



Welcome!

Before we get started, please introduce yourself in the chat with your name, organization/title, and where you are joining us from.



Fostering Client Agency Through Building Self-Advocacy Skills: A practical strategy for lawyers, advocates, and service providers

**Introductory Webinar
The Right Question Institute
Spring 2025**

Luz Santana, RQI Co-Founder
Naomi Campbell, Director, Legal Empowerment Program
Keila Perez, Program Associate

Overview

- Service providers, legal aid lawyers, community activists, and more are operating with a lot of uncertainty in a changing and difficult landscape
- This webinar introduces a method to help build the **agency** of the people and communities you serve
- This method helps people connect decisions made in their daily interactions with public institutions and systems with decisions made elsewhere
- It is designed to make your work easier, as people learn to advocate for themselves and their needs **alongside you**, as you provide services or advocate on their behalf

Agenda

- Background
- Interactive training
 - An experience in the method
 - Unpack the method and explore its applications across fields
 - Review guidelines for using the method and introduce specific tools you can integrate into your work
- Next steps and Q&A
- Optional post-session discussion

After the session

- **Evaluation**
- Look for an email with:
 - A **recording** of the session and powerpoint slides
 - Download link for the **resources** introduced today
 - Opportunities for **personalized support**

An Interactive Session



Individual work with pen
& paper or computer
document



Sharing with other
participants in the chat
box

Before we get started...

- **Pre-session poll:**
 - Do you currently have a specific strategy for client empowerment at your organization?
 - If so, what does that strategy entail?



Background on the Right Question Institute

The Right Question Strategy

An educational strategy that fosters the development of two skills essential for **self-advocacy** and **effective action**:

- Asking better questions
- Participating more effectively in decisions

Why questions? Why decisions?

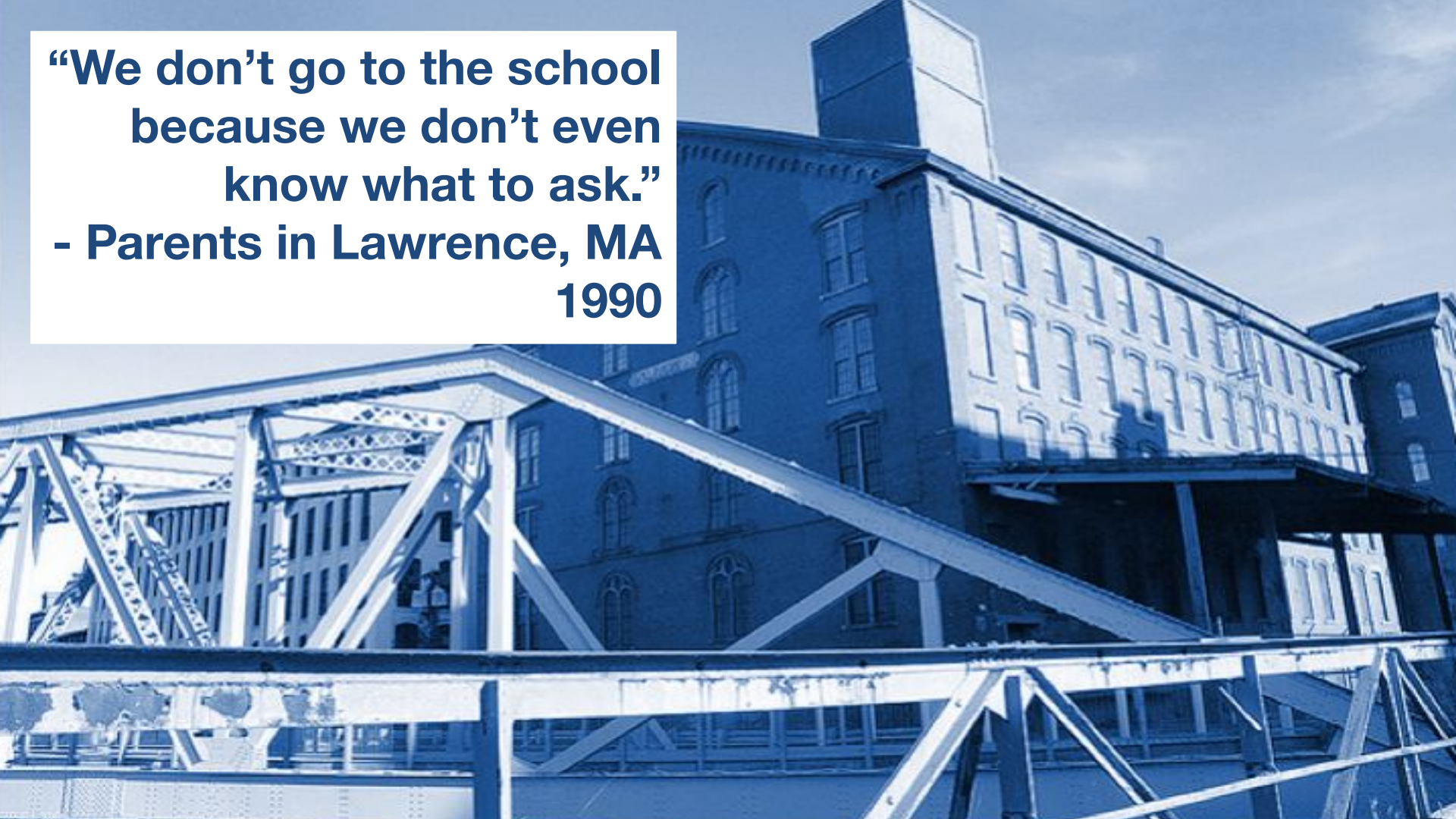
Asking questions is a foundational skill for thinking, learning, and taking action.

The ability to focus on decisions helps people become more effective and strategic.

People become more engaged, understand more, and discover their own power.

These two skills are rarely taught.

**“We don’t go to the school
because we don’t even
know what to ask.”
- Parents in Lawrence, MA
1990**



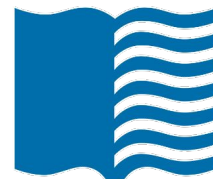
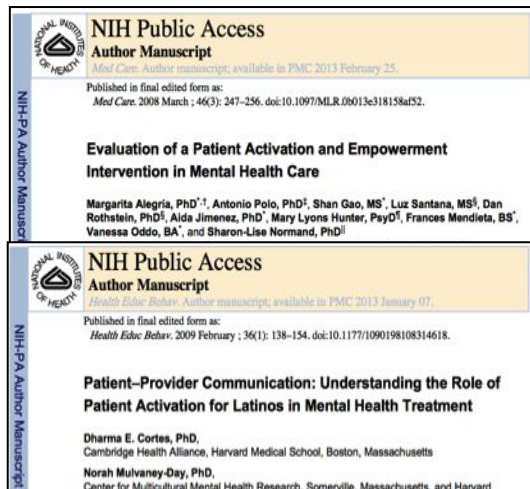
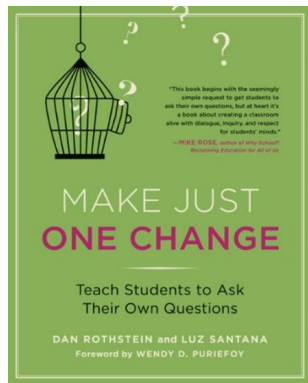


Right Question
Institute

A Catalyst for Microdemocracy



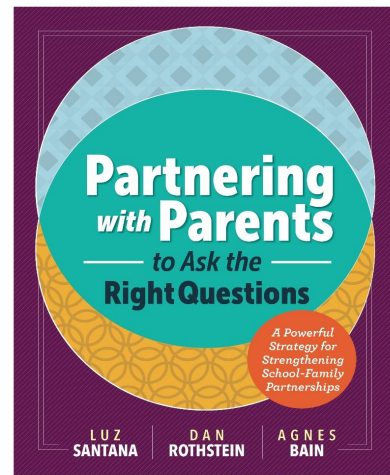
HARVARD
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION



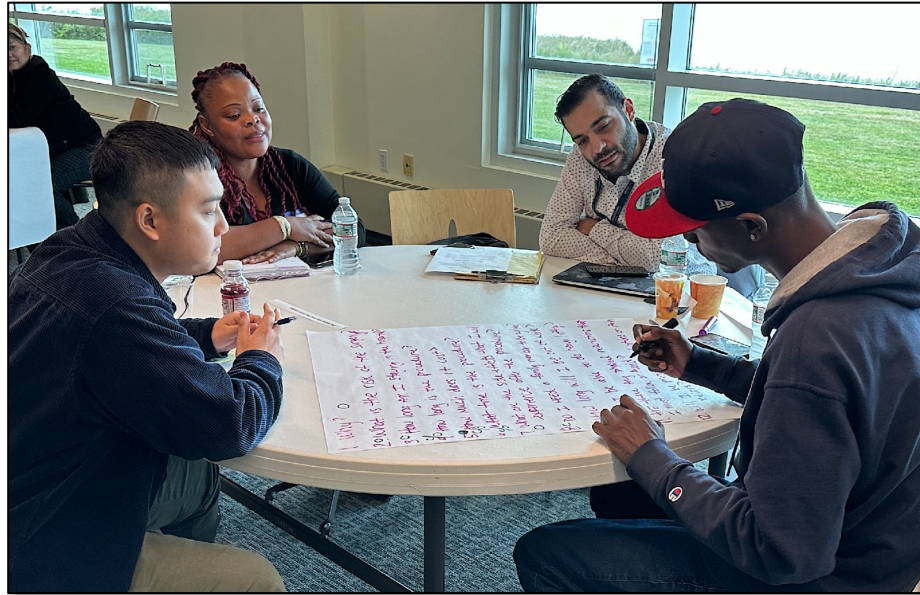
LIBRARY OF
CONGRESS



SOCIAL
INNOVATIONS
Journal



An experience in the Right Question Strategy



Interactive Exercise

Rules for Producing Questions

1. ASK AS **MANY** QUESTIONS AS YOU CAN
2. DO **NOT STOP** TO ANSWER, JUDGE OR DISCUSS
3. WRITE DOWN EVERY QUESTION **EXACTLY** AS IT IS STATED OR COMES TO MIND
4. **CHANGE** ANY STATEMENTS INTO QUESTIONS

What might be difficult about following these rules?

Today's Question Focus:

Choose one of these statements for your Question Focus:

**Your child might be held back in the same grade
for one more year.**

The doctor might be changing your medication.

***Your child might be held back in the same
grade for one more year.***

OR

***The doctor might be changing your
medication.***

- Ask as many questions as you can.
- Do not stop to answer, judge, or discuss.
- Write down every question exactly as it comes to mind.
- Change any statements into questions.



Categorizing Questions: Closed or Open

- **Closed-ended** questions can be answered with a “yes” or “no” or with a **one-word** answer.
- **Open-ended** questions require more **explanation**.

Identify your questions as closed-ended or open-ended by **marking them** with a “**C**” or an “**O**.”



Closed- and Open-Ended Questions

| Closed-ended questions | |
|------------------------|--|
| Advantages | |
| | |

Closed- and Open-Ended Questions

| Closed-ended questions | |
|------------------------|---------------|
| | Disadvantages |
| | |

Closed- and Open-Ended Questions

| Open-ended questions | |
|----------------------|--|
| Advantages | |
| | |

Closed- and Open-Ended Questions

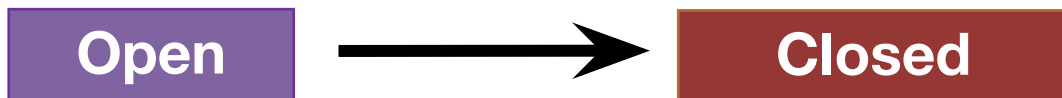
| Open-ended questions | |
|----------------------|---------------|
| | Disadvantages |
| | |

Improving Questions

Change one **closed-ended question** so it becomes **open-ended**.



Change one **open-ended question** so it becomes **closed-ended**.



Prioritizing Questions

Review your list of questions.

Choose three questions you consider *most important* from your list.

While prioritizing, think about the Question Focus you chose:

Your child might be held back in the same grade for one more year.

The doctor might be changing your medication.



Focusing on decisions

A simple definition:

A **decision** is the selection of one option from among two or more options.

When decisions are made it is important to focus on:

- The **OPTIONS**
- **REASONS** - the basis or explanation for a decision.
- **PROCESS** - the steps and actions taken, people involved, and information used in making the decision.
- **ROLE** - the part you play/ the part the people affected by the decision play in the decision-making process. For example, you make the decision, someone else makes the decision and you give your opinion, you give information, you accept or challenge the decision.

An example

Every day you make a decision about what to wear:



The OPTIONS

An example



The REASON: If you chose the t-shirt, the reason might be that it is hot outside.



The PROCESS: The process might be checking the temperature.



Your ROLE: Your role in choosing what to wear is that you made the decision.

Identify one question that will help you learn about:

- The **REASON** for the decision.
- The **PROCESS** for making the decision.
- Your **ROLE/the ROLE** of the people affected by the decision.

**Add a new
question to your
list if you
don't have one**

Reflect



What did you learn?

What did you notice about your thinking as you went through the process?

Use the chat!

Reflect



How do you think the people you work with could benefit from using a similar process for formulating questions?

Use the chat!

Unpacking the method & applications in the field

The Question Formulation Technique

1. Question Focus

2. Producing questions



1. Ask as many questions as you can
2. Do not stop to discuss, judge or answer
3. Record *exactly* as stated
4. Change statements into questions

3. Improving questions

- Categorize questions as closed or open ended
- Change questions from one type to another

4. Strategizing

- Prioritize your questions
- Action plan or discuss next steps
- Share

5. Reflecting

The Question Formulation Technique

1. Question Focus

2. Producing questions



1. Ask as many questions as you can
2. Do not stop to discuss, judge or answer
3. Record *exactly* as stated
4. Change statements into questions

3. Improving questions


- Categorize questions as closed or open ended
- Change questions from one type to another

4. Strategizing


- Prioritize your questions
- **Action plan or discuss next steps**
- Share

5. Reflecting

The Voice in Decisions Technique

1. Question Focus
2. Producing questions 
3. Improving questions
 - Categorize questions as closed or open ended
 - Change questions from one type to another
4. Strategizing on how to use questions


1. Ask as many questions as you can
2. Do not stop to discuss, judge or answer
3. Record *exactly* as stated
4. Change statements into questions

- Prioritize questions
- Define “decision” and key elements in decision making 
 - Reason(s): the basis for a decision
 - Process: the steps and actions taken, people and information involved
 - Role: the part people affected by the decision play in the process
- Identifying questions about reason, process, and role
- Optional: develop an action plan or discuss next steps


Decision: Choosing one option from among two or more

5. Reflecting

The Voice in Decisions Technique

1. Question Focus
2. Producing questions 
3. Improving questions
 - Categorize questions as closed or open ended
 - Change questions from one type to another
4. Strategizing on how to use questions

1. Ask as many questions as you can
2. Do not stop to discuss, judge or answer
3. Record *exactly* as stated
4. Change statements into questions

- Prioritize questions
- Define “decision” and key elements in decision making 
 - Reason(s): the basis for a decision
 - Process: the steps and actions taken, people and information involved
 - Role: the part people affected by the decision play in the process
- Identifying questions about reason, process, and role
- Optional: develop an action plan or discuss next steps

Decision: Choosing one option from among two or more

5. Reflecting

How does this connect to empowerment?

When people formulate their own questions . . .

- People feel a stronger sense of **agency** as they navigate systems
- People are better able to **advocate and make their voice heard** for themselves and their families
- Frontline service providers and clients **build trust and partner** more effectively together to achieve better outcomes

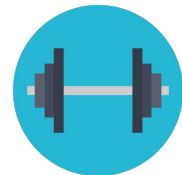
Three changes as outcomes:



COGNITIVE



AFFECTIVE



BEHAVIORAL

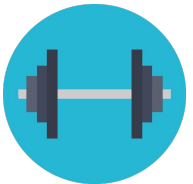
“Estás más preparado. **Sabes lo que quieres.** Cuando sabes lo que quieres, **buscas la forma de obtenerlo.** [You are better prepared. **You know what you want.** And when you know what you want, **you can look for a way to get it.**]” - Nelida Herrera, Sacramento, CA



“It helps you advocate for yourself, **without feeling overwhelmed or inferior** to what someone might have. I wasn’t intimidated any more... **it makes you feel like, ‘I can do this.’**” - Alicia, Boston, MA



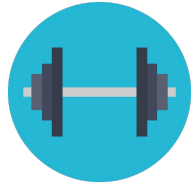
“I didn’t know I could ask questions at the school. But, **by doing that, I was able to get my son the services he needs.**” - Session participant who learned to advocate for her son with a hearing impairment, Mass.



“We became homeless, we were evicted from our apartment. . . .I was like, I can’t bring the kids to a homeless shelter, I’ve been there myself once and I don’t ever want to go back. It helped me to be more confident. When I went into that room, I don’t think without writing down those questions . . . I wouldn’t have been able to do that. I wouldn’t be able to go in there and not cry and be hysterical . . . I wasn’t like that at all, I was completely under control.” - Stacey French, Dover, New Hampshire



As a result of this workshop I plan to: What ever it takes to get the information I need.



“What ever it takes to get the information I need.”- Session participant, Louisville, KY

In the medical literature

Alegría, M., Polo, A., Gao, S., Santana, L., Rothstein, D., Jimenez, A., Hunter, M.L., Mendieta, F., Oddo, V., Normand, S.L. (2008). **Evaluation of a patient activation and empowerment intervention in mental health care.** *Med Care*, 46(3), 247-56.

Cortes, D.E., Mulvaney-Day, N., Fortuna, L., Reinfeld, S., Alegría, M. (2009). **Patient—provider communication: understanding the role of patient activation for Latinos in mental health treatment.** *Health Education & Behavior*, 36(1), 138-54.

Deen, D., Lu, W.H., Rothstein, D., Santana, L., Gold, M.R.(2011). **Asking questions: the effect of a brief intervention in community health centers on patient activation.** *Patient Education and Counseling*, 84(2), 257-60.

Lu, W.H., Deen, D., Rothstein, D., Santana, L., Gold, M.R. (2011). **Activating community health center patients in developing question-formulation skills: a qualitative study.** *Health Education & Behavior*, 38(6), 637-45.

Deen, D., Lu, W.H., Weintraub, M.R., Maranda, M.J., Elshafey, S., Gold, M.R. (2012). **The impact of different modalities for activating patients in a community health setting.** *Patient Education and Counseling*, 89(1), 178-83.

Examples of applications

- **Legal professionals** preparing families for IEP meetings
- **Social worker** preparing youth for court appearances and meetings with attorneys
- GED class **students** advocating at the welfare office
- **Community** advocating for violence prevention programs

Making the strategy work for your needs

- **How am I supposed to make time for something additional?** → Spending 10 minutes can help make meetings and relationships with clients more efficient and productive.
- **Is this appropriate for situations where a client is facing an urgent problem, or there is an immediate safety risk?** → This is not appropriate for all situations! You will know if it is a good time to use a tool for partnering more effectively with clients.
- **Some clients are already asking questions, how is this going to help?** → Having a client prioritize and be strategic can get them better results, when they're working with you or when they're preparing for a different situation.

Integration

What are some specific situations in which you could use a method for helping clients / the people you work with ask their own questions?

Use the chat!



Facilitating the methods

Using the process

One small shift in practice:
the client is the one asking their own questions

The Question Focus

The Question Focus is a stimulus for jumpstarting questions. It is the focus of question formulation.

**Only one requirement for the Question Focus:
*It should NOT be a question.***

Today we used:

Your child might be held back in the same grade for one more year.

The doctor might be changing your medication.

Examples of applications

- Legal professionals preparing families for IEP meetings
Example Question Focus: “The school recommends an IEP to help your child”
- Social worker preparing youth for court appearances and meetings with attorneys
Example Question Focus: “The emancipation process”
- GED class students advocating at the welfare office
Example Question Focus: “You have been denied benefits”
- Community advocating for violence prevention programs
Example Question Focus: “A shooting at our kid’s school”

Resources

Teaching Templates & Guides

5 Steps for Asking Better Questions

Asking your own questions can help you get more information and advocate for what you need.

Topic: _____

1. Ask as many questions as you can about the topic.
 - Do not stop to try to answer or judge the questions
 - Write each question exactly as it comes to mind
 - Change any thoughts or statements into questions

2. Find different types of questions on your list:
 - Closed-ended questions: Can be answered with "yes" or "no" or one word. Mark them with a "C."
 - Open-ended questions: Require an explanation. Mark them with an "O."
3. Practice changing your questions to get different information. Change one of each:
Closed → Open Open → Closed
4. Choose the three most important questions for you. Mark them with an "X."
5. Reflection: Why did you choose those three questions? What did you learn? How can you use it?

HAVING A SAY IN DECISIONS THAT AFFECT YOU

DECISIONS:

size of one option from
options.



decision about what to wear.
the t-shirt, that is the decision.

to think about when looking at a decision:

REASON – the basis or explanation for the decision. So, if you chose
the t-shirt, the reason might be that it is hot outside.

PROCESS – the information used to make the decision, the people involved
at involved, the steps along the way towards making the decision.
process might be checking the temperature.

ROLE – the part you play anywhere in the process for making the decision.
example, you make the decision, someone else makes the decision and you give
opinion, you give information, you accept or challenge the decision. Your role
in deciding what to wear is that you made the decision.

to make decisions that affect you.
made that affects you, it is important to ask questions about that decision.

ABOUT DECISIONS:

that affects you. Write it down here.

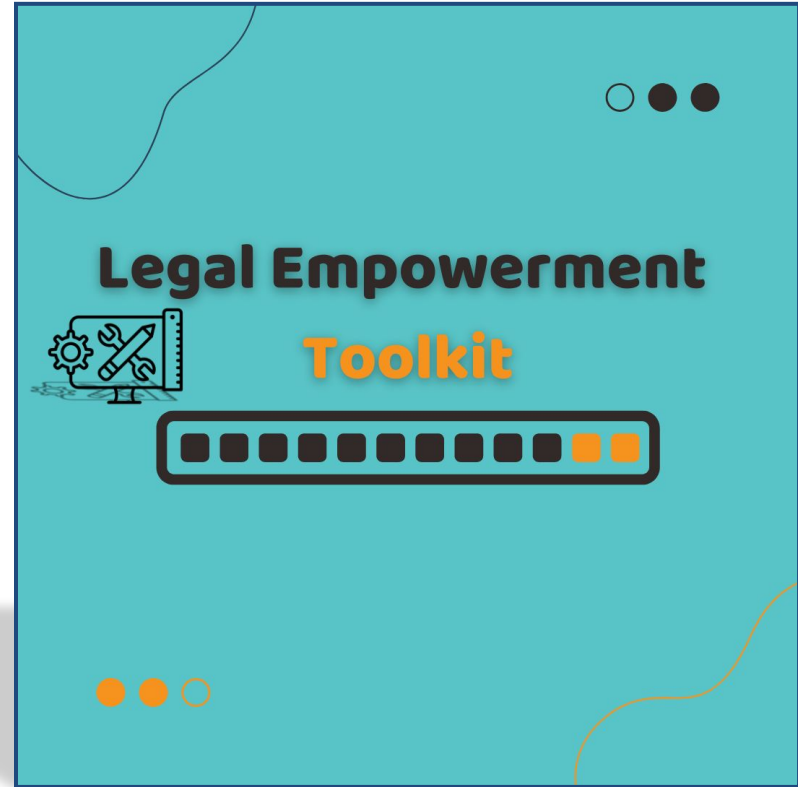
ut this decision using these four rules:

tions as you can about the decision.
to answer, judge, or discuss the questions.
on exactly as it comes to mind.
ghts or statements into questions.
ght be difficult for you to follow? Why?

Resources

Upcoming Toolkit


Sign up for our
network to receive
updates!
rightquestion.org



Resources

Facilitation Videos

View on our
resource page

**Right Question Institute**
A Catalyst for Microdemocracy

STRATEGY | OUR WORK | ABOUT | **RESOURCES** | CONTACT | [SIGN UP](#) | [LOGIN](#) | [DONATE](#)


TEACHING + LEARNING | LEGAL EMPOWERMENT | VOTER ENGAGEMENT | SELF-ADVOCACY

Resources

BOOKS:
PARTNERING WITH PARENTS
MAKE JUST ONE CHANGE

VIEW BY FIELD:
TEACHING + LEARNING
SCHOOLS + FAMILIES
+ DOWNLOAD AND USE
INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS
FACILITATION MATERIALS
+ WATCH + LISTEN
INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEOS
WEBINARS
PODCASTS
+ READ
RIGHT QUESTION INSIGHTS
RIGHT QUESTION ROUNDUP

LEGAL EMPOWERMENT
VOTER ENGAGEMENT



[Video] Using the Question Formulation Technique (QFT) with Individuals
FIELD(S): Schools + Families
TYPE: Instructional Videos

Next steps

Evaluation

Before we move onto next steps and open up for discussion, please take two minutes to respond to the following evaluation:

<https://tinyurl.com/3bykxxpe>



Next steps

- Look for an email with:
 - A **recording** of the session and powerpoint slides
 - **Resources**
 - Teaching templates in English and Spanish
 - Videos of one-on-one facilitation
 - Opportunities for **personalized support** and **further training**

5 Steps for Asking Better Questions
Asking your own questions can help you get more information and advocate for what you need.

Topic:

1. Ask as many questions as you can about the topic.

- Do not stop to try to answer or judge the questions
- Write each question exactly as it comes to mind
- Change any thoughts or statements into questions


2. Find different types of questions on your list:

- Closed-ended questions: Can be answered with "yes" or "no" or one word. Mark them with a "C."
- Open-ended questions: Require an explanation. Mark them with an "O."

3. Practice changing your questions to get different information. Change one of each:
Closed → Open Open → Closed

4. Choose the three most important questions for you. Mark them with an "X."

5. Reflection: Why did you choose those three questions? What did you learn? How can you use it?


Source: Right Question Institute
www.RightQuestion.org

Some final thoughts

Three criteria for accountable decision-making that correspond to key democratic principles

Reason  *Legitimacy*

Process  *Transparency*

Role  *Opportunities for participation*



“I believe unconditionally in the ability of people to respond when they are told the truth. We need to be taught to study rather than to believe, to inquire rather than to affirm.”

- **Septima Clark**

Thank you!

Now, some time for your questions

We are eager to hear from you:

naomi.campbell@rightquestion.org

keila.perez@rightquestion.org

Register to access free resources at: www.rightquestion.org

Free Resources

The Right Question Institute offers many of our resources and methodology through a Creative Commons License and we encourage you to make use of and/or share this resource. **Please reference the Right Question Institute** as the source when using our resources or methods.



Source: www.rightquestion.org

Finding a Question Focus

One key tip for an effective Question Focus:
The simpler, the better.

The Question Focus is usually presented as a statement:

- Your doctor says you might need surgery.
- Your application for services has been denied.
- The judge will be deciding your custody case tomorrow.

For finding questions about reason, process, and role:
The Question Focus must include a decision

Facilitation Tips

- Introduce the process as quickly as possible
- Do not explain the topic or question focus or give examples of questions
- Do not stop to answer the questions as they are being produced – that is not your role
- Make sure to leave time for reflection – what did you learn? How can you use it?