

Building Relationships

Key Concepts

- The **1:1 meeting** is a key tool for establishing and maintaining relationships; there are three types of 1:1s – recruitment, maintenance, and escalation.
- A **“hard ask”** is an effective way to ask for a commitment to establish a relationship.
- **Recruitment and retention best practices** can significantly increase the rate at which new people join and stay on your team.

Why Build Relationships?

Again, we define organizing as leadership that enables people to turn the resources they have into the power they need to make the change they want. Power comes from our **commitment** to work together to achieve common purpose, and commitment is developed through relationships.

“Organizing is a fancy word for relationship-building.”

– Mary Beth Rogers

Building Intentional Relationships

Relationships are rooted in shared values. We can identify values that we share by learning each other’s stories, especially “choice points” in our life journeys. The key is asking each other “why?”

Relationships are long term. Organizing relationships are not simply transactional. We’re not simply looking for someone to meet our ask at the end of a 1:1 meeting (read on for what this means) or house meeting. We’re looking for people to join with us in sustained, long-term growth and action.

Relationships are created by mutual commitment. An exchange becomes a relationship only when each party commits a portion of their most valuable resource to it: time. Because we can all grow and change, the purposes that led us to form the relationship may change as well, offering possibilities for deeper relationships or more enriched exchange. The relationship itself becomes a valued resource.

Relationships involve consistent attention and work. When nurtured over time, relationships sustain motivation and inspiration and become an important source of continual learning and development for the individuals and communities that make up your organizing campaigns.

The 1:1 Meeting

The 1:1 meeting is a tool to establish, maintain, and grow relationships in organizing. Each 1:1 meeting has four key pieces:

Purpose – Be up front in establishing why you are meeting in order to make sure you are both on the same page. If you plan to ask the person you're meeting with to make a commitment at the end of your 1:1, it is appropriate to let them know when you set up the meeting and remind them at the beginning of your meeting, so that they aren't caught off guard.

Exploration – Most of the 1:1 is devoted to exploration by asking probing questions. If you are meeting a person for the first time, ask questions that help you understand their story, values, and resources that may be relevant to your shared purpose (e.g. knowledge or skills they may have). If you already have a relationship, ask questions that help you understand what's going on in their life, or the challenges or success they are experiencing in their organizing.

Exchange – We exchange resources in the meeting such as information, support, and insight; you may connect your stories or provide coaching on a challenge. This creates the foundation for future exchanges.

Commitment – A successful 1:1 meeting ends with a commitment to start working together or continue working together.

Three Types of 1:1 Meetings

There are three types of 1:1s that you will use or engage in in your organizing relationships.

1. Recruitment 1:1

These meetings happen at the start of a relationship to connect you and a new organizer and establish a connection based on shared goals and values. The goals of the recruitment 1:1 are to make a personal connection, use your personal story to identify and gauge potential and interests, probe for a shared experience and connect on values, and lastly, pivot to engagement – that is, move the volunteer to action based on what you've discussed. Think about the volunteer's aptitude, skills, and connections when considering how to best engage them.

See page 18 later in this section for a sample recruitment 1:1 meeting agenda.

2. Maintenance 1:1

These meetings should occur regularly between you and each of your organizers (assuming that you are in a leadership role in your team or snowflake). This is an opportunity to catch up on a personal level, debrief recent actions taken by the organizer and their team, and offer coaching. Maintenance 1:1s should be scheduled regularly and proactively: do not wait for a problem to occur to schedule one. A good guideline is to schedule a maintenance 1:1 every two weeks.

3. Escalation 1:1

These meetings are for organizers who are ready to take the next step on the "ladder of engagement" in assuming more responsibility and taking on ownership of goals (see the Structuring Teams section for more information on the "ladder of engagement"). First, recognize the accomplishments the organizer has already made, then propose the idea of taking on this new leadership role. If all goes as planned and the organizer accepts, take the time to clearly lay out the responsibilities and expectations for this new role.

Because every organizer has a limited amount of time, and maintenance 1:1s need to happen regularly, each organizer has a limit to how many relationships they can maintain. See the Structuring Teams section for information on "sustainable relationship ratios."

Maintenance 1:1s are the primary opportunity to coach an organizer. See the Coaching section for more information on how to approach coaching.

Hard Asks

When you ask someone to make a commitment – for instance, attend an event or take on a new role – it's important to make an effective ask, or what we call a "hard ask." A hard ask is an ask that results in a commitment to a specific action. Here are some best practices for a hard ask:

- Ask in **concise, plain, and specific language**.
 - » Example of an effective hard ask:
"Can you come to our team meeting next Wednesday at 6pm at Alisha's house?"
 - » Example of an ineffective ask:
"Would you be interested in coming to a meeting at some point to meet the team and talk about how you might want to get involved?"
- Never apologize for asking: organizing is an opportunity, not a favour. Sometimes we feel badly for asking someone to take action because we feel it is an inconvenience, when really, we're providing the person we're asking with an **opportunity** to take action.
- Don't ask them to commit to something general; instead, **have a specific event or role in mind**. If it's an event (e.g. a canvassing event or house meeting), include the date, time, and location in your ask.
- **Convey urgency**: Describe an urgent problem and how the person you are asking is the solution to the problem.

Three Types of No

When securing commitment, it's inevitable that our hard asks will sometimes be met with "no." In organizing, there are **three types of "nos"** that you will encounter – "**not now**," "**not that**," and "**not ever**" – and being attuned to the difference will dictate how you proceed with the person you're asking.

If someone says "no" they might mean "not that time," so try offering another time or date. For example:

"Can you come to our next team meeting on Monday at 5PM?"

"No, I have to work then."

"No problem, we have another meeting next Sunday at 1PM, can you come to that?"

If someone says "No, I don't want to do that," it probably means "not that." Try asking them to commit to something else. For example:

"Can you come door-to-door canvassing with us on Tuesday at 5PM?"

"I don't know if I feel comfortable going door-to-door, I've tried it before and found it really intimidating."

"That's okay! We are also planning an event to recruit new volunteers for the end of the month. Will you come to the planning meeting for that on Sunday at 1PM?"

If someone says definitively “No, I’m not interested in doing more” or “No, I don’t want to join the team,” then don’t worry about it! Thank them and move on. For example:

“Can you come door-to-door canvassing with us on Tuesday at 5pm?”

“No, I am too busy right now to take on anything else, I’m sorry!”

“That’s okay, thanks for taking some time to talk with me. Have a great day!”

Sample Recruitment 1:1 Agenda

The following is a sample recruitment 1:1 meeting agenda. Reminder here that this is a framework you can follow, not an exact formula for what you must do in a 1:1.

Purpose (2 minutes) – Be up front about your purpose for the meeting (e.g. “Our team needs a new canvass lead.”), but that first, you’d like to take a few moments to get acquainted.

Exploration, Connection, and Exchange (20 minutes) – Most of the 1:1 is devoted to exploration by asking probing questions to learn about the other person’s values and interests, as well as resources they might hold. In response, it’s up to you to share enough about your own values, interests, and resources so that it can be a reciprocal exchange. Start by asking questions like:

“Why is this issue important enough for you to act?”

“Can you remember the first time you stood up for something you believed in?”

“Did you always feel strongly about this issue? Why / why not and what changed that?”

Once you have an understanding of their story and motivations, share yours. Wherever you find similarities between their story and yours, make a connection.

Commitment: A Hard Ask (10 minutes) – A successful 1:1 meeting ends with a commitment to work together. This commitment is best secured through a hard ask:

- Stress the urgency of the commitment you are asking for:
“We need another canvass lead to enable our team to meet our target.”
- Emphasize the values you have in common:
“To achieve the change we want we need to meet our targets.”
- Frame it so that it seems the person you’re asking is the solution to the problem:
“Will you take on the role of canvass lead?”
- Be specific, make sure they understand what it is you are asking them. Provide time and space for them to ask questions until they’re clear.
- End the meeting with an understanding of next steps – that is, they should leave knowing the next time you will meet or how and when they will hear from you.

In this portion of the 1:1, you are trying to get them to share their Story of Self with you, and then to share your story to build a Story of Us. See the Telling Stories section for what this means.

Best Practices for a 1:1

Do

Schedule a time to have this conversation (usually 30-60 minutes)

Plan to listen and ask questions

Have a plan for your meeting – give context or purpose, connect with one another, and secure commitment

Share experiences and motivations

Illustrate a vision that articulates a shared set of interests for change

Be clear about your next steps together

Split the bill if you meet in a coffee shop or restaurant

Meet in public unless you know them well (e.g. a coffee shop or public park)

Don't

Be unclear about purpose and length of conversation

Try to persuade rather than listen and ask questions

Chit chat about your interests

Skip stories to 'get to the point'

Miss the opportunity to share ideas about how things can change

End the conversation without a clear plan for next steps

Pay for the whole bill (note: it can make the relationship feel transactional and can get expensive in the long run!)

Recruitment & Retention Best Practices

Employing best practices can significantly increase the rate at which new people join and stay on your team. Here are some key best practices to keep in mind when building and maintaining relationships:

- Don't be apologetic: organizing is an opportunity, not a favour. When asking for commitment, be enthusiastic.
- Always Follow-Up: When someone offers to get more involved, ask for their contact information and give them yours. Follow up with them as soon as possible, ideally within 48 hours.
- Always schedule for the next time: don't let anyone leave without asking when they'll be coming back.
- Confirm commitment: use a hard ask and make sure your people understand that you are counting on them.
- Plan for no-shows: assume that half of your people will turn up. For example, if you need four people for a successful event, plan on scheduling eight.
- Design actions that are empowering to participate in.

Designing actions so that they are inherently motivational is a key way to keep people engaged. See the Acting: Targets & Timelines section for information on "motivational engagement."

In organizing, it's up to us to create welcoming, organized spaces and engage volunteers so that they keep coming back. The following is a list of top reasons why volunteers don't return:

- They don't feel it is worth their time
- Atmosphere is disorganized and they don't feel they're receiving attention or direction
- No one explained why the work they are doing is important
- They are uncomfortable doing what they have been asked to do
- They feel overwhelmed by tasks and goals
- The volunteer environment is unwelcoming
- No one recognizes their contribution
- No one asked them

To summarize, building strong, resilient relationships is critical for effective community organizing. Our power stems from our commitment to one another and to taking action together, and the hard ask, the 1:1 meeting, and best practices for recruitment and retention are key ways we can secure commitment in our work.