

Different Way of Seeing & Leading- Asset Building in Complex Systems

Point Attractor

Point attractor patterns emerge when “things” – time, attention, energies are drawn to a common point.

Observe a Point Attractor:

Look to see what draws people’s attention.

- The Developmental Assets Framework, itself can serve as a point attractor.
- A charismatic leader can be a point attractor.
- A grant deadline is a point attractor.
- A one-time event or gathering can be a point attractor.

Decide when to Use a Point Attractor:

You can be deliberate in thinking about how to make good use of the idea of a point attractor, for instance, you might design one:

- When you want to maintain focus
- When you want to hold your group together
- When you see behavior you don’t understand so you can focus the energies

Act – Using a Point Attractor:

- Find ways to amplify the ‘point’ if the pattern it produces is productive.
- Find ways to damp or mute the ‘point’ if the pattern it produces is destructive.
- Identify a common interest or outcome that many people can focus on.
- Ask yourself, “Is there a single “point” (issue, event, person) or is this some other kind of attractor? (random, periodic, strange)

Examples from Asset-Building Settings:

When Peter Benson arrives in a community and makes multiple presentations and conducts several interviews on local media, he (and his message around asset building) becomes a point attractor in that community, at that time. If an initiative has planned ahead, they have figured out follow-up strategies to ensure that the message itself becomes a point attractor after he leaves town.

In one local YMCA, signage that poses questions about the % of youth who have various specific assets becomes a point attractor and leads viewers to ask “What’s that about?” of nearby staff, which can lead to a discussion of asset building.