



A World Café Hosting Guide

The World Café invites people to participate in a collaborative conversation to co-evolve the futures they want rather than settle for the futures they get. It's based on something we all know how to do—*engage in a good conversation*—and assumes that people already have within them the wisdom and creativity to effectively address their most important challenges and opportunities.

The World Café Process

In a World Café, four people sit at a café-style table or in a small conversation cluster to explore a question or issue that matters to their community or organization. Other participants seated at nearby tables or in conversation clusters explore similar questions at the same time. As they talk, participants are encouraged to write down key ideas on large cards or to sketch them out on paper tablecloths that are there for that purpose.

After an initial round of conversation in these small groups, lasting perhaps 20 to 30 minutes, participants are invited to change tables. When participants travel, they carry key ideas and insights from their previous conversation into the newly formed group. In addition, one “table host” stays at each table to share with new arrivals the key images, insights, and questions that emerged from the prior dialogue at that table.

This process is repeated for two or three rounds and is followed by all participants participating in a whole-group conversation and contributing to a gathering or “harvesting” of the actionable ideas and recommendations that have emerged.

World Café Etiquette

A few simple practices enable participants to support each other in speaking and listening authentically—and in being more aware of how every participant contributes to a collective whole. It's very helpful to post and share these with the group at the beginning of your World Café.

- 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.
- Write, doodle, and draw on the tablecloths.
- Have fun!

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Principles of World Café Design

The World Café process reflects the way living systems co-evolve. Its core principles can help people in a wide range of settings develop their capacity to work together in shaping their common futures.

- **Set the context:** Clarify the purpose and parameters within which the dialogue will take place.
- **Create hospitable space:** Design a welcoming environment that is physically appealing and that assures personal comfort, safety and mutual respect.
- **Explore questions that matter:** Focus collective attention on powerful questions that will benefit from collaborative engagement.
- **Encourage everyone's contribution:** Enliven the relationship between the “me” and the “we” by inviting full participation and by fostering deep listening and speaking.
- **Cross-pollinate and connect diverse perspectives:** Enable the emergence of new insights by designing conversations that foster multiple points of view while keeping the focus on core questions.
- **Listen together for patterns, insights, and deeper questions:** Guide the conversation in ways that will reveal deeper patterns and common perspectives without losing the uniqueness of individual contributions.
- **Harvest and share collective discoveries:** Make the collective knowledge and insight that emerges both visible and actionable.



What Specifically Does the World Café Host Do?

The task of the World Café host is to put the World Café design principles into action, with thoughtfulness, artistry, and care. A good host can make the difference between participants simply having an interesting conversation and their experiencing true breakthrough thinking. He or she will:

In welcoming participants and setting the context

- Work with others to create a comfortable World Café environment (see the notes below).
- Help welcome participants as they enter.

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- Explain the World Café process and describe the World Café etiquette.
- Help the group focus on issues that genuinely matter to them by posing the question participants will explore during each round of conversation.
- Let people know how long each round will be and invite them to view the “interruption” in their conversation – and the invitation to continue with new partners – as vital to the weaving of collective intelligence.
- Encourage everyone to participate—to write, doodle and draw key ideas on their tablecloths—or to note key ideas on large index cards or placemats in the center of the group.

During each round of conversation

- Move among the tables and help participants as needed.
- Continue to embody the spirit of hosting, “holding the space” for good conversation.



When moving from one round to another

- Let people know in a gentle way when it’s time to move and begin a new round of conversation. Remind them that although they may be interrupting their talk for the moment, the conversation will continue at a new table.
- Upon completing the initial round of conversation, ask one person to remain at the table as the “table host” while the others serve as travelers or “ambassadors of meaning.” The travelers carry key ideas, themes and questions into their new conversations. (It is often best not to assign or ask for table hosts at the beginning of the round. In this way each person feels equally responsible and no one is “in charge” of recording ideas.)
- Ask the table host to welcome the new guests and briefly share the main ideas, themes, and questions of the initial conversation. Encourage guests to link and connect ideas coming from their previous table conversations – listening carefully and building on each other’s contributions.

During large group harvesting sessions

- Invite participants to share discoveries and insights to help the group discern patterns, develop collective knowledge, and identify new possibilities for action.
- Engage participants in “listening for what is emerging” and note how each perspective contributes to a larger understanding than any single view reveals.

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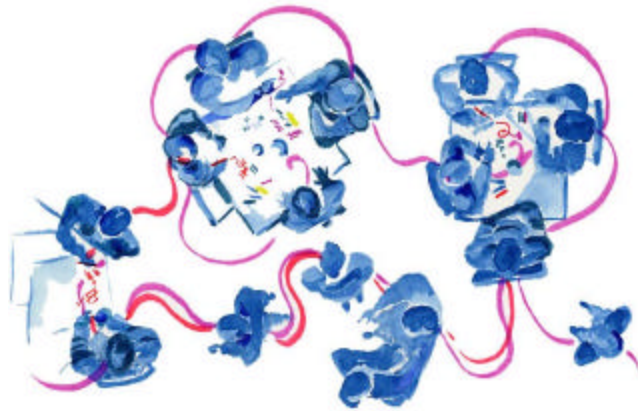
- Throughout, practice the art of hosting, which involves invitation, welcoming, offering, and honoring participants and their contributions.
- Be creative in adapting the design principles of the World Café to meet the unique needs of your situation!

Tips for Creating World Café Ambience

Be creative in setting up your World Café to foster a sense of informality and intimacy. When participants arrive they should know that this is no ordinary meeting. Creating hospitable space involves attending to the layout and design of the physical environment and relating to participants in ways that are welcoming, inviting, and appreciative.

- If possible, select a space with natural light and an outdoor view.
- Work to 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, while more than five limits the amount of personal interaction.

Small round tables of 36-42 inches are ideal. If small round tables are not available, be sure your table setup allows participants to cluster in groups of four easily.



- Arrange the café tables in a staggered, random fashion—as they might be in an actual café—rather than in neat rows.
- Use colorful tablecloths and place a small, attractive centerpiece on each table. Use your imagination to select a centerpiece that is meaningful.
- Place at least two large sheets of paper (for example, from a flip chart) over each tablecloth along with a mug or other container filled with colorful, water-based markers. (For legibility, use dark colors such as green, black, blue, and purple; include one or two bright colors for adding emphasis to table graphics.) Paper and pens encourage drawing, note-taking, and the interconnection of ideas.
- Put one table near the podium as a base for the World Café host and event sponsor to use.
- Arrange wall graphics, banners, and other displays in attractive ways (including the World Café etiquette). If possible, place plants or greenery around the room.

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- Have music playing as people arrive and are being welcomed.
- To honor the tradition of community and hospitality, provide beverages and snacks. A World Café isn't complete without food and refreshments!

Ways to Make Collective Knowledge Visible

In a World Café, there are several ways to make collective intelligence visible:

- Use a graphic recorder to capture the group's ideas on a wall mural using text and graphics to illustrate the patterns of the conversation. To find a graphic recorder in your area see www.ifvp.org.
- Use harvesting support teams to cluster and display the specific ideas, insights, core questions, or recommendations emerging from table conversations.
- Invite participants to take a “gallery tour” to survey the work depicted on table tops, wall graphics, and other work spaces.
- Invite participants to share insights and suggestions using large Post-Its® and index cards that may be collected as part of the output from the Café.
- Document all work for use in conjunction with the results from other World Cafés on similar questions, if appropriate, in order to deepen and continue the exploration in widening networks of conversation and committed action.



Sustaining Insight and Action

With the World Café we have the opportunity to see our organizations and communities as living networks of conversation focused on our most important questions. From this perspective, conversation and action are not two separate domains but a single integrated process in which “conversations about questions that matter” is the ever-present ground for action.

The World Café creates a space for collaborative inquiry in which participants continually discover shared meaning, access collective intelligence, generate new knowledge, deepen trust, and experience new levels of creativity that are energizing and exciting. The entire experience fosters a strong sense of shared commitment and ownership of the outcomes of the process.

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For More Information and Additional Resources

For more information and additional resources on the World Café process, the World Café design principles, or the global World Café community, please visit www.theworldcafe.com.

The World Café: Shaping our Futures Through Conversations that Matter, by Juanita Brown, David Isaacs and the World Café Community, contains exciting stories, extensive conceptual background, and more detailed guides for convening and hosting World Café dialogues in community, business, government, and other settings.

