

THE WORD CAFE MODEL

Guidelines for setting up a world café

- ✓ Seat four (five max) people at small Café-style tables or in conversation clusters.
- ✓ Set up progressive (at least three) rounds of conversation, approximately 20 minutes each.
- ✓ Engage questions or issues that genuinely matter to your life, work, or community.
- ✓ 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).
- ✓ Upon completing the initial round of conversation, you may ask one person to remain at the table as a “table host” 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.
- ✓ By providing opportunities for people to move in several rounds of conversation, ideas, questions, and themes begin to link and connect. 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.
- ✓ In the last round of conversation, people can return to their first table to synthesize their discoveries, or they may continue traveling to new tables.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ After at least three rounds of conversation, initiate a period of sharing 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. 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.

How to create a café ambiance:

It is essential to create an environment that evokes a feeling of both informality and intimacy.

- ✓ If possible, select a space with natural light and an outdoor view to create a more welcoming atmosphere.
- ✓ Make the space look like an actual Café, with small tables that seat four or five people. Less than four at a table may not provide enough diversity of perspectives, more than five limits the amount of personal interaction.
- ✓ Arrange the Cafe tables in a staggered, random fashion rather than in neat rows. Tables in a sidewalk café after it has been open for a few hours look relaxed and inviting.
- ✓ Use colorful tablecloths and a small vase of flowers on each table. If the venue allows it add a candle to each table. Place plants or greenery around the room.
- ✓ Place at least two large sheets of paper over each tablecloth along with a mug or wineglass filled with colorful markers. Paper and pens encourage scribbling, drawing, and connecting ideas. In this way people will jot down ideas as they emerge.
- ✓ Put one additional Café table in the front of the room for the Host’s and any presenter’s material
- ✓ Consider displaying art or adding posters to the walls (as simple as flip chart sheets with quotes), and play music as people arrive and you welcome them.
- ✓ To honor the tradition of community and hospitality provide beverages and snacks. A Café isn’t complete without food and refreshments!