



getting started with
COMMUNITY
PEACEBUILDING

**your first steps to understanding, connecting, and
collaborating for community change**



Getting Started With Community
Peacebuilding: Your First Steps to
Understanding, Connecting, and
Collaborating for Community Change

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Who are Community Peacebuilders?

Do you wish you were more engaged with your community?

Do you want to develop more trust, understanding, and care with your neighbors?

Do you long to improve your community, but don't know where to start?

Then this is for you!

At Peace Catalyst International, we are passionate about empowering “community peacebuilders” wherever they are—folks committed to digging deep, building bridges, and partnering across differences for positive change.

This isn't about quick fixes or finding "the answer." It's about the slow, patient, humble work of earning the trust of our neighbors, integrating into the community, and finding our place alongside those around us who are working for good.

Maybe you're new in your community; maybe you're newly inspired to get involved; maybe you've been engaged for years and want to discern new possibilities.

Wherever you are on this journey, we wrote this for you!

Defining Community Peacebuilding

What is Peacebuilding?

Often when we think of peace, we think of the lack of conflict. We assume that we have peace when people aren't fighting, aren't arguing, aren't blaming, and aren't hurting. If things are calm and people appear to be getting along, then we may say things are "peaceful." But this absence of conflict—this negative peace—never lasts long, because the underlying issues persist.

Instead, we envision a positive peace, a peace defined by the good being created. Positive peace is about preventing conflict by connecting and empowering people, interrupting violent conflict with creativity and compassion, and seeking healing, justice, and reconciliation once harm has been done.

This is a peace that must be built, inviting us to work through conflict rather than avoid it. Peace means co-creating relationships and societies where everyone can flourish together.

Defining Community Peacebuilding

What is Community?

Community can be understood in two ways.

A superficial understanding of community is defined by proximity or shared identity. We might say we're in the same community if we live around the same neighborhood, town, or city. Or we might share an ethnicity. Or practice the same religion or attend the same school. Or play in the same sports league. Or participate in the same online fandom. When we have shared interests, history, or experiences, we may be in community. (This primer is written with a local neighborhood in mind, but the same principles apply almost everywhere.)

But real community, deep community, goes beyond shared interests and location. Community Peacebuilders dream of a community defined by care, by trust, and by dignity. A thriving, peace-filled community means people have a sense of responsibility for their collective future: a future where folks look out for each other, value and include each other, and understand that the well-being of one person affects the well-being of everyone.

Centering Relationships at the Heart of Peacebuilding

Community Peacebuilding is rooted in real relationships. Becoming part of deep and meaningful transformative change in our communities only happens when we are known and trusted by our neighbors and collaborators. What do trusting relationships look like for Community Peacebuilders?

- **Rooted in authenticity**

Can we build peace with integrity and transparency? Can we bring our full selves to our community? People will sense ulterior motives. We build trust when we are open and vulnerable about our values, our motives, and our experiences.

- **Rooted in humility**

Can we arrive as learners, recognizing the dignity and wisdom of our neighbors? We are not saviors in our community, and assuming we are the experts causes harm. We build trust through honoring and celebrating the contributions of all.

- **Rooted in a shared future**

Are we part of our community, or separate? Are we fixing other people's problems, or contributing to our own future? Nobody wants to be someone else's project. We build trust when our well-being is tied to the flourishing of our neighbors.

The Big Picture of Community Peacebuilding

An Ecology of Community Change

There is no single approach to building peace. Communities are complex and constantly changing, and the path to a future where everyone thrives together encompasses a wide variety of activities.

Community Peacebuilders find themselves amidst a broad ecology of methods for cultivating peace. Each element of the ecology is essential—these methods of community change don't compete; they work together. Community Peacebuilders may feel especially drawn to one part of the ecology, or they may participate in several. Many movements and projects will integrate multiple elements.

There is no one "right way" to build peace. Transformation is deeper when Community Peacebuilders can celebrate and collaborate with different ways of pursuing a common vision.

The Big Picture of Community Peacebuilding

Community Aid

“How can we reduce harm?”

Community Aid is an urgent and emergency response to harm; it doesn't fix the problem, but it keeps it from getting worse.

Examples include food pantries, homeless shelters, needle exchanges, violence interrupter teams, mutual aid, and soup kitchens.

Community Development

“How do we build and skill up?”

Community Development is about the community's economic capacity, empowering people with skills and resources.

Examples include ESL classes, community gardens, job training, business microloans, recreation centers, and youth mentoring.

Community Building

“How do we relate?”

Community Building is all about relationships: connecting across differences, reconciling broken relationships, and creating a collective story and vision.

Examples include potlucks, block parties, story circles, dialogue events, restorative justice circles, mediation, and cultural celebrations.

Community Activism

“How do we use our power?”

Community Activism is using collective power to influence government leaders, institutions, and businesses.

Examples include advocating for new street signs, protesting unfair policies, participating in government meetings, and boycotting harmful businesses.



The Ecology of Community Peacebuilding

Interconnected Paths to Community Transformation



The Community Peacebuilding Process

Understand, Connect, & Collaborate

At Peace Catalyst, we approach peacebuilding through a journey of Understanding, Connecting, and Collaborating.

Community peacebuilders seek to **Understand** their community, its conflicts, and their own place within it all. When peacebuilding is not grounded in understanding—or at least the desire to Understand—it can harm more than it helps.

Peacebuilding is rooted in relationships. We build those relationships by intentionally **Connecting** with those around us. We Connect to find partners, to include others, to amplify unheard voices, and to build bridges across divides. Change only happens through trust.

Our goal is **Collaboration**—working with our neighbors, our partners, possibly even our perceived enemies to build a thriving community. Change that arises from within a community is more transformative than a fix from the outside.

Though these stages loosely build upon each other, the cycle never stops. When we Connect, we Understand more. When we Collaborate, we also continue to Connect. Community Peacebuilding invites us to weave all three elements together.



The Cycle of Community Peacebuilding

Understand



Collaborate

Connect

Understand the Community

Understanding is foundational for Community Peacebuilding. It is continuous—every new piece of information, every new relationship, every new experience helps us understand more.

- **Understand Yourself**

Knowing yourself is essential to peacebuilding with integrity and humility. What is your relationship to the community? What are you passionate about? What do you need to thrive?

- **Understand your Context**

What is the history and geography of your community? What events and stories have shaped it? Where is the wealth and the power, and how are they shared?

- **Understand the People**

Who lives in your community? How did they get there? What's their story? How do they view or interact with others? What experiences, wounds, memories, and values guide people?

- **Understand the Conflicts**

What divisions plague your community? Who is involved, and who is impacted? What fears, needs, wounds, and stories keep the conflict going?

10 Ideas to Start Understanding

- 1 Take a walk around your community. Where are you comfortable? Where do you feel uneasy? What's under those feelings?
- 2 Draw a map of your community. Who lives there? What resources exist? What places gather and empower people?
- 3 Read your local paper. What conflicts or fears do you see? Whose voices and perspectives are left out?
- 4 Learn your community's history. Go to the library, visit a local historical society, or listen to the stories of your elders.
- 5 Who is in your community? Be curious: explore learning basic phrases, culture, and history of other groups.
- 6 Seek out stories, narratives, local art and music, or experiences different from your own. What needs and values do you hear?
- 7 Reflect on community conflicts. Who is "othered"? Who holds power? What stories or assumptions are being made?
- 8 Every community conflict is part of something bigger. What national issues are affecting local relationships?
- 9 What is your relationship to local conflicts? To whom are you connected? How are you and your neighbors impacted?
- 10 Consider your place in the community. What's your own history? What resources, skills, and passions do you bring to the table?

Connect Across Differences

Connecting across differences is the lifeblood of Community Peacebuilding. Community healing and change are impossible until people are known, trusted, and reconciled.

- **Connect With Your Partners**

Cultivating peace can be challenging and lonely. It is essential that we connect with those who share our heart, our values, our vision. We surround ourselves with those we trust.

- **Connect With Your Neighbors**

Community Peacebuilding starts with those around us and those with whom we're already in relationship. We build momentum by connecting intentionally with our own network.

- **Connect With Those on the Margins**

Society can be judged by how it treats those with less power and fewer resources. Peacebuilding centers these voices. Who around us is disempowered, excluded, and ridiculed?

- **Connect With the "Other"**

With whom in our community are we unfamiliar or uncomfortable? With whom do we disagree? Building a future positive peace means building bridges across these divides.

10 Ideas to Start Connecting

- 1 Start with people you already know. Hear their stories, concerns, values, and hopes. Ask who else you should talk to.
- 2 Make new connections. Have you been hearing about a neighbor or local leader? Seek an introduction, or reach out yourself.
- 3 Be present and available in your community. Spend time in public spaces: parks, libraries, your front yard. Who do you see often?
- 4 Show up at community events: block parties, prayer gatherings, performances, celebrations. Meet helpers, neighbors, and leaders.
- 5 Knock on doors. Go meet neighbors you don't know. Introduce yourself, and maybe bring some treats. Remember their names!
- 6 Invite neighbors to a barbecue or potluck. Host a fun gathering where folks can meet and contribute with little pressure.
- 7 Invite community members to a conversation. Host a more structured gathering to share stories or discuss a local issue.
- 8 Invite someone you disagree with out for a coffee. Go with the express intention of listening and understanding, not arguing.
- 9 Find a community to learn and grow with. Join folks with shared values: faith communities, cultural groups, non-profits, etc.
- 10 Invite someone of a different identity to hold you accountable. This trust and humility helps you address your blind spots.

Collaborate for Change

Collaboration with neighbors is the fruit of our Understanding and Connecting. We find our place in the ecosystem of change through skills, passions, relationships, and community needs.

- **What relationships do you have?**

Relationships guide our collaboration. What do those around us care about? What is important to those we trust? Who can involve us in existing work, or be a partner in something new?

- **What are you passionate about?**

We want to collaborate in ways that are exciting and life-giving for us. Our passions help sustain us for the long haul. What ideas, issues, or activities are close to your heart?

- **What skills and resources do you have?**

To collaborate well, we want to have something to contribute. What do we bring to the work? What skills, resources, and connections can we use for the good of our community?

- **What does your community need?**

Community Peacebuilding requires understanding our community. We may have passion, relationships, and skills, but our ideas will still fall flat if we aren't meeting felt needs.



Community Peacebuilding Compass

Discerning Where & How to Collaborate
in Your Community



10 Ideas to Start Collaborating

- 1** Support the good work of others. Celebrate other peacebuilders. Share their news, join their events, and bring others along.
- 2** Volunteer. Invest yourself in groups that share your values and passions. This deepens your relationships and builds credibility.
- 3** Get your community to show up for groups and issues you care about. Personally invite those in your network to get involved.
- 4** Start network weaving. You've already built your network. Now consider, who should know each other? Who can you introduce?
- 5** Partner with neighbors to host community events. Barbecues, potlucks, story circles, block parties... it's better with a team!
- 6** Partner across divisions to learn together. Co-host a diverse group for a book club, film discussion, or community conversation.
- 7** Find an organization to host you. Have an idea for a project? Pitch it to a local faith community or non-profit—they may love it!
- 8** Organize neighbors to identify a shared need, then work on it. Need a stop sign? Repairs in the park? Get busy and advocate!
- 9** Skill up together. What does your community need? What skills would make it happen? How can you learn with your neighbors?
- 10** Bring your skills to your community. Every vocation has a role. How can your business, IT, or construction experience help?

Next Steps


Want to go deeper into community peacebuilding with PCI?

- ▶ Join us for an event or training at www.peacecatalyst.org/events
- ▶ Learn with us through our podcast (peacecatalystpodcast.podbean.com) and blog (www.peacecatalyst.org/blog)
- ▶ Join the Christian Peacebuilding Network to find support and learn more about peacebuilding at www.facebook.com/groups/christianpeacebuildingnetwork
- ▶ Learn about shalom, the biblical concept of peace at www.peacecatalyst.org/shalom
- ▶ Join Peace Catalyst on staff or as a volunteer at www.peacecatalyst.org/join





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