

# **community engagement methods – world cafes**

## **community engagement framework**

SCOTTISH BORDERS COMMUNITY PLANNING PARTNERSHIP

## WHAT IS A WORLD CAFÉ?

Small groups of participants sit around tables and discuss an open ended question for an agreed length of time. There is a facilitator and note taker at each table. Participants change tables after the agreed length of time but the facilitator and note taker remain. There is usually a different question to discuss at each table.

## WHY USE A WORLD CAFÉ?

It promotes discussion and helps to generate ideas and solutions on challenging issues. It can be used as a standalone event, or as part of a larger conference. Using World Café encourages people to talk in small groups. It allows people to speak or simply to listen.

## HOW TO DO IT

### PREPARATION

- Identify the purpose and objectives, and consider the context of your event. Name your event e.g. 'The Health Café'.
- Identify a facilitator and note taker for each table.
- Think about questions you want to ask and brief the facilitators and note takers.
- Identify and book an appropriate venue, i.e. one that will be accessible, comfortable and inviting for the group you are working with.
- Liaise with venue co-ordinator to decide on the lay-out of rooms, etc.
- Identify target group and send out invitations including the programme format together with background about your organisation and the aim of the event.
- Create a delegate list from the names of people attending.

### DEVELOPING THE QUESTIONS

- The aims, objectives and context of the event will help you frame meaningful questions.
- Your café may only wish to explore a single question.
- Several questions may be developed that progress the discussion. For example develop three questions which can be introduced as starter; main course and dessert (the main course being the most searching question).

- Remember – a powerful question is simple and clear, is thought provoking, generates energy, raises questions and unconscious assumptions and opens new possibilities.

### PLANNING THE SESSION

- Set out the venue with several, café-style tables to seat eight to ten people.
- Supply each table with flip-chart paper, pens and post-its.
- Some people cover tables with paper cloths that you can write on.
- Plan to have a mix of people from different roles or settings at each table.
- Make sure that people know where they are sitting and where they move to and when.
- Plan the time for each question, conversation sessions and feedback.
- Agree which format your café conversations will take, for example:
  - how many questions
  - how the conversations will travel – one or two table moves before going back to their original table
  - make sure the facilitators are well briefed.

### FACILITATING THE SESSION (MAKING THE QUESTIONS WORK)

- The lead facilitator (this may be you) needs to be there early.
- The table facilitator's job is to:
  - welcome participants at the table; introduce the group members to each other

- explain that participants are free to write on the post-its as well as to doodle and draw ideas on the table to aid participation and prompt ideas (only if you have paper table cloths!)
- remind participants about café etiquette, i.e. focus on what matters, contribute your thinking, speak your mind and heart, listen to understand, link and connect ideas, listen together for insights and deeper questions
- guide conversation, and confirm feedback with group.
- briefly share key insights from the prior conversation so that participants can link and build themes
- The note taker's job is to support the facilitator to:
  - take notes
  - jot down key connections, idea discoveries and deeper questions as they emerge
- The facilitator and the note taker stay at the same table.
- The rest of the group moves on.
- During the second round, the facilitator encourages participants to build on the ideas from the first round, and repeats this for round three.
- The facilitator and note taker agree the feedback from each table.
- The lead facilitator finishes by summarising the discussion in broad terms, describes how the findings will be reported and what will happen next – and most importantly, thanks everyone for participating.

## IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE SESSION

- Once the event has closed, the ideas recorded on the flip-chart paper at each table are analysed.
- Facilitators and note takers check and record written post-its and tablecloth doodles to ensure that all ideas are captured.
- It is very helpful if the lead facilitator meets with facilitators and notes takers immediately after the meeting to identify emerging themes

## PROS

- World Cafés works best with a mix of people bringing different ideas and experiences.
- World Cafés are a good way to bring people from different backgrounds together to think about a complex issue and to find imaginative ways forward.
- Well facilitated, World Cafés are fun.

## CONS

- Facilitators need to be experienced.
- If feedback is not analysed immediately after the event, you may risk losing some of the emerging themes and imaginative solutions.

## RESOURCES

- Venue and catering
- Stationery
- Participants' travel expenses
- Experienced facilitators and note takers for each table – many people with experience of group work will be able to do this
- Time of specialist lead facilitator brought in to coach.

## TOP TIP

It is very important to plan well for this type of engagement. Facilitators and notetakers must leave nothing to chance – meaningful results are all in the planning.

## WORLD CAFES

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