

# Core Team Handbook



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# Table of Contents

What is a Core Team?	Page 3
Why have a Core Team?	Page 4
Range of Core Teams	Page 7
Steps for Developing a Core Team	Page 9
Core Team Health Checklist	Page 11
Sample Agenda	Page 12
What is an Organizing Culture?	Page 13
Stories of Strong Core Teams	Page 15
How to Run a Listening Campaign	Page 18
Other Things to Consider/Learn	Page 22
Discernment	Page 27

# What is a Core Team?

A core team is a team of people, within a Calgary Alliance member organization, that is focused on how to apply the practices of community organizing within their organization.

Their purpose is to:

- 1 Strengthen their organization and its mission.
- 2 To connect the member organization to the work of the broader alliance.
- 3 To maintain the membership, including dues, of the member organization.

# Why have a Core Team?

## **Core teams strengthen our member organizations and their mission by:**

1. Listening for emerging issues, opportunities and pressures in people's lives. This is primarily done through regular one-on-one conversations (1-1's), but can also be done through house meetings and listening campaigns.
2. Being talent scouts that actively look for potential leaders and what areas they have energy and interest to exercise their leadership.
3. Being teams in which people can learn and develop leadership skills. This can happen through formal IAF leadership workshops, as well as through mentoring and providing opportunities to practice leadership.
4. Building a relational culture that strengthens and deepens relationships among an organization's membership. This is done through building a culture of regular relational meetings and listening.
5. Being places of reflection, that pay attention to what is happening in the life of the community and reflecting on how this relates to the mission, values and traditions of the organization.
6. Conducting listening campaigns that identify energy, leaders and issues around which they are willing to work.
7. Carry out action campaigns that focus on issues that emerge within a member organization and/or its community.

8. Utilize Alliance Campaigns to educate, involve and energize people within a member organization to address social issues impacting its members and issues that connect with an organization's mission.
9. Focus on the community surrounding a member organization. They can build relationships and identify shared opportunities to act on issues facing that community.
10. Conduct listening and discernment processes to help member organizations develop their understanding of their core values, purpose and direction.

## **Core teams Strengthen our Shared Work by:**

1. Identifying potential leaders and connecting these leaders to training and opportunities to exercise their leadership.
2. Conducting listening campaigns that can identify energy, leaders and the issues we want to collectively tackle.
3. Educating their membership about issues the Alliance is addressing and how they impact members of our community.
4. Mobilizing people to take part in actions, assemblies etc. This builds our shared power by giving us the ability to involve the depth of our membership.
5. Being places of reflection, that are able to draw on the depths of each tradition, in helping us all understand what is happening in our communities and how to best respond.

## **Core teams maintain membership**

If there are only one or two people involved in the Calgary Alliance's work from a member organization our experience has been that this relationship is weak and easily broken.

When there is a team that holds responsibility for this relationship the relationship is more often maintained through the ups and downs of organizational life. A team is also better positioned to enable a member organization to both benefit and contribute to our shared work.



# Range of Core Teams

Core teams can take many different forms depending on the culture, structure and needs of a member organization.

## Activity Levels

On the low-end, a core team can come together when there is a particular need related to the Alliance's work as a whole, for example during a listening campaign, to identify people for local trainings, to provide campaign related education or to mobilize members for an action etc.

At a mid-level, core teams begin to meet more regularly and become active, not just when there is an Alliance need, but also when there is an internal need for relational meetings, identifying leaders. For example, when there is a need they will conduct internal listening campaigns and engage in the organizing cycle internally.

At the higher-level of activity core teams meet regularly and become a part of the heart of their organization or community. They become central to how an organization listens and understands the needs of its members. They actively look for and develop the leadership talent within a member organization. They regularly conduct 1-1's. The organizing cycle of listening, discerning, planning, action and reflection becomes integrated into the rhythms of an organization.

An active core team may also look beyond the organization itself, listening to a broader community, building partnerships, listening and taking action on important local or sector issues. Core teams can become important places of reflection and learning for their communities.

## Structure

The way core teams are structured and how they fit into a member organization's structure can also vary widely among organizations

depending on their purpose and the culture of the organization. In most organizations a strong core team is a separate team that has a core membership of 4-12 people and a network of connected individuals that allow it to be in relationships with the different parts and communities within an organization.

In many organizations the core team role is taken on by an existing team within an organization. This might be a justice/advocacy team, a listening team, an outreach team, a membership engagement team, etc. Several organizations have experimented with having boards take on this role. The central challenge of this model is ensuring that the governing responsibilities do not overtake the core team's responsibilities.

Many organizations adopt a hybrid model where their core team is a sub-committee of an existing team. Whether this model is taken or not, it is important to keep a strong formal tie to an organization's leadership and structures.



# Steps for Developing a Core Team

1. Identify a co-chair and, if possible, an initial small team. Having more than one person expands energy, accountability, creativity and connection. So find at least one person to work with you to build your core team.
2. Conduct an institutional analysis. Identify who has formal and informal power. What are the ways in which people already are gathered together? This can be a work site, existing teams, a choir, a breakfast group, age groups, ethnic groups etc. Identify who are leaders in these groups. If you wanted to shape the culture and direction of the organization as a whole, who would you want on your core team and who does your core team need to be connected to? Are there people already connected to an aspect of the Alliance's work? Write up this list of leaders.
3. Conduct 1-1's with these leaders. Identify who might have an interest in being part of the core team as well as people who might be your connection to a part of the community. These might be communicators, mobilizers or people who can endorse the work of the Alliance.
4. Personally invite and gather the people you want to be part of your core team. Decide on an initial focus, how often you will meet, how you will work together etc.
5. Choose an initial project to work on. Possibilities include:
  - a. An Alliance campaign.
  - b. Conducting 1-1's to understand your community and look for potential leaders and new energy.
  - c. Having your members turn out to an upcoming training, educational event or action.
  - d. Conducting a listening campaign. This can be connected to

the Alliance's work or around a particular issue within the organization, helping people understand each other and building relationships or developing people's understanding of their values or vision for the organization.

- e. This listening campaign can flow into an organizing cycle where issues are discerned, and plans of action are developed, carried out and reflected on.
- f. Core teams can also have an external focus aimed at carrying out the organizing process in a neighbouring community or amongst allied organizations.

# Core Team Health Checklist

- ☐ Does your core team have co-chairs? The ideal is to have a senior co-chair who is mentoring a developing co-chair.
- ☐ Has everyone on the core team attended the Foundations of Community Organizing training? How many have attended a regional IAF leadership institute?
- ☐ Do you actively recruit members of your organization, beyond the core team, to attend the Foundations of Community Organizing Training?
- ☐ Is your core team connected to the organization's formal and informal power structure?
- ☐ Does your core team include members that are connected to the different parts of your organization?
- ☐ Do members of the core team conduct regular 1-1s with each other and with members of your organization?
- ☐ Is the core team actively identifying potential leaders and connecting them with opportunities that match their interests and the interests of the organization?
- ☐ Is the team informed of the Alliance's current campaigns and is it actively engaging people in these campaigns?
- ☐ Does your core team engage in regular listening seasons that will lead into local action?
- ☐ Are you developing a culture that is relational, reflective and action orientated?

# Sample Agenda

What could a typical core team agenda look like?

Here is an example:

1. Welcome and introductions (an opening prayer or reflection can be included)
2. 1-1's among members or other relational elements
3. Accountability for actions committed to (usually 1-1's)
4. Reflection on what people were hearing
5. Some sort of business e.g.. an alliance campaign, planning an action, planning a listening session, planning how to address an emerging opportunity etc.
6. Commitments
7. Close



# What is an Organizing Culture?

When we look at an organization that has developed a strong organizing culture three things characterize its culture: they are relational, reflective and action oriented.

**Relational** - Relational cultures take time to understand people as whole people. They build trust and networks of relationships between members. They get to know the pressures people are facing, but also get to know people's strengths and interests, and they look for opportunities for people to act based on these. Relational cultures look for people's potential and create opportunities for people to grow into that potential. When problems, issues or opportunities arise these are addressed through conversation and dialogue.

***Practices that build relational cultures include:** 1-1's, house meetings, intentionally creating opportunities for people to develop and practices of thinking about people along with their interests and strengths.*

**Reflective** - Reflective cultures set aside time for personal and shared reflection and evaluation. Reflection and evaluation are integrated into meetings and follow actions. Relational cultures bring out the depths and richness of their traditions in order to make sense of their context and to help guide the way they will think, act and create. Reflective cultures intentionally seek out dissenting or marginalized perspectives and treat these as valuable sources of insight and perspective. Reflective cultures see failures as opportunities for learning and development.

***Practices that build a reflective culture include:** scheduling time for evaluation at the end of meetings, after actions and after significant events; scheduling times for personal reflection; having people read or learn together; asking continuously "what can we learn from this and how can we improve" and then incorporating what we have learned into future planning; intentionally inviting and listening to dissenting perspectives.*

**Action Oriented** - Action orientated cultures do not just talk about issues, they find concrete ways to take action. Strong action oriented cultures prioritize taking actions that are intentional about getting a reaction. They are also willing to experiment and take risks. Meetings are held either to plan or to evaluate action that is taken between meetings. People take commitments to act and collectively hold each other accountable for those actions. Action oriented cultures build and use the power they have to bring about change.

***Practices that build an action oriented culture include:** setting agendas focused on planning actions; making commitments and holding each other accountable for those commitments; people taking actions that are experiments, that try out possibilities or are research into what can work; Valuing creativity and the act of creating; people thinking about, building and mobilizing power strategically so that actions create reactions.*

**Exercise** - Reflect on your organization.

- In which of these three areas is your organization strong?
- In which of these three areas is your organization weakest?
- What difference would it make if you became stronger in that area?

# Stories of Strong Core Teams

## ***Listening with Youth***

Lutheran Church of our Saviour has built a core team to engage its neighbourhood. When they began a 1-1 campaign to identify leaders within their community, it became clear that they were facing a crisis growing out of their youth program and people's energy and anger was focused on this crisis. They interpreted this anger as a sign that people cared about their youth, but people didn't know what direction to take.

The core team decided to organize a listening campaign. After church they held house meetings of youth, parents of youth and people who cared about the youth. What they learned was that the youth were not interested in just games and laser tag. Instead they wanted to have meaningful conversations with interesting people other than their parents. They also found out that there were a lot of interesting people in the congregation who wanted to connect with the youth, but didn't know how.

So they started organizing conversations between the youth and interesting people in the congregation about topics that mattered to the youth. They shifted from having a crisis to having more volunteers wanting to work with the youth program then they knew what to do with.

## ***Cheap Thrills***

St. David's United had a lot of their members transitioning to being seniors. How could they best minister to this growing group? Their core-team decided to listen to the seniors. They conducted a listening campaign with their seniors and discovered that many of the seniors were feeling isolated and wanted to connect, but that many of them were on fixed incomes and didn't have extra money for expensive outings or trips.

So they created a program called Cheap Thrills that would bring together their seniors for events and outings that didn't cost much, but would connect these seniors together and be fun for everyone involved.

### ***Bus Jacks***

In a bus garage of ATU members in the US, they had a dangerous problem. They had new busses, but the old jack that lifted up the old busses didn't fit the new ones. So the workers had bolstered them up with wood blocks. One day the local organizer was meeting with the core team and saw a bus, up on the jack, teetering on the wooden blocks.

"Wow that doesn't look safe!" the organizer exclaimed.

"It isn't, but management won't order the new jacks," one of the workers responded.

"Well, how much are the new jacks?"

They didn't know. So they went off to find the catalogue and discovered they were a few hundred dollars each.

"So what would be the consequences if one of those busses fell on the people working under the it?" There was no need to answer the organizer's question.

When the manager came back to his office the core team was lined up waiting to talk, catalogue in hand. They showed him how much the jacks cost, and then brought him to a jacked up, teetering bus, and made sure he understood the human and financial costs of a bus falling.

The new jacks were quickly ordered.

### ***LISTENING AND STRENGTH OF PURPOSE: THE EXPERIENCE AT CHURCH OF THE CROSS***

At Lutheran Church of the Cross (LCOC) in Calgary, as the 2010s came to a close, the leadership felt that there was a sense of a lack of clarity about the congregation's mission and purpose. The congregation engaged in a self-questioning by asking "where are we seeing God at work in our congregation and in our community"?

The leadership of the congregation held a listening campaign amongst its



members and with local community leaders. Through 1-1, house meetings, prayer and discussion, the congregation reflected on these concerns.

What the team heard, and its follow through on this, has led to a renewal of purpose at the church, with the formation of a centering team to continue active listening and sharing among congregants.

At the broader community level, the church has initiated actions to support the local community by providing space for a community kitchen, as well as operating a lunch program for local schools. LCOC is actively engaged with the lives of its congregation as well as with its local community, and is committed to continuing and strengthening this engagement.

# How to Run a Listening Campaign

A **LISTENING CAMPAIGN** is a focused effort to build community, identify leaders, energy, and issues that people are willing to fight for/work on in a specific organization, neighborhood or workplace. A Listening Campaign can also help a group shape its vision to find out where it is now and where it wants to go in the future.

## Purpose

- Connect stories
- Build relationships
- Identify and develop leaders
- Help to understand how deeply or broadly people are affected by specific issues
- Identify issues people are concerned about and willing to act on either internally or as part of a public agenda

## How

There are a number of ways in which you can carry out a Listening Campaign:

- A series of one-to-ones: a group of volunteers in your organization agree to do a number of one-to-one meetings. One-to-ones are conversations between two people where the agenda consists of learning about the other person, their story, their interests, their anger, and their ideas for change. They should last somewhere between 25 and 45 minutes.
- A series of house meetings. House meetings are small group meetings chaired by a member of the CACG team, ideally with between 5 and 15 participants and lasting between 25 and 45 minutes. They can be held in people's homes or anywhere that is convenient.
- Meetings at your institution (using discussion leaders) organized to coincide with other activities, for example, after a committee

meeting, service or during another event.

- These can be run as a single event or as a combination of the above.
- After the listening sessions, discern as an institution where there is energy, leaders, stories, and issues that people will work on. What will your organization work on? What issues do you want to bring to the Alliance?

## Planning

<b>Interests</b> – How can a listening campaign serve the interests of your institution/ community?	
<b>Goal</b> – Reflect on what you want to get out of the listening campaign for your organization, neighborhood or for city-wide change. Use this to plan your listening campaign.	
<b>Leaders</b> – Who will be responsible and who will carry out your listening? Your core team, board, listening team and/or volunteers?	
<b>Training</b> – How will you ensure that the leaders have been trained in how to conduct a listening campaign and relational meetings?	

<p><b>Who</b> – Decide on who you want to listen to. Think about the different groups that make up your institution/ community. Do you want to listen to your neighborhood?</p>	
<p><b>Content</b> – What core questions do you want to be answered by everyone? Do you need to adapt questions for particular groups? What additional questions might be useful if there is time and opportunity?</p>	
<p><b>Method</b> -What method do you want to use? 1-1 meetings, house meetings, or a combination?</p>	
<p><b>Format and Timing</b> – Do you want to have a single scheduled event? A series of groups or 1-1s over a defined period? Listening sessions tied to existing events? Listening sessions with partner organizations?</p>	



<p><b>Responses</b> – How will you collect and analyze the information gathered? How will you keep track of potential leaders, stories, energy, and issues?</p>	
<p><b>Analysis/Discernment</b> – Who will be responsible for analyzing the information you gain? The board, your core team, discernment team etc. When will you do this?</p>	
<p><b>Sharing</b> – How will the information you gain be shared? Will you conduct an institutional discernment assembly? Will you report to your community? Will you use communication channels? How can people confirm that you heard accurately? What will you share with The Alliance?</p>	
<p><b>Next Steps</b> – What do you need to do next to ensure that your goals are realized? What are your steps to engage your members, potential leaders, and the energy surfaced around the issues that were identified?</p>	

# Other Things to Consider/Learn

## One-to-One Listening

1. Identify the team that will be conducting the one-to-one relational meetings.
2. Decide on who needs to be listened to, who will set up 1-1s and with whom.
3. Decide if there are specific questions that will be asked as a part of the 1-1s.
4. 1-1's should be 30-45 min in length.
5. Listen to develop trust and an understanding of the other person's interests, pressures, passions, and vision.
6. Do not just ask assigned questions, take time to ask for stories, to explore interests, to agitate and stimulate reflection on self, potential, commitments, integrity, legacy etc. Share your stories as well.
7. After the 1-1 record: interests, pressures, stories, where is there energy, and responses to any assigned questions. Is this someone who is a potential leader or contributor in any area?
8. Gather together as a team to share and discern what has been learned.

## House Meetings

A house meeting is a “relational conversation” between 5 – 12 people who sit down together, generally for one and a half hours, to share their stories, concerns, and dreams. A house meeting campaign is a large series of these meetings that seek to build and strengthen a vibrant, caring community and organization with the capacity to act on the needs and values of its members.

## Setting Up a House Meeting

1. Identify people to lead house meetings.
2. Conduct training on setting up and running house meetings. At the end of the training, ask people to commit to how many house meetings they will hold and by when.
3. Schedule house meetings in people's homes or public meeting space: Often, two people will co-host two meetings. One person (the host) will host the meeting, invite approximately 10 people, remind those people to come, and provide refreshments. They will tell people they invite that they are asking them to come for a limited time to share their stories and concerns with other members of the organization/ community to see if there is a common sense of purpose they can act on, and, if need be, assure them that no one will be required to sign up for anything and that no one will be asked for money. The second person (the facilitator) will plan and conduct the meeting and report on it afterward. Then, the two people hold a second meeting, reversing the roles.
4. Sign people up for house meetings: In some house meetings, the host will invite all the participants. For others, the dates, times, and places can be publicized to the community or people can be signed up at community/organizational events.
5. Schedule house meetings in the organization. Ask existing committees or groups to conduct a house meeting as part of a previously scheduled meeting or gathering. Schedule an event after events, services, or during religious school where everyone who stays afterward will break into small groups for an hour.
6. Collect reports from the meetings about who was there, what was discussed, what were the primary concerns and visions for the community and the congregation, and whether anyone there appeared interested in taking on leadership. Each meeting should have a pre-assigned note-taker.

## **In General, the Role of the Host is**

- Organize the location for the house meeting
- Invite participants and follow up with anyone who committed and did not attend
- Provide snacks or refreshments if appropriate
- During the meeting act as the note taker

## **Record**

- Interests, issues, and themes that surface
- Stories and who has them
- Note areas where there is passion/anger/great love
- Note areas where there is common interest
- Who attended
- Potential Leaders – who has a deep passion, vision, relationship etc.? In what areas might they lead?

## **In General, the role of the facilitator is to**

- Welcome everyone and explain the ground rules
- Explain the purpose of the meeting and agenda
- Introduce the questions being discussed
- Ensure that everyone gets a chance to speak and sticks to time limits
- Record the key points that come out of the discussion (if there is no host)
- Participate in the conversation

## **Prepare and use your own story**

Both the host and facilitator are also participants who share their own stories. Sometimes groups are slow to start. Be ready with your own story (it's fine to make a judgment about how much you are prepared to share) to start things off if people are hesitant. Even if the discussion is lively, it's a good idea to contribute your own story so that people don't feel that they are being 'interviewed'.

## **Within the Reflection Groups**

- Don't let people ramble or generalize – keep them specific and related to their story and experience.
- Agitate when the opportunities arise. Ask “why?” – help them reexamine how they operate. Probe for the public connections to people's stories. This helps them connect to their passions & anger.
- Make sure everyone's story is honored/held sacred.
- Don't let anyone try to solve another's problems or engage in therapy.
- Be firm on time limits so that everyone gets time to talk.

## **Dealing with difficult participants**

It's easy for groups to get derailed by someone who goes off on a tangent or dominates the conversation. Be polite, but assertive in pulling the conversation back on track, for instance by saying, “I don't mean to cut you off, but I want to make sure everyone has a chance to speak,” or “I want to make sure we fully answer the question...maybe we can get back to your other points if we have time at the end” and then ask someone else to contribute. Call on people who have not contributed (“Mary, what do you think?”). But don't force someone to speak if they really don't want to.

Please speak to CACG's Organizer, Ryan Andersen (403) 993-7123 or [ryan@calgarycommongood.org](mailto:ryan@calgarycommongood.org), if you have any questions or concerns.

## **Sample Agenda of a House Meeting:**

7:00 Welcome and introductions

7:05 General Instructions Given to the Group:

- Honor each person's story.
- Listen for understanding and insight - what makes that person who they are?
- Do not try to solve someone else's problems or engage in therapy.
- Share stories that you are comfortable sharing publicly. This is not a counseling session and not confidential, there is a note taker who will share what has been heard.
- Pay attention to how you are reacting to others' stories - what insights or questions are they stirring in you?
- Be conscious of time limits in order that everyone gets time to speak.

7:10 First Question – Give everyone an equal chance to respond

7:32 Second Question –

7:54 Third Question –

8:16 Summary and discussion of key themes that you have heard

8:30 Closing

- Thank everyone
- Tell people how the information will be used
- Invite people to the discernment assembly



# Discernment

## Core Team Discernment

### Purpose

- To identify the key themes and patterns and clusters of issues that were heard in the listening session
- To share stories and how they impact people
- To identify leaders
- To identify where there was energy
- To begin to turn general problems into actionable issues
- To discern which issues you want to take forward for the institutional/Alliance discernment.

## Institutional Discernment

Each institution usually conducts its own internal discernment process. This is done to:

- Check with the participants that “This is what we heard. Is this right?”
- Discern which issues you will focus on or bring to the larger alliance.
- Identify the leaders who will commit to work on these issues.
- It can involve holding a meeting with each of the issues listed on a separate sheet. Give people sticky notes and ask them to put them on the sheets (with their name & phone number) with the issue they want to work on (through a research action team). See where there is energy and capacity to move forward.
- Use this as a time of celebration and building momentum.

## Core Team Work Related to Truth and Reconciliation

Some ways that Core teams can support the Truth and Reconciliation Process include working with your organization to:

1. Expand / deepen your relationships with Indigenous organizations.
2. Recruit more people to go through the Wrestling process.
3. Bring the full force of your organization behind efforts to address the systemic expressions of racism.



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