

Community Reference System

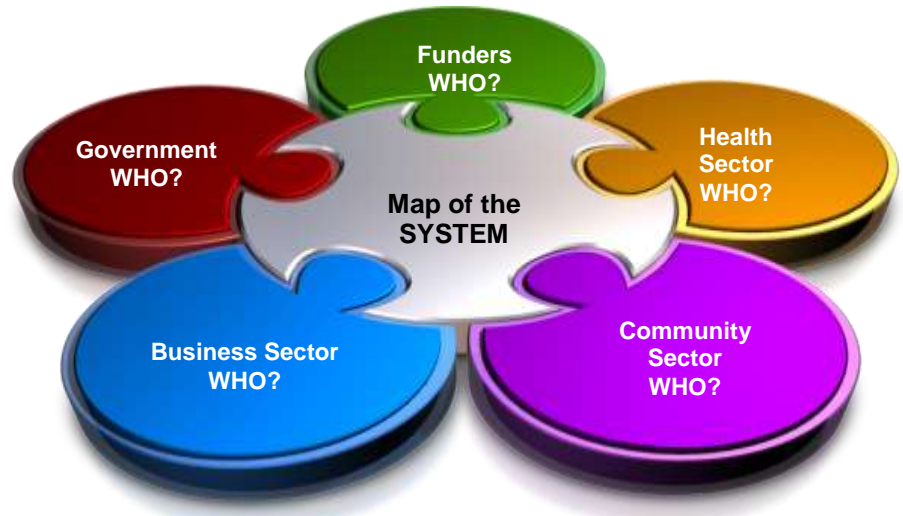
Use the Community Reference System when...

- 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

What is it?

The Community Reference System is a highly participative way to engage a community in helping to select who attends a learning event or gathering on their behalf.

Put another way, it's a process to allow a community to determine the participation of its own members.



THE COMMUNITY REFERENCE SYSTEM: STEP-BY-STEP

1. The planning team defines its community and develops a rough social map of the interest groups, perspectives and/or demographic makeup contained within it. The planning group decides upon the relevant criteria that must be met by all participants.
2. Participant is known to be actively concerned about the issue. Typical criteria include:
 - Process would not be seen to have credibility unless this person were invited
 - Participant has a reputation for speaking out on this issue
 - Participant is well respected by his/her peers
 - Participant is available to attend entire session
 - Participant would be willing to do work after the conference to implement action plans created during the conference
3. At least one individual is identified within each of the components of the social map.
4. The 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)
5. These recommended people are contacted and asked to make two or three recommendations.
6. After two or three iterations, the same names should begin to appear on the list
7. 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.
8. Participants who have been selected to attend the event are then contacted and invited.

Source: The Search Conference by Fred and Merrelyn Emery

Community Reference System

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 to 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 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 to invite to your 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.

MORE RESOURCES

Using a Community Reference System for Selecting Participants in a Community Search Conference

<http://www.positivefuturesguide.com/free/commref.pdf>

The Search Conference Method for Participative Planning by Robert Rehm and Nancy Cebula

<http://www.elementsuk.com/libraryofarticles/searchconference.pdf>

The Search Conference: A Compact and Robust Method for "Getting Outside of the Box" and on to Being Globally Innovative

<http://www.positivefuturesguide.com/free/searchbasic.html>

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