



The World Café

World Café fosters creative and collaborative thinking – allowing new ideas, insights and questions to emerge during all phases of organizational planning and development.

World Café Guidelines:

1) **Set the Context**

Pay attention to the reason you are bringing people together, and what you want to achieve. Knowing the purpose and parameters of your meeting enables you to consider and choose the most important elements to realize your goals: e.g. what themes or questions will be most pertinent.

2) **Create Hospitable Space**

Café hosts around the world emphasize the power and importance of creating a hospitable space—one that feels safe and inviting. When people feel comfortable to be themselves, they do their most creative thinking, speaking, and listening. Create a welcoming atmosphere.

3) **Explore Questions that Matter**

Knowledge emerges in response to compelling questions. Find questions that are relevant to the real-life concerns of the group. Powerful questions that “travel well” help attract collective energy, insight, and action as they move throughout a system. Depending on the timeframe available and your objectives, your Café may explore a single question or use a progressively deeper line of inquiry through several conversational rounds.

4) **Encourage Everyone’s Contribution**

As leaders we are increasingly aware of the importance of participation, but most people don’t only want to participate, they want to actively contribute to making a difference. It is important to encourage everyone in your meeting to contribute their ideas and perspectives, while also allowing anyone who wants to participate by simply listening to do so.

5) **Connect Diverse Perspectives**

The opportunity to move between tables, meet new people, actively contribute your thinking, and link the essence of your discoveries to ever-widening circles of thought is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Café. As participants carry key ideas or themes to new tables, they exchange perspectives, greatly enriching the possibility for surprising new insights.



6) Listen Together for Patterns & Insights

Listening is a gift we give to one another. The quality of our listening is perhaps the most important factor determining the success of a Café. Through practicing shared listening and paying attention to themes, patterns and insights, we begin to sense a connection to the larger whole. Encourage people to listen for what is not being spoken along with what is being shared.

7) Share Collective Discoveries

Conversations held at one table reflect a pattern of wholeness that connects with the conversations at the other tables. The last phase of the Café, often called the “harvest”, involves making this pattern of wholeness visible to everyone in a large group conversation. Invite a few minutes of silent reflection on the patterns, themes and deeper questions experienced in the small group conversations and call them out to share with the larger group. Make sure to capture the group’s insights.

Once you know what you want to achieve and the amount of time you have to work with, you can decide the appropriate number and length of conversation rounds, the most effective use of questions and the most interesting ways to connect and cross-pollinate ideas.

The World Café Conversations

- Seat 8 - 10 people at small Café-style tables or in conversation clusters.
- Three progressive rounds of conversation, approx. 20 minutes each.
- Sharing (3-5 minutes) about your initiative
- Engage questions or issues that genuinely matter.
 - What is effective about this or these initiatives?
 - What can be done to build upon and expand the initiative?
 - What are next steps and how could this be made to happen?
- Encourage participants to write, doodle and draw key ideas on their tablecloths (and/or note key ideas on large index cards or placemats in the center of the table). Identify one person to take more comprehensive notes.
- Upon completing the initial round of conversation, the “table host” remains at the table for the next round, while the others serve as travelers or “ambassadors of meaning.” The travelers carry key ideas, themes and questions into their new conversations, while the table host welcomes the new set of travelers.



- In subsequent rounds of discussions, the table host briefly reviews the initiative and summarizes the previous table discussion. The host continues the discussion (with the question, below) or pose other questions to help deepen the exploration.
- Additional 2nd-3rd round question: What did you hear at the other tables that could be applied to this initiative? You may use the same question for one or more rounds of conversation, or you may pose different questions in each round to build on and help deepen the exploration.
- At the end of the second or third round, all of the tables or conversation clusters in the room will be cross-pollinated with insights from prior conversations.
- After at least three rounds of conversation, a period of time will be facilitated to share discoveries & insights in a whole group conversation. It is in these town meeting-style conversations that patterns can be identified, collective knowledge grows, and possibilities for action emerge.