

# Applying the Transitions Framework to Community Reconciliation Projects

## Andrus Family Fund

AFF is exploring the role of the **Transition Framework** for organizations and communities working to address community problems, conflicts and injustices. This document has been created as a means to assist applicants as they think about what it means to incorporate the Transition Framework into their programs. It puts into writing the experience of many of AFF's community reconciliation grantees' use of the Transition Framework.

AFF has observed - through the work of our grantees - **four stages of community reconciliation**. In addition to outlining the common changes and transitions that may result during each stage, we have described potentially useful tools and interventions as your group or community maneuvers through the phases of Transitions. This document is neither exhaustive nor prescriptive and is intended to open up a group to possibilities as it creates interventions unique to the histories and dynamics of its community. As potential applicants review this document, it may be useful to remember that along with grant dollars, all AFF grantees will be assigned a Transition Coach who will be available to help them to identify and implement Transition-related interventions such as those described below.

We look forward to continually adding new and creative ideas to this evolving document and, more importantly, to learning from you as you embark on your own justice and reconciliation efforts in your own communities.

**Stage 1:** An organizing group identifies a primary conflict or injustice that it wants to address and begins to develop a vision about how to approach it. At this stage, a sense of importance and urgency is communicated.

### **Common changes that occur during this stage:**

- A sense of ownership/responsibility as the group's members take on the role of Agent of Change/Convener.
- Organizing group goes through its own internal process to figure out how it wants to proceed.
- Group "norming\*" begins during this phase and continues through Stages 2 and 3.
- Serious exploration of the **Transitions Framework** begins [**What's the purpose of the TF? Does it fit their needs? Can they identify with the purpose of the framework?**]

### **Potential Transition issues during this stage:**

- **Pre-endings** sense of fantasy ("this is going to be the greatest thing") or denial ("there is no issue here"). This is a continuum and most groups/people will fall somewhere in between these two extremes.
- With **endings**, there is a need to balance acknowledgement of losses with harnessing the sense of excitement/urgency.
- Silence (sense of complacency) is broken as issues to be addressed are raised by the organizing group.

**Common emotions/attributes during this stage** (those most common during Endings and Neutral Zone): fear, sense of being overwhelmed, excitement, full of possibility, urgency and importance, denial, blame of others for current situation (not yet seeing collective responsibility), anger. In terms of the internal group formation, togetherness and empowerment begin to develop and hope begins to form.



### **Potentially useful tools/interventions (mostly internally focused on organizing group):**

1. Focus on steps that are "big enough to matter and small enough to work".
2. Organizing group members begin to use the Transition Framework as a tool to engage with each other.

3. The organizing group is often a microcosm of the larger community and therefore allowing time for and focusing on the intra-group work is an essential part of planning for the inter-group (community level) work.
4. When the loss belongs to the community, it is the responsibility of the leader to draw from the larger group the words to describe the loss as clearly as possible.
5. Use the [Guide to Diagnosing Stages of Transitions](#).
6. Normalize the sense of chaos and being confused often present as the organizing group begins this work. ([Neutral zone](#))
7. Build the case for the need for reconciliation/justice: Sell or Frame the problem by illustrating the consequences of doing nothing.
8. Begin now with documenting all aspects of the project. Collect baseline data, and build in feedback loops for on-going monitoring and evaluation.

*\*Norming: Group members often work through this stage by agreeing on rules, values, professional behavior, shared methods, working tools and even taboos. During this phase, members begin to trust each other. Motivation increases as the group gets more acquainted with the project.*

Stage 2: The organizers invite a diverse group of invested parties, particularly those who have been most aggrieved, to participate in the further development of the project. This group designs, agrees on and initiates a collaborative process for change and reconciliation that addresses the initially, and any subsequently, identified conflict(s).

**Common changes that occur during this stage:**

- A clearer understanding of what it means to be a convener is developed.
- Reconciliation work continues to be internal to the organizing group while beginning also to be external.
- The initial vision developed in stage one is enhanced and clarified based on the diverse input of the convened group.
- The purpose and goals of the project may shift, which is ok as long as voices are all heard and time for expression and decompression are welcomed.

**Potential Transition issues during this stage:**

- Un-harnessed chaos can lead to a sense of being stuck or a lack of productivity
- Group members may experience a sense of loss when the collaborative process developed is different from their organizations' traditional approaches to such issues.
- A shift may take place in terms of the group members moving away from working *for* the community to working *with* the community.
- Often group members have a fear of making things worse by acknowledging losses, but it is important to remember that unacknowledged losses fester and refuse to heal.
- Group members may express resistance toward the Framework itself.

**Common emotions/attributes during this stage** (those most common during [Endings](#) and [Neutral Zone](#)): fear; sense of being overwhelmed; excitement; full of possibility; urgency and importance; burdened by the responsibility: who's stupid idea was this anyway?; denial; nostalgia; confusion; anxiety, anger.



**Potentially useful tools/interventions:**

1. [Stakeholder Mapping](#)
2. [Risk/Loss Analysis](#) (along with power mapping as needed)
3. Define explicitly: Who stands to lose what?
4. Be aware of the [Marathon Effect](#): Where is everyone in the race? (Avoid scapegoating and blaming)
5. Harness the chaos to allow for creativity: craft a multi-pronged approach to participate in the planning of the project. (Have fun!)
6. Create a safe space for invested parties to be able to discuss the difficult issues/identified conflicts as part of the planning process.
7. A storytelling process so folks feel heard (may require that judgment is suspended at least temporarily in order to listen to each other's story)

8. In considering the implications of the change both individually and as a group, complete “**Making Change not just noise: A Self Guided Handbook**”

**Stage 3:** Multiple community partners implement the group designed collaborative process by investigating the historical origin of the conflict(s) and the continued legacy of harm; analyzing the current issues; increasing mutual understanding; supporting parties to transform their perception of themselves, others and the conflict; and identifying changes and related action steps.

**Common changes that occur during this stage:**

- Though it continues to take place within the coalition, the majority of the reconciliation work is taking place within the community. (And in this, the control shifts some from the coalition to the community)
- Perception of Self/ **Master Narrative:** The story that many people tell themselves about his/her community is usually cast in a positive light. Participation in the agreed upon process will uncover negative aspects of history and will open up people’s eyes to a fuller version of this history.
- Old narrative is suspended allowing a new narrative to emerge.

**Potential Transitions issues during this stage:**

- Backsliding
- Resentment at the loss of identity/ ‘perception of self’/the story that one has always told herself about her community
- Denigrating the process (or the people/organizations involved)

**Common emotions/attributes during this stage** (those most common during Endings and Neutral Zone and some in **New Beginning**): **Anger that can be acted out internally (possibility of internalized oppression)**, resentment at the newly gained knowledge – disorientation as the narrative changes, excitement by the possibilities as well as the initial quick accomplishments.



**Potentially useful tools/interventions:**

1. Replace or soften losses: create space/avenues for people to express anger
2. Follow the **Transitions Communications Guidelines:** Vary the medium and use the 6X rule
3. Build in symbolic events and ceremonies both to acknowledge endings and to celebrate success.
4. **C.U.S.P.** – Rebuild or redefine those things often lost during endings: **C**ontrol, **U**nderstanding, **S**upport and **P**urpose.
5. Increase opportunities for learning.
6. Be certain that the coalition members are able to gather to take stock and evaluate process. A retreat during this time can be crucial both for internal relationships within the coalition as well as reinvigorating engagement and course correction.

**Stage 4:** From these transformed perspectives, an expanding coalition of community members implement the action plans. Ongoing community education about the conflict(s) continues.

**Common changes that occur during this stage:**

- Coalition membership will change as some of the initial members will fall away and new members join.
- Project is no longer ‘owned’ by one particular organization but now has a greater responsibility to the community and everyone who has participated. (The challenge here is about how to maintain the momentum of the work once one particular organization has given up primary responsibility for the effort.)

**Potential Transition issues during this stage:**

- How to integrate new members into the fold: there is a need for ‘Re-norming’ and the creation of a new story to tell

- Although it is tempting to keep moving forward, it is important in this stage to celebrate and build on the successes (**New Beginnings**).
- Ultimately, this is where the ‘rubber meets the road’ and momentum is either taken advantage of or lost.
- Loss of perspective of why the project was started in the first place.

**Common emotions/attributes during this stage** (those most common during New Beginnings though all three will be prevalent as the coalition is expanded): excitement; ability to build on the successes to date; loss of control as the momentum grows within the community; disorientation as a new phase is entered.



**Potentially useful interventions:**

1. Be cognizant of the marathon effect as the coalition expands and education efforts take place.
2. Evaluate the successes to date: what’s working – what is not? It is especially important at this point in the journey to dedicate some time to the internal relationships of the coalition and once again acknowledge transitions internally.
3. Pull together the visual and written history of the project and on-going reflections to date.