

## Organizing with Elicitive Questions

Effective organizing helps people get what they want; helps people want what is consistent with their values; and clarifies and aligns their values. An important tool for accomplishing all this is elicitive questions.

Elicitive questions benefit both the person asking them and the person answering. The person asking the questions gets information – and information is an organizer's life blood! Elicitive questions help you understand people who disagree with you. By asking rather than arguing, you get their perspective; discover how they are framing the issue; find common ground with unexpected allies; and collect data. In that way they can strengthen relationships.

Elicitive questions encourage the person being asked to express their assumptions and beliefs. They assist people to look beneath the surface, like peeling a layer of an onion.

Elicitive questions are not:

- ▶ a yes or a no question
- ▶ "why" questions, which often stir up resistance or allow people to wax philosophical or invite rationalization
- ▶ long, complex questions that are hard to digest
- ▶ a way to trick someone into the "right" answer

Instead, elicitive questions:

- ▶ connect people deeper with their own selves
- ▶ create motion and options by assuming people have wisdom inside them
- ▶ are short and simple
- ▶ often ask the unaskable questions

Examples of elicitive questions:

- ▶ Specifically, when has that happened?
- ▶ What parts of the proposal do you agree with?
- ▶ How could you imagine us working together?
- ▶ What would it take to convince you to...?
- ▶ How did you reach that conclusion?
- ▶ What jumps out at you when you look at this information?
- ▶ What else?

*By Daniel Hunter with Betsy Raasch-Gilman, Training for Change  
More from Fran Peavy's booklet Strategic Questioning:  
An Experiment in Communication of the Second Kind*

