



TOOL | COMMUNITY REFERENCE SYSTEM

The Community Reference System – developed by Fred and Merrelyn Emery – is a highly participative way to engage a community in helping to select who attends a learning event or gathering on their behalf. It’s a process to allow a community to determine the participation of its own members. The Community Reference System is an effective way to build awareness and “buzz” about your Gathering.

OVERVIEW

The Community Reference System is best used when:

- It is not possible to invite an entire group to a particular event – when the number of participants for a particular session has to be limited.
- There may be questions asked about how participants were chosen for an event.
- A group’s work must have credibility or the environment is highly political and cynicism around an event’s legitimacy needs to be diffused.
- The process of involving a broader subset of the community to identify participants can help build awareness and enthusiasm for the event itself

EXERCISE HOW-TO

1. Brainstorm a list of names for each sector who are known to be concerned about your issue or opportunity. Typical criteria include:
 - The process would not have credibility if unless this person was involved
 - The person has a reputation for speaking about this issue
 - The person is well-respected in the neighbourhood
 - The person is available and willing to participate
 - The person is likely to be willing to do work in support of your issue
2. Make sure you have generated at least one or two names for each sector on the community map and identify at least one individual is identified within each of the components of the social map
3. Contact these initial individuals are contacted and asked to recommend two or three people from within their sector who meet the criteria. (Sometimes a script is developed)
4. The recommended people are then contacted and also asked to make two or three recommendations. After two or three iterations, the same names should begin to appear on the list
5. From this total list of possible participants, select folks whose names have been repeated and add participants to ensure that all perspectives identified on the rough social map are represented. These individuals are then contacted and invited.

A SAMPLE PHONE SCRIPT

Hi, my name is _____ and I'm with the _____ group.

We are in the process of looking for people within our community who should be informed about the work that we are doing, and who might have an important perspective to share about _____.

Your name has come forward as someone who could help us identify individuals who need to be included in a focused discussion about how to achieve the goals of our initiative. Ideally, we are looking for people who: *(List a few criteria of the kind of person you are looking for).*

I'm hoping that you can recommend some possible invitees who you think meet our criteria.

Specifically:

- Can you think of anyone who you would recommend would fit the criteria?
- Is there anyone else that you would suggest we speak with to get names of potential participants?

Take down these names so they can be compiled with the work others have done. Also, phone the other names provided. An overlap in names often reveals the people who you need to put extra effort into being sure they are invited to the event.

Thank you very much for your input. We hope to be sending out invitations by __ (date) __. Would you be interested in being added to our contact list to learn more about our initiative and receive periodic updates about the results of this session?

SOME CAUTIONS IN IMPLEMENTING THE CRS

- People contacted must be clear that they are not being invited to the event, but rather being asked to recommend people who they believe should be invited
- The community reference system can be time-consuming and labour intensive
- The reference process might create anxiety amongst individuals within the community about whether or not they will be invited
- Records and results of the community reference system must be well maintained so that the final selection process is clear

WORKSHEET



Our Community Reference System			
	Contact	Sector	Contacted By:
Initial Contacts			
Round #1 Recommendations			
Round #2 Recommendations			
Selected Invitees			