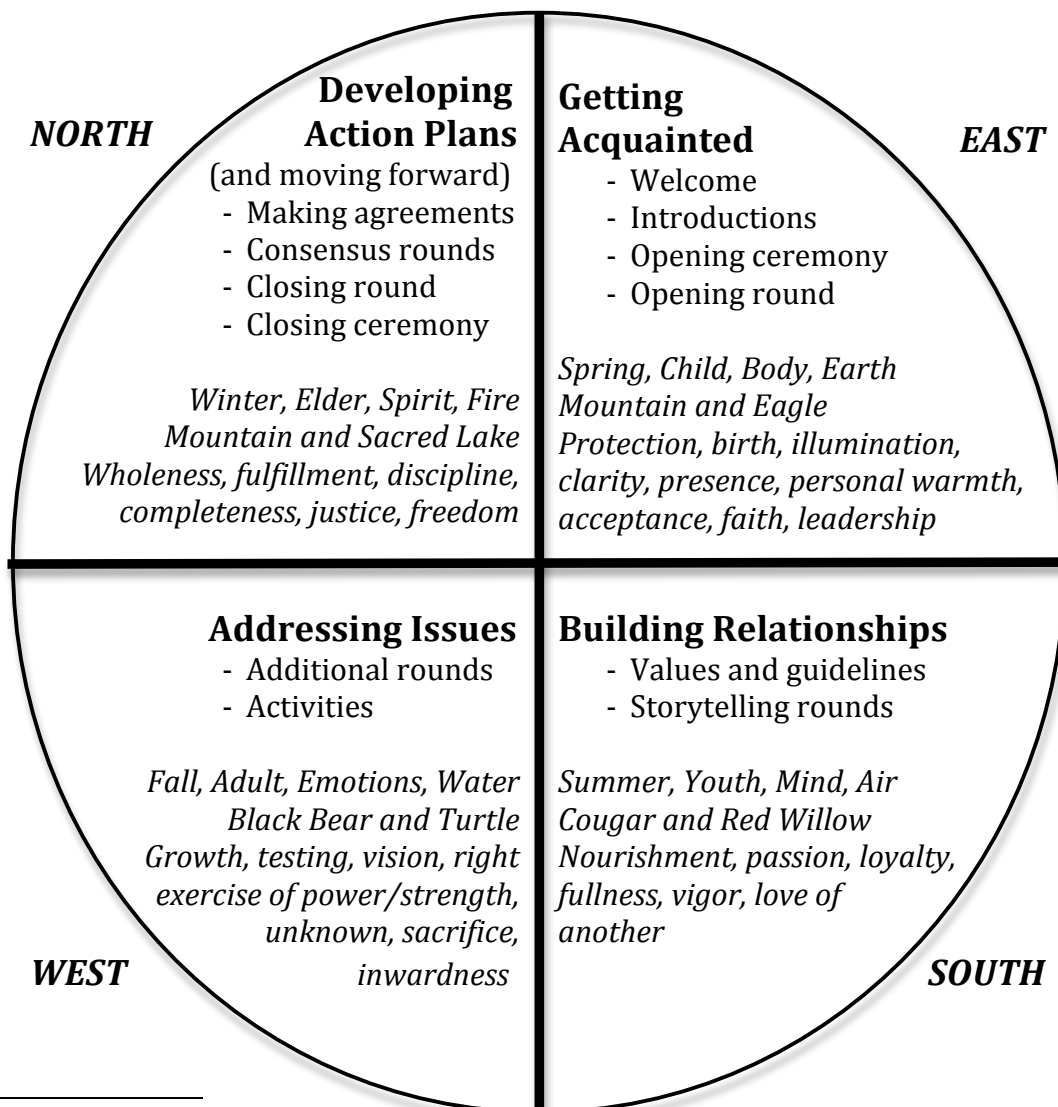


Medicine Wheel Framework for Balance in the Process

The Medicine Wheel, used by many Native Peoples, represents a holistic view of the essential elements of life and their interdependence. The teaching holds that these elements are held in balance around a sacred center as part of a greater whole. “In many Native American cultures, a person who is acting out or harming others is ‘out of balance’; if one person is out of balance, so too is the community. Similarly, the understanding in a circle is that a problem for one is a problem for all. We are all connected and the wisdom of the circle teaches us that we all must move to restore balance. No one person - no problem - is ever put in the middle of the circle for all to blame, judge, to correct, or even to help.”¹

The Medicine Wheel Framework can be useful in designing circle processes, urging us to balance the four elements of the process as parts of a greater whole. This means that roughly the same amount of time is spent on getting acquainted and building relationships as on exploring the issues or developing a plan of action. When a balance of all four elements cannot fit into one Circle, they can be covered by multiple Circles. The figure below depicts this balance of the process as overlaid in *italics* by the balance of other elements of life, as some Native American cultures saw it.²



¹ *Healing the Wounds of Street Violence*, Carolyn Boyes-Watson, CYD Journal, Volume 2, No.4, Fall 2001, p 19.

² Adapted from *Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community* by Carolyn Boyes-Watson and Kay Pranis, as well as *Working Paper: Achieving Better Social Outcomes in New Zealand through Collaboration: Perspectives from the United States* by Lynne Dovey. State Services Commission, September 2003 available at <http://www.ssc.govt.nz/node/7918>