



TOOL | VIRTUAL PEER INPUT PROCESS

TIME REQUIRED: 50 MINUTES

Do you have a new idea or process that you would like to test? The Virtual Peer Input Process is a quick and structured way to get input and insight from peers into a current challenge you or your team are facing. It taps into the collective wisdom of peers to offer participants rapid feedback and new perspectives on a current challenge that often are a catalyst for new insights.

USING THIS TOOL WILL HELP YOU:

- Invite in new perspectives and insights to address a current issue or challenge
- Leverage the wisdom of peers to surface assumptions or illuminate new opportunities
- Collectively identify common patterns and themes in the work of community change

OVERVIEW

The Virtual Peer Input Process can be helpful in different situations. For example: It can help to surface and test assumptions while building shared understanding for a group who is launching an innovative initiative together. The Virtual Peer Input Process can also be used to generate fresh perspectives and illuminate new ideas for action for an individual or group struggling with a specific challenge. For individuals engaged in similar work, the Virtual Peer Input Process provides a structured way for peers to learn from each other. This, in turn, can help the peers to surface common patterns and themes in their work that can be addressed together.

The Virtual Peer Input Process has been adapted for online learning environments. It works best when participants come to the process with a question or dilemma they want to resolve. The Virtual Peer Input Process cycle takes approximately 25-30 minutes in total.

VIRTUAL PEER INPUT PROCESS: THE HOW TO

1. **The Virtual Setting** – The Peer Input Process can be easily adapted for an online or virtual setting. All the participants: the process facilitator; peer presenting the question; and peer response team can either dial in by telephone or join via video conferencing. In either case, the process can be effective and adapted to the virtual setting. The facilitator plays a key role in convening the call and monitoring the timing and process.
2. **Introduction** - Designate a leader/facilitator to host the Virtual Peer Input Process. This leader/facilitator begins the call by sharing all of the steps in the process with the group. The facilitator is also the time keeper, making sure that participants move through each step of the process in the time allocated. In a virtual session, information about each of the steps can be simply posted on a slide. (5 minutes)
3. **Presenter Poses & Unpacks the Question** – The individual/team seeking input briefly shares highlights of their project, opportunity or dilemma to provide context (e.g. purpose/common agenda; engaging key players; developing strategies; and the key events and achievements to date). They then take the last minute of time to pose the question they are seeking input about. (10 minutes)
4. **Peer Questions** – The Peers on the call now have an opportunity to ask the presenters some **clarifying questions** to gain a better understanding of the project and the challenge. Next, the peers are given time to ask deeper, **probing questions** (often starting with Why? Or How?) (10 minutes)
5. **Peer Group Discussion** – The Peers now talk to each other about the presenters' question. The presenter cannot speak during this discussion – their role is simply to “listen in” on the conversation about their work and their issue. (10 minutes)
6. **Presenter/Team Reflections** – The person or group seeking input reflects on what they have learned from the peer discussion and shares how they now plan to proceed in addressing their question based on the group's input. (10 minutes)
7. **Process Reflection** – The facilitator invites all participants to reflect on the process; identify commonalities; and share any final comments. (5 minutes)

PRINCIPLES FOR USING THIS TOOL

- **Craft a Good Question** – The question that captures the struggle or issue you are wanting peer input on is important to the success of the Peer Input Process. Great questions are “open-ended” and generate discussion. Avoid questions that can be answered with a yes or no. Ideally participants should be asked to think about this in advance.
- **Provide Good Context** – To encourage good advice from peers, presenters should give a good, high-level overview of your project before posing your question. Specifically, your overview should include: its purpose, core strategies, key strategies & achievements and priorities for the coming year.
- **Respond Honestly to Peer Questions** – Presenters are encouraged to be completely honest in responding to the questions posed by peers. If you cannot answer any posed question, please say so.
- **Note Key Ideas from Peers** – Presenters should jot down key thoughts and ideas that are generated as they are listening so it’s easier to share reflections.
- **Tips for Sharing Reflections** – In the final step of the Peer Input Process cycle presenters are asked to share feedback with peers. In doing this it is useful for the presenter to:
 - Thank them for sharing their insights
 - Highlight how their comments made you think about your issue differently
 - Share how peer insights may have led you to confirm and/or question some of your own initial thoughts
 - Indicate some possible new ideas for moving forward that they have inspired.

Sample Peer Input Process Question

Our collaboration is new. Several funders have told us that they are reluctant to fund us because we do not have a “track record”.

How can we encourage funders to invest in us?

“ While the thought of being questioned by one’s peers can be anxiety provoking, many social innovators find the experience to be very beneficial. ”

- Calgary Network for Collaborative
Social Innovation

THE TOOL IN PRACTICE

Depending on the overall size of the group and/or the amount of time available, there are different design options that can be used to host a Peer Input Process either in person or virtually. Some options include:

- **Peer Triads** – If time allows, you can ask the entire group to divide into groups of 3. In 90 minutes you can host 3 separate rounds so each person in the group has an opportunity to both give and receive peer input on a current challenge or question. If you are meeting virtually, the Zoom Platform has virtual break-out rooms that can be used for this process.
- **Small Groups** – With larger groups and/or limited time, participants can be divided into small groups of 6-8. Within each group, an interested volunteer (ideally someone who has self-identified in advance) could be invited to share their issue and/or problem.
- **One Group** – An interested volunteer (ideally someone who has self-identified in advance) could be invited to share their issue and/or problem for input from the entire group of presenters.

DIVING DEEPER

- **[Supporting Pioneering Leaders as Communities of Practice](#)** – This paper, by Margaret Wheatley, explains the importance of supporting leaders whose work involves pioneering new paradigms and innovative approaches. Specifically, she writes that, “peers supported to learn together create a rich marketplace where knowledge and experience are shared. It also becomes an incubator where new knowledge, skills, and competencies develop.”

