



Shared Purpose

Shared purpose is what bonds you as a team in your work, and becomes the story of your journey together, what you're working towards and why you're working towards it. Shared purpose is not assumed, but made explicit. Since this purpose is shared by nature, it must be cultivated together. Your team's shared purpose may represent a longer term vision for change or 'mountaintop' goals you are climbing towards, as well as how you choose to do that climbing (i.e.: the shorter term goals that you believe will get your team there). Your shared purpose becomes your collective guiding north star, and will guide your action as a team as well as be communicated to others you hope to join the cause. This is where creating a purpose statement together, which you can read back at team meetings, or revise together over time, comes in handy.

For example, consider these two shared purpose statements held by different teams:

- ❖ "Work collectively to create systemic change in our school by targeting our school's cafeteria food and single-use item waste to improve sustainability"
- ❖ "Help the majority of the student body practice veganism to promote sustainable living"

These two groups have some alignment: they both value sustainable practices around food. Yet their direction and strategy are different. Knowing who you are as a team will help you communicate, relate and work together with other groups, while maintaining your own goals and vision for change.

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1. Exploring your Purpose

1.1 How Do You Get Clear?

Cultivating shared purpose in your team means making time to talk about your vision for the future *as a team*, and breaking this vision down into tangible short term goals that everyone is on board with. Creating a **purpose statement** that you can read back at team meetings can be very helpful in keeping your team focused and in tune with your higher goals. Planning and executing meaningful actions together and reporting back on the outcomes will foster a sense of meaning and purpose in your weekly activities as you climb to your mountaintop.

1.2 Creating It

As you begin creating a shared purpose with your team, you might wonder how everyone is going to come together and how an agreement will be made. It's important to remember that while everyone has their own background and lived experiences, that doesn't mean you can't find commonality in an issue you want to change. A healthy team will have a common goal that goes above individual goals or plans, and this will help expand your team, grow and most importantly, have a cohesive environment so everyone can have fun and create a microcosm of the world you want to see!

In your initial shared purpose discussions focus on the common threads, rather than minor differences in opinions. If these differences persist, acknowledge them and have a discussion about what the underlying differences in perspectives or desires are about. Often one person's views and priorities can still fit with the rest of the group's vision. Remember, creating a shared purpose for your team is an iterative, collaborative process. Keep an open mind and don't feel bad if your opinion or thoughts aren't shared by the group.

1.3 What If You Don't All Agree?

As you begin your journey, you will need to make concessions with your own personal goals and opinions. Most of the time, this means that you will have to meet in the middle or compromise on your personal vision for the group. You might even have two camps of ideas on your team.

Say, for example, that your group realized the biggest source of emissions in their school was from the heating system, and decided to make their purpose to change it to a more sustainable heating source. One group of students wants to put posters

up around the school explaining why the electric heater would be better, and to hold ugly sweater days to raise awareness. Another group thinks it's more effective to hold a protest in front of the principal's office to convince her to change the boiler, and to make signs about how awful she is. The team decides that the protest is too antagonistic, but that they should still engage with authority. Instead, they choose to write a letter to the school board about why the electric heater would be better for the environment. In this instance, the group found cohesion by meeting in the middle and having a group discussion on what ideas they are willing to part with and others they are not. They decided that being rude to authority was too impractical for the group and not in line with their communities vision, and instead decided on writing letters to authority to help change their mind.

For a more detailed example, read the story below:

I started out as a new organizer about halfway through the team's journey. They had the general shared purpose of reducing community greenhouse gas emissions in their city, but disagreed on how to do it. The team was almost evenly split down the middle into "camps." One group wanted to promote green infrastructure along streets, including community gardens, more tree cover, benches, wider sidewalks and bigger bike lanes. They believed these infrastructures could be adopted and succeed because they were already in line with what the local government wanted to achieve.

The other group also wanted to promote these infrastructures, but wanted to take things a step further. They wished to expand on what the city was already planning and ask for something even bigger and bolder: to create car-free streets. They figured that they should ask for the most bold policy, thinking that the city government would meet them halfway and make a portion of a street car-free or "car-light".

As a newcomer with an outside perspective, I asked the two camps what made them hesitant about conceding to the other's vision. Together, we discovered that the hesitancy for "green infrastructure" group was due to their ideas around public perception. They didn't think their community was bought into car-free streets and would reject the notion. Meanwhile, the "car-free" group was worried that the green infrastructure wouldn't have a significant impact on reducing emissions.

This discussion showed that what they wanted was the same, but they had to do some further community research to feel good about the direction they took. The green infrastructure team actions were to find research on emissions impacts, and the car-free group did a street survey to garner public opinion.

When the car-free group came back with the results to the next team meeting, there was a large shift. They had discovered that 90% of the people they talked to were interested and excited about car-free streets in their neighborhood. The green infrastructure group began to be bought-in, and after reading the survey feedback, were just as excited about car-free

streets as the other group. Their fears seemed unfounded and they wanted to take that bold leap with the other teammates. The team was able to decide on their shared purpose and democratically vote on it at that very meeting. The energetic atmosphere made for a great team bonding experience and set the plan in motion!

So, what can you take away from this story? Despite having the same overall goal, why did the team disagree on how to get there? How did they solve their differences? As you cultivate shared purpose on your team, think of the holistic ways you can come together and learn from each other. If people are brought into the vision, they're more willing to compromise because they believe in your shared purpose.

For more information on cultivating shared purpose, specifically around the concept of the collective, [go to the Relationships and Culture Guide](#). A collective is a group of entities that share common issues or interests, that may work together to achieve a common objective. This is another perspective to understanding a team's purpose.

2. The Importance of Your Community

→ USE WITH: [Team Community Exercise and Worksheet](#)

Purpose:

- ❖ Team explores what their ideal community would look like.
- ❖ Team explores the different communities they want to work in and help change.
- ❖ Explore local organizations and their connection to different communities.
- ❖ Begin exploring who you are trying to have an impact on.

Time: 10 - 20 minutes

Worksheets included:

- ❖ Community worksheet:
 - Your Communities
 - Your Teams Communities
 - Other Shared Purpose Examples
- ❖ Anti-Oppression reflection:
 - Is anti-oppression in your team's shared purpose?

3. Visioning Exercise

Purpose:

- ❖ To see a vision of your future, and to have everyone on the team share their vision of the future with each other.
- ❖ To use that vision to find the similarities to cultivate a shared purpose.

Time: 20 - 30 minutes

3.1 Introduction

It takes courage to challenge existing norms and the status quo and to do something different. You have to be brave to act when you feel like the job is really big. You might be only one person, but you can make a difference, and can come together with others to help keep the planet healthy.

Society needs *creativity*, innovation, commitment, and hard work. Society needs your help to create an innovative, healthy, beautiful future.

One place you can look into to gain courage and hope is through knowing the team, and the rest of the community, will be carrying on the work of your ancestors who were working to create a better life for their kids. One day you will be ancestors, and future generations will be proud of the incredible work you did to leave them in a world that is worth living in and fighting for.

3.2 Visioning

Please settle back into your chair and allow your eyes to lower or gently close, take a deep breath, (*pause*), and let it out. (*Pause*).

“You are now travelling 100 years into the future. You arrive in a green space in the middle of what seems to be a city. Wow, things look different now. The innovations and inventions of your generation must have really changed the way everyone lives. You smell fresh crisp air, walk over to a fruit tree and pick and eat the delicious interesting fruit.

Take a good look around and look for other things that have changed. What has stayed the same? Think about what must have happened to get this world to where it is now, to livable, fun, beautiful, and thriving.

You hear the laughter of some children and a couple run over to you and stare at you and give you a bit of a funny look. They look familiar, as if they could be family. They ask you, “who are you? Where are you from?”

You tell them your name and that you are from 2020. Their eyes grow wide with excitement. “Wow, we heard about that time and how the earth’s systems and our people were really starting to struggle. We heard it was a time of great learning for the human family and that kids and adults had to make big changes for us to have the world we do today. Tell us, what types of things did you work on or do to make this world we live in now possible?”

Think about the things you may have worked on or actions you took in your lifetime that helped create a greener, more fair and just world. Answer them with a few things that you think you will work on or already are.

They listen carefully, they thank you, and they give you a quick hug before they run off to play.

You watch them go, thinking about the life they may lead. You take one last look around - notice what stands out about this world.

Take a deep breath in and travel back to 2020. Take your time opening your eyes and returning to the group.”

3.3 Debrief with the group

- ❖ How did this activity make you feel?
- ❖ What was the world you imagined like?
- ❖ What do you think you need to do to create the world that you imagined?
- ❖ What role do you want to play in creating a better world? What actions do you wish to take?
- ❖ What are the similarities in the futures you imagined?
- ❖ How can we work together to make that future a reality?

4. Finding Your Shared Purpose

4.1 Individual Exercise

→ USE WITH: [Shared Purpose Exercises and Worksheets](#)

Purpose:

- ❖ To find your individual purpose and research areas of interest.
- ❖ Reflect on the world you want to create, and the team you want to create it with.

Time: 10 minutes

4.2 Team Exercise

→ USE WITH: [Shared Purpose Exercises and Worksheets](#)

Purpose:

- ❖ To create a purpose statement for your team.
- ❖ To connect with your fellow team members and find common issues you care about.
- ❖ Begin critically thinking about your community and the issues within different constituencies and how they can be effective.

Outcomes:

- ❖ Your team's shared purpose statement.
- ❖ Deciding what community you will work within.

Time: 50 - 55 mins

5. Going Deeper and References

5.1 Go Deeper

For inspiration and further examples cultivating Shared Purpose:

- ❖ Kalu Yala is an eco-village, building to be the most sustainable modern town. [Check out Kalu Yala's shared purpose for inspiration here.](#)
- ❖ [Watch this Ted Talk by Stephen Jon Thompson on "Creating a Community and Finding Purpose". \(13:32\)](#)

5.2 References

Leadership Organizing and Action, (2016, December 12 - 14), Open Society Foundation Youth Exchange

<http://communitylearningpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Ganz-Marrakesh-training-guide-.pdf>

Organizing: People, Power, Change, (2014, October), Dogwood Initiative, Leadnow, One Cowichan, the David Suzuki Foundation, Stonehouse Institute, Organize BC, and genius.

https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/themes/52e6e37401925b6f9f000002/attachments/original/1423171411/Organizers_Handbook.pdf?1423171411

5.3 Acknowledgements

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