



Fishbowl Discussion: Defining Your Communities

Overview:

A fishbowl discussion is a group communication technique that can help students talk about issues. In this case, it can be used to allow students to explore the communities to which they belong in safe environment. It is designed to help students learn to listen to each other, enhancing relationships necessary for the growth of your Bonner Program.

A continued exploration of community building can be achieved through future reflections on Bonners' experiences.

Category:

Community building, interpersonal development, relationship building, communication, reflection

Level:

Intermediate

Recommended

Bonner Sequence: This training is recommended for Bonner students during the second year. This activity is also suitable for a retreat.

expectation	explore	experience	example	expertise
	♥	♥	♥	
VALUES: community building, diversity				

Type:

Structured activity suitable for any size group.

Goals of this Guide:

- To engage participants in a meaningful activity that will help them learn more about each other.
- To help establish individual identities for a Bonners in a class or program

Materials:

- Index Cards
- Pens

How to Prepare:

As the facilitator, it will be your job to ensure the wellbeing and openness of all participants. If possible, go through the workshop prior to facilitating it to be prepared throughout the activity.

How to Do/Brief Outline:

Setup the room with a small circle of four to five chairs in the middle of the room surrounded by a larger circle of one chair per participant. (If you would prefer, participants may also sit on the ground.)

Following is a very loose outline. Adjust the time allotted to each part as you find most effective.

This one hour and forty minute workshop has the following parts:

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|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| A. The Guidelines | suggested time 5 minutes |
| B. Defining Community | suggested time 10 minutes |
| C. Determining Your Communities | suggested time 10 minutes |
| D. Break | suggested time 10 minutes |
| E. Discussing Your Communities | suggested time 50 minutes |
| F. Closing Reflection | suggested time 15 minutes |
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Part A. The Guidelines

Suggested time: 5 minutes

Begin the workshop by introducing yourself, role, and hopes for the discussion. Set a tone for the day's activities to ensure that will feel comfortable sharing with the group.

Part B. Defining Community

Suggested time: 10 minutes

Depending on the time you have for this workshop, you may have participants brainstorm what a community is and begin them with the following prompts. If you have less time, you may omit the brainstorm and only give them the following prompts.

A community can be any group of individuals or families working toward a common goal. A community may include, but is not limited to, a town, a city, a neighborhood, an office, an industry, a profession, a school, a religion, a corporation, a geographic or a political entity.

"People live in communities. But the real importance of 'living in community' is that people—and groups of people—develop the ways and means to care for each other, to nurture the talents and leadership that enhance the quality of community life, and to tackle the problems that threaten the community and the opportunities which can help it." -*Measuring Community Capacity Building* (Aspen Institute, 1996)

Part C. Determining Your Communities

Suggested time: 10 minutes

Pass out index cards and pens to all participants. Instruct them to reflect on which communities they are members and then have them list three to five of their communities. Some example communities include: African-American community, Baptist community, gay and lesbian community, Young Republicans and Jewish community.

Part D. Break

Suggested time: 10 minutes

During the break the facilitator will read the index cards and determine five communities to discuss among the group. Because you will want to have at least three people actively discussing the community and you do not want to single out someone who does not feel comfortable sharing, at least five people should have written down a community for it to be used as a fishbowl discussion.

Part E. Discussing Your Communities

Suggested time: 50 minutes (10 minutes per community)

Announce to participants that you will now be discussing communities that are present within your Bonner program, but may not be understood by all members. The purpose of this exercise is to understand more about the Bonners in your program and their backgrounds. It will help to dissolve stereotypes and enable Bonners to be able to understand how other Bonners may be misunderstood because of the communities to which they belong.

Start with one community and ask Bonners to raise their hands if they are members of that community. Then ask who would be willing to come to the fishbowl (the smaller center circle) to share more about their community. Invite three to five Bonners to come forward.

Prompt each discussion by asking the fishbowl how the community is often misunderstood and what it is sometimes difficult to be a part of that community. To do this, encourage participants to discuss issues such as belonging, stereotypes, membership, inclusion and exclusion. Allow them to have a free flowing discussion and encourage the larger circle to be active listeners. Transition the discussion at 10 minutes, or earlier depending on your time constraints.

An example fishbowl:

Community: Bonner Scholars and/or Leaders

Prompt:

- What is often misunderstood about Bonners?
- What do other students on your campus think about Bonners?
- What do you wish others would know about Bonner?
- What is the hardest part about being a Bonner?

Example responses from students:

- People think Bonners are only goody two-shoes.
- Bonners only do community service because they are nerds or want to add something to their résumés.
- Bonners only do service for the recognition or money.

- We are striving to change the campus culture to one more devoted to the community, but we are frustrated because the Bonner Program is misunderstood.

Continue the fishbowl discussions until the remaining communities have been given a chance to talk.

Part F. Closing Reflection

Suggested time: 15 minutes

Ask participants what they have learned from listening and participating in the discussions. Encourage them to discuss anything they will do differently and how they will now be able to better understand their fellow Bonners.

Sample reflection questions include:

- Which group did you misunderstand the most?
- Based on your misperception, have you overlooked potential friendships/relationships?
- Which community can you relate to because of similar experience?
- What will you change about yourself because of this activity?
- Do you ever wish you did not belong to a community of which you are a member?
- What did you learn by listening to those who were discussing their communities?
- For those who discussed their communities, what was the hardest part about sharing your experience?