?
- Are our strategies evolving in ways that help us to achieve our overall purpose, can we connect the dots between what we are doing and our Theory of Change?
- Are we using our principles to guide us to make strategic decisions and help adapt the strategy over time?

We hope you find these tools useful in continuing the momentum to build on local strengths, facilitated collaborative processes and learn together. Catalysts' Circle offers workshops, coaching and strategy design services that can further help you dig deeply into these keys and explore the others that can help you make a truly Connected Community.



Catalysts' Circle can be found at www.connectedcommunities.ca or email agloger@connectedcommunities.ca for more information