



METHODS FOR FARMER SELF-ORGANIZING & KNOWLEDGE/SKILL SHARES

Farmer Convergence-2 hours

This facilitation is based on the “World Café” or “Knowledge Café” method. For more detailed facilitation notes, we have included an additional list of resources. We are keeping this facilitator guide brief for the sake of ease of use.

As with any instructional design (formal to informal), it is always essential to identify;

Who? How would you describe your participants?

Why? What makes this topic relevant to them? What motivates them to engage in this kind of learning?

What? Are there topics, information, or knowledge anyone wants to share or specifically gain from this?

Purpose:

- Connect people and build relationships-networking
- Gain a better understanding of a complex issue
- Process and share knowledge gained

Supplies Needed:

Tables or small circles of chairs

Background music

Chime or signal (can use the music) that it is time to rotate to a new group

Butcher paper/flip charts

Markers

Sticky notes (3 x 5 is best)

Method: General Steps

1. Introduce a topic that is multifaceted and complex.
2. Break into small groups of 4-6 people.
3. Groups will divide and re-group with each round. Plan on two people remaining at each table, while the rest of the group moves on.
4. Once you have cycled through these group discussions of approximately 25 minutes each, bring the group back together to process learnings and identify any key takeaways.
5. Communicate the plan to share these with the larger group after the Convergence.

Facilitator Guide: Details

Key components of World Café

- Set the context: This is the critical planning piece of the World Café method. Knowing your purpose and then who should be in the room will help you set the format and create the questions for discussion.
- Create a Welcoming Space: As best you can, set up the room to indicate something “different” than a ‘sit and get’ educational space or a typical meeting table. Tablecloths on tables, flowers, colorful decorations can contribute to the ‘café’ atmosphere. Papering tables with butcher paper and providing markers that encourage doodling and note-taking by all is also a nice touch.
- Beyond the physical cues, as a facilitator of this method, it is also important to convey community practices or agreements that indicate a safe learning environment that values diversity of opinion and respect. These agreements can happen as you open the space, or if time is short, as a facilitator you can have them prepared ahead of time and gain understanding and general consensus on the ones you present.
- Create Questions that Matter: In this discussion-based method, relevant questions matter. The art of creating questions is partially based on knowing your audience and having an understanding of levels of critical thinking. Questions should be open ended (not ‘yes’ or ‘no’). In this convergence method, 1-2 people will remain at each of the tables while the rest of the group travels to the next table. In the next rotation, those that stayed in the previous round will have the opportunity to move on. This strategy enables fresh thinking while capturing the learning that occurred in previous conversations. It should build a sense of community and collective energy.

There are three approaches to creating the tabletop questions in this convergence method.

- One approach is that all the table groups address the same question and then participants travel to different tables to hear the various perspectives, re-grouping with each round. In this approach, the time for each round shortens because table discussions are more about sharing ideas generated by previous groups and then adding to them with the new group.
- The second approach creates a set of questions, with each table addressing a different question or aspect of the challenge the group is collectively attempting to solve. This is often best accomplished with the group brainstorming aspects of a challenge they are trying to solve. In this approach, the group is essentially creating the questions. Allow at least twenty minutes for this process. If the group is large, you may want to provide sticky notes and quickly group those sticky notes into topics or questions.
- In a third approach, questions are progressive in complexity and change with each round. The first rounds’ questions may rely on observation or personal experiences, with later rounds focused on analysis or evaluating various options. This line of questioning is grounded in scaffolding critical thinking skills. Read more about facilitated questions and decisions in the resource that highlights ORID. Beyond using this for a convergence or World Café, it can be useful in bringing a group to a decision when an issue is complex and there are multiple perspectives.

- **Encourage Active Engagement:** In many settings, larger group discussions require active facilitation, attempting to ensure that no one person or perspective dominates. Participants may have different levels of comfort in a larger group. And in many cases, there are dynamics of power that can be overt or hidden and difficult to overcome in moving a group forward together. This method relies on smaller groups and re-grouping of people to minimize these issues. Even so, community agreements should still address issues of ‘stepping forward and stepping back’ to give space for everyone to participate.
- **Connect Diverse Perspectives:** The re-grouping process that is essential to this convergence method is akin to dropping a pebble into a pond. Participants get to link their insights and perspectives into ever widening circles. They can see in real time their impact on the community as they bring these insights to solve a problem with the community. Expressing the excitement of this possibility at the outset of the convergence and articulating the observation of it happening as the rounds progress is a great validation for the group.
- **Listen Together for Patterns and Insights:** This task should occur within each of the groups and conversations. In addition to sharing individual perspectives, participants should be made aware of this aspect of the convergence. This requires deep listening and analysis of what is being shared. Encourage folks to listen to what is not being spoken and what is being spoken.
- **Share Collective Discoveries:** Often this is called the harvest. The closing of the convergence is critically important. In this process, the group comes back together to name those patterns of connection obvious. The harvest may vary based on the method of question development guided the rounds and the overall purpose of the convergence.

One way to begin this process is to ask each table group to do one of the following, being prepared to share with the larger group:

- identify themes that emerged between groups
- identify action steps that would address the problem or challenge that framed the purpose of the convergence
- capture any unique approaches that felt new

As the facilitator, listen for those connections, patterns, and insights that could bring the group closure as well as creating a sense of accomplishment and community building. If thinking on the spot is not your forte’, engage the group in this by using the ORID method, asking them for themes they notice.

Ultimately, we all want to make the world a better place and feel a sense of contribution to the whole. The convergence World Café method brings out that better impulse in individuals and the collective.

Group size considerations

This convergence style can work with groups of 12-100. The critical aspect is that table groups should be no larger than 6 people. Smaller groups may have groups of 3-4. If you have a VERY LARGE group, there will be need to do the rotations in smaller pods or rounds. The harvesting process at the end of the convergence will have to be crafted to capture large themes and the energy of the collective.

Sample Convergence Topic and Question Methods

Purpose: Small Farms Feed the World: How can we make small farms viable?

Method 1: Each table has a topic/question. Groups address the question. Give 20 minutes for discussion and then re-group with 1-2 people staying behind at each table. With each round, shorten the time by 3 minutes.

Questions to consider:

- What barriers face small farms sustainability and viability?
- What changes in our food system would make small farms viable?
- What changes in our farming system would make small farms viable?

Method 2: Present a general topic or challenge to the group. Give a few moments for individuals to identify critical aspects of the topic they feel need to be addressed. Provide sticky notes and invite each person to write their responses on the sticky notes, one idea or topic per note. Post butcher paper around the room to equal the number of tables available. Ask a couple of participants to start the process by putting their sticky notes, each one on separate butcher sheets (assuming their topics are separate responses). Then have other participants put their sticky notes on the butcher sheets, grouping together the responses that are alike. Once the sorting has happened, quickly title each butcher sheet and have table hosts come and get a sheet, taking it to their assigned tables. Proceed to divide the participants among the tables and start discussions. If the group is larger, this step can be done first as a table group, with each table then putting the themes identified up on the butcher sheets in front of the room.

Once the major themes are identified, each table group explores a different theme. Re-grouping would occur with each round getting progressively shorter as in method 1.

Sticky Note Examples:

- Federal programs that benefit small farms
- Fair prices for farmers
- Land access or tenure models that do not create debt



Method 3: Each round's questions get more complex. Although groups re-group with each round to enable different folks to interact with the questions and in groups, the time for each round remains at least 20 minutes because the questions considered are different.

Each table is considering the same question:

Round 1: What do small farms contribute to our food system?

Round 2: What do small farms contribute to communities?

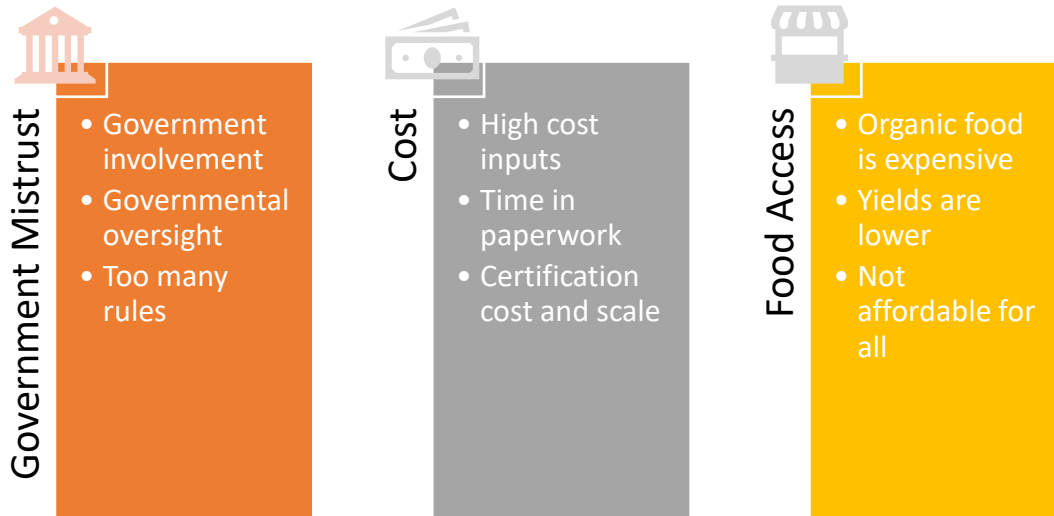
Round 3: What motivates consumers to support small farms?

Round 4: What would strengthen small farm viability?

WORLD CAFÉ

Method 2—Another Example:

Challenge: So few organic farms as a % of all of agriculture? How can we increase the # of organic farms? In the example below; the boxed text represent sticky note responses. The categories along the side would represent the table topics.



Other Useful Resources

World Café Facilitator Guide

<https://theworldcafe.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Cafe-To-Go-Revised.pdf>

Creating Group Agreements

<https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/groupagree>

Questions for Facilitators: The ORID Method

<https://medium.com/permaculture-3-0/on-technique-orid-strategic-questioning-that-gets-you-to-a-decision-c373bf57753b>

Technology of Participation

<https://www.ica-usa.org/consult.html>

World Café

<https://theworldcafe.com/tools-store/hosting-tool-kit/>

Farmer Summits-the Unconference 4-8 Hours

This method of learner-centered education is foundationally “Open Space Technology” which was first developed by Harrison Owen. At its core, Open Space developed as a way for conflicted groups or complex problems to find resolution. One of the tenets is that “Peacemaking is too important to be left to the professionals. It is the opportunity and obligation of every human being.” And we would add to that “meaning-making” as well. It is the self-organizing aspect of this learning container that makes it so profound and relevant, whether its purpose is finding solutions or gaining new knowledge.

The Unconference model relies on the Open Space “rules of engagement” but is more conducive to knowledge sharing than complex problem solving. An Unconference is intended to be highly collaborative and offer a vibrant atmosphere where questions are welcomed and sharing is encouraged and required.

At the outset, the Unconference learning environment and facilitation creates:

- Meaningful and useful interaction between attendees is the sole purpose of an unconference.
- An encouraging, participatory, and not passive learning environment.
- Fluidity between teaching and learning; a teacher at one moment may be a learner the next.
- And uplifts the experience and expertise of the participants, rather than relying on the contributions of a few outside experts.
- Participant input and control over their learning and takeaways.

Adults as learners have life experience to draw upon. They are accustomed to making meaning. An Unconference trusts the wisdom in the room.

Unconference Purpose:

- Share knowledge and learn from each other
- Create a conference-type schedule democratically; potentially around a theme (organic farming, or more specific-specialty crop)

As with any instructional design (formal to informal), it is always essential to identify;

- **Who?** How would you describe your participants?
- **Why?** What makes this topic relevant to them? What motivates them to engage in this kind of learning?
- **What?** Are there topics, information, knowledge that they would like to have or have to share? Potentially invite others who have this information, ‘seeding’ the larger group.

Supplies Needed:

Tables or small circles of chairs, possibly several small rooms

Background music

Chime or signal (can use the music) that it is time to rotate to a new group

Butcher paper/flip charts

Markers

Sheets of 8.5 x 11 paper

Masking Tape

Sticky Dots

Method: General Steps

- Set up the space with all the materials needed for participants to suggest workshops.
 - 8.5 x 11 sheets of paper
 - Markers
 - Tape
 - A schedule on the wall with colored paper or a masking tape grid indicating the time blocks and general agenda for the Unconference time (see example on page 8)
- Open the Unconference, stating the purpose and theme.
- Clearly explain the process and general steps
- Have participants suggest topics, one idea per piece of paper
- The only thing needed to get a proposal onto the agenda is a willing "convener," whose job is being at a specific place and time and taking notes about what's discussed.
- Participants take their suggested workshop topics to the schedule on the wall; Duplicate suggestions can be clumped or combined.
- If there are more suggestions than time slots, the facilitator can employ a group voting method using sticky dots, with each person voting for their top choices. The number of dots should be determined by the number of sessions one person could attend in the given time period.
- Once the agenda is agreed upon, participants attend sessions just like a regular conference. The biggest exception is that during the sessions, they're encouraged to self-organize by using the Law of Two Feet, whereby they move to another session if they feel they're not contributing to or getting anything out of the one they're attending.
- Workshops are no longer than 45 minutes in length.
- Be sure to capture notes and learnings from the session by assigning a role of scribe once each session convenes.
- Scribes should turn their notes into the facilitator at the end of each session to be compiled and shared with all participants after the Unconference.

Other Open Space rules of engagement to consider:

1. Whoever comes is the right people, even if your session is small.
2. Whenever it starts is the right time.
3. When it is over, it is over. 45 minutes is the maximum.
4. Whatever happens is the only thing that could happen.
5. Law of two feet applies to all sessions.
6. Participants can be bees; moving from one session to another.
7. Participants can be butterflies, just hanging out in the space between



Example for a Day-Long Unconference

- 8:30-9:15 Open and Welcome
Set intention and welcome
Create the Community Practices
Generate Content-Workshop or Session Proposals
Create the Schedule
- 9:30-- Workshops Begin
- 2:45 Workshops End
- 3:00 Wrap Up and Next Steps

WORKSHOP SESSION GRID

If there are more workshop sessions proposed than time in the agenda, use a sticky dot or other voting method to determine which ones move forward. Similar sessions suggested could be combined if those that proposed them see them as similar.

ROOMS	A	B	C	D
9:30-10:15				
10:30-11:15				
11:30-12:15				
LUNCH				
2:00-2:45				
3:00	RECONVENE IN LARGE ROOM FOR CLOSING & NEXT STEPS			

Adult Learning and Popular Education in the Context of “Teaching for Transformation”

1. According to Jane Vella, there are twelve principles for effective adult learning. These include: Needs assessment that is inclusive of the learners.
2. Safety in the environment and process.
3. A sound relationship between teacher and learner.
4. Careful attention to sequence and content reinforcement.
5. Praxis-learning by doing with reflection.
6. Respect for learners as subjects of their own learning.
7. Cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects.
8. Immediacy of the learning.
9. Clear roles.
10. Small groups.
11. Engagement of the learners.
12. Accountability

Popular Education demands the facilitation of critical dialogue that serves to bring awareness to learners. According to Freire, credited with this framework, “Provided with the proper tools for such encounter, the individual can gradually perceive personal and social realities as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his or her own perceptions of that reality and deal critically with it.” (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p.30).

The world is emerging from the pandemic with direct experiences of fragility in our food and farming systems, along with issues of injustice within them for workers and food access. The opportunity to gather as a community and do this critical reflection to find a way forward that will enable farmers to remain viable and make food from small and medium sized farms more accessible.

Popular Education and Open Space Technology have as a goal a transformation of current systems. The current agricultural system is not benefiting small-medium scale organic farmers. The opportunity and tools for farmers to identify and propose beneficial structural changes need to be integrated into training and technical assistance focused on production methods.

Open Space Technology is designed to work best when issues are complicated or multi-faceted. There will be separate spaces designated for different but potentially overlapping themes with time in the agenda for the facilitators to compare sessions generated in each group for the benefit and sharing with the whole gathering.

“When people gather in Open Space there is no preset agenda other than the topic previously agreed to and the time allotted for the meeting. There are no planned panel discussions and plenary sessions. The agenda is created through the facilitator inviting everyone present to nominate issues that he or she feels passionately about and is prepared to take responsibility for” (Openspaceworld.org on 03.15.22). In this way, the Farmer Summit Day will strengthen outcomes of distributed leadership, self-governed farmer groups, and a spirit of ongoing learning from each other. The larger number of farmers in attendance will also make it more likely that this education and the critical dialogues could be conducted in primary languages other than English.

SOURCES FOR FURTHER READING ON ADULT LEARNING

Andragogy

Knowles and his work, see:

<http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-knowl.htm>

Transformational Learning

Chapter by Mezirow

<https://www.ecolas.eu/eng/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Mezirow-Transformative-Learning.pdf>

Experiential Learning

On David Kolb's work

<https://experientiallearninginstitute.org/resources/what-is-experiential-learning/>

Self-Directed Learning

SB Merriam and a new update on Adult Learning including SDL

http://www.umsl.edu/~henschkej/henschke/the_new_update_on_adult_learning_theory_miriam.pdf

Popular Education

<https://www.preventconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/What-exactly-is-Popular-Education-Learning-Heads.pdf>

About Freire

<https://daily.jstor.org/paulo-freires-pedagogy-of-the-oppressed-at-fifty/>

Highlander Folk School

<https://highlandercenter.org/>

OTHER RESOURCES FOR UNCONFERENCE

From Open Space World:

<https://openspaceworld.org/wp2/>

From Ed Camp https://digitalpromise.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Edcamp-Organizers-Handbook_Update-2023April.pdf