



RIVER OF LIFE

The River of Life is a tool that can help a partnership reflect on its histories, motivations and influence on the partnership and how it has developed. This tool builds on the work of Paulo Freire to encourage reflexive dialogue. The purpose of the tool is to develop a communal narrative about what has brought the partnership together and the work it is doing. It provides the narrative using a set of guided questions and the metaphor of a river that allows partners to acknowledge, celebrate, reflect on, change and sustain the processes and goals for the project. It encourages a look at the internal partnership dynamics and also the external institutional, political, economic, and historical constraints and opportunities that shape the partnership.

The following is a brief summary of the exercise. For details, see facilitation guide and examples of Rivers of Life at: http://cpr.unm.edu/research-projects/cbpr-project/facilitation_tools.html

Objective

To help partnerships reflect on the histories and influences that motivate partners to work together and also on the goals, processes and results of your partnership work

Time

60 minutes (few minutes to individually reflect, 45 minutes for teamwork and 15 minutes to reflect)

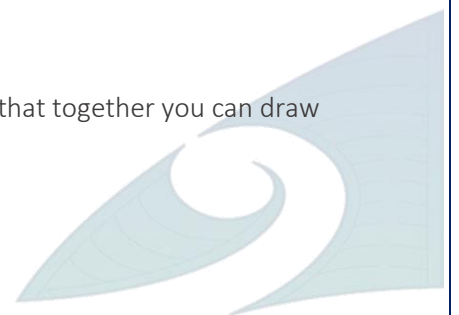
Materials

Sheets of paper, coloured markers, flipchart, scissors, magazines, construction paper and glue

Procedures

Explain the value of a river as a symbol for many cultures as it reflects life, growth and change. As partnership, engage in the following steps:

- a) Step 1: Each member of the partnership reflects independently about: When and why did you join the partnership? What is important to know about your community? What important events and changes have you seen?
- b) Step 2: Lay out a long sheet of paper and other art supplies so that together you can draw your partnership river of life.





- c) Step 3: Draw the river of life considering the beginnings, the influences, the obstacles, and the peaceful moments.
- d) Step 4: Make a historical timeline with dates below the river of life. Relate important historical events as well.
- e) Step 5: Reflect on the river of life considering the following questions:
 - 1. What stood out for you?
 - 2. What were facilitators for the partnership?
 - 3. What were some of the challenges?
 - 4. How could you use this River of Life in your work?
 - 5. How would you like the river to flow going forward?

Source: Sanchez-Youngman S, Wallerstein N. Partnership river of life: creating a history time line. In: Wallerstein N, Duran B, Oetzel JG, & Minkler M. editors. Community-based participatory research for health: advancing social and health equity, 3rd edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; 2018. p. 375-378.

