FISH AND BOULDERS
A FACILITATION GUIDE

Participatory evaluation is an approach that ensures program participants are actively involved in evaluation activities from start to finish. The goal of the Fish and Boulders method is to have participants spend time reflecting on the strengths and barriers of their program, as well as collectively brainstorming about how to reach the program goals.

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

??? WHAT IS IT?

The Fish and Boulders exercise is an engaging and participatory tool for visioning, assessing the path forward, and reflecting on what has and needs to happen to reach a goal.

??? WHAT IS IT USED FOR?

The Fish and Boulders exercise is used as an evaluation activity that helps groups identify a goal and then think through the various strengths and obstacles that propel them towards or hold them back from achieving that goal. It can be used as a visioning exercise, analysis tool, and even a progress tracker as groups start to work on addressing the strengths and barriers within their organization.

MATERIALS LIST

SUPPLIES

For this activity you will need:
- A large space or canvas to place the cards (Sticky Wall, large poster/chart paper, digital template)
- Masking tape to adhere the canvas to a wall
- Flip chart paper and markers to record the group agreements and reflection questions
- Notepads and pens/pencils for individual/small group brainstorming
- Cardstock cut into fish and boulder shapes for people to write their ideas on large enough to read
- VIRTUAL OPTION: Virtual meeting platform, PowerPoint presentation, a polling tool to capture responses, or a shared document (e.g., Google doc or screen sharing) to record answers electronically

LOGISTICS

Consider the size of your group and the space needed to allow people to comfortably participate in discussion. Plan the room layout, wall space and location for hanging the cards so everyone can see clearly. Arrange the room to allow individuals to do parts of the activity on their own (classroom style) or together in small groups (tables of up to 8). If you are conducting this virtually, you may decide to set-up small group breakout rooms using a virtual platform to facilitate the activity virtually.

HEADS UP!

If you are using a Sticky Wall, apply adhesive spray to the wall 24 hours beforehand so it can dry and the cards will stick. Bring an extra spray can in case you need to spot spray any areas are not sticky.

FACILITATION PLANNING

PREPARATION

The prep for this activity will depend on how many participants will be in the group you are facilitating. Things you will need to do beforehand include:
- Spray sticky wall or have a long piece of roll paper cut (you can draw the river on ahead of time or allow the group to draw their vision of a river as an icebreaker activity).
- Print fish and boulder templates on different colored cardstock (you can add a layer by having two different color cardstock for current and future strengths/barriers)
- Cut out fish and boulders
- Write group agreements and program goal(s) on flipchart paper

Supplies and materials you will need include:
- Sticky wall/ roll paper
- Masking tape
- Scrap paper
- Pens
- Markers
- Flip chart paper

WARM-UP

- Orient group to the purpose of the activity
- Go over group agreements
- Use metaphor of a stream to paint the picture
  - Stream = path to goal
  - Fish = strengths towards reaching goal
  - Boulders = barriers to reaching goal

CONDUCTING THE ACTIVITY

- Review goal(s) with the group
- Individual brainstorming
- Instruct how to write on cards:
  - One idea per card
  - 5-7 words
  - Write big
- Transfer clearest ideas onto cardstock fish/ boulders
- Have participants share ideas with the group and place on sticky wall/ canvas
  - Greater strength/ barrier = further upstream
  - Lesser strength/ barrier = further backstream
  - Group similar ideas together
- Scan for any connections between strength/ barrier cards and move them together

WRAP UP

- Reflect as a large group to wrap up activity
  - What stands out
  - Are there any surprises
  - Last thoughts
- Share that group will get a document that reflects the work they did together
- Take pictures of the group's finished work so that, when you take it down, you can keep it organized and have a visual to refer to during analysis.

FACILITATION PLANNING

Fish and Boulder Evaluation Activity – Facilitation Plan

Location:	Date:	Time:	# of participants:
Facilitator(s):	Rational Aim: To assist the group in identifying factors that are moving them towards their goals, as well as barriers they are currently encountering or expect to encounter in the future as they implement program activities.		Experiential Aim: To create a shared vision about the current projection of the project and identify areas to focus evaluation questions and goals.
Room set-up: Small groups, round tables, 6-8 people per table	Materials: One large sticky wall, card with legend (fish = strengths/resources, boulder = barriers, colors = existing/future), goal card(s)		Supplies: Fish cards, boulder cards, markers, masking tape, note paper, pencils/pens, chart paper

Fish and Boulder Session

Introduction	Brainstorming/Individual Work Time	Reflection & Conversation Debrief
Hi everyone! We are so excited to be here with you in person today and to get to know you and your organization better. In case you do not know who we are, [INTRODUCTIONS HERE]. We have a lot of exciting work ahead of us, and this activity is designed to help your organization gain clarity and identify potential areas for evaluation goals and objectives. This exercise is called Fish and Boulders. In this exercise, we will use the metaphor of a river [point to sticky wall]. At the end of the river is our goal [point to sticky wall goal card], which represents optimal functioning of your organization towards achieving your goal . You each have several fish shaped cards and several boulder shaped cards. The fish represent positive factors (GIVE EXAMPLES: assets, resources, and strengths) that help propel you towards the end goal, and the boulders represent barriers or obstacles that may keep you from fully attaining your goal. [IF GOAL HAS NOT BEEN SET, SPEND TIME IDENTIFYING THE GOAL WITH THE GROUP]	To start the activity, we are going to take some time to think individually about the strengths and barriers that impact your organization's ability to achieve the end goal. 1. What are some of the strengths, resources, or assets your program has that help to propel you towards your goal? 2. What are some obstacles or barriers you have encountered, or expect to encounter, as you begin implementing program interventions ? Take some time to think about both the fish (strengths) and boulders (barriers). Write down your ideas on your card and place them on the sticky wall in the 'river' as you complete cards . [GIVE 5 MINUTE WARNING TO WRITE IDEAS ON CARDS AND PLACE UP ON THE STICKY WALL]	Now we are going to come back together as a group to deconstruct this picture that you all helped to create. Let's go through each 'fish' to see where you all felt that the organization has strengths or resources first, and then we will go through the barriers or obstacles. [READ ALL FISH OUT LOUD] 1. After hearing all the strengths that you identified, which stand out to you? [PUT STARS ON FISH THAT ARE IDENTIFIED AS MOST IMPORTANT BY THE GROUP] Which ones really resonate, and seem most relevant to propelling you towards your goal? Are there any strengths/resources that correspond with another or 'go together'? [READ ALL BOULDERS OUT LOUD] 2. After hearing all the barriers, what stands out to you? Are there any barriers that you see that can potentially be removed? Which barriers feel like the highest priority to tackle first as you begin implementing program activities? [STAR THE MOST IMPORTANT BOULDERS IDENTIFIED BY THE GROUP]. 3. As we wrap up this exercise, what stands out for you? What are the program's key takeaways? Do you have any concerns? What are you excited about? Are there any connections or overall themes that can be seen between the fish and boulders? Any other last closing thoughts, comments, or questions? Thank you!

FACILITATION PLANNING (VIRTUAL ADAPTATION)

PREPARATION

The prep for this virtual activity will look a little different than that of the in-person facilitation. While there will be no prep of physical materials, things you will need to do beforehand include:

- Create a digital template to work in (you can do this using Microsoft Word, Microsoft PowerPoint, or other software or by creating a space in a web-based platform like Canva or Miro)
- Send out virtual meeting invitation to participants with link to meeting space

Supplies and materials you will need include:

- Virtual meeting platform
- Digital template
- Accessibility options (closed captioning, translation, etc.)
- Notetaker

WARM-UP

- Orient group to the purpose of the activity
- Go over group agreements
- Use metaphor of a stream to paint the picture
  - Stream = path to goal
  - Fish = strengths propelling towards reaching goal
  - Boulders = barriers to reaching goal

CONDUCTING THE ACTIVITY

- Review goal(s) with the group
- Guide the group through each component – fish/ boulder
  - Individual brainstorming
  - Sharing with the group
  - Type clearest ideas into fish/ boulder templates
- Have participants review shared ideas and consider placement on the stream
  - Greater strength/ barrier = further upstream
  - Lesser strength/ barrier = further backstream
- Scan for any connections between strength/ barrier cards and move them together

WRAP UP

- Reflect as a large group to wrap up activity
  - What stands out
  - Are there any surprises
  - Last thoughts
- Share that group will get a document that reflects the work they did together
- Take screenshots of the group's finished work so that you can have a visual to refer to during analysis

Fish and Boulder Evaluation Activity – Facilitation Plan (Virtual Adaptation)

Location:	Date:	Time:	# of participants:

Facilitator(s):	Rational Aim: To assist the group in identifying factors that are moving them towards their goals, as well as barriers they are currently encountering or expect to encounter in the future as they implement program activities.	Experiential Aim: To create a shared vision about the current projection of the project and identify areas to focus evaluation questions and goals.

Room set-up:	Materials: Computer/ tablet, digital platform (Zoom, etc.),	Supplies: digital template (PowerPoint, etc.), scrap paper to brainstorm on, pen/pencil to write with

Fish and Boulder Session

Introduction	Brainstorming/Individual work time	Reflection & Conversation Debrief
Hi everyone! We are so excited to be here with you today and to get to know you and your program better. In case you do not know who we are, [INTRODUCTIONS HERE]. We have a lot of exciting work ahead of us and this activity is designed to help your program gain clarity and identify potential areas for evaluation goals and objectives. This exercise is called Fish and Boulders. In this exercise, we will use the metaphor of a river [indicate river on digital template]. At the end of the river is our goal [indicate digital goal card], which represents optimal functioning of your program towards achieving your goal . You can also see that we have several fish shapes and several boulder shapes in our river. The fish represent positive factors (GIVE EXAMPLES: assets, resources, and strengths) that help propel you towards the end goal, and the boulders represent barriers or obstacles that may keep you from fully attaining your goal. [IF GOAL HAS NOT BEEN SET, SPEND TIME IDENTIFYING THE GOAL WITH THE GROUP]	As we have already identified, your program has this goal [READ GOAL ALOUD] Now we are going to take some time to think individually about the strengths and barriers that impact your program's ability to achieve the end goal. 1. What are some of the strengths, resources, or assets your program has that help to propel you towards your goal? 2. What are some obstacles or barriers you have encountered, or expect to encounter, as you begin implementing program interventions ? Take some time to think about both the fish (strengths) and boulders (barriers). Write down your ideas on your note paper. [GIVE 5 MINUTE WARNING TO WRAP UP BRAINSTORMING]	Now we are going to come back together as a group to create this picture together. One by one, we will have you read from your list of fish and boulders, making sure to indicate if it's an existing or a future strength/barrier. [LET EACH PERSON CONTRIBUTE THEIR IDEAS AND TAKE NOTE OF THEM ON THE DIGITAL TEMPLATE] Now, let's go through each 'fish' to see where you all felt that the program has strengths or resources first, and then we will go through the barriers or obstacles. [READ ALL FISH OUT LOUD] 1. After hearing all the strengths that you identified, which stand out to you? [PUT STARS ON FISH THAT ARE IDENTIFIED AS MOST IMPORTANT BY THE GROUP] Which ones really resonate, and seem most relevant to propelling you towards your goal? Are there any strengths/resources that correspond with another or 'go together'? [MOVE FISH TOGETHER WHEN A CONNECTION IS MADE] [READ ALL BOULDERS OUT LOUD] 2. After hearing all the barriers, what stands out to you? Are there any barriers that you see that can potentially be removed? Which barriers feel like the highest priority to tackle first as you begin implementing program activities? [STAR THE MOST IMPORTANT BOULDERS IDENTIFIED BY THE GROUP]. 3. As we wrap up this exercise, what stands out for you? What are the program's key takeaways? Do you have any concerns? What are you excited about? Are there any connections or overall themes that can be seen between the fish and boulders? [MOVE BOULDERS TOGETHER WHEN A CONNECTION IS MADE] Any other last closing thoughts, comments, or questions? Thank you!

DATA ANALYSIS

HOW DO WE ANALYZE IT?

For this activity, the inputs from participants can be analyzed using a qualitative analysis method. We do this by using theming and coding to find the larger focus areas that both propel towards and get in the way of achieving the goal.

WHAT DO WE DO WITH IT?

We take the fish, boulders, and goal cards that are written on by participants and type them into a document that contains all of their organized thoughts. This can be done in list format or a visual interpretation of what they created as a group. If you are doing this digitally, you can simply create a PDF of your document to share with the group.

OTHER HELPFUL INFORMATION

HOW SHOULD IT BE SHARED?

A polished version of the Fish & Boulders can be shared with the participants as an overview of their work and as a progress tracker as they start to shift their efforts to be aligned with what they discovered during the activity. This activity can be repeated for each goal set, and can also be revisited to see where changes have been made or to identify new strengths/obstacles, etc.

FACILITATION TIPS

1 Make sure to spray the sticky wall ahead of time with spray adhesive so that the fish and boulders will stick when you place them on it.

2 Walk around while the group is brainstorming to see how much time they need and keep them on track with time.

3 If you're doing this virtually, it's best to present your screen and type for them, rather than having them fill it out.
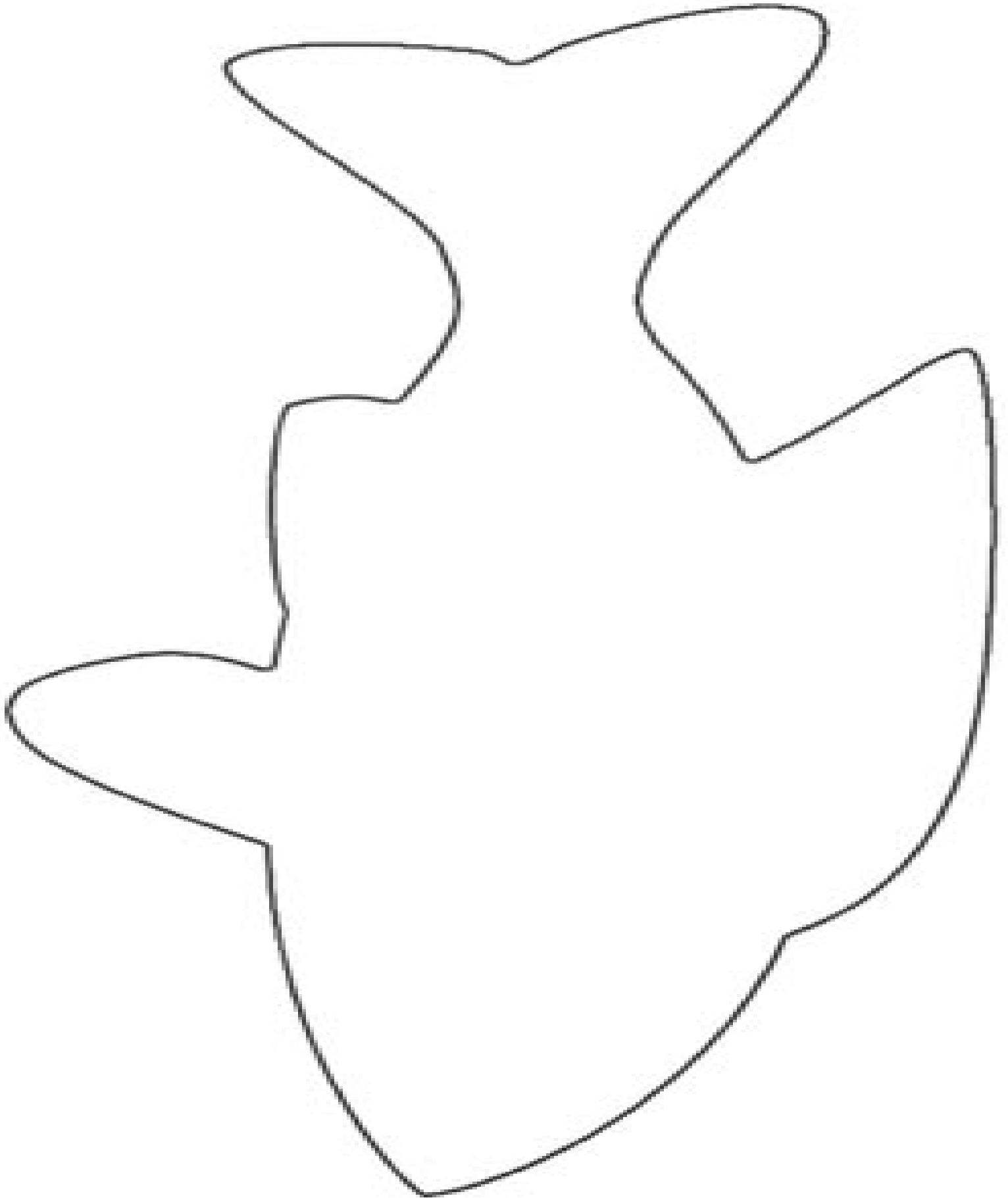
4 Providing participants with the facilitator instructions for this activity can build capacity for evaluation.

PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION ACTIVITY SOURCE(S)

1. Fish and Boulders: A participatory tool, by Action Evaluation Collaborative, 2017

Fish and Boulder Activity

Date

LEGEND
Fish = strengths
Boulder = barriers
Pink = existing strengths/barriers
Green = Future strengths/barriers

Text Here (×40, distributed across fish and boulder shapes)

Program Goals
- Type Goal Here

Organization Goals

Individual Level:
1. Goal 1
2. Goal 2

Organization Level:
1. Goal 1
2. Goal 2