



Guide Book

Using Human Centered Design processes
for social good

A social change initiative of
Skills Society and
Project Citizenship
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Action Lab Leader Guide



**A THINK TANK
EXPERIENCE
THAT EXPLORES
CREATIVE WAYS TO
SUPPORT ENGAGED
CITIZENSHIP**

Taking on the role of being a Citizen Action Lab Leader is taking a courageous dive into exploring and supporting cutting edge work in human services.

Through the lab you'll be part of...

Helping improve quality of life outcomes

Helping teams to come up with creative solutions

Helping support the citizenship of people with disabilities

About the Lab



What is the Citizen Action Lab?

The citizen action lab offers a fun and creative experience that encourages participants to explore new ways for an individual with a disability to become more active and included in community life.

Where does an Action Lab take place?

The Action Lab takes place in our think tank space at Skills or out in the community. It is always facilitated by one of the Action Lab Leaders.

What happens?

During each session we guide the participants in disciplined brainstorming activities and action plans that will help to increase the participation and quality of life of a citizen who has a disability.

Why have an Action Lab?

If you are struggling to help an individual grow community connections, to find volunteer opportunities and work experience or simply want to explore new ways that they could contribute their gifts and talents in a meaningful way, then consider scheduling a session with the Action Lab.

Together we can help foster engaged citizenship in our community!

Preparing for an Action Lab

How you'll be asked to lead an Action Lab-

Lab- Requests for Action Labs will come to Ben Weinlick initially. When Ben receives the requests he will send out an email to the Action Lab Leadership Team to see who can host a lab within a 2 week period. At that point Ben will connect an available Action Lab leader with the Skills Society support worker, Manager or Team Leader requesting a lab.

Remind people to fill out the Discovery Sheet-

It is likely that the person requesting a lab will need a reminder from the available Action Lab Leader to fill out the Discovery Sheet. The Discovery sheet is necessary so that the participants in a Citizen Action Lab will have a starting point for brainstorming ideas. You'll have PDF copies to email to people

Tips

- Ask people to list at least 15 cool things the person likes and is interested in
- Ask people to note what the person they support spends their days doing
- Ask what the person gravitates towards when out in community



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Discovery
WORK-SHEET

Show
+ Tell



Fill this out before coming
to an Action Lab experience!

TO COME UP WITH IDEAS for cool roles, citizenship experiences and community connections we need to know a bit about this person and their unique gifts and interests. Make a list below that summarizes what they like, what they have shown interest in or are curious about. Here are some ideas to get you started:

LIST SPECIFIC DETAILS; e.g. instead of simply saying "likes music", write "Sophia likes classical music".

ASK AND EXPLORE QUESTIONS; e.g. What kinds of things does this person gravitate towards when they are out in the community? Where would this person want to spend their days? What do they love to do? What do you notice that they spend time and energy on at home? What are they naturally really good at? What are this person's gifts that often people don't notice?

A bit about: _____

Use this space to tell a story, draw a picture or attach an item that shows what **engaged citizenship** means to you.

Who should come to an Action Lab?

Face to Face Discovery before an Action Lab

In many ways the Citizen Action Lab is a way to help support staff to come up with and act upon creative community connecting of people they support. For discovery exploration sheets it is really important for staff to explore face to face with the people they support. This happens before an action lab.

Invite diverse perspectives and people

Depending on the person with a disability the action lab is for, it may or may not fit to invite the person to the first lab experience. Often we've found that an initial lab experience is best with key supports present and some outside positive people with little knowledge of the person. All ideas that emerge will need to be checked later with the person and their supports before moving forward. Make sure you have at least one person in the group who is really social, chats easily with people and brings humour. They will help to naturally inject humour and playfulness into the experience.

8 people max for an Action Lab

- Have at least 4 people and no more than 8 for a lab
- Invite some people that know the person well and are trusted by them
- Invite some key staff that support the person and will have responsibility to follow through on plans
- Invite some good Skills Society ideas people who may not know the person well. You might invite a team leader that has lots of great ideas and is enthusiastic. You might invite another manager to come and share ideas
- You might invite a community member who is creative or runs a business and would be willing to share ideas
- Try to gather a diverse mix of people for a lab

**Diverse
perspectives
make for
creative
ideas!**

Being a Steward of an Action Lab

What does a steward do?

As a leader of an action lab you will be a steward of the whole experience. A steward is like an active facilitator that helps explain what the lab is about, what will happen, what is expected of participants and helps keep the process on track. A steward should be friendly, enthusiastic and model the stages of the think tank process.



Good Action Lab Stewardship

- Explain what Citizen Action Labs are and most importantly why they can help
- Ensure everyone feels welcome and feels they have valuable contributions to make
- Model what we want to see in action labs, like creativity, humour, divergent thinking, convergent thinking.
- Show people the **Action Lab Agreement Card** and ask people if they are ok with following it
- Set time constraints and pick a time keeper
- Guide the process

Explain there will be 4 phases in the process...

1. **Check-in** (Getting to know each other)
2. **Discovery phase** (Learning about the person the lab is centered around)
3. **Idea phase** (Divergent thinking, coming up with lots of ideas)
4. **Action Phase** (Convergent thinking, narrowing down to 3 actionable ideas for the circle of support to work on with the person, picking who will help implement the ideas)

Explaining our Lab Process

Creativity and Thinking Differently

The Citizen Action Lab is in many ways about helping people get unstuck from status quo assumptions so together we can generate fresh ideas and action that will improve the quality of life and citizenship experience of people with disabilities.

Thinking differently and creatively is challenging because we all see through the lens of our past experience. Seeing through the lens of our past assumptions usually leads to coming up with ideas based on what was familiar in the past. Which means we just keep doing the “*same old, same old*”. To combat this, we need to engage in a purposeful creative process that helps facilitate new thinking and action

Divergent and Convergent Thinking styles

We need big creative ideas and we need practical action planning to make an Action Lab successful. **Divergent Thinking** is a thinking style that is associated with wild, creative, free flowing ideas. We need Divergent thinking when coming up with fresh ideas. **Convergent Thinking** is a thinking style associated with sorting through all the ideas you came up with and

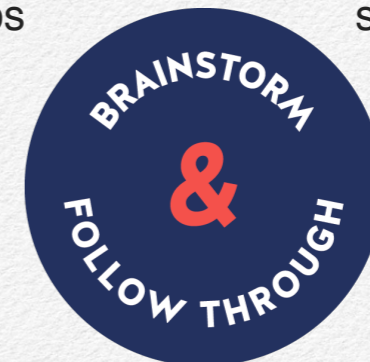
picking practical ideas that could easily be acted on. We need both styles at the right times in a structured process.

Problems arise in traditional brainstorm sessions usually for 4 reasons...

1. **Because of not having a structured creative process to follow**
2. **Because participants mix thinking styles at the wrong times**
3. **Because of not leaving time for action planning**
4. **Because a couple voices dominate the discussion**

We need a structured process that helps harness all our thinking power at the right times. During the Citizen Action Lab there is a specific amount of time for wild, divergent thinking and a time for convergent, practical action planning. We need to be careful to not mix thinking styles at the wrong times.

Using a creative problem solving process helps keep all this on track and helps sustain trust among participants which is essential to feeling brave enough to suggest new ideas.





– OUR –

Think Tankin'

EFFECTIVE PROCESS

HELLO
my name is

CHECK IN



Discovery

WORK-SHEET



LET LOOSE WITH IDEAS!
– Divergent thinking –



BREAK INTO ACTION
ORIENTED THINKING FOR
LAST 15 MINUTES
– Convergent thinking –

THROUGHOUT THE
SESSION WE ASK
OURSELVES:

WHAT CAN I DO TO
FOSTER TRUST WITH
OTHERS?

Divergent

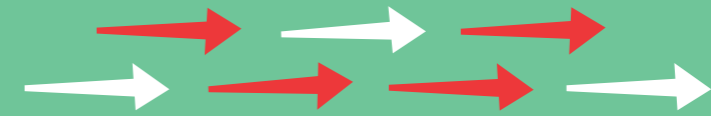


Divergent Thinking Guidelines

The brainstorming and thinking of new possibilities phase of our creative process

- **TURN OFF YOUR FILTERS**
Whatever idea comes to mind go with it. Don't evaluate at this stage. Ideas will be evaluated later.
- **GO FOR QUANTITY**
Seems weird, but the more ideas the better. Go for lots of ideas. The more ideas you have the greater chance of having a good one.
- **BUILD AND COMBINE IDEAS**
The most innovative ideas have come about through mixing things together that seem crazy at first. Let one idea spark another idea. Build on each others ideas.
- **EMBRACE THE WEIRD AND WILD!**
The wilder the ideas the better. It's easier to tame a wild idea than to invigorate a weak one. Stretch your thinking. It's the crazy ones that make real positive change in the world.

Convergent



Convergent Thinking Guidelines

After divergent thinking we need to find ideas that can turn into action

- **DON'T THROW OUT WET BLANKETS**
In critiquing ideas we can easily take it personally and disturb collaboration. Remembering the *Action Lab Agreement* helps.
- **BE AFFIRMATIVE!** Discipline yourself to think, "*what's good about this idea being presented to me?*" Be careful of too quickly succumbing to the "*no way!*" reflex.
- **CHECK YOUR OBJECTIVES**
What is the point of this Action Lab? Would the person you are coming up with creative solutions around want to engage with what you are suggesting? If not, is it because it is new, unfamiliar?
- **IMPROVE YOUR IDEAS**
Not all ideas are workable solutions. Be disciplined about refining and improving an idea until you have some first steps to get moving on.
- **BE BRAVE!** Don't dismiss new thinking or fresh ideas out of hand.

Action Lab Agreement

Put the Action Lab Agreement card out on the table as you explain the lab process and agreement

The Action Lab Agreement helps participants see what is expected of everyone and gives some cues as to what behavior can help foster trust, curiosity, creativity and practical action planning.

Here you can also put the buttons out from your action lab kit and see if people want to wear them to help remind each other of our lab agreement



CITIZEN ACTION LAB

Action Lab Agreement

- **LETS ACT IN WAYS THAT FOSTER TRUST**
Treat each other with respect. Be supportive. Help others be successful.
- **LETS BE OURSELVES**
Bring your unique perspective. And speak in ways that people will be willing and eager to listen.
- **LETS BE CURIOUS**
Be open to having your thinking provoked and expanded. Being willing to be surprised.
- **LETS BE CAREFUL OF OUR JUDGMENTS**
We see through our own colored glasses. Be careful of absolute judgments, certainties, assumptions and biases.
- **LETS ACKNOWLEDGE AND APPRECIATE**
Strengthen collaboration through appreciating others contributions and strengths.
- **LETS PRACTICE REFLECTIVE OPENNESS**
Rather than point fingers or say why someone is wrong, describe where your perspective is coming from. Why do you see situation a certain way. Describe your biases. Doing this will make it easier for people to hear each other's insights.
- **LETS BE OPEN TO FEEDBACK**
Be receptive to new ideas and come with a willingness to change your thoughts, opinions and behaviors.
- **LETS NOT BE HELD BACK BY OBSTACLES**
Focus on what's possible. Don't believe in the power of perceived obstacles. Creative teams find ways around challenges that arise.
- **LETS HAVE FUN**
Work hard and let's not take ourselves too seriously. Humour and fun fosters trust and opens up new ways of thinking.

1. Check-in

10 min

Getting to know each other

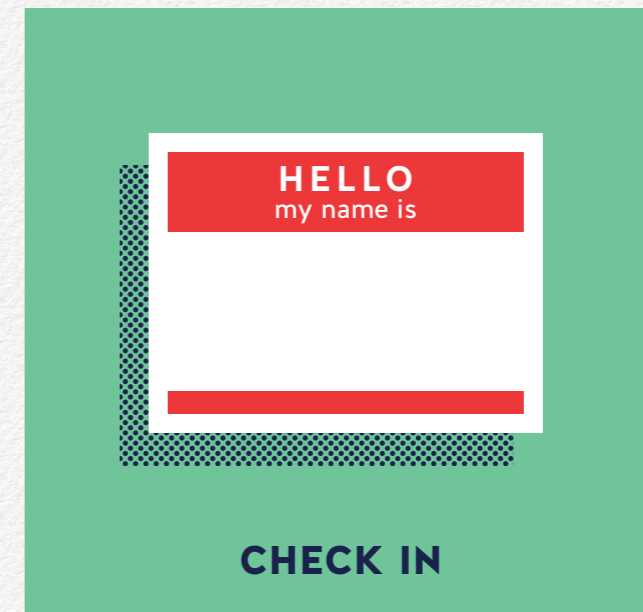
The check-in is a way of getting to know participants and building trust. This is really important and should never be skipped.

Have people go around and introduce themselves and say how they are doing, what they've been up to lately, if there is anything weighing on their mind. Ask participants to share at least 10 words.

As the leader, go first and model what a good check in is like.

Using the Visual Connector cards for check-in

You could also use the Visual Connector cards that are in your Action Lab kit. **Spread the cards out and ask participants to pick one that relates to what engaged citizenship means to them.** More ideas for ways to use the cards are in the card box.



2. Discovery Phase

15 min

Discovery and Learning



This is where the think tank really starts to take off. Before we can come up creative community connecting ideas that will help improve someone's quality of life, the Action Lab group needs to learn about the person the lab is for.

Tell participants about the discovery phase

Let participants know that we first need to hear about the person and their likes, interests and aspirations in order to later come up with ideas.

Take out the completed Discovery Sheet

Ask the participant(s) that completed the discovery sheet with the individual, to share a bit of the person's story, what the person likes, where they like to go in community, what they're interested in etc...

Make a Summary List

As the lab leader, have a piece of paper ready to list the key interests and likes that emerge as the story is shared and people begin to ask questions about the person. List what they like, what they have shown interest in or are curious about.

List Specific Details

E.g. Instead of simply saying "likes music", write "Sophia likes classical music".

Exploratory questions if you need them...

What kinds of things does this person gravitate towards when they are out in the community?

Where would this person want to spend their days?

What do they love to do?

What do you notice that they spend time and energy on at home?

What are they naturally really good at?

What are this person's gifts that often people don't notice?

Is there anything they used to do as a kid that they loved and haven't done for a long time?

Ask, Why questions. Why do you think they like _____? Where does that interest come from?

--	--

4. Action Plan Phase

15 min

Tell participants about shifting to the Action Planning phase

Now it's time to shift to the convergent thinking phase where everyone sorts through the ideas the group generated and picks the best 3 to see about exploring further.

Remind participants to be mindful of the Convergent Thinking Guidelines. Capture generated ideas on the Action Plan Sheet



Convergent Thinking Guidelines
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⚡	WHO WILL HELP?	ACTION PLAN			GOAL
		1st we need to	2nd we need to	3rd we need to	Community Connections
1					
2					
3					

Wrap up

2 min

Now there should be a plan of action that key supports can take back to the person and have further discussion about the proposed new action plans.

Before everyone runs off, ask people to go around and say one thing they are excited about from the action lab.

You could use the Visual Connector cards again and ask people to pick a card that visually sums up what they will take away from an action lab experience.

Thank everyone



Action Lab Checklist

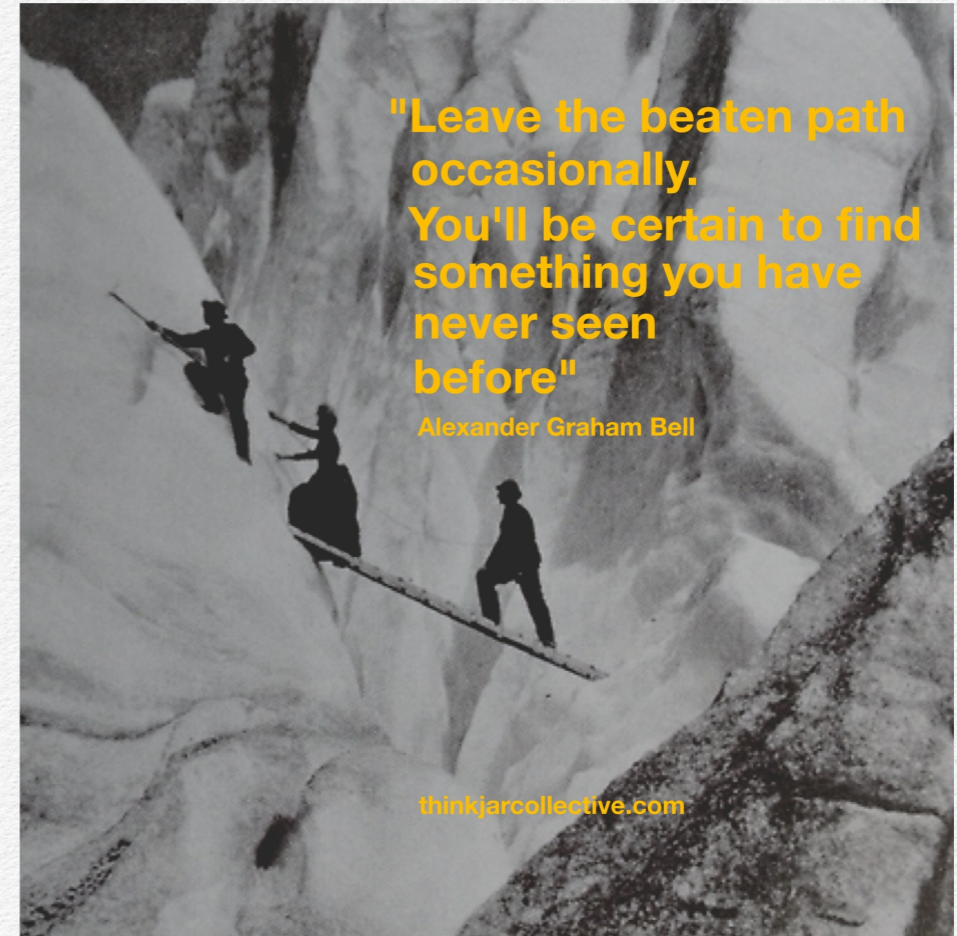
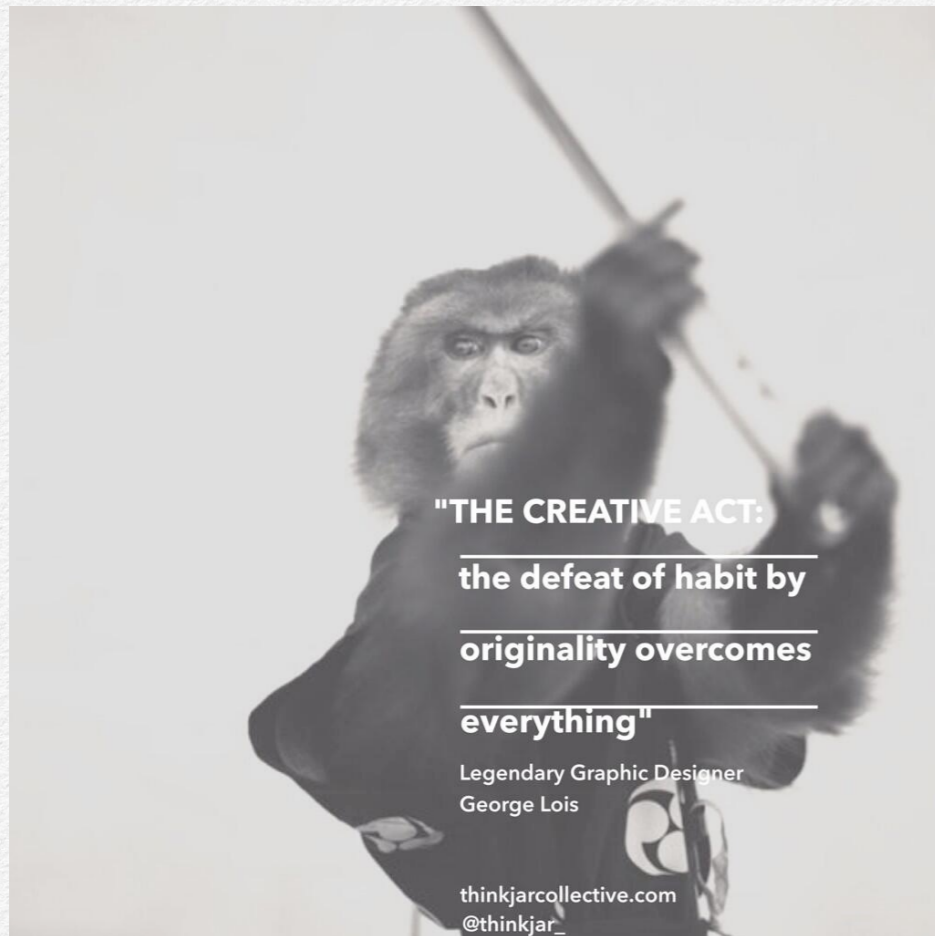
Before an Action Lab Checklist	
Reminded key staff to fill out Discovery sheet before coming to an action lab?	()
Invited the right people?	()
Found a good location?	()
People committed to be present for 1 1/2 hours?	()
Someone bringing snacks?	()
Have the action lab kit?	()
Brought an artifact or story about what citizenship means to you?	()

THROUGHOUT THE SESSION WE ASK OURSELVES:

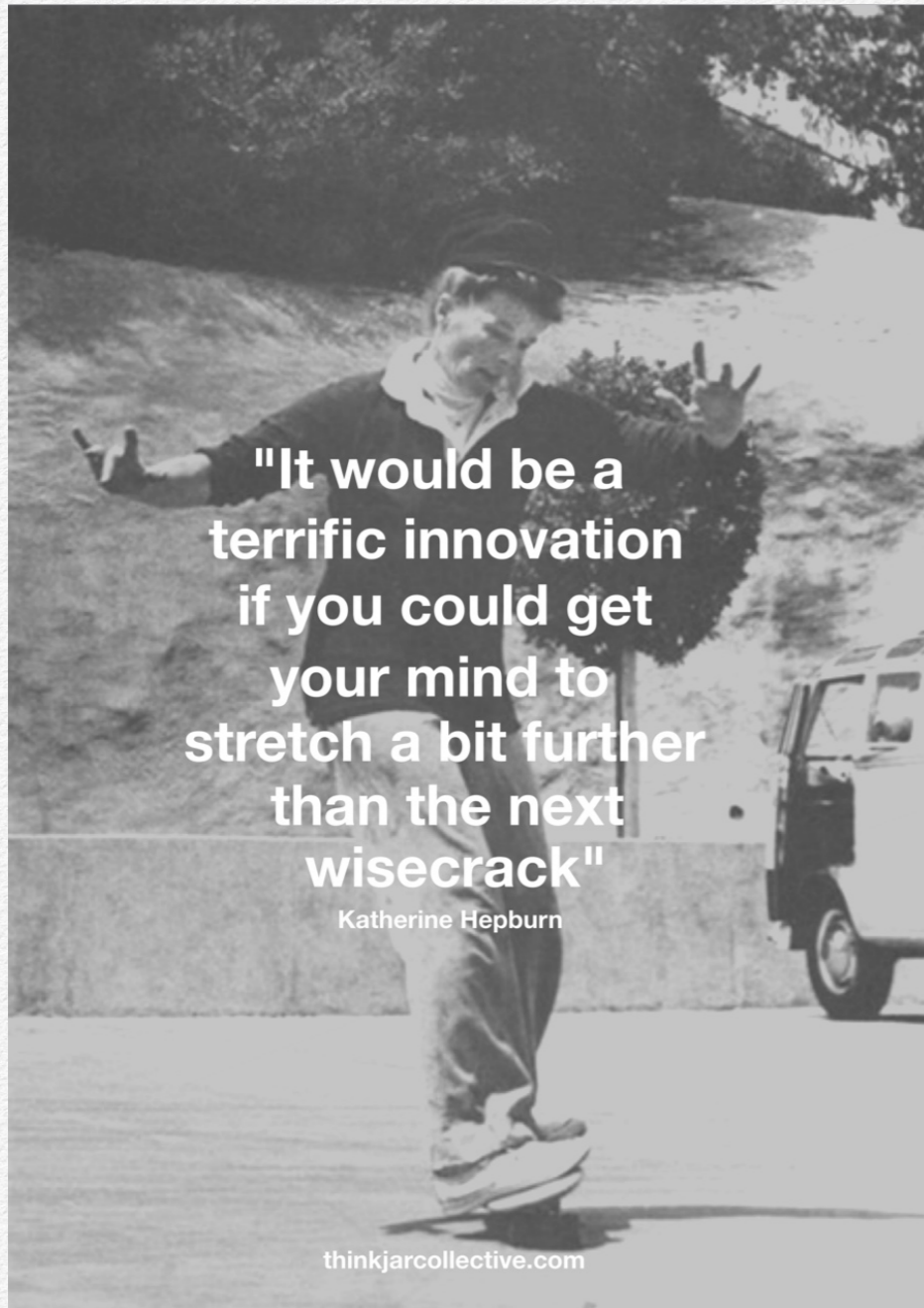
WHAT CAN I DO TO FOSTER TRUST WITH OTHERS?

During an Action Lab Checklist	
Welcomed everyone?	()
Explained what the Citizen Action Lab is and why?	()
Explained a bit about the need for a structured creative process to harness the collective thinking power for good?	()
Brought out the Action Lab Agreement and explained it?	()
1. Check In	()
2. Discovery Phase	()
3. Idea Phase	()
4. Action Plan Phase	()
There is an action plan to take away?	()
Closed on a good note?	()

Quotes



Quotes

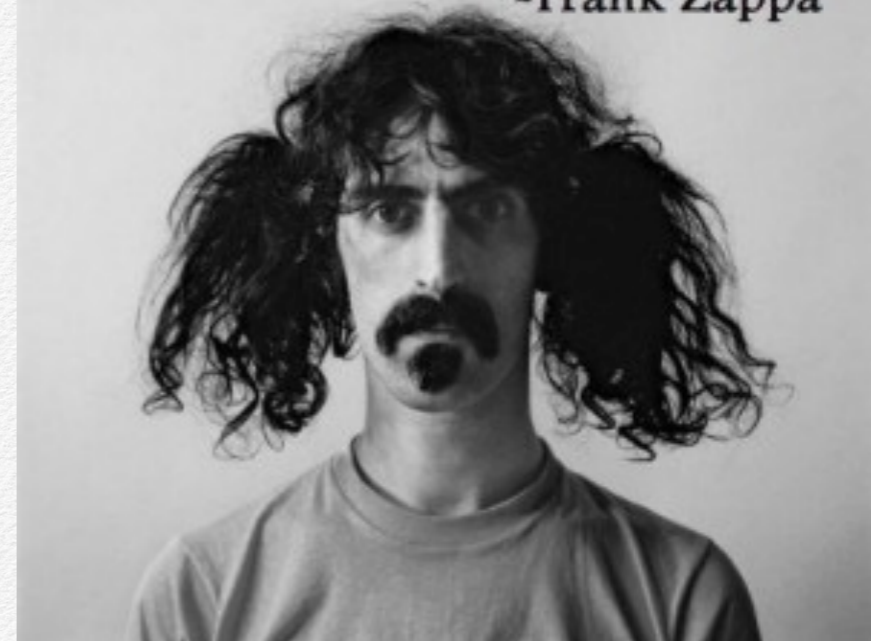


Quotes



"Without deviations from the norm,
progress is not possible."

-Frank Zappa



Optional Creative tools and techniques



You could use any of the following techniques while in phase 3 of the lab process.

These are famous creative problem solving techniques that innovative people and organizations use to help bring about creative thinking.

Optional Creative Tool #1

Brain-Writing on Sticky notes

Sometimes you'll find that one or two voices or personalities dominate a think tank experience. This situation can be tricky to navigate and sustain trust with all participants. One option might be to suggest coming up with ideas through Brain-writing.

Brain writing means that instead of saying out loud in a big group all of your ideas that bubble up, instead you ask participants to write down ideas on sticky notes and then post them up when everyone is done. Writing ideas or drawing ideas on sticky notes can be really good for sorting ideas later in the convergent phase.

Brain-writing rules

- One idea per sticky note
- Write in sharpie marker
- When people post their ideas, have the person say out loud what each idea is

Optional Creative Tool #2

Making a prototype of an idea out of Lego

You'll find 5 small lego bags in each Lab kit. These Lego bags are carefully curated to have the right pieces for building simple structures and adding a lego figure to convey a story or model of a proposed idea.

Using our hands to make something unlocks new thinking. It is easier to understand someones idea if a group can see it and interact with it.

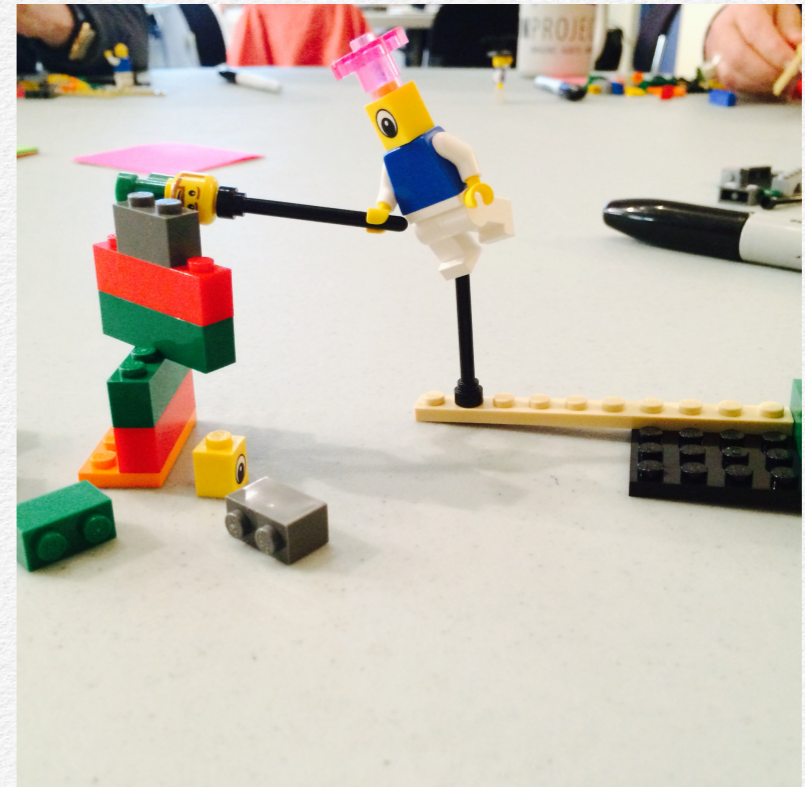
Lego making options

- Build a model of an engaged citizenship activity
- Build a model of what good quality of life might look like for the person the lab is centered around

Collaborative option

1st step -Build a model of a challenge to community inclusion that the person you support often faces

2nd step -Person next to you builds a model of a solution to the challenge the person faces



Optional Creative Tool #3

Random word or object creativity technique



Random words are like pebbles being dropped in a pond. They stimulate waves of associations and connections, some of which may help you to a breakthrough idea.

Find 5 random words or objects

You can retrieve random words from a dictionary by opening it, by chance, at any page, closing your eyes and randomly putting your finger on a word. If the word is not a noun continue down the list to the first **noun**. You can use any resource (e.g., magazine, newspapers, books, telephone yellow pages, etc.). Close your eyes and stab your finger at a page. Take the noun closest to your finger

List the characteristics of the word or object

Work with one word at a time. Draw a picture of the word to involve the right hemisphere of your brain and then list the characteristics of the words. Think of a variety of things that are associated with your word and list them.

Relating to community connecting

What ideas does the random object spark in terms of community connecting and citizenship ideas? E.g. If **Scissors** is the random object it could lead to ideas like...What if the person helped kids in an arts and crafts workshop? What if they worked in a print shop?

Force connections in your mind

You'll surprise yourself when when trying to connect Make a forced connection between each characteristic and the challenge you are working on. In forcing connections between remote subjects, metaphorical-analogical thinking opens up new pathways of creative thinking. Ask questions such as:

- How is this like the challenge we're working on?
- What if my challenge were a...?
- What are the similarities?
- ...is like the solution to my problem because...?
- How is...like an idea that might solve our challenge?

What is the essence?

What is the principle or essence of your random word? Can you build an idea around it? For example, the essence of a **nose** might be smell. Forcing a connection between a smell and improving the automobile inspires the idea of incorporating a cartridge in the auto during manufacturing that warns the driver of malfunctions with various odors. If you smell orange blossoms, for example, it's time to have your brakes checked, or if you smell cinnamon, you might have a gasoline leak and so on.



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About the Lab

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The Action Lab takes place in our think tank space at SKILLS and is always facilitated by one of the Action Lab leaders. During each session we guide the participants in brainstorming activities and action plans that will help to increase the participation and quality of life of a citizen who has a disability.

If you are struggling to help an individual grow community connections, to find volunteer opportunities and work experience or simply want to explore new ways that they could contribute their gifts and talents in a meaningful way, then consider scheduling a session with the Action Lab. Together we can help foster engaged citizenship in our community!

A TIME FOR THINKING *Differently*

“For a long time a team didn't notice the potential gift of a young woman. Sophia spent much of her day scotch taping her photographs because she liked them to last when she crumpled them up in her pocket. Most of her supports didn't think her activities with scotch tape was anything special. One day a creative member of the staff asked—What else is like this taping activity? Laminating! Then an idea emerged to help Sophia find a role with a print and laminating shop where she could contribute her gifts, earn some money and make friends through work.”



Come Prepared!

- Bring a detailed list of a person's interests, natural talents and aspirations. This can be taken from the individual's *Person-centered plan* or you can use the *Discovery Worksheet*.
- Bring a story, picture or object that shows what **engaged citizenship** means to you.
- Prepare to collaborate, have fun, support your peers, learn and think big!

Request an ACTION LAB

For more information or to schedule an *Action Lab* session please contact Ben Weinlick at SKILLS.

bweinlick@gmail.com

What
if...

Great
idea!

