



KEEPING STUDENTS FIRST:

**Building Community Labor Partnerships
for Strong Schools**

EXERCISE 1: BUILDING OUR SCHOOLHOUSE



Building Movement Project

EXERCISE 1: BUILDING OUR SCHOOLHOUSE

PURPOSE OF THIS TOOL:

When addressing problems in schools, teachers and parents often share a common interest: the academic success and general well-being of the students. This tool allows participants to explore their vision for how their schools can be their best, and surfaces the commonalities shared between parents, teachers, students, and other community activists and leaders.

HOPED-FOR OUTCOMES:

- › Parents, teachers, and students discover their common vision for their schools
- › Establish a shared goal to plan around

HOW TO PREPARE

This tool is for meeting organizers and can be used on its own, as an icebreaker for another partnership-building gathering, or preceding the Network Map.

Below you'll find suggestions for preparation, which vary slightly depending on whether you are part of a labor union or a community group. Feel free to use anything that is helpful in putting together this exercise, and leave out what is not. You'll also find different sets of suggested questions based on how ready your group is to have discussions about race and class. If you need additional support in guiding those discussions, you will find suggested resources at the end of this toolkit.

It is important to consider carefully who will facilitate this meeting. If you choose not to have an outside facilitator, we highly suggest having a team co-facilitate so that all groups—teachers, parents, community leaders and students—are represented in the planning process and in front of the participants.



Building a Planning Group:

- It is important to ensure that representatives from each invested group are part of the process from the beginning. If you decide to do this exercise internally first, it can still be useful to get input from outside representatives.

- For community groups, parents, or outside facilitators:** Begin by identifying either a teacher, school staff member, and/or a student.
- For union members:** Begin by identifying a community member, parent, and/or a student who would be willing to co-plan this meeting with you.

- The goal of this meeting is to bring together stakeholders from the school/community (parents, teachers, students, and other community activists and leaders) who will have different perspectives on how we can best improve our schools. With that in mind, and together with your planning partners, identify who would want to participate in an exercise such as this, and who "needs" to participate.
 - › Who would most benefit from hearing from other participants in the group?
 - › Alternatively, who does the group need to hear from to fully understand the vision and challenges that exist for the school/community?
 - › Strive to get as representative a group as possible that includes all those involved in the school/community.

- Talk about the roles that each of the planners will play. This could include:
 - › Recruitment
 - › Agenda Development
 - › Logistics
 - › Facilitation or Securing Outside Facilitation



Planning the Meeting:

- Identify what you'll need for the meeting logistically (including space, food, and supplies) and figure out who will be responsible for each piece.

- Plan out the meeting itself. Remember to pay attention to who traditionally holds power in these spaces and make sure that everyone is represented and feels fully able to participate in the experience. This may include setting ground rules with the group during the introductions.

- You'll also want to think about what the next steps will be coming out of this meeting. It's most important to establish a common goal, but also important to ensure a continuation of the process for those interested in working together. Possibilities include:
 - › Establishing working groups;
 - › Setting up a series of planning meetings; or
 - › Creating a steering committee.

- Schedule the meeting and reach out to participants.

Note: We encourage you to use the Network Map exercise as an initial next step following this meeting. It will allow for some tactical planning around the shared goals.



What You'll Need:

- Flip charts, white board, or chalkboard
- Pens, markers, dry erase markers, or chalk
- Glue sticks
- Scrap paper
- Printed/cut copies of the exercise, one for each table (see instructions below)
- Cards with the three discussion questions (see next page) written/printed on them, one for each table



Preparing the Exercise:

- Print out copies of the tool, cut the pieces along the solid lines, and place one set on each table you'll be using. During the activity, participants will fold along the dotted lines and glue the pieces together.

- Place one card or piece of paper with the three discussions questions written or printed on it at each table.

- Assign each table a number and clearly indicate it using a large card or sign.

- To ensure mixed groups, write the table numbers on slips of paper (one for each person who will be at the table) and distribute them evenly into three containers (i.e. baskets, bags, envelopes, etc.): one for teachers and staff, one for parents and community members, and one for students.

- As participants walk in, ask them to select a table number from the container that corresponds to their identity within this context (i.e. teachers and staff, parents and community members, or students) and take a seat at that table.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions should be written or printed out and placed at each table. Select 3-4 questions total that feel most relevant or helpful to your group, based on where your work together is most focused: the local, district, or state level.

Note: If you/your group has less experience navigating discussions involving race and class, you might want to use an outside facilitator to guide this discussion. There are also helpful resources at the end of this report.

Level	Discussion Questions
LOCAL LEVEL	1. What is your favorite memory from school?
	2. What is your biggest concern for your school right now?
	3. What is your vision for what your school could be?
	4. How do you think the race and class makeup of the school might impact that vision?
	5. How does your school deal with issues of racial inequality and racial justice?
	6. When was the first time you saw or experienced racism/classism in your school?
DISTRICT LEVEL	1. What is your favorite memory from school?
	2. What is your biggest concern for your school right now?
	3. What is your vision for what your school could be?
	4. How do district policies or regulations impact that vision?
	5. Who do you think the district does a good job serving? Why?
	6. What are some examples of economic/racial inequality you have seen in your school district?
	7. How would you address inequality in your school district?
STATE LEVEL	1. What is your favorite memory from school?
	2. What is your biggest concern for your school right now?
	3. What is your vision for what your school could be?
	4. Do all your students get what they need from the state to succeed in school? Why or why not?
	5. When was the first time you realized that not everyone has an equal chance to succeed in school?
	6. How does systemic/structural inequality in your state laws and policies prevent every student from having an equal chance to succeed in school?
	7. What is your vision for true education equity in your state?

SAMPLE AGENDA

The following agenda is an example of how you might set up a gathering centered on this exercise. You'll want to plan for anywhere from 2 to 2.5 hours for completion.



10-20
MIN.

Welcome and Introductions

- Start by welcoming people into the space and explaining the purpose of the gathering.
- Then, as a large group, begin a round of introductions where people say where they're from, their relationship to the school, and respond to the following question(s):
 - › What is one thing you would like to see happen at your school?
 - › [If this is your second meeting together]: What was one takeaway you had from our last discussion together and why was it important to you?

Note: The facilitator should adjust according to the number of people in the room. For larger groups, consider having folks introduce themselves to the person on their left and right. Then, invite four or five people to introduce themselves to the entire room.



5 MIN.

Introduce the Tool

- Explain that the goal of this exercise is to help participants consider their vision for their school, what they have in common when it comes to improving things, and the role they can play in making sure those things happen. Be sure to note that there will also be things you don't agree on, but that there will be space to discuss that.
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10 MIN.

Individual Reflection

- Ask participants to take 10 minutes to reflect individually on the questions at the table.
 - They can use the provided scrap paper to jot down some ideas.
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20-35
MIN.

Small Discussion Groups

- Give participants 10-15 minutes to discuss the questions and their individual answers as a small group. If groups are larger, add more time for discussion.
 - Give participants 10-20 minutes to identify key takeaways/themes from the groups and to represent those takeaways/themes, through drawings, words, or in any way they choose, on their schoolhouse walls and roof.
 - Once they get their "answers" onto the walls, ask them to glue the walls and roof together to build their schoolhouses.
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15 MIN.

Vision Sharing

- Once everyone is finished, ask participants to walk around the room and look at all the schoolhouses.
- As they walk, ask them to think about the following questions (Note: you can write these up on a flip chart/white board/chalkboard or hand out paper with the questions printed on them to take notes as they walk):

Vision Sharing (cont.)

- › What are some of the shared visions you see?
 - › What would be needed to support students, teachers, and families?
 - › What can you offer in support of this work?
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25-50
MIN.

Full Group Discussion

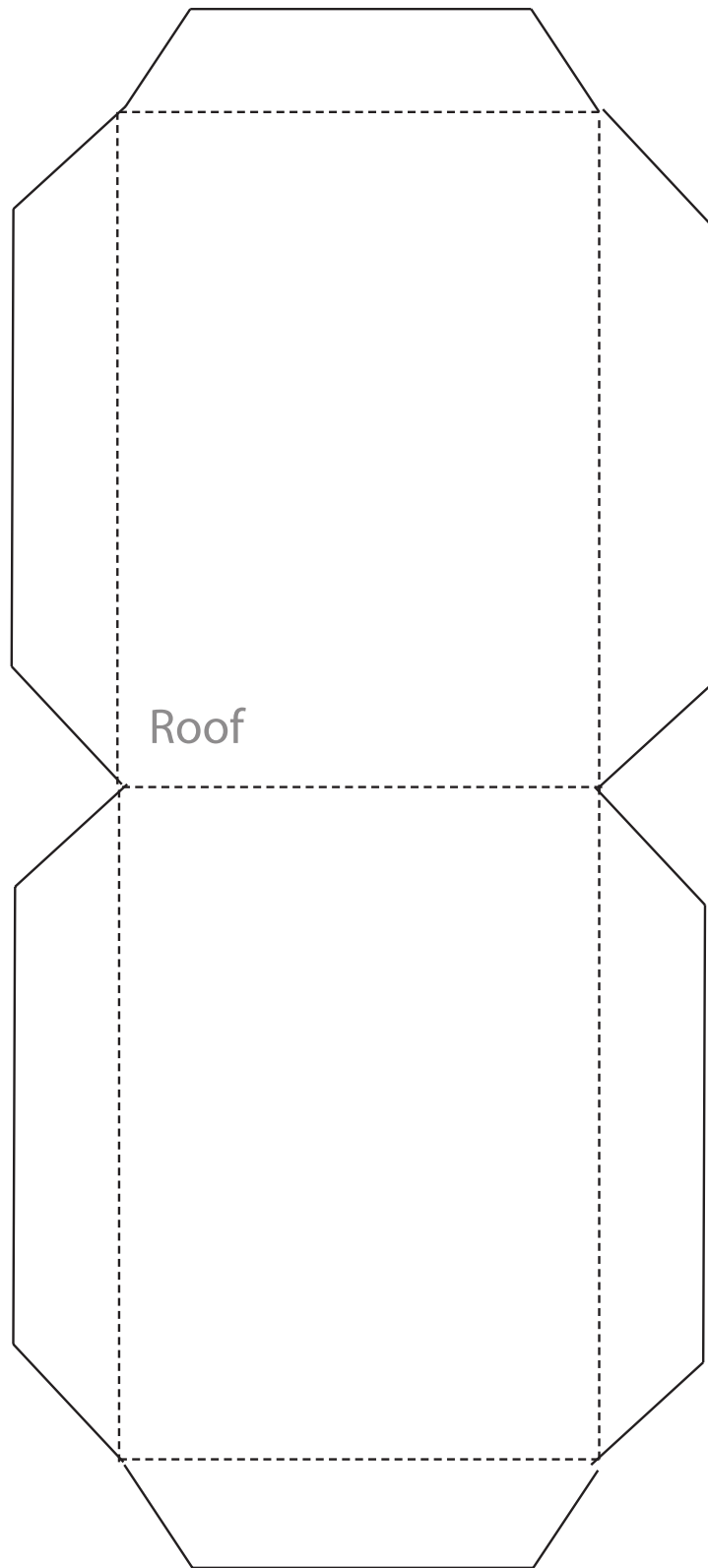
- [15-20 minutes] Once everyone has finished walking around, ask the whole group to come together and share their thoughts, in particular:
 - › Any 'A-ha!' moments
 - › Where people struggled
 - As people talk, have the facilitator note key takeaways on a flip chart/white board/chalkboard. Note areas of agreement or disagreement.
 - [20-30 minutes) As a group, discuss:
 - › What are some common themes and places we all agree on? What surprised you?
 - › Where there are differences in vision, what are some ways we can address those? What tensions exist?
 - › What are some initial steps we can take towards working together?
 - › What are some of the challenges ahead?
 - › What are some of the roles we see for ourselves?
 - Collect suggestions from the group about what they're seeing as shared goals and vision, and propose an overall goal for the group. Allow participants to discuss, amend, and ultimately agree on a shared vision or goal.
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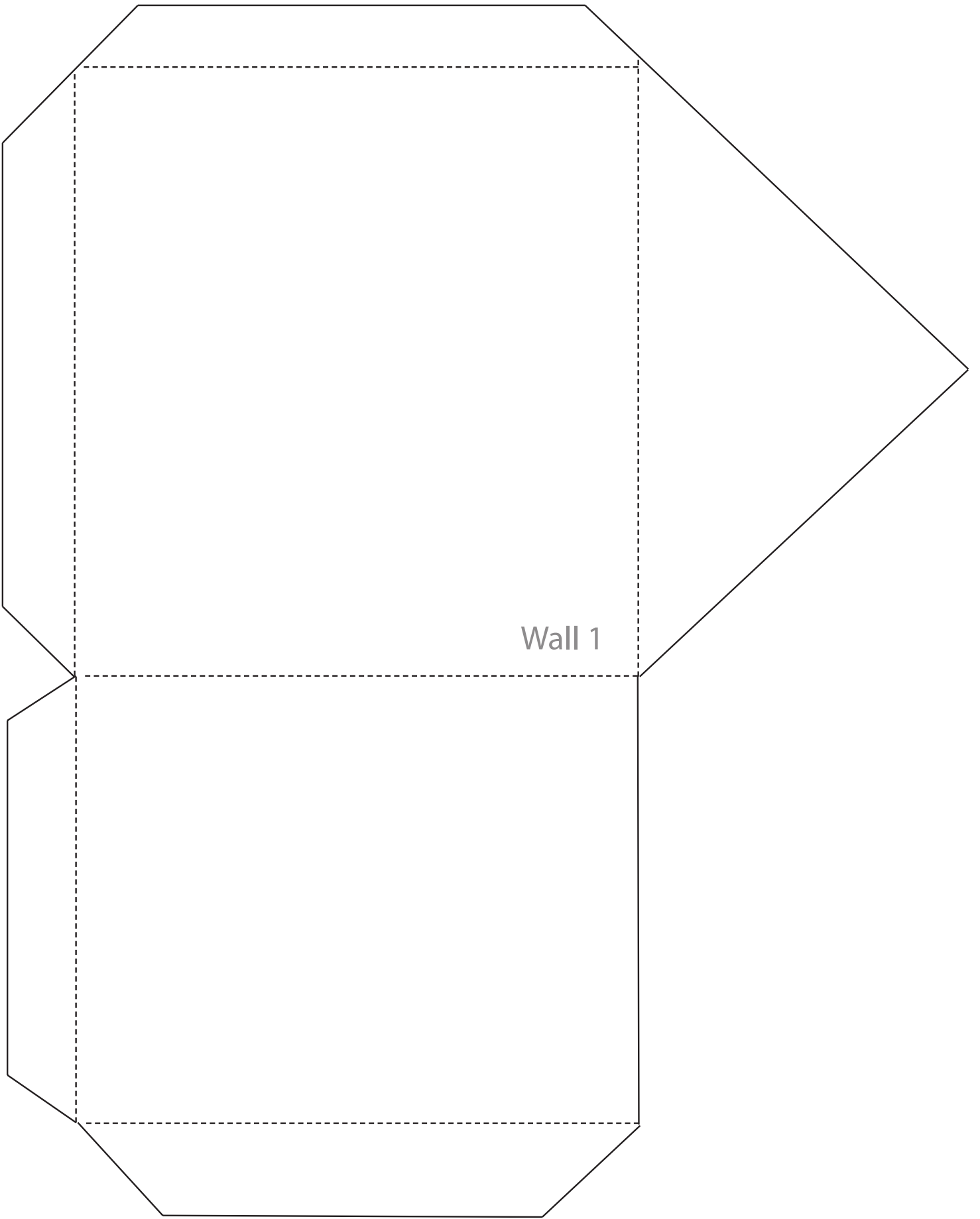
15 MIN.

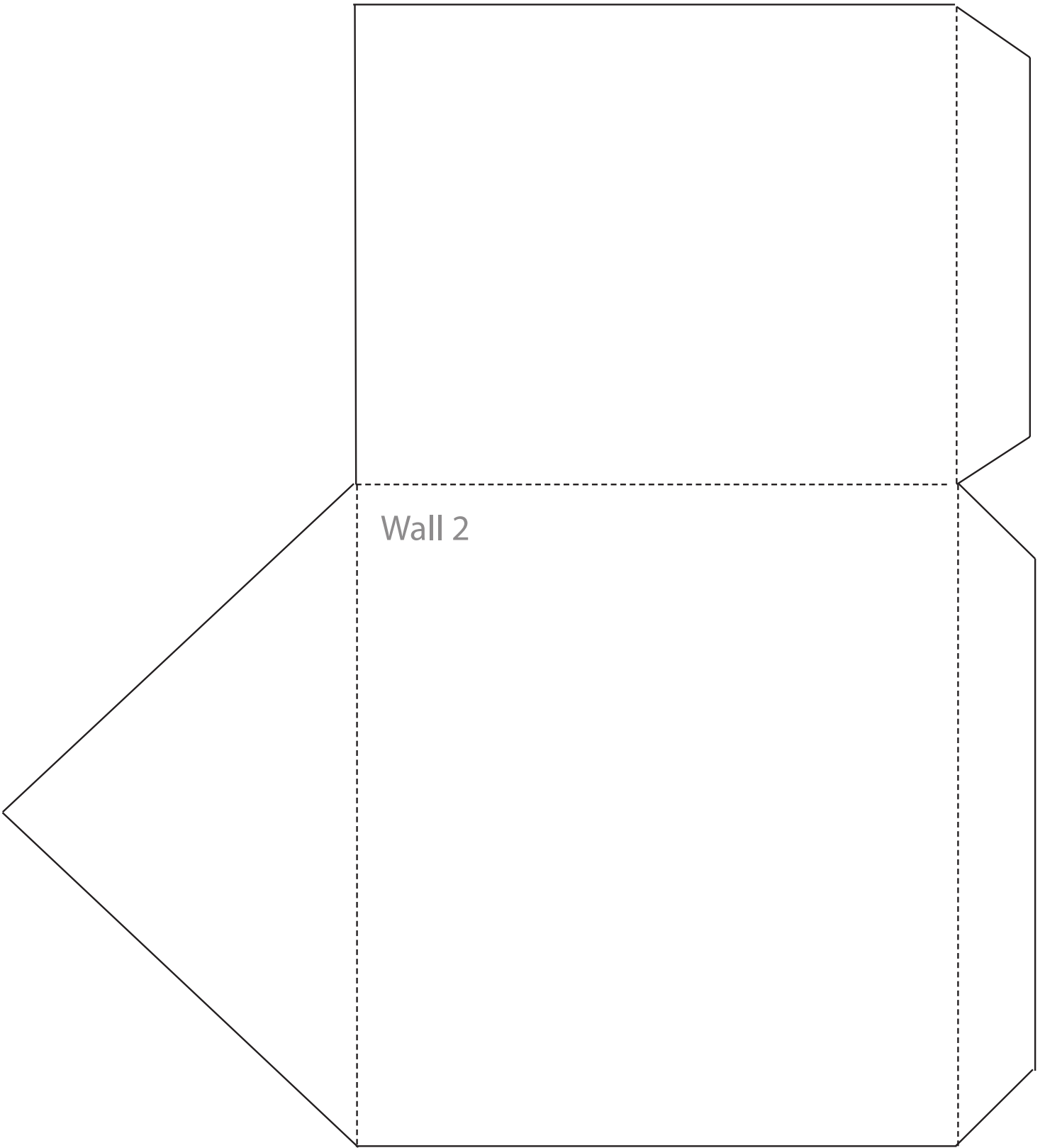
Closing and Evaluation

- Ask people to share:
 - › Something they can offer moving forward.
 - › One thing they liked and one thing they would change about the conversation.
- Close the discussion and thank people for their participation. Let them know what the next steps will be and how they can be involved.



Roof





Wall 2



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For more information, please visit
The Building Movement Project at
www.buildingmovement.org

or contact us at
info@buildingmovement.org

