BRIDGE BUILDING TOOL
AN ARBOR DAY FOUNDATION ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE TRAINING RESOURCE

The bridge building tool is a resource designed to help a group of people generate goals, look at the gap between reality and a future ideal, and generate ideas on how to bridge the gap. This tool can be used in urban and community forestry programs, as described below.
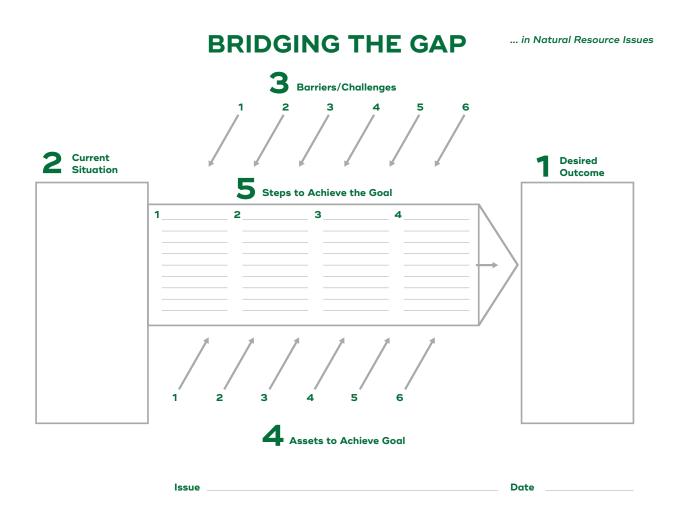
STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

1. The bridge building process starts by collectively defining the desired future of the community's urban forest. This is called the "wow" step. It is important to gather a variety of views on goals from those within the community.

    a. First, define the "urban forest." This term may be unfamiliar to some people. One definition you can use is "all the trees across a city or town, on private or public property."

    b. Next, you can develop and conduct a survey of people within a community, or hold a community event where residents can brainstorm answers to the following question: "What would you like to see and experience in our community's urban forest in the ideal future?"

    • People can list descriptive statements or draw pictures or symbols, either on a survey or on flip chart paper at a community event. At a community event, write the word "Wow!" at the top of flip chart paper and put it at the front of the room for people to write on.

    • If you have more than 12 people at an event, divide them into small groups to create a list which they can then share with the whole group.

2. Next, have participants describe the current reality of the community's urban forest. This is called the "now" step.

   a. To generate feedback, ask participants to respond to the following prompts: "Describe the current reality of the urban forest in our community. What is it like? What positive qualities do you notice in our community's trees? What issues do you notice with our community's trees?"

   b. Again, you can gather feedback via surveys or at a community forum. At a community event, write the word "Now" at the top of flip chart paper and put it at the front of the room, to the left of the paper with "Wow!" written on it, for people to add their comments.

      • The perspectives people share will vary based on where they live within the community and their neighborhood's unique features. To get a view of the whole city or town, you'll need to talk with people in each area of the city or town.

3. Ask participants to think of steps that they can take (or others can take) to bridge the gap between the current reality ("now") and the desired future ("wow!"). This is called the "how" step. The goal is to get specific ideas from people in the community about how to achieve the future ideal.

   a. You can use the following prompts to gather ideas from respondents: "What steps could you take to move from the current reality to the ideal future for our community's urban forest?" "What steps could other people or organizations take to change our community's urban forest from where it is now to where we would like it to be?"

   b. You can also provide examples of possible steps to take, based on what other communities have done or what you have already thought of as ideas to do locally. For example, one idea is to start a Youth Tree Team to help plant and care for trees in low canopy communities, and to do community outreach in those neighborhoods.

   c. Once you get specific ideas for how to achieve the ideal future for the urban forest, you can ask respondents to think of barriers that might prevent certain actions or make them difficult to do. For example, if there is a shortage of capacity at the city government level to oversee a Youth Tree Team, a different organization might need to take the lead.

   d. You can also ask participants to brainstorm assets the community has to help achieve future goals. For example, there may be a neighborhood association interested in partnering to create a Youth Tree Team.

4. Have participants vote on actions to take and sign up to help implement various actions.

   a. If you are doing a survey, first collect ideas from residents about the steps they feel are important to take (from step 3 above). Then do a follow-up survey where you list all the ideas you received in the first survey and ask respondents to vote on their top 3 or 5.

   b. If you are hosting a community forum, you can provide participants with sticky dots and ask them to put dots next to their top 3 or 5 actions that the group brainstormed.

   c. Lastly, ask participants to put their name next to the actions they would like to help with so that you can follow up with them on implementation of the next steps.

5. You can use the following graphic to document the information you gather from community residents:

BRIDGING THE GAP   *... in Natural Resource Issues*

3 Barriers/Challenges

1   2   3   4   5   6

2 Current Situation

5 Steps to Achieve the Goal

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____

1 Desired Outcome

1   2   3   4   5   6

4 Assets to Achieve Goal

Issue _____   Date _____

IDEA: Use a Google Jamboard or a similar tool to collect thoughts and ideas on each of the three questions above. Once you know "how," you can decide "who" and "when."

THE ARBOR DAY FOUNDATION AND FAIR FORESTS CONSULTING

At the Arbor Day Foundation, we believe everyone should have access to the powerful benefits of trees. To help strengthen our focus on communities that need trees most, we partner with experts like Dr. Christine Carmichael from Fair Forests Consulting. This resource, crafted by Dr. Carmichael, is part of our ongoing commitment to empowering our partners to grow their environmental justice work in urban forestry.

Alliance for Community Tree members have access to our full environmental justice training series in the ACT Member Resource Center. Learn about this network and how to join at arborday.org/ACT.