

FACILITATING MEETINGS THAT CENTER RELATIONSHIPS AND RESULTS

Tool #3: Effective Questions

In the fall and summer of 2023, a group of Tamarack team members and network members wrote a guide to hold spaces where people can connect and find things to work on together, even when they think they're really different from each other.

The guide is structured as seven invitations – seven practices we can deploy as we design and facilitate meetings that center relationships and results. This tool is tied to invitation #6 – Give Context, Ask Effective Questions, and Listen for Responses. It is also tied to invitation #3 – Check In and Check Out.

TOOL: EFFECTIVE QUESTIONS

A note about questions:

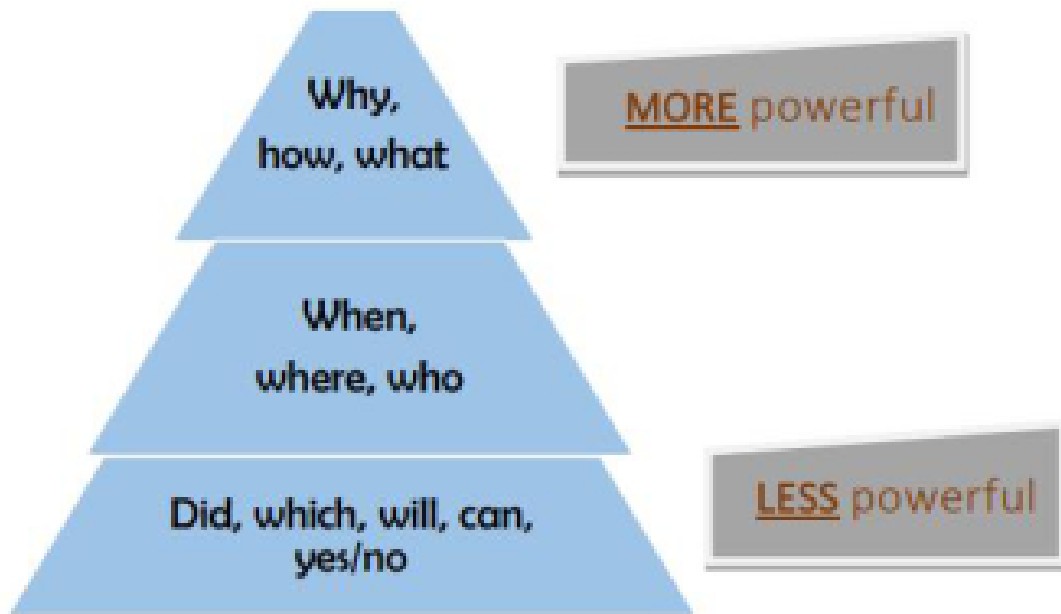
In group conversations, the art of questioning shapes the dynamics and depth of dialogue. As facilitators, how we craft and ask questions should nurture an environment where everyone feels valued and heard, and where people speak to their lived experiences only by choice. Our context statements, questions, and how we listen should seek to minimize harm and cultivate feelings of safety and collaboration.

Effective questions:

- Help people discover their own knowledge
- Help us make meaning of what we've experienced
- Expand thinking about possibilities
- Clarify what really matters
- Surface assumptions and diverse perspectives
- Accelerate a group's movement forward
- Build empathy and connection
- Surface what, if clarified, would help things flow better
- Are brief

Dimensions of Effective Questions

- **Context** - What framing is needed for group members to engage with the question?
- **Construction** - What if / how might we?
- **Scope** - What is the scope? What limitations?
- **Assumptions** - What knowledge are we each bringing? Where do we find additional information?
- **What we're listening for:** What is the the core purpose of the discussion that the question will prompt? What should I listen for amidst the many ideas that will emerge to support the group in its work? What is the the core purpose of the discussion that the question will prompt? What should I listen for amidst the many ideas that will emerge to support the group in its work?



Here are some examples of effective questions:

Questions to understand what matters to people:

- What do you want?
- What do you need?
- What makes it matter?
- Where will that get you?
- What does success look like?
- What is at stake?
- What is at risk?
- What is really going on?

Questions to build shared understanding of what's true today:

- What is working?
- What is not working?
- Who (or what) energizes you?
- Who (or what) drains you?
- What do you notice?
- What have we tried?
- What do lived experiences experts teach us?
- What is the current reality?
- What does the data tell us?

Questions to explore possibilities:

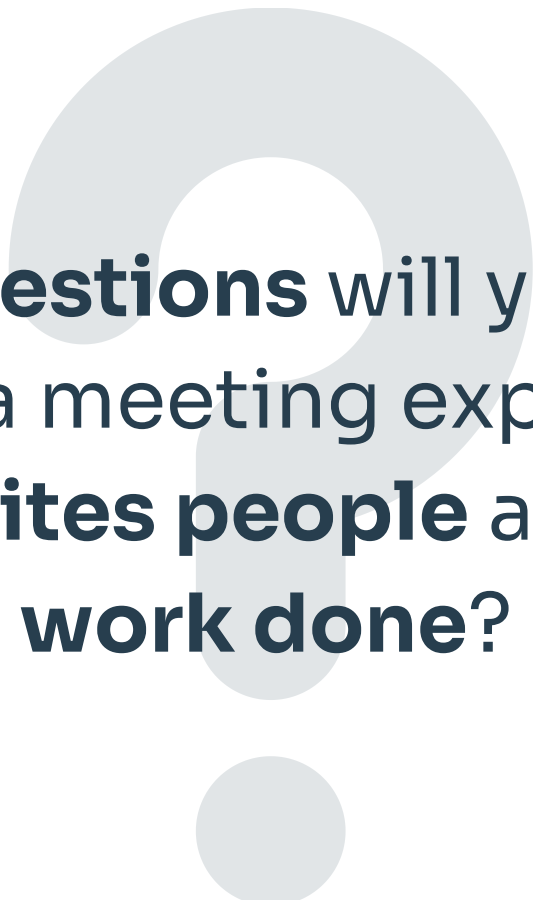
- What is possible?
 - What if yes?
 - What if no?
 - What is next?
 - What will change if we do... ?
 - How might we...?
 - What else is possible?
-

Questions to build clarity

- What are potential harmful / unintended consequences?
 - What pieces of the current inequitable systems does [the proposal] accept?
 - Who benefits?
 - What root causes does that proposal address?
 - What do you mean?
 - What else?
 - Who else?
 - What now?
 - What then?
 - With whom?
 - What feels unclear?
 - Would you?
 - By when?
 - Like what?
 - How else?
 - How would we/you do that?
 - Say more.
 - I'm realizing as we talk that I don't understand what you see the problem to be.
-

Moving into collective action:

- What promise will you make to our group?
- What could you/we start doing?
- What could you/we stop doing?
- What conclusions do you draw?
- What could get in our way?



What **questions** will you ask to
create a meeting experience
that **unites people** and gets
work done?



Source: Adapted from <http://rbfnetwork.com/new/resources-free/> (accessed August 25, 2022 by Danya Pastuszek) and from Dimensions Consulting's Powerful Questions (<https://www.lwv.org/sites/default/files/2018-07/Powerful%20Questions.LWV%20DEI%20Training%20Resource.pdf>); and from Tamarack's 2022 Community Change Institute session on Powerful Questions.