



Are We Facing Our Fears?

The 2016 United States presidential elections revealed that many Americans are afraid of government, afraid of particular leaders, afraid of unknown “others,” afraid of change and afraid of not changing.

A mood of unexamined fear seems to hang over our nation like a thick fog.

In the dark as we are, we forget the value of what is unseen. And in fear of the unknown, or fearing loss of what we have, human beings have a habit of leading with oppositional rhetoric (or unleashing outright bigotry). What is it that we are afraid of losing? And what are we for?

SEED's November Tip of the Month offered guidance to identify your [Strategic Who](#): “The smallest, *most diverse* possible group who, if assembled and set in motion as a team, has the capacity to set a lot more in motion” (John Paul Lederach). But really, there is little point in thinking strategically about “who” needs to be assembled, until we are able to articulate what we are *for* – a glimpse of shared vision for the greater good that diverse others will want to expand and realize together.

Three steps to help burn off the fog, with questions for macro-level thinkers:

1) Notice fear working in you. Change is scary. Accept fear without critique; pause; breathe; be silent. Practice hanging out with discomfort. Vow to be constructive. *Question: Can safety and support be promoted through skill-building? How can we better promote opportunities for children and adults to develop emotional awareness and gain practice communicating what we are for?*

2) Lift up and celebrate what already exists that is wonderful, that we can build on. One thing we are *for* at SEED is maximum diversity. Working with thousands of nonprofit leaders across the United States, we notice that urban-based groups particularly benefit from learning across difference and utilizing diversity to cultivate shared power. Distributive leadership is messy and far from efficient. But as diversity enriches results, everyone wants more diversity. *Question: How can the magic (and skills) be shared with those who have had too little taste of diversity to be hungry for it?*

3) Let go of the familiar. Have you ever tried to coax a child off a swing? The child doesn't want a good thing to end. The face clenches and hands grip tighter, as the toes dig into the soil to leverage resistance against moving off the swing. Recognize that stance? *How can we support each other to let go of something good and discover something better?* Remember, if we had never let go of that swing, we would not have learned to swim, to ride a bike, to dance, to drive, or to collaborate with very different people for change that benefits everyone.

As James Baldwin said, “Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

