TOOL | USING PERSONAS IN THE DESIGN OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Creating personas helps to understand the various kinds of people you may wish to engage in a community engagement process. A Community Engagement Grouping of Personas can be identified by answering some or all of the following:

- Age Range
- Gender
- Marital/Family Status
- How many and break down of family members (adults, children by age, grand parents)
- Education
- Housing Situation

- Income and Income Sources
- Ethnicity or Indigenous Status
- Employment Status
- Needs – how this persona sees or experiences the issue or problem
- Aspirations – what the persona aspires for themselves

- Motivations – solve the problem, move it somewhere else, blame others, interested in change
- Role(s) – Resident, Funder, Business Owner, Politician
- Attitudes
- Engagement opportunities and challenges

When thinking about the range of people you may wish to engage, imagine the differences you may experience among the following personas:

- Visible minority single parents with preschoolers who are on income security, living in subsidized housing, who have less than a high school education;
- Senior citizen, homeowner, living on a fixed income.
- Local business owner concerned about how the issue or problem hurts her/his business
- Teenagers that hangout in the park or on the street
- Substance abusers
- Victims of violence
- Immigrant women who do not speak an official language
- Indigenous families who left the reserve to access better services, employment, or medical treatment.

- Funders who are supporting local agencies
- Elected representatives

Personas can be created for a certain type of person more generally or about how a persona experiences a specific problem or issue.

PERSONA "MARY" (See Image)

Mary is 19 and a single parent of a 4 year old living in Millwoods. Mary did not finish high school, works at a fast food outlet for minimum wage with no benefits. She pays $600 per month for a basement apartment but tends to move around from place to place. Also, her daughter has behaviour problems at school.

Key questions for engagement could include:
- How critical is it to involve women like Mary in our CE efforts?
- Why do we think she would be interested in participating? What would compel her to participate?
- What is the best way(s) to engage women like Mary in our community engagement efforts?
- How might we support her involvement (child care, gift card?)

Think about personas as a better way to understand what groups of people you need to be involved and why.
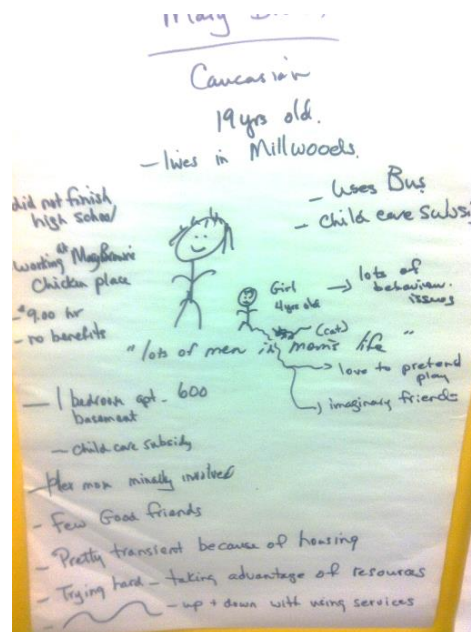
IDENTIFYING PERSONAS

The flip chart example is from numerous personas that were identified by a gathering of Head Start agencies that were trying to deepen their understanding of the various types of families they work with and their needs and circumstances. Once you develop a persona you can continue to add to it as your engagement of people continues.

An alternative method of identifying personas is having groups use an Empathy Map.

An Empathy Map is about placing yourself in the shoes of another person or persona. Through a structured process, the goal is to deepen your understanding or your sense of what another person is experiencing. While still subject, the exercise is to free yourself of your own perspective and see with someone else's eyes, hearing through the ears of another, and feeling what they might feel.

See the Tamarack Handout on Empathy Maps for more details.
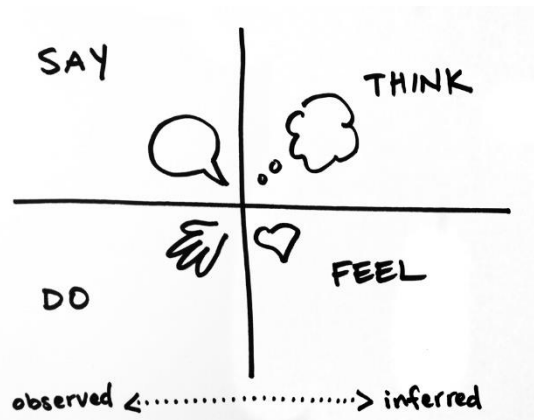
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- A closer look at personas – what they are and how they work:
  https://www.smashingmagazine.com/2014/08/a-closer-look-at-personas-part-1/
- Social Services Playbook – pages 11-16:
  http://www.nuance.com/resellers/pdf/DragonPlaybook_SocialServices.pdf