

GUIDE

BUILDING BRIDGES

People:	Ideally everyone in your group
Time:	1 hour
Resources:	This guide and a place to meet

How can this help us?

There is more that brings us together than that which separates us. The world over, we all need food to eat, we all grieve when our loved ones die, we all thirst for happiness.

Transition is a process based on building trust and looking to the good that it presumes people will bring to the process. And yet, in the UK, less than 30% believe that “most other people can be trusted”. It’s worse in Singapore, where it’s just under 20%, and in Portugal, it’s just 10%. Both Singapore and Portugal have some of the highest rates of income inequality. In general, in countries that have a higher level of income equality, there are higher levels of trust. Given this, how can Transition succeed in building resilience if it doesn’t build friendship and trust across all “barriers”?

The guide:

“Us” and “them”

“I feel I’ve lived more deeply in my community in the past 2 years since I’ve been involved in Transition than I have in the previous 20 years of living here.”
Participant in Transition Tooting

“There are two sorts of people in the world; those who divide people into two types, and those who don’t!” Edward A Murphy Jr.

Often people talk about “us” and “them”. Talking about groupings isn’t a bad thing in itself but it can very quickly lead to talking about in-groups and out-groups. An example of this is that Transition is often described as being “white and middle-class” and yet I have met many people who are part of Transition and feel excluded by being described as white and middle-class. They do not feel their life experience can be boxed up into these categories.

This kind of “us” and “them” or “othering” comes about as a result of focusing on the things that set us apart rather than the things that bind us together. More often than not, “us” and “them” also implies that “we” are dominant and they are “subordinate”. Often there is talk of “reaching out” to bring people into “our” agenda. This approach rarely results in genuine engagement but more a one-way pledge of a group of people to convert “the others”.

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A reconnection with what is already there: Partnerships

Perhaps one way Transition can deepen connections in communities is by becoming more aware of and working with what is already there – peoples' existing experiences, their passions and aspirations, their compassion.

You can practically do this is by working in partnership. Partnerships enable strengths and experiences to be brought together to achieve something new that alone would not otherwise be possible. Partnering with a local women's group for example will bring an understanding of gender issues that might be difficult to acquire alone while partnering with a local tenants group will bring yet another kind of experience and focus. Each partnership offers an opportunity for learning, exchange and a re-shaping of what Transition is and means in different contexts. More than anything, developing partnerships means being ready to go to others rather than expecting everyone to come to you.

Map your connections

This exercise helps you to map the existing "bridges" or connections you have within your Transition group. This exercise is best done in groups of 4-6 people.

1. Take a piece of flipchart and sit around it together in your group with two differently coloured markers.
2. In the centre of the paper, write your names or the name of your Transition group.
3. Using a spider diagram format, write down names of groups, institutions or initiatives that you know of in your Transition area, it might be a local faith house, the local school, council, the football club, tenants group and so on
4. Using another colour pen, write down any people or "bridges" you know in that group, often groups are quite surprised by the number of connections they do have in their communities between them
5. Take a step back and look at what you've done then discuss which connections you'd particularly like to follow up

Make contact

Having done the exercise above, if you find that you want to connect with a group but don't have a bridging person to connect you then try the following steps:

- 1: Identify who you'd like to connect with
- 2: If you're nervous about connecting with this group then help yourself by finding out a bit more about them. For example, if you'd like connect with your local mosque then find out a bit more about Islam – read about the religion, research the structure in a mosque, find out about the mosque's local activities. Having done a bit of research, remember that you don't need to know everything. If you don't know what to do in a situation, people are unlikely to be offended if you just ask for example "shall I take my shoes off or leave them on?"
- 3: Contact the group and ask if you can go along to dialogue with them. Tell them who you are and what your group is interested in but make it clear that you want to hear from them too, go along to listen and ask questions – take an open mind and heart with you as your ally

4: Reflect with the group and build possible activities together

5: Reflect on the work you've co-created

6: Keep the connection alive through ongoing communication and activities

More support:

This guide is taken from the 7 Ingredients for a just, fair and inclusive Transition guide here: <http://transitionnetwork.org/resources/7-ingredients-just-fair-inclusive-transition-inner-transition-guide/>

For more support and information on building network and partnerships go here: <http://transitionnetwork.org/do-transition/starting-transition/7-essential-ingredients/networks-and-partnerships/>

Check out the 7 essential ingredients of Transition here: <http://transitionnetwork.org/do-transition/starting-transition/7-essential-ingredients/>

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Use the following space for your own notes.