

# ENGAGEMENT

One of the biggest tasks for an organizer is to ensure that a neighborhood has representation from all sectors of the community. Businesses, faith-based institutions, schools, homeowners, renters, and folks from diverse backgrounds all bring very different views and assets to help strengthen and build community.

It is equally important for an organizer to go out into the neighborhood and begin networking and connecting with individuals and groups to build trust so that engagement efforts are seen as authentic. There are several tools, concepts, and strategies that can be used to assist with engaging individuals and groups. You can network and connect by conducting one on ones, go door knocking, attending focus groups, participating in Study Circles, and developing surveys and questionnaires. You can also engage neighbors and stakeholders through communication and marketing efforts through flyers, email, websites, blogs, etc.

Some of the results you'll see from using these tools are:

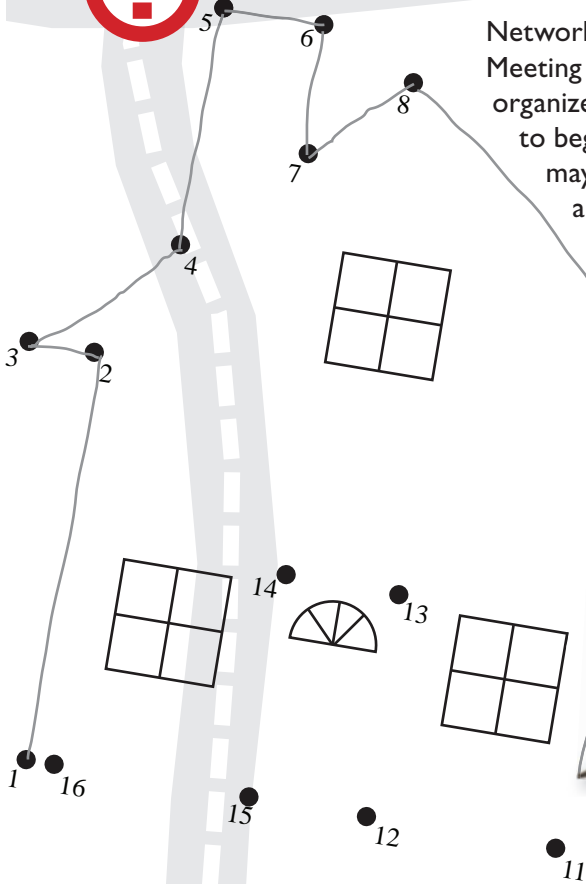
- Being able to get people to the table to talk about issues and share their gifts, skills and talents
- Giving the organizer the chance to be visible and build trust within the community
- Moving from talking about issues and concerns to action
- Developing solutions that create ownership within the community
- Discovering resources to make actions real and reachable
- Communicating your message so that others are engaged

## What's Covered

- Networking and Connecting
- Social Tools
- Communication Efforts



## NETWORKING AND CONNECTING



Networking and connecting are one of the first steps in organizing. Meeting representatives from the community can not only help the organizer become more familiar with what groups exist, but allows you to begin to build relationships with key neighborhood individuals who may be willing to assist you in the future. Learning who the players are in the community will allow you to tap them for their input and expertise. It will also allow you to begin connecting individuals and/or groups that may have shared interests.

There are two aspects to networking and connecting: social and technological. Some of the social aspects include one on ones, door knocking, focus groups and Study Circles. Technological aspects include your communication and marketing efforts such as email, websites, blogs, etc, which we will talk more about in the “Communication Efforts” section.

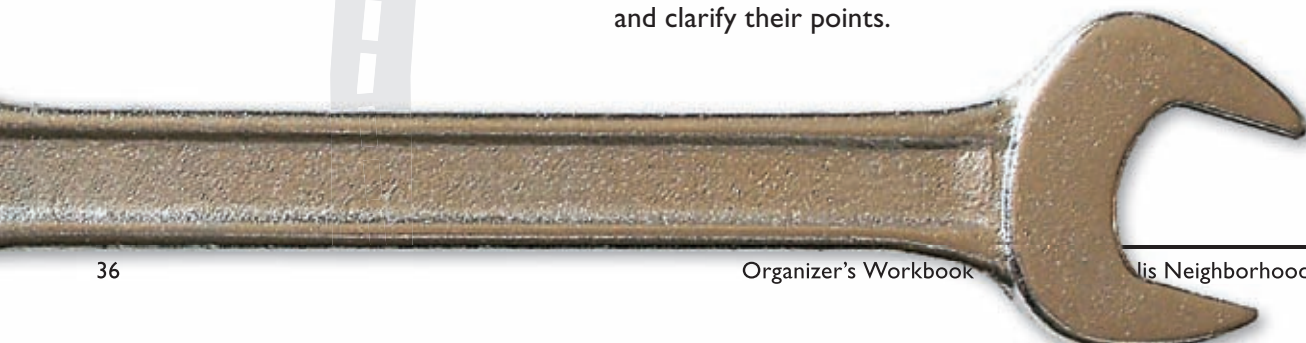


## SOCIAL TOOLS

### ONE ON ONES

What is a one on one?

“A one on one is a personal conversation with an individual community member to learn about his/her concerns, level of interest and commitment to an issue, and the resources the person has to offer,” (Marin Institute, para. 1, 2006). As an organizer, you can educate others about current issues and upcoming events and projects that may be going on to engage and raise awareness. The location of the one on ones can be a mutual place (library, coffee shop, etc) where you have the opportunity to have an in-depth conversation. Be respectful of the interviewee’s time. A suggested time for a one on one is 45 minutes to an hour. The most important aspect of a one on one is to build trust and a relationship with the individual that will encourage them to get involved. The best way to get the most out of a one on one meeting is to let the individual express his or her thoughts as you ask questions and clarify their points.



### Who should be asked?

You want to talk to as many people as possible. You should also continue to talk with individuals before, during, and after a project or event.

The Marin Institute (2006) recommends the following:

In order to have a broad base of support and determine people's real concerns, it is important to make contact with a representative sample of the community. It is important not to miss any groups or sectors in the community, or they will not have ownership of the issue, and the organizer will not know what their concerns are (Para. 3).

### How to find them?

Begin with individuals that you already know. Ask the people who you interview to identify other leaders and stakeholders that they think should be included.

### What should you bring?

Bring information that briefly explains what your organization does and why you are conducting one on ones. You should also develop a document with pre-identified questions. Leave space between the questions to quickly jot down replies and note interest. Make sure to continue to make eye contact and use body language to assure that you are capturing and appreciating what they have to say (see section on Neighborhood Meetings). It may not be a good idea to bring a tape recorder or type your notes on a laptop computer during the one on one. The focus should be on building the relationship with the individual and finding out their interests, versus simply gathering data.

### What to ask?

In order to determine the level of commitment that an individual will have, you'll need to find out as much as possible. It is important that you ask appreciative questions that make sure that the person is not only providing you with his/her own ideas and opinions, but also looking at things from a positive perspective (see section on Neighborhood Meetings).

- Here are some sample questions that were given to trained resident volunteers to ask community leaders during one on ones in the Binford Redevelopment and Growth (BRAG) area located on the North East Side of Indianapolis.
- 1) Who are you: Neighbor, Businessperson, School or Church?
  - 2) How long have you lived, worked, worshipped in the BRAG area?
  - 3) What brought you to the BRAG area?
  - 4) If you have located here recently (last 3 years), why did you choose this area?
  - 5) If you had three wishes for our area, what would they be?
  - 6) If you are not already involved in the BRAG area, what would motivate you to act?
  - 7) Without being humble, what do you value about yourself as a friend, parent, professional or citizen?
  - 8) If you had unlimited funding, what would you spend your money on in our area?
  - 9) Do you know of another person we should interview?

It is important to stay neutral. Don't lead the conversation to any specific issue or idea. You can make the conversation flow naturally by using open-ended questions.

## EXAMPLES

*Closed-ended:*

*"Do you feel that we need sidewalks on Main Street?"*

*Open-ended:*

*"What are your views about the infrastructure of the neighborhood?"*

*Here are some additional questions:*

- How long have you lived in the neighborhood/community?*
- What are the assets that you consider to be part of this community?*
- What is your vision for the neighborhood?*
- What gift, skill, and/or talent would you like to share with the community?*
- How would you like to get involved with the neighborhood?*
- Have you been involved in other organizations that have been/are involved in the community?*
- Who are others that we should speak with?*

### **Documenting your One on Ones**

Make sure that you document your one on ones. You can do this by developing a summary sheet that could be used at the end of the one on one interview to make sure that the most important points are captured.

The individuals that you have built relationships with through this one on one process should continue to be informed and engaged in activities, programs, and events that your organization has to offer. Finding out what residents and other stakeholders are interested in will assist you in finding out what it is that will keep them involved. You may find out that a business owner is concerned or interested in infrastructure and streetscape issues within your neighborhood. You can engage or create opportunities for them to participate in initiatives that address those issues.

Note: Outside of making sure that people are connected to their interest it is also equally important to make sure that individuals see the "big picture". This is the larger vision of the community. It is important to inform them how their position and work play apart in the overall quality of life of the neighborhood.

Sit down with your spouse, neighbor, or a colleague and practice your one on one interviewing skills. You can use the questions from the “What to ask?” section or develop your own. Record at least 3 main points of interest.

**TRY IT!**

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### **Building your Team**

Building a core team of volunteers from your community can assist you not only with one on ones, but with future endeavors that your organization may take on. It can also create opportunities for cultivating new leadership and ownership. Others outside of the community will begin to see that this is a citizen-driven effort.

### **Door Knocking**

Along with one on ones, door knocking can be an effective networking and connecting tool. One of the ways to make door knocking as effective as it can be is to have a specific area or targeted audience that you would like to approach. One of the benefits to door knocking is engaging residents that may not come to scheduled meetings or events that are going on in your community. It allows them to voice their ideas and vision for the neighborhood. At the same time, it allows you and your team the opportunity to “sell” your community. This could be the way to tell them about what’s happening with your organization and why it may be important for them to get involved.

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## FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups are facilitated discussions that pull in a targeted audience to provide input on a particular subject, topic, or issue. A focus group can be used as the first step to engage church leaders, apartment managers, business owners, etc. within a neighborhood.

### How to conduct a focus group

You can conduct a focus group by inviting 6-10 participants from a common background to a meeting. You may meet one time, or several, depending upon the input that you need. The facilitator should have pre-developed appreciative questions that will prompt individuals to begin the discussions. The facilitator should make sure that each participant provides input. You will also want to document the information that is shared.

### Who can help?

Work with neighborhood volunteers to assist you in identifying meeting locations, set-up, and the recruitment of participants. Churches, community centers, and schools usually have the adequate space to conduct a focus group.

Aside from neighborhood volunteers, consider working with local colleges and universities. Students from these institutions may be able assist you in recruitment and facilitation of the focus groups. Students may be able to use this opportunity and information as a class project, while you get the input that you need.

## STUDY CIRCLES

Similar to a focus group, Study Circles are facilitated, small group discussions that move residents to action. Study Circles allow residents to bring many different points of view together to create the best possible solutions to tackle different community issues. Study Circles are a great way to engage residents and other stakeholders around comprehensive community organizing.

A STUDY CIRCLE

- Is a small, diverse group of 8 to 12 people.
- Meets together for several, two-hour sessions.
- Is organized by a diverse group of people from the whole community.
- Includes a large number of people from all walks of life.
- Has easy-to-use, fair-minded discussion materials.
- Uses trained facilitators who reflect the community's diversity.
- Moves a community to action when the study circles conclude.
- Sets its own ground rules. This helps the group share responsibility for the quality of the discussion.
- Is led by an impartial facilitator who helps manage the discussion. He or she is not there to teach the group about the issue.
- Starts with personal stories, then helps the group look at a problem from many points of view. Next, the group explores possible solutions. Finally, they make plans for action.

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Study Circles are based on the following principles...

- Involve everyone. Demonstrate that the whole community is welcome and needed.
- Embrace diversity. Reach out to all kinds of people.
- Share knowledge, resources, power, and decision making.
- Combine dialogue and deliberation. Create public talk that builds understanding and explores a range of solutions.
- Connect dialogue to social, political, and policy change.

Study Circles can provide a new platform for those residents that may have never gotten involved before.

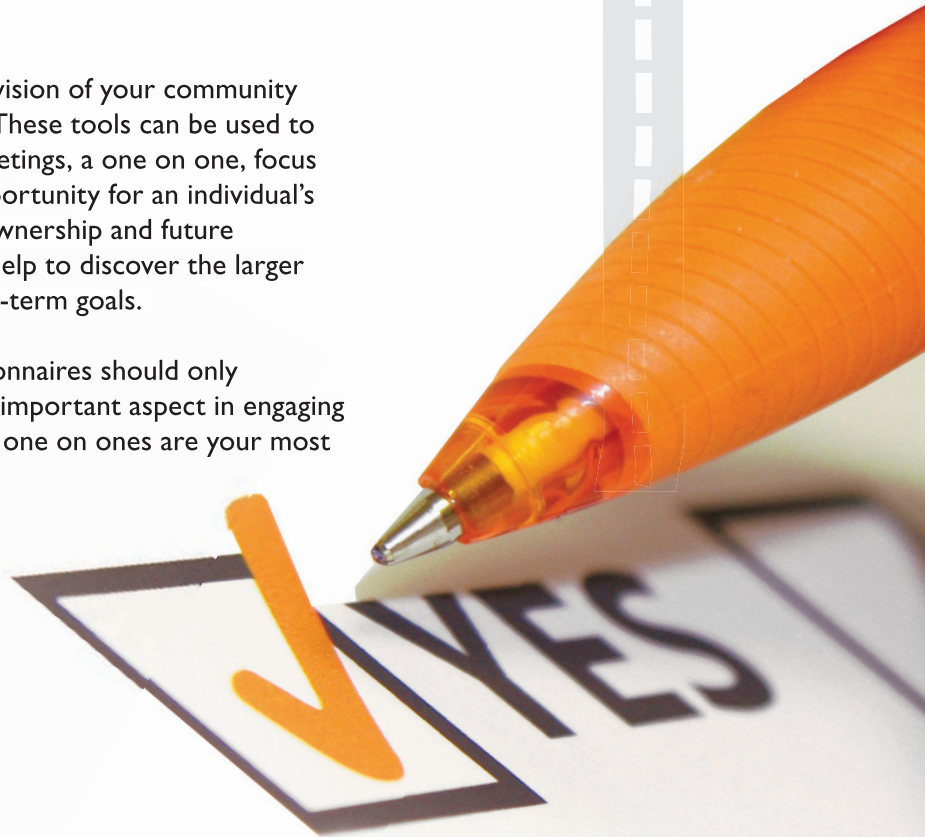
### **How to conduct a Study Circle**

If you are interested in hosting Study Circles in your neighborhood, contact the Indianapolis Neighborhood Resource Center for technical assistance, facilitator training, and resources. INRC encourages neighborhoods to use the Study Circle process to engage new individuals into the great work that is going on throughout the city. You should also visit the Everyday Democracy (formally the Study Circles Resource Center) web page at [www.everyday-democracy.org](http://www.everyday-democracy.org). The site provides a step-by-step overview of how to plan, conduct, and move your Study Circles to action. It also provides additional resources and materials for little to no cost.

### **SURVEYS AND QUESTIONNAIRES**

Another way to gather information about the vision of your community is to conduct a survey or use questionnaires. These tools can be used to reach those that may not be able to attend meetings, a one on one, focus group, or study circle. It provides another opportunity for an individual's voice to be heard, which helps to encourage ownership and future involvement. Surveys and questionnaires can help to discover the larger vision and assist in determining long- and short-term goals.

It is important to note that surveys and questionnaires should only complement your outreach efforts. The most important aspect in engaging individuals is relationship building. Conducting one on ones are your most important tool to do this successfully.





## COMMUNICATION EFFORTS

Another way to engage others into your organization is by making sure that you communicate a clear message that tells your story. One way to do this is by developing a marketing effort that will work to captivate the audience that you want.

### TELLING YOUR STORY

Have you ever looked in the newspaper or watched the evening news and came upon a negative story about your neighborhood? Have you come across a headline that may have read, “Drugs and High Crime Continue to Rattle the Eastside?” This type of negative attention can sometimes derail your neighborhood’s efforts to be seen in a new light. It can also overshadow all of the great progress that you and your neighbors, after many years, have been working so hard to achieve.

As a neighborhood organizer it is important that you work along with the neighborhood to frame and tell the story of all of the positive work and success and relay that message to the larger community. These are the stories that you may not find in the daily newspaper or on the evening news. Developing your marketing strategy can assist you in spreading the great things that are happening.

### MARKETING YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Marketing is a process that helps you exchange something of value for something that you need.

Your marketing effort could be the first introduction to residents, businesses, and institutions within your community about your organization/association, initiative, or project. Having a strong marketing effort can help build the credibility that you need to engage others. As residents and other stakeholders begin to see the information and message that you are trying to send, the more interested they’ll be in finding out more and getting involved.

Marketing not only benefits the neighborhood, but can allow for businesses and institutions within your community to benefit. As these businesses and institutions become more familiar with your organization/association, they will be more likely to support your efforts. Once you have built the support that you need, you can begin to have a greater impact on the overall community. Using a newsletter, website, blog, or other marketing tools will allow you to reach well beyond your neighborhood. It can attract other neighborhoods, as well as businesses or institutions that may have a similar interest.

### MARKETING YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD CAN HELP YOU:

- Reach the audiences that you want with a message that motivates people to respond
- Stand out from the crowd and attract the kind of attention, support, and enthusiasm you need
- Tell your story the way you want it to be told
- Have a greater impact on your community

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## Marketing goals

There are two types of marketing goals – Action and Image. Action goals are specific, measurable, and have results. These should be related to things we can count. For example, you may be developing a computer class for seniors within your neighborhood. Your goal may be to have 30-40 seniors engaged in this class. Or, you may have a target for your newsletter to reach 500 households.

The other type of goal is Image. Image is the way that you want to be viewed as an organization/ association. You can create goals to help you change how you are seen. If you are just starting a new organization/ association, or suffering from an outdated image, it will be important to set Image goals to create positive change.

## Before you market your neighborhood, know your position

Your “position” means finding and establishing your unique role within the community. Finding your position can help you define your organization’s character and how it wants to be seen. It also gives you the opportunity to measure your reputation with the community. As your role becomes well known, your name will be firmly associated with the unique contribution that you make.

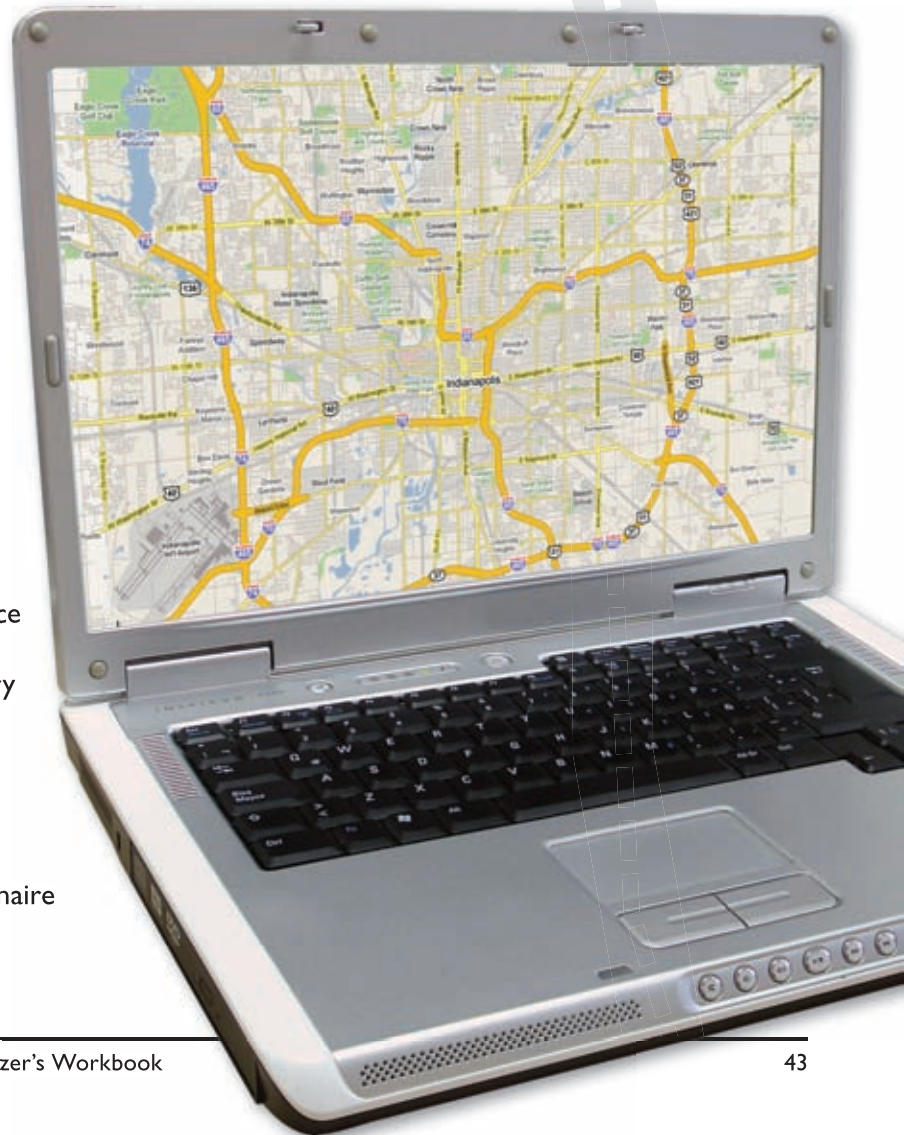
“The most effective marketing efforts are thought through from the beginning to the end.”  
*Gary Stern*

## TECHNOLOGY: EMAIL, WEBSITES, BLOGS, ETC...OH MY!

Although technological networking tools take time, effort, and sometimes money, it is always an efficient, timelier way to get information out to the community. Having access to technology such as email, websites, and blogs can not only reach a wider audience but add to the credibility of your organization. Technological tools can also provide another medium of input on issues and create a space for communities to advocate for themselves.

Examples of how technology can assist your community include:

- Developing a website to encourage residents to attend neighborhood meetings and events
- Emailing neighborhood meeting reminders to area residents
- Creating a blog to allow residents to voice their opinions about specific subjects
- Using the internet to research the history of the neighborhood
- Creating an e-newsletter
- Creating a video that shows your community in action and displaying it on Youtube.com
- Developing an online survey or questionnaire



These are just a few examples of how technology can assist us in connecting and networking with residents, businesses, faith-based institutions, and other stakeholders within the community. The most effective way to use these tools is to build upon the assets that are already within your community. Individuals and institutions can assist in:

- Creating a neighborhood newsletter
- Getting local media coverage for a community event
- Developing a neighborhood website
- Printing flyers for an upcoming event

Residents and partners bring skills, experience, and interest to your marketing efforts. It will be helpful to tap into and engage those residents that have marketing, media, and/or technological skills. Institutions bring skills and experience to the table, as well. Institutions such as businesses, faith-based organizations, and schools may be able to support your efforts by making copies or distributing your materials.

## TRY IT!

Communication Mapping - In the first column create a list of possible marketing tools that are available. These could include flyers, websites, newsletters, etc. In the second column list all of the possible collaborations or partnerships that could assist you in your communication efforts (neighborhood associations, businesses, etc.). In the third column, list all target populations. These are groups that are currently not engaged that you want to get involved (youth, seniors, renters, etc). Lastly, using the first three columns, think about strategies that you could create to develop an effective communication effort and list them in the fourth column. These will be things that you and your organization will do to make sure that your message is shared with the community.

1. Marketing Tools	2. Collaborations/ Partnerships	3. Target Populations	4. Strategies
Flyers	Neighborhood Associations	Youth	Ex. Strategy: Partner with the neighborhood church to develop a website that will encourage area youth to get involved in community service.
Websites	Board Members	Seniors	
Newsletter	Churches	Renters	

## EVALUATE YOUR MARKETING EFFORTS

Analyze progress on your action goals by measuring the specific results. If your goal is to increase attendance at your neighborhood meeting by 20% by June, make sure that you measure to see if you have reached your goal. You can measure your progress on image goals by surveying participants, members, board members, and funders. One of the ways to do this is by creating a simple survey or questionnaire that asks individuals who attend a neighborhood meeting or event how they found out about your organization/association. Evaluating your goals will help you to be more effective in your effort to inform and engage.

### **The Zawadi Exchange – Roving Listener Project**

Over the past few years in the Mapleton-Fall Creek neighborhood, the Roving Listener project has continued to engage residents. De'Amon Harges of the Zawadi (“Gift”) Exchange “roved” the neighborhood, door to door, listening to residents talk about their interest, talents, dreams, and gifts. This approach has built many new relationships within the Mapleton-Fall Creek area between neighbors by connecting them by their similarities and common interests. The process has also allowed residents to share resources and garner support within and outside of the community.

One of the outcomes of the Roving Listener Project that emerged was “The Cooks”. Cooking is a talent that became very apparent as the Roving Listener Project continued. As residents shared their love of cooking with De'Amon, he began to connect several of them together. Once the cooks met, they talked about ways that they could partner to share their love of cooking with others. They first began cooking for each other, which allowed them to continue to build their own relationship. As word got out about their cooking abilities, they were asked to cater events within the neighborhood. These events allowed “The Cooks” to think about how they could turn their talent and passion into an entrepreneurial opportunity.

Their big opportunity came when Lockerbie United Methodist Church asked them to provide the desserts for a new café that the church had opened. Today, residents from all over the City are able to sample “The Cooks” delicious treats. This is just one of many examples of how engaging residents within the community can lead to positive change.

## REAL LIFE SCENARIO



