



# Most Significant Learning (MSL)

Collecting significant learning stories in an authentic way

## A form of qualitative, participatory monitoring and evaluation

Most significant learning is a modified version of the Most Significant Change technique. But instead of stories of impact, MSL is all about collecting stories about our learning. In particular MSL is about reflecting on situations where we held an assumption about something that turned out not to be true.

Using social innovation is all about uncovering our assumptions and testing them. So MSL is a good fit when you are working with social innovation, or working with ambitions of systems change.

MSL stories are usually told by an individual, often someone working to bring about social change. They can be directly written down by a story-teller, but it can be a good technique to do this in pairs, or in a circle, each discussing your learnings over a period of time, and selecting the one you want to dive deeply into. MSL technique encourages you to select one specific learning and dive into it more deeply.

## Guidelines for collecting MSL stories

### *Ethics*

Attention must be paid to the ethics of collecting stories from individuals. When an interview is conducted or a story written down, the person sharing their experience must understand how the story will be used and note whether they are happy for their 'story' to be used in that way. If you are collecting the story from another person you should assure them that the information they give is confidential: that is, their 'name' won't be attached to the information and made public unless they ask for this to happen. Whatever is collected in an interview process is confidential. You must not discuss what you heard with any other informants or outsiders. The only people you may discuss the findings with are the team themselves.

## Example MSL story collection guide

### Background:

My name is ..... and I am from ..... I am hoping to talk with you about your learnings with the Community Revitalisation program. We are interested in the things you have learned, in particular where you held an assumption about something that later turned out not to hold true.. I will go over what I have written at the end to make sure you are happy with it.

We hope to use the MSL stories and information collected from your interviews for a number of purposes including:



- to help us pool our common learnings
- to make improvements to our work
- We may use it in a report

### Contact Details

Name of storyteller \* \_\_\_\_\_

Name of person recording story \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_

Date of recording \_\_\_\_\_

*\* (If they wish to remain anonymous, don't record their name or contact details – just write 'staff member' or some similar description.)*

### Questions

Start with some warm up conversation

1. What's your role and how long have you been involved with CR?

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2. Please list any assumptions/hunches that you held that turned out not to hold true, over the last 3 months.

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We have been talking about a number of learnings (refer to list provided in Q2 above). From your point of view, which do you think is the *MOST* significant learning. Please try to describe this in the form of a story and in as much detail as you can *{if you are using a tape recorder turn it on here}*.

*What assumption was it that you held at the beginning.. and what was the basis of this belief/hunch?*

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*What happened to shed new light on this? Can you tell the story of how it unfolded and how you discovered this assumption wasn't holding true?*

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*What happened next? How did this learning affect you/ the work?*

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*What difference will it make going forwards?*

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Why did you choose this learning in particular? That is, **why was it significant for you?**

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### Confidentiality

We may like to share your story for learning and reporting. Do you, (the storyteller):

- want to have your name on the story (tick one) Yes  No
- consent to us using your story for publication (tick one) Yes  No

