The World Cafe

Café Conversations in the Summer Institute

We will use the method of café conversations to integrate what was learned from the community stakeholder dialogue interviews. One person from each interview group will meet at a café table to form a group of five to ten people who will describe what was personally meaningful to them about the interview they participated in during the morning. One member of the table conversation will take notes about the themes that arise in the conversation. After about 30 minutes of conversation, everyone but the recorder will go to a different table. There, completely new groups will pick up the conversation and deepen the level of understanding of our value to the OU stakeholders. Staff for the Summer Institute will collect the records of these themes and collate them for presentation on the last day.

Each day we will participate in a café conversation over lunch. Each conversation will build on the interviews of that day and on the conversations from prior days. By the end of the week, we will have a very rich fabric of themes that describe our value to our stakeholders with solutions to improve the health of our community, accumulated from the personal experiences of the community stakeholder interviews.

Background

World Café Conversations are an intentional way to create a living network of conversation around questions that matter. A Café Conversation is a creative process for leading collaborative dialogue, sharing knowledge and creating possibilities for action in groups of all sizes.

The challenges of life in the 21st Century require us to find new ways to access the wisdom and intelligence inherent in groups both small and large. The need for collaboration, insight and coordinated action has never been greater. Café Conversations are one way that communities, businesses, governments, and people from all walks of life are using to create a common purpose, share knowledge, make more intelligent decisions, and call forth life-affirming action together.

The methodology of the World Café is simple: The environment is set up like a café, with tables for four or more tablecloths covered by paper tablecloths, flowers, some colored pens and, if possible, candles, quiet music and refreshments. People sit four or more to a table and have a series of conversational rounds lasting from 20 to 45 minutes about one or more questions, which are personally meaningful to them. At the end of each round, one person remains at each table as the host, while each of the other three travel to separate tables. Table hosts welcome newcomers to their tables and share the essence of that table's conversation so far. The newcomers relate any conversational threads which they are carrying -- and then the conversation continues, deepening as the round progresses. At the end of the second round, participants return to their original table -- or move on to other tables for one or more additional rounds -- depending on the design of the Café. In subsequent rounds, they may explore a new question or go deeper into the original one. After three or more rounds, the whole group gathers to share and explore emerging themes, insights, and learnings, which are captured on flipcharts or other means for making the collective intelligence of the whole group visible to everyone so they can reflect on what is emerging in the
room. At this point, the Café may end or it may begin further rounds of conversational exploration and inquiry.

In World Café, the formulation of powerful questions is a fundamental art and skill. Questions like "What's important to you about this situation, and why do you care?" and "What are we not seeing (or talking about) that is vital to our progress?" can open up new possibilities and energy. If you (as planner or host) do not know what question(s) are right for a particular Café, you can ask as a first round question "What question, if answered, could make the greatest difference to the future of the situation we're exploring here?"

The seven design principles of World Café are:

- Set the context
- Create hospitable space
- Explore questions that matter
- Encourage everyone's contribution
- Cross-pollinate and connect diverse perspectives
- Listen together for patterns, insights, and deeper questions
- Harvest and share collective discoveries