GATHER

THE ART & SCIENCE OF EFFECTIVE CONVENING

Rockefeller Foundation
Innovation for the Next 100 Years

Monitor Deloitte.

CREATED BY **MONITOR INSTITUTE**

This guidebook was completed in June 2013 by Noah Rimland Flower and Anna Muoio at Monitor Institute with input from Rob Garris and his colleagues at the Rockefeller Foundation.

It expands on an earlier edition created for the Foundation's internal use by a Monitor Institute team led by Diana Scearce that included Lindsay Bellows, Stuart Burden, and Noah Rimland Flower.

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Rockefeller Foundation
Innovation for the Next 100 Years

THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION supports work that expands opportunity and strengthens resilience to social, economic, health, and environmental challenges—affirming its pioneering philanthropic mission since 1913 to promote the well-being of humanity.

The Foundation operates both within the United States and around the world. The Foundation's efforts are overseen by an independent Board of Trustees and managed by its president through a leadership team drawn from scholarly, scientific, and professional disciplines.

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MONITOR INSTITUTE is a social change consultancy that works with innovative leaders at nonprofits and foundations to advance social impact across a diverse range of issues. Monitor Institute strives to be a scout for social innovation, bringing new approaches to clients and contributing to the public debate on leading-edge topics such as impact investing, strategic philanthropy, and networked collaboration. As a for-profit/for-benefit hybrid, Monitor Institute pursues social impact while operating as a fully integrated unit of Deloitte Consulting LLP.

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MODUS OPERANDI DESIGN (ModusOp.net) designed and produced this guidebook. Modus Operandi Design is a full-service design studio specializing in media branding and is based in New England.

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THE GUIDEBOOK

What's in It and How to Use It

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHORS AT **MONITOR INSTITUTE**

Who the guidebook is for

THIS GUIDEBOOK IS FOR people who want to change the world. It's for social change leaders who understand the power of convening the right group of people, and who believe that collective intelligence trumps individual smarts when it comes to solving shared problems. It's for those who know that there is an art and a science to convening and want to get better at both. Ultimately, this guidebook is a practical toolkit to help a world-changer who is taking on the role of lead convening designer.

What you'll find in the guidebook

THIS GUIDEBOOK IS ORGANIZED around the most common building blocks of constructing any convening: deciding whether to convene, clarifying a "north star" purpose, and making a bevy of design choices that flow from that purpose. If offers a set of design principles, key questions, and critical issues to be considered and customized for your situation.

What the guidebook is not

THIS DOCUMENT IS NOT a compendium of all the available material on convenings, or a guide to the broader body of material on facilitation, meeting production, collaboration, innovation, multi-stakeholder negotiation, and conflict resolution, though we refer you to external resources. It is also not a step-by-step manual, as every convening is a custom design. Instead, it offers starting points, questions, frameworks, and worksheets to guide you through the design process.

Tips on navigating through the guidebook

JUST STARTING TO PLAN A CONVENING? Start at the beginning, working from Choosing to Convene through Assembling Participants. When you reach a point where you need to do more work before you can proceed, read ahead to see what you're in for and then return when you're ready.

Already in the planning stages? Even if you're close to execution, it won't hurt to review the basics and make sure you're clear on why convening is the right tool for your purpose. Unless your convening is in a few days, you'll probably find it valuable to read Structuring the Work and Executing the Event.

A NOTE FROM **ROB GARRIS**, MANAGING DIRECTOR AT ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION

Why the guidebook was created

CONVENING HAS BEEN A CRITICAL TOOL for the Rockefeller Foundation's century of successful philanthropy. The Green Revolution's improvements to food security, the emergence of impact investing to combine financial, social, and environmental benefits from investments; a new global alliance for life-saving vaccinations (GAVI), the recovery of post-Katrina New Orleans, and many more remarkable advances were accelerated through Rockefeller-led convenings. And yet, as of a few years ago, we had not formalized our skills and training in this core competency. Given the increasing complexity of the world, the emergence of diverse and disparate new global players, and the general tendency of organizations to specialize, it was clear that convening would continue to play an important role in the Foundation's work. In 2011 we launched an internal project to document and then strengthen our own convening skills, working not only with our immediate colleagues but also with our grantees. Then, as we considered how to make our next 100 years as successful as the first, we saw the value of collaboratively developing a convening guide that could be shared widely with our colleagues, partners, and grantees. The result is the guide you are reading. We hope it strengthens your capacity to create change through effective convenings.

WHAT Is a "Convening"?

The term "convening" can refer to meetings, conferences, workshops, symposia, and many other events. We use it to mean a gathering that is different from these common formats in one important way: for the duration, the attendees are participants in a *collective* effort that serves a specific shared purpose.

As a result, they are typically in-person gatherings of 10 to 80 participants that last from a half-day to as long as a week.

CONVENINGS ARE...	CONVENINGS ARE NOT...
Composed of diverse stakeholders who represent a range of perspectives on a topic, often from different organizations	Regular, internal meetings
For accomplishing a clear purpose (e.g., drive toward decision-making or alignment) and intended outcomes	Focused on administrative, process-related topics
Designed to draw on all participants to generate insight and action beyond what any single actor could achieve on his or her own	Solely for delivering information or a single point of view (e.g., a training or a media event)

The BUILDING BLOCKS of Effective Convening

A. CHOOSING TO CONVENE

PAGE 7

To convene or not to convene?

DECIDE whether a convening is the right tool for your situation and at this point in time.

B. DEFINING YOUR PURPOSE

PAGE 14

What's the point?

IDENTIFY your convening's "north star" purpose, and how co-creative or traditional a design you want.

C. FORMING YOUR TEAM

PAGE 19

Who's your team?

UNDERSTAND how the work of convening design is typically divided, and choose a team structure that fits the job.

D. ASSEMBLING PARTICIPANTS

PAGE 30

Who do you invite?

CONSIDER who will be interested, decide who to invite, and convince them to come.

E. STRUCTURING THE WORK

PAGE 46

What will they do together?

DEVELOP a set of activities that will help the group achieve the intended purpose.

F. PLANNING THE FOLLOW-THROUGH

PAGE 62

What will you carry forward?

ASSESS how well the convening went and take action on any important next steps.

G. TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

PAGE 68

What is the complete vision?

TRANSLATE the general principles into a specific experience and a plan to create it.

A CHOOSING TO CONVENE

THE CASE for Convening

1 We have become at once more connected and more fragmented.

RAPID GLOBALIZATION has given new wings to many things. Our jobs, goods, money, and ideas can come from and go to nearly anywhere in the world, making our present location matter less and the state of things far away matter more. And yet, the same technology that enables us to connect with ease also allows us to fragment into tiny silos filled with people and information that reflect our own narrow interests.

2 Yet the new social challenges we face are larger and more interconnected.

FEW OF TODAY'S SOCIAL CHALLENGES are entirely new in kind. There is nothing new about poverty, lack of education, inequitable access to healthcare, or environmental degradation. What is new is our ability to see and understand how problems connect. We have become more sophisticated in our use of data and better at tackling problems holistically and systemically. And we are becoming more capable of using our problem-solving "technologies" (our solutions and ways of organizing) to adapt to new changes in social challenges as they emerge.

3 We need to build social solutions that are larger than single organizations.

OVER THE PAST SEVERAL DECADES, many social entrepreneurs have built organizations that scale new ideas to tackle old problems. Yet there will always be limits to what an organization working in isolation can accomplish. Scaling up a new idea can take many years. And, if an organization's work remains isolated, the impact it makes can erode if progress is not also being made on other facets of the problem.

4 We need convenings that are designed to enable collective action.

CONVENINGS ARE GAINING MOMENTUM as a means of tapping collective intelligence and enabling change. They combine different perspectives, enabling us to clearly perceive trends and identify promising new ideas. They can reshape how we see a problem, deeply influencing our perspectives on what levers are most effective for creating change. They can help us find new ways to join forces, committing to new levels of strategic and operational alignment across our organizations.

Convenings have long been at the heart of efforts to achieve social progress, but their power has grown dramatically over the past two decades. They are now potent tools in an organization's social change toolkit.

But in many organizations this "convening power" is still not tapped to its fullest potential. Building your convening muscles can enable you to bring collective effort to bear in powerful new ways and make the headway we all need against today's increasingly complex challenges.

A Convening TRAGEDY

You open your inbox and find an invitation to a convening sponsored by an influential foundation.

IMAGINE THIS...

You're honored to be invited and excited when you realize that the topic is a social challenge that's significant to your work. You read on but soon realize that you're not sure what the real purpose of the convening is after all—or how it will be different from all the other conferences on the topic you've attended. Suddenly you think, oh, not another meeting. The invite claims that "leading social changemakers" and "inspiring thought leaders" will be coming, but details are vague. Still, you decide to go, figuring that this foundation's name will attract a good crowd.

The gathering place is hard to find and you're given poor directions. You arrive late, take a random seat, and begin listening to the first of a series of lengthy presentations. The speakers are all well known, but the lectures are a disjointed collection of individual points of view. Worse: you've heard two of the speakers give the same talk at other conferences. So you do what others are doing: use the time to catch up on email. You hope to make some new connections during the breaks but get frustrated when these are shortened after the keynotes run long.

There are a few breakout sessions during the day. Here you're able to get a clearer sense of the crowd: a mix of the usual suspects from both the funding and nonprofit communities, along with quite a few people whose backgrounds seem only tangentially related to the topic. You join one breakout on a topic that sounds promising, where honest exchange between the funder and nonprofit camps would help break a long-standing logjam, but the discussion devolves into grandstanding. Plus, more than 30 people crowd the room, making quality conversation difficult. There's a palpable power imbalance between the two groups, and you can tell in a second that the facilitator is way out of his league.

You're both exhausted and bored by the end of the day. At dinner you end up talking with several others who are deeply committed to this issue. The consensus: another well-intentioned conference that missed the opportunity to catalyze the conversation.

A Convening TRIUMPH

You get an email from someone you've worked with in the past inviting you to participate in a convening. As you read it, your excitement builds.

NOW IMAGINE THIS INSTEAD...

It's on a cutting-edge approach in your field that you believe has tremendous potential but has yet to be widely adopted. "We hope you can join us, but come prepared, because we'll be doing real work together," writes the organizer. And she has a particular role in mind for you, as the facilitator of a table conversation where your background will be particularly relevant. You immediately reply with a yes and block the two full days on your calendar.

A few weeks before the event you start wondering what it will be like. Another email from the organizer arrives that afternoon: travel, lodging, food, and other details are all included, and you're particularly interested to see the agenda and bios of the other participants. There will be only 32 people, and it's a high-caliber group filled with people doing such fascinating work that you start picturing how to make a good impression.

The opening dinner gives you the opportunity to meet several of them. It's immediately clear that these are fellow travelers in your world, knowledgeable and capable people with a visible passion for problem-solving. The organizer closes the evening with a short but inspiring speech about the opportunity she sees for advancing the field and the importance of overcoming present obstacles.

Over the next day and a half, you spend most of your time in group discussion and small breakouts, scheduled at what feel like natural intervals, with short presentations and relaxed meals. You begin feeling a growing sense of kinship and shared purpose with this group, and use the unstructured time to dig deeper on topics raised in the group discussion. Many of these one-on-one conversations give you a sense of how you might collaborate in the future, and one leads to the core concept of what could be a promising new initiative.

You're particularly struck by how the organizer facilitates the conversation, providing direction and structure but constantly adapting to the energy of the group, even rearranging the agenda at one point when the value of digging deeper on the current topic becomes clear. As the time draws to a close, the group has arrived at a new level of shared understanding and alignment around a strategy to pursue, and you happily put your name down to join a follow-up conversation in two months.

As you leave, you wonder why it felt so easy to work with so many people you'd never met. You wonder: what would it take to create such a powerful gathering yourself?

Is Convening the Right TOOL for Your Work?

CONVENING PLACES SIGNIFICANT DEMANDS on people's time and resources, so it's important to make informed decisions about when and how to bring a group together.

As a first step, review your theory of change. Ask whether a convening is the best tool for what you're trying to achieve. Use the following set of considerations to determine if bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders for an in-person gathering of at least a half day is the best path forward.

CONSIDERATIONS	ALTERNATIVES
Can the purpose/opportunity be clearly articulated?	NO — When the purpose is not clear, focus first on deeper research and framing. Be careful not to develop a too-rigid point of view. Leave space for learning from diverse perspectives in the future.
Is the issue ripe for meaningful progress? Is there sufficient energy around the issue to "tip" to a new level of insight or action?	NO — When the issue is nascent, ill-defined, and/or lacking critical mass, focus on mapping the system and connecting players with shared interests.
Can the critical stakeholders be assembled?	NO — If not, consider lower-commitment modes of engagement that make it possible for key stakeholders to take part, such as short consultations, interviews, surveys, forums, wikis, or convening virtually.

CONTINUED

Is Convening the Right TOOL for Your Work?

CONSIDERATIONS	ALTERNATIVES
Does the purpose/opportunity call for collective intelligence?	NO When the issue you're working on can just as easily be addressed by individual actors, focus on building their capacity or make progress through 1-on-1 interactions.
Is an extended block of time essential to doing the work?	NO If the work is better suited to shorter blocks of time (less than two hours), consider convening virtually and/or adding a short, focused meeting to other events where key players will already come together.
Do you have the necessary resources: 1) ample time to dedicate to the convening design and production process; 2) convening facilitation, design, and production support?	NO If not, hold off until you've secured ample leadership capacity and design/production team members, and consider less support-intensive alternatives for connecting the group such as conference calls, webinars, surveys, forums, or wikis.
Do you need to be the primary convener?	NO If other actors would be better positioned to take the lead role—or are already holding a related convening—explore partnerships.

B

DEFINING YOUR PURPOSE

Defining Your PURPOSE

Purpose: the north star of a convening's design

IF YOU'RE LIKE many people who take on the role of designing a convening, you may be mulling over the many practical choices ahead: Who should I invite? Who can facilitate? What venue can we reserve? Those decisions and many others are important. But if you're hoping to make your convening a catalyst for significant social impact, you'll first need to get specific about exactly what it is you're trying to achieve.

Any conference design needs to achieve at least the goals of building networks and sharing learning. Those are a good fit when your aim is to give participants a resource-rich environment for advancing their own agendas. But if you want to achieve more than that, you'll need the group to work together. There are four broad types of purposes the group can achieve: you can help them to influence, to innovate, to develop foresight, or to align and act.

Crafting a purpose for your convening might sound like a check-the-box exercise. Yet it actually serves the very functional role of providing you with a north star to guide you through the many practical choices that follow. A convening that enables participants to innovate will not need the same design as one designed for participants to develop foresight. Even two convenings that enable innovation will have distinct purposes. And while it may feel tempting to write a purpose that spans two or even three of the four types, a purpose that is clear, focused, and specific gives you the rudder you need to make each of the practical choices in a way that serves exactly the goal you have in mind.

The purpose should drive your choices, but it should also be shaped by new realizations. The remainder of this guidebook shares a set of general principles that apply across all four types of purposes. Once you have a first draft of your purpose, keep it handy as you work through the remaining stages of the design process, and use it as a lens for interpreting those principles for your particular situation. Then look for the set of principles specific to your type of purpose in the final chapter, Tying it All Together. As you make your design decisions throughout the process, keep testing them against your purpose. If it fails to help you arrive at a clear answer, or when the answer it points to doesn't feel right, turn back to the purpose and try to sharpen it—or revise it.

DEFINING
Your Purpose

First, cover the fundamentals

ENGAGE A DIVERSE range of participants, reflective of different facets of the problem. Help them connect with one another, build trusting relationships, and discover shared areas of commonality.

BUILD NETWORKS

SHARE LEARNING

ENABLE PARTICIPANTS to exchange information, expertise, and points of view in a form that benefits their individual and collective practice.

Then, choose a primary purpose

INFLUENCE

SHAPE THE ATTITUDES of key stakeholders and the public by inviting thought leaders and decision makers to discuss your initial proposals, use their perspectives to sharpen the ideas, and then use the resulting product to promote broader conversation and action.

INNOVATE

EXPLORE NEW APPROACHES and enable creative disruption by reframing, reimagining, or recombining different elements and perspectives. Use these inputs to prototype transformational new processes or services and develop ideas for their adoption and scale.

DEVELOP FORESIGHT

ANTICIPATE POTENTIAL CHALLENGES and identify new opportunities for intervention, by collecting indicators of how the world is evolving today and diverse perspectives about the directions that it could take in the future.

ALIGN & ACT

MOBILIZE STAKEHOLDERS in different parts of a system to act in concert. Help build a shared understanding of the system and the problem, develop consensus around a common vision, align strategies around it, and support one another in the execution.

WORKSHEET

A simple way

to clarify your purpose is to answer these five questions. You may want to start with general answers, and then return later to make them more specific, as you make additional choices about your design.

"In order to create change, this convening will help participants...

...**BUILD NETWORKS** by:

.....

.....

...and **SHARE LEARNING** by:

.....

.....

"Beyond that, it's **PRIMARY PURPOSE** is to...

❑ **INNOVATE** ❑ **INFLUENCE** ❑ **DEVELOP FORESIGHT** ❑ **ALIGN AND ACT** ❑ **OTHER**

...which it **WILL DO** by:

.....

.....

.....

Its purpose **WILL NOT** include:

.....

.....

Defining Your "DESIGN STANCE"

NOW THAT YOU'VE DETERMINED your purpose, you need to figure out how to achieve it. This is your "design stance." A traditional stance, for example, tends to be a good fit for convenings that only touch lightly on a purpose beyond the two fundamentals of building networks and sharing learning, and results in a format closer to a standard conference. A co-creative stance tends to be more effective at achieving shared goals but will require more thoughtful design and preparation. Use these spectrums to sketch out your stance:

TRADITIONAL	USE THESE SPECTRUMS TO THINK THROUGH THE TYPE OF EXPERIENCE THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO CREATE	CO-CREATIVE
CONVEY INSIGHT		DISCOVER INSIGHT
DESIGNED BY A LEADER		CO-DESIGNED BY PARTICIPANTS
INSTRUCTIONAL		PARTICIPATORY
DELIVERED BY A LEADER OR LEADERS		CO-DELIVERED BY PARTICIPANTS
ACHIEVE A SPECIFIC GOAL		HAVE AN OPEN-ENDED OUTCOME
ENGAGE THE MIND ALONE		ENGAGE THE FULL SELF
INCLUDE HOMOGENEOUS PERSPECTIVES		INCLUDE DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES
USE EXPERT KNOWLEDGE		USE COLLECTIVE PATTERN RECOGNITION

C

FORMING YOUR TEAM

Who You Need on Your TEAM

The sponsor calls for the convening, defines its purpose, sets the overall vision and outline of the design, and oversees the process at a high level.

At a nonprofit this is often a senior executive, and at a foundation it is often the program director or program officer. When a convening is high stakes for the organization, many others may ask for sponsor-level input, in which case it is important to set clear expectations about how their input will be incorporated.

THE SPONSOR
(YOUR BOSS)

THE LEAD DESIGNER
(YOU)

The lead designer develops the sponsor's general idea into a specific concept and manages the project's many details. The lead designer's work falls into four categories:

CONTENT: Defining what issues need to be addressed, choosing who should be part of the conversation, and developing the materials they will need to have a productive exchange.

PROCESS: Creating a series of activities in the room that will guide the assembled group toward its goals in the time that it has together.

LOGISTICS: Arranging the many practical conditions that will enable the gathering such as the timing, venue, travel, meals, materials, and technology. (If possible, this is the most important to delegate.)

PROJECT MANAGEMENT: Tracking and moving forward the workstreams, deadlines, decision rights, and other elements of the effort.

CAN DELEGATE TO ...

ASSISTANT DESIGNER

Helps the designer research participants, develop pre-reading, create presentation materials, and synthesize the convening's outputs. (This work can range from junior-level assistance to peer-level thought partnership.)

FACILITATOR

Advises the designer on the process design and facilitates the conversation during the course of the event. (In many cases, the most appropriate facilitator will be the designer or sponsor.)

MEETING PLANNER

Advises the designer on logistical decisions, carries out the logistical planning, and manages logistics during the event. (This person may also be participating or facilitating, but with reduced bandwidth.)

PROJECT MANAGER

Works closely with the designer to map all of the elements of the work, including their overlapping dependencies, and makes sure that they are all completed on time.

Establish CLEAR ROLES in the Design Process

New Profit bridges its grantees' three key leadership roles

The work of convening design is best managed by a lead designer and a small team, but it's not uncommon for convenings to have a high enough profile that many others in your organization will want to get involved or at least have a say. This was exactly the situation at the venture philanthropy New Profit Inc. as the organization contemplated how to convene the board chairs, chief development officers, and social entrepreneurs from each of the social enterprises in its portfolio. New Profit had gathered each of these groups independently for a number of years, with great success, and was attempting for the first time to bring all three stakeholder groups together on the topic of what it takes to achieve long-term financial sustainability.

The task of designing the convening fell to Kevin Greer, head of the Portfolio Learning Initiative, and Katie Pakenham, the Director of Network Management. They could see immediately that the stakes were high; not only was success important for the portfolio organizations, but many of the board chairs were also among New Profit's current and potential supporters. They could also see that the work would require coordinating input from many directions. Not only would each member of the senior management have a desire to play the role of the "sponsor," but nearly every one of their fellow managers would have good reason to be concerned about the outcome—and have an opinion about the design. What's more, it was clear that the design of the day would not be a simple task, since there were delicate power dynamics to negotiate between each organization's trio of leaders.

Greer and Pakenham used two tools to address this situation. First, they shared a short "proposal" for the convening's purpose with the rest of the New Profit leadership. This two-page document contained three explicit goals, three implicit (unstated) goals, three topical themes, topics that were off the table, the most important qualities of the experience, and a list of potential speakers. This clear statement of intention provided a starting point for getting input from others, while still leaving substantial white space in the details of how the time would be structured. Getting early buy-in with this document bounded the debate and focused it in a productive direction.

Next, they thought through the specific types of input that they would need, and gave input rights to various internal stakeholders for different facets of the work: strategy, speakers, content, design, attendees, branding, and experience. Integrating that input and acting on it was the responsibility of the core operating team (Greer, Pakenham, and two others), and final authority rested with Lisa Jackson, one of New Profit's managing partners. This created explicit channels for input, giving them the benefit of their colleagues' ideas and suggestions while maintaining the ability to move to a decision when the time came. The result: while they spent substantially more time than usual on input and coordination, all of their internal stakeholders stayed aligned throughout the design process and the design was improved by many hands along the way.

The Three Core WORKSTREAMS

CREATING A CONVENING is a constant dance between three practical demands: creating the agenda and content, managing engagement and communications with participants, and arranging all of the underlying logistics. Doing each of these well is the science of convening design; doing them as an extension of your purpose is the art.

The details of your work will differ depending on how much of a challenge you've taken on in each of those regards, but the following sample set of workstreams is a general illustration of the tasks that you and your team will need to accomplish.

START OF PLANNING

AGENDA & CONTENT

- Assemble the team, find partners, and run RFP process if necessary, ensuring that all parties understand the purpose
- Define the objectives
- Brainstorm design ideas

- Draft and circulate a high-level design, focusing on the purpose
- Begin research for presentations and pre-reads

ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATIONS

- Map stakeholders and plan levels of engagement, including social media and other communications
- Identify core invitees (including potential presenters if needed)

- Interview core invitees (about their interests, availability to participate, and who else to engage), clearly communicating the convening's purpose
- Issue core invites
- Identify second-wave invitees

LOGISITICS

- Choose the date and location
- Contract with a local partner (if necessary)
- Issue RFP to hotels, if necessary
- Process travel visas

- Choose a hotel
- Choose venue (if not a hotel)
- Research dinner and outing prospects
- Contract with a graphic designer

AGENDA & CONTENT	ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATIONS	LOGISITICS
■ Gather and respond to design input ■ Continue research for presentations and pre-reads	■ Issue second-wave invites (including presenters) ■ Identify backup invitees and presenters ■ Request bios and special needs	■ Make dinner reservations ■ Draft agenda for any outings
■ Refine the design ■ Continue research for presentations and pre-reads	■ Issue backup participant and presenter invites (if necessary) ■ Communicate important info regarding travel reservations	■ Contract for A/V services ■ Finalize agenda for any outings; begin arranging details
■ Role-play the event to anticipate how participants will engage, then refine the design ■ Create first draft of presentations and pre-reads	■ Request remaining bios and special needs ■ Finalize bio-book design (if formal bio book is needed)	■ Purchase air and ground transport, if necessary ■ Finalize outing details
■ Iron out "micro design" (e.g., facilitation guidelines), ensuring that facilitation supports the purpose ■ Refine presentations and pre-reads	■ Request remaining bios (if necessary) ■ Produce bio book content (if necessary) ■ Recruit participants to blog and tweet during or after the event	■ Print complex paper products (e.g., bio book) ■ Work with venue on logistics, setup, and catering
■ Create templates and supporting materials ■ Finalize presentations and pre-reads	■ Communicate important travel, logistical, and prep information ■ Initiate any shared online space where participants can connect during or after the event	■ Print and ship simple paper products (signs, flip-charts, handouts, name tags) ■ Assemble and ship table supplies

YOUR CONVENING

Choosing a FACILITATOR

THE CONVENING FACILITATOR plays a critical role in ensuring that the group can achieve its full potential. Having the right facilitator can be crucial to reaching your goals.

General guidelines

- As early as you can in the design process, either choose to fill the role of facilitator yourself or identify someone else for the role, based on three core considerations:
  - **RELATIONSHIP TO THE GROUP AND THE TOPIC**—For the topics being discussed, who will have strong rapport with the group, enough subject-matter depth to guide the conversation, and the ability to maintain neutrality even in heated moments? (In many cases, this will be the designer or sponsor, but power dynamics are a common reason for that person not to be at the front of the room.)
  - **FACILITATION EXPERTISE**—Of these people, who has the front-of-room skill and experience necessary to guide the group through this conversation? (See the next page for a list of qualities.)
  - **AVAILABILITY**—Of these people, who has the time available for both facilitating on the day of and working with you ahead of time? If they're external, who fits your budget?
- If you are not facilitating the event yourself, you will need high confidence in the person you choose. Whether you are looking internally or externally, you'll be best served by recommendations from trusted colleagues, or by having personally seen that person in action.
- The facilitator needs to know the purpose, the specific process you've designed, who the participants are, their respective personalities and underlying agendas, and any history of events that this conversation is meant to build on. Hold nothing back—facilitation is an improvisational art, so the more that a facilitator is prepared, the better he or she can perform.
- A good facilitator can also help you a great deal in vetting your design ideas, based on his or her experience with many other events. It's ideal to share your design ideas as soon as you have a solid first draft of your concept, and to use your facilitator as a thought-partner from that point forward.

THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FACILITATORS PROVIDES A DIRECTORY OF CERTIFIED FACILITATORS AT HTTP://WWW.IAF-WORLD.COM/. HOWEVER, THIS AND ANY OTHER DIRECTORY SHOULD BE USED AS A LAST RESORT OR A SUPPLEMENT TO TRUSTED RECOMMENDATIONS.

QUALITIES of a Good Facilitator

"A FACILITATOR SHOULD HAVE A FEROCIOUS CONCENTRATION ON THE QUALITY OF THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE, ON CLARIFYING AND ALIGNING AROUND THE PURPOSE, AND MAKING THAT AS PARTICIPATIVE A PROCESS AS IT CAN BE."

–CONVENING DESIGNER

WORKSHEET

In choosing a facilitator, or considering whether you are well positioned to play the role yourself, the following skills and competencies are worth seeking:

- Process experience and capabilities that specifically fit your convening's purpose. For example, experience with futures thinking tools may be important when your purpose is developing foresight.
- Emotionally centered, confident, and humble, sure to recognize and acknowledge the needs of the group.
- Conversant in the language and issues central to the convening topic, but without being wedded to a strong position on the issues being discussed.
- Flexible enough to adjust during the convening.
- Puts the group first, especially in challenging moments.
- Neutral in engaging diverse perspectives on the topic; has excellent listening skills and won't push his/her own agenda.
- Balances control and emergence, and therefore able to facilitate focused dialogue and work while giving the group ample space to take the conversation where they want to.
- Attuned to participants' diverse cultural outlooks and perspectives.
- Capable of probing gently to encourage full participation, draw out underlying beliefs, and promote mutual understanding.
- A capable user of a wide range of process tools, both in the advance design and in the moment.
- Skilled at storytelling and real-time synthesis.
- Good at preparing the group for the upcoming stages of work so that they know what to expect.

LIST ADAPTED FROM THE CHANGE HANDBOOK BY PEGGY HOLMAN, TOM DEVANE, AND STEVEN CADY, 2006, PAGE 38.

"NO MATTER HOW MUCH PREP YOU DO, AND HOW MUCH YOU THINK YOU KNOW THE GROUP, GROUPS REACT IN UNPREDICTABLE WAYS. A FACILITATOR WHO CAN CHANGE EVERYTHING ON THE FLY, WITHOUT MAKING IT SEEM CHAOTIC AND DISORGANIZED, HAS REAL SKILL."

–CONVENING DESIGNER

ALL QUOTES WERE TAKEN FROM IN-PERSON INTERVIEWS WITH THE EXPERT CONTRIBUTORS LISTED IN THE APPENDIX.

Facilitation FUNDAMENTALS

THERE ARE TIMES when you as the lead designer will be the best positioned to lead the conversation, or must lead it if you lack the resources to bring in an outside facilitator. If you're not completely comfortable wearing that hat, here are a few tips to get you started.

START WITH GOALS AND GROUND RULES. Working in a collaborative group setting is very different from other modes of interaction, so it always helps to remind people why they're there and how to engage productively. Get agreement at the very beginning about the goal of the gathering, share the agenda, clarify roles such as your own as the facilitator, explain how decisions will be made (if relevant), and request that they follow certain ground rules such as reserving judgment and speaking openly.

BUILD AGREEMENT ALONG THE WAY. Getting the group to stand behind the process is the foundation for strong participation. You can gather ideas by proposing, listing, brainstorming, or clarifying what's been said. You can then combine any duplicates, prioritize the list, and ask for advocates. Then, to get agreement, you can ask for a show of hands, or give each person a certain number of votes to cast among the options.

GUIDE EACH DISCUSSION THROUGH AN ARC. Every discussion has a natural arc from opening, to narrowing, and finally to closing. Use your wording and questions to help the group stay aware of where they are, so that each segment of time can be used effectively.

LISTEN AS AN ALLY. One of the hardest things to do as a facilitator is to set aside your own opinions for the sake of helping the group as a whole. When you feel the need to advocate, set aside that need and focus on your curiosity about the speaker's point of view. You might paraphrase the speaker's words to confirm the meaning of what you heard, ask open-ended questions to probe for more information, or use your body language to show that you are at ease rather than in a confrontation.

Facilitation FUNDAMENTALS

USE CONFLICT AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPOSE UNDERLYING BELIEFS. When people express conflicting views, compromise is rarely found without establishing mutual understanding. One of the best ways to get there is to ask the people in conflict to explain why they believe what they do. What data, observations, or chain of reasoning led them to their perspective? In doing so you will often find the seeds of compromise.

STEP IN WHEN THE GROUP NEEDS HELP. Your goal as a facilitator is usually to melt into the background, keeping the focus on the group. But be alert to when the group needs help, and step in as necessary. Make process suggestions about how to proceed, educate the group about what steps you'll be asking them to take, ask open-ended questions to encourage participation, and enforce agreements about what process should be followed.

GATHER ANY INFORMATION YOU CAN ABOUT HOW PARTICIPANTS ARE LIKELY TO ENGAGE. What are their learning styles, personalities, and cultural backgrounds? Try to find out what attitudes they are likely to share with others, where they are likely to diverge, and any points of existing tension. If you're concerned about encountering a challenging situation, role-play different ways that the conversation could unfold and plan how to respond.

EXPECT A WIDE RANGE OF ATTITUDES. Participants will each have their own default habits in group discussion. For some, that will be creative contribution; for others, it might be playing devil's advocate, being the pragmatist, or even trying to assert control. They may also arrive feeling anywhere from fresh and energetic to bone-tired and disengaged. Watch for these patterns in their behavior, adjust your approach if necessary, and work with them to drive the conversation in a productive direction.

CHOOSING the Right Facilitator

Speaking military to military on the use of torture

In 2011, the international NGO Human Rights First set out to convene a group of retired generals, admirals, and other security officials from around the world to meet at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center. The purpose was to hear their views on the delicate topic of torture: whether it was useful, and whether they would help other nations end the practice. It was important that the conversation be off the record, for the group to be small (at 22 participants), and for it to be diverse in both the countries and the skill sets represented (such as combat, logistics, and law). But beyond the format, the leaders of Human Rights First knew that choosing the right facilitator for the meeting would be crucial for helping participants open up and develop a sense of shared mission.

This would be the second time that Human Rights First had hosted such a conversation. In 2005, it had convened a coalition of retired U.S. generals and admirals to oppose the torture policies of the George W. Bush Administration, following the scandals at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo. That first group had been highly effective in shaping domestic policy, working with Senator McCain to prohibit torture by the U.S. armed forces. Later, members of the coalition stood behind President Obama on his second day in office when he signed executive orders banning torture by the CIA and closing the agency's secret interrogation sites. Building on the success of that first initiative, Human Rights First wanted to use a similar approach for advocating abroad.

Human Rights First chose Richard Danzig as the facilitator for this second convening. Danzig is widely respected on military, foreign policy, and international matters, having served as the Secretary of the Navy under President Bill Clinton. The leaders of Human Rights First believed his abilities to bridge civilian and uniformed leaders on international issues would ensure a robust, candid, and productive conversation. And Danzig's involvement did play a large part in making the gathering a success. The group began working with Human Rights First soon after, and continues to this day to advocate for respecting the Geneva Conventions worldwide.

D

ASSEMBLING THE PARTICIPANTS

MAPPING your Stakeholders

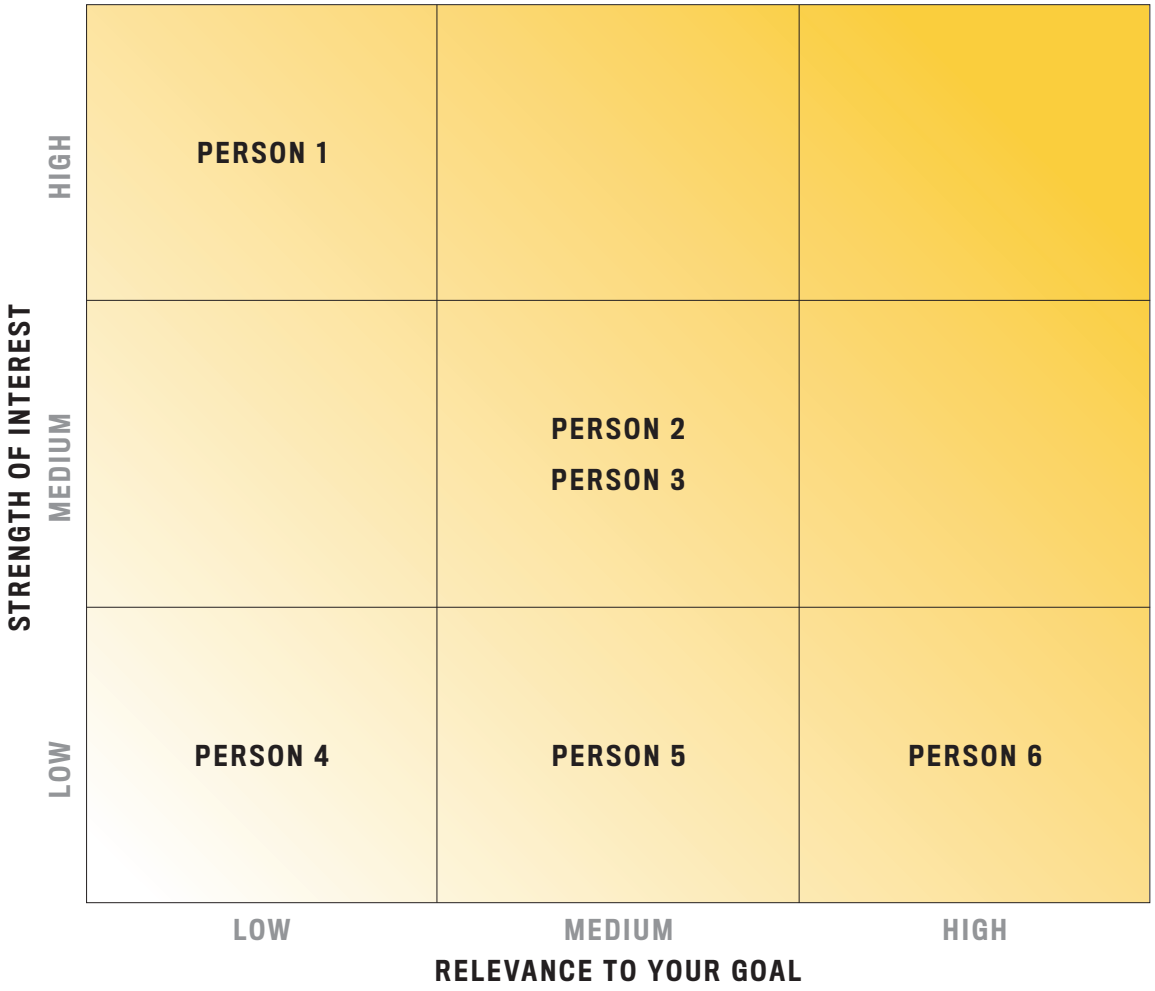
IN LARGE PART, the success of a convening rests on whether the group of people you assemble is the right mix. This is an important part of the *art* of convening. It's easy to start this process by scanning your own or your organization's contact list and filling the room that way. This may work fine, but it's worth taking the time to step back and establish a clear rationale for who needs to take part in your convening.

Start by mapping your stakeholders. This means thinking not just about the people who will be in the room but everyone who will be interested in knowing that this gathering is happening.

Two criteria are helpful for developing a rationale for your invitee list:

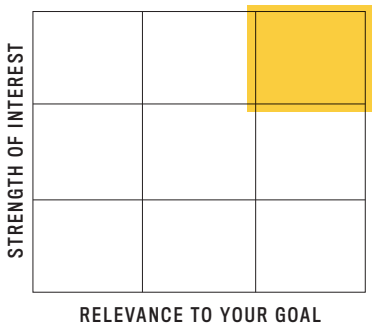
- **HOW RELEVANT THEY ARE TO ACHIEVING YOUR PURPOSE**–In other words, how much will their presence contribute to achieving your convening goal?
- **HOW INTERESTED THEY ARE LIKELY TO BE IN PARTICIPATING**–Take into account their interest in the topic, their ability to commit their time, and their relationship with you.

You can use these two criteria as a way to chart your "landscape" of stakeholders.



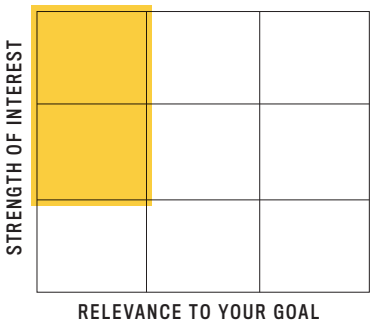
SEGMENTING your Stakeholders

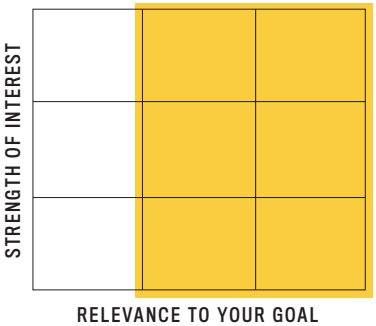
ONCE YOU'VE CREATED a draft list, consider how you want to "segment" your stakeholders according to how you will engage them and the type of role you envision for each. Choose one of four options for each person: whether to consult them on aspects of the design, include them on the invitation list, involve them in a lower-touch way, simply inform them—or not include them at all:



CONSULT: This is the highest level of inclusion you can give a participant, giving him or her partial decision rights on the purpose, process, outputs, or any other element of the event. Weigh this decision carefully: it is an opportunity to create powerful buy-in and gain valuable input, but could also complicate and slow down your planning process.

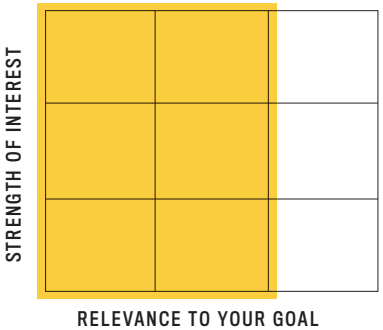
INVOLVE: There are ways to include stakeholders without giving them the substantial decision rights you would grant to someone who you plan to "consult." For example, you could ask for their suggestions on what questions to address or tasks to accomplish; ask them to share brief statements of their point of view or provide reactions to what is created; or encourage them to help distribute the outputs.





INCLUDE: These are people you want to have participate in your event but don't need to involve in the design.

INFORM: Some stakeholders should hear about the results of the work rather than be involved in the event. This segment could include people you are trying to educate or influence, funders who want to hear about the results of what they supported, or even academics who would be interested in learning about the conclusions.



GENERAL Considerations

- **CHOOSE PEOPLE** because they have interest, passion, or expertise in the topic you're discussing and for their ability to influence the field, not solely because of their title or organization.

- **INCLUDE AS MUCH DIVERSITY** as you can, especially in the qualities that directly relate to the topic. Consider diversity of constituencies (e.g., nationality, profession, organizational type, or field) and perspectives (e.g., political stance, upbringing, training, or worldview), and avoid creating a group that will likely be seen as the "usual suspects." Including deeply different mindsets and identities in the conversation does make it more challenging to create a sense of community, but provided that everyone shares an interest in the outcome, it is also the surest path to high-quality new ideas.

- **SEEK PARTICIPANTS** who have something valuable to offer, are curious to learn new information, are committed to creating new ideas, and are capable of engaging in dialogue with minimal ego. If it is essential to include one or more participants who may have trouble engaging collaboratively, plan to spend time with them ahead of the event to discuss what the work will be and the role you'd like them to play.

- **LOOK FOR** any substantial differences in either perspective or relative status/power. If they exist, make a choice: would it serve your purpose for the gathering to grapple with them directly, or could it be more productive to acknowledge these tensions but focus the conversation elsewhere? The latter may be more appealing, but it requires finding a way for these tensions to be a part of the discussion rather than the proverbial elephant in the room.

"I THINK OF CONVENING AS A KIND OF 21ST-CENTURY COMMUNITY ORGANIZING."

–CONVENING DESIGNER

How to Build a Shared KNOWLEDGE Base

ONE OF THE MORE ARTFUL ASPECTS of choosing who to invite is composing a group that will be well positioned to create new knowledge together. Doing this well can be a decisive factor in achieving the kinds of collective intelligence that only a convening can generate.

TO GET STARTED, ASK YOURSELF what common ground this group already shares, and how you can expand it by the time they need to work together. If you're lucky, the purpose you have in mind is one that your group is already primed to work on when they gather. But some of the most powerful convenings are designed to be a bridging moment for a group of deeply diverse actors who may share little common understanding beyond their passion for the purpose. This is especially true for those focused on innovation and creating foresight, which often involve bringing together people with deep vertical expertise in different disciplines.

Questions to ask

IF THAT TYPE OF BRIDGING is necessary with your group, ask yourself:

- **WHAT INFORMATION** related to the topic will everyone in this group already understand? What perspectives will they already agree on? Use this foundation as a starting place.
- **WHAT BASIC INFORMATION** will everyone in the group need to understand in order to work collaboratively toward the goal? Think through each participant, or type of participant, and look for gaps between what they will need to know and the starting point. Find ways to bridge these gaps, which could be as small as an understanding of the other participants' backgrounds and recent work, or as large as having a deep understanding of the current state of play in an emerging field.
- **COULD THEY LEARN** what they need ahead of time—from materials that you or other participants provide? Note that in most cases, at least a third of participants will skim or ignore the pre-reading, and the rest will dedicate only a small amount of time to it. So be conservative in the amount of material you provide and choose pieces that they will be motivated to study.
- **COULD THEY LEARN** what they need in the opening stages of the event—from other participants, from a speaker, or from you? This information will certainly be heard but costs precious time and can leave action-oriented participants feeling impatient.
- **WHAT INFORMATION** or perspectives can you provide that will provoke discussion, whether because they are new or because they are controversial? And, as above, do you want to provide these perspectives ahead or time or at the event itself?

Ideas to try

- **INTERVIEW** knowledgeable participants beforehand and share their perspectives as a pre-read to help get the group up to speed.
- **RESEARCH** and share background information on unresolved questions if participants would not know the full picture themselves, or when there is not time to construct the picture collectively.
- **BEFORE THE EVENT,** ask participants to share experiences or information related to the topic, and then play those back through a pre-read, in opening remarks, or on a wall poster.
- **DURING THE EVENT,** divide participants into groups for more intimate discussion and learning or have them participate in team activities that tap into their respective areas of expertise.
- **ENGAGE** in collective history-telling and landscape-mapping at the start of the day to give each participant the chance to have their point of view heard and establish a shared understanding of the issue's background.
- **CREATE** "playing cards" for key information or ideas and design breakout group activities that let participants absorb that information and respond to it.

EXAMPLE of Building a Strong Shared Knowledge Base

Defining the field of "impact sourcing"

When program officers at the Rockefeller Foundation set out in 2010 to accelerate the field of "impact sourcing" in Africa, they knew that a convening of the key actors (and principal competitors) would be a powerful tool. They believed in the core promise: that businesses could achieve a win-win by outsourcing their business processes to vendors in Africa who drew their labor force from poor and disadvantaged communities. But the field was at such an early stage in its development that they were concerned that the conversation would get bogged down in debating basic matters of fact rather than bigger questions about the field's boundaries, direction, and potential for growth. To make the most of the group's time together, they worked with Monitor Inclusive Markets to produce a whitepaper documenting the current state of play: whether there was a field, how large it was, and what needed to be done for the field to grow.

All of the convening's participants got a copy of the whitepaper three weeks in advance, and the gathering began with an opportunity to respond with comments. This enabled the group to then move into a conversation about the future of the field with a deep agreement on the facts of what was currently happening.

One of the most important points established by the whitepaper was that the field could be expected to grow as large as $20 billion by 2015, employing 780,000 workers, which gave participants a sense that they were part of a fast-growing pie with room for each of them to have a slice. The result was a productive, focused, forward-looking dialogue that created a sense of common purpose around supporting the rapid growth that they all believed was possible.

After the convening, the whitepaper was expanded to become a public statement of participants' shared vision, a far stronger statement than the foundation or any other single actor could have made on its own. To see the results, read "Job Creation Through Building the Field of Impact Sourcing" at http://j.mp/10YnxOo.

TARGETING a Size for the Group

DEPENDING ON YOUR PURPOSE, you may want to cap the size of the group at a certain level in order to avoid group dynamics that run at odds with the work to be done. While some expert convening designers are able to create large-scale gatherings for a wide range of purposes, complexity increases dramatically as the size of the group increases. If you need to work with more people than can be productive to engage at once, consider running multiple gatherings that each provide input into the broader work. Below are some rough guidelines for what to expect at three common group sizes.

SMALL
TEENS TO LOW TWENTIES

Generally the largest size that suits intimate dialogue among participants where they can build trust and achieve breakthroughs in how they relate.

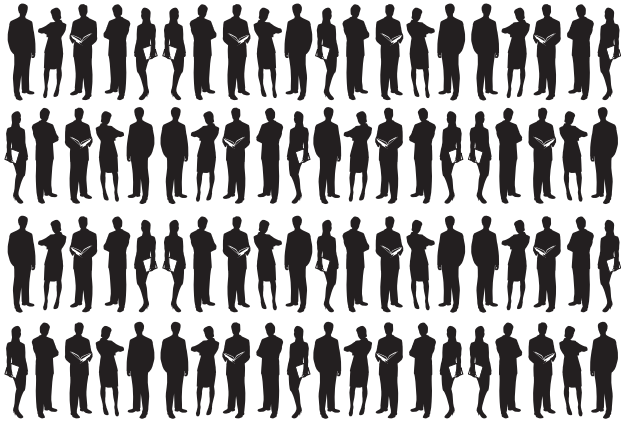
NOTE: THIS IS OFTEN A GOOD SIZE IF YOUR PURPOSE IS TO INFLUENCE OR ALIGN AND ACT, AND ONLY A SMALL GROUP OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS NEED TO PARTICIPATE.

MEDIUM
LOW THIRTIES TO HIGH FORTIES

Generally the largest size that suits generative ideation where participants all have the chance to build on one another's concepts.

NOTE: THIS IS A GOOD ALL-PURPOSE SIZE RANGE WHETHER YOUR AIM IS TO INFLUENCE, INNOVATE, DEVELOP FORESIGHT, OR ALIGN AND ACT.

LARGE
FIFTY TO EIGHTY



Generally the largest size at which there can be meaningful exchange in plenary, the group can contribute to a shared task, and most participants will have a chance to meet one another.

NOTE: THIS IS A GOOD SIZE IF YOUR PURPOSE IS TO INFLUENCE, ESPECIALLY IF YOUR GOAL IS MORE TO INFORM THAN TO SWAY. IT CAN ALSO BE USEFUL IF YOUR AIM IS TO DEVELOP FORESIGHT AND THE CONVENING IS USED TO DRAW INPUT FROM A LARGE GROUP.

EXAMPLE of Using Small Convenings in Combination

Eight convenings add up to accelerated growth in eHealth

In 2007 the Rockefeller Foundation heard from many health practitioners that the world's weakest health systems were at a crucial tipping point: with the right investment, "eHealth" technology could help these systems achieve great gains in both quality and efficiency. Rockefeller's leaders decided to convene the key players in this emerging field to consider what shape it could and should take.

Two galvanizing purposes were at the core of this effort. Primarily, the Rockefeller Foundation hoped these convenings would help to "align and act," both by building partnerships among players and by creating common IT operating standards. Secondarily, they hoped the sessions would influence the field, both by creating healthcare policy recommendations for national governments and by inspiring donors to give more private funding.

With a clear sense of the key issues and key players in the eHealth space, the designers steered away from creating one large convening, which would be at odds with their two purposes. Instead, they organized a series of separate convenings to address the eight most important questions: two week-long convenings of 25 to 30 participants happening in parallel each week for four weeks. The topics of each week's two convenings were closely related, so that interesting conversations could be sparked between the two participant groups during shared dinners and activities. Industry, donors, governments, researchers, and civil society were all represented.

These eight events proved valuable networking opportunities for a range of diverse participants and also created a substantial body of persuasive material for governments and donors. Even better, the convenings launched a set of robust activities: the creation of the mHealth Alliance, a new approach to open source electronic health records, a new national health network in Rwanda, and noticeably greater momentum for eHealth throughout the Global South.

Sending INVITATIONS

AN INVITATION attracts participants to come—but it also sets the tone for what they expect of the convening more broadly. Below are some general guidelines for creating an effective invitation.

GENERAL APPROACH

Tailor the communication based on the cognitive and emotional impact you want to make on that individual, e.g., giving them hope for the outcome, offering a chance to make a difference, or giving them exposure to an elite group.

Consider how much convincing this person will require that your gathering is worth their time. If you don't have an established reputation, make sure to have a strong pitch.

To lay the groundwork for a collaborative atmosphere, ask people to come because of their background, capabilities, and interests as individuals—not because of their position or because they represent a particular organization.

When inviting speakers, make it clear up front that you have a specific role in mind for them (even if you haven't decided exactly what), so they don't expect to simply deliver their usual spiel. (Ideally they should be invited to participate as well.)

COMPOSITION

Use language that is personal, direct, warm, and speaks to the person as an important relationship, whether existing or new.

Make the convening's purpose clear and position it as part of the larger goals that it serves.

Word the topic as one or more questions rather than general issues, topics, or problems, to suggest there will be something to develop and explore.

Trust that people will want to contribute: emphasize not what the person will gain but what they have to offer to the work.

Include at least the city where you plan to hold the event, the date(s), and the amount of time you are asking for, even if you haven't yet settled on a specific venue.

DELIVERY

Convey the invitation through existing relationships wherever possible, since a personal appeal will be considerably more effective.

Use a combination of in-person, phone, email, and hard-copy invitations. One type can be used to follow up on the other.

Give the invite an eye-catching design that connects to the topic and is part of the style for the rest of the materials.

"NO MATTER WHAT THE FORM, AN EFFECTIVE INVITATION IS EXTENDED WITH GENUINE HOSPITALITY, GENEROSITY, AND CONVICTION." —CONVENING DESIGNER

Additional CONSIDERATIONS

Enabling authentic conversation that includes both funders and nonprofits

WHEN FUNDERS AND NONPROFIT LEADERS are in the same room, there is often an elephant somewhere nearby. It's the inevitable power dynamic that often exists between those with funds and those seeking funding. If your purpose is served by having both in the room—and it is increasingly important to do so—here are some suggestions on how to maintain an open and honest exchange:

- **PRIORITIZE EQUITY** in every aspect of the gathering. Start by have funders take a back seat in the design and facilitation, so that the event is clearly and visibly created to serve the field rather than a funder's agenda.
- **CREATE A PROCESS** for the group that involves funders principally for their knowledge of the content, the actors, and the current state of play.
- **DESIGN THE CONVERSATION** to steer clear of topics that compel nonprofits to demonstrate their expertise in front of funders; the need to grandstand can easily degrade the quality of the conversation.
- **ENCOURAGE FUNDERS** to be fully transparent about their motivations, goals, and perspectives, and the role they intend to play.
- **HEAVILY DISCOURAGE** funders from observing without participating, which will leave the other wondering about their opinions.
- **IF IT IS ESSENTIAL** for grantmaking conversations to occur, be open about how they will fit in, but keep them separate from the rest of the convening so as not to distract from the work.

"POWER DYNAMICS ARE INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT. THE CHALLENGING MEETINGS THAT I CONSIDER TO HAVE GONE WELL ALL INVOLVED FRUITFULLY HANDLING POWER DIFFERENCES."

—CONVENING DESIGNER

Working with Speakers and Other EXPERTS

HOW YOU INCLUDE SPEAKERS and other experts in your convening is an important part of taking a co-creative stance, because the emphasis on participation opens up many more options beyond asking them to deliver their standard presentation. Here are some ways to think of engaging speakers beyond the usual keynote address or seminar talk:

- **PRE-READING CONTRIBUTOR**–If she or he has written material that is useful background for the conversation, you may want to include it in the pre-reading.
- **PEER PARTICIPANT**–There may be no need for experts to engage in a different way than other participants.
- **SCENE-SETTER**–She or he can open the conversation by sharing a general point of view about the task or topic at hand, such as an update on the state of the field or a vision for how it might develop. This might be a 45-minute keynote or a punchy 15-minute briefing. Either way, the fewer slides they use, the better.
- **BREAKOUT FACILITATOR**–She or he can lead a small group conversation focused on a topic of expertise, at once guiding and informing the discussion, if she or he is skilled at both.
- **INTERVIEWEE OR PANEL MEMBER**–You can have a conversation with a speaker on stage, either one-on-one or on a small panel. This provides greater flexibility, allowing you to ask questions on the fly based on the group's previous discussion. Panels can also be used to respond to the outputs that breakout groups create.
- **CLOSER**–She or he can speak at the end to respond to what was said and share thoughts about implications and future possibilities.

> "CONVENING IS ABOUT CREATING SAFE SPACE FOR PEOPLE TO TELL THEIR TRUTH."
>
> –CONVENING DESIGNER

INFORMING Stakeholders Through Capture and Sharing

IF THERE ARE STAKEHOLDERS who you would like to inform about the event without having them in the room participating, there are now many options for those not present to provide input, hear what was said, and see what was produced.

PARTICIPANTS

OUTSIDE AUDIENCES

REAL-TIME CAPTURE

- Live-tweet memorable quotes; encourage the group to use a shared hashtag in their tweets.
- Live-blog the event as it occurs. Recruit a team of volunteer bloggers among participants, encouraging them to share their reflections in writing.
- Conduct and post impromptu video interviews (sometimes termed "flip chats") to capture reactions, learning, and other thoughts from participants.
- Live-stream parts or all of the event as audio or video.

REAL-TIME INPUT

Take audience questions for speakers through online formats for real-time engagement such as webinars, videoconferencing, live polling, and tweeting.

POST-EVENT KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND CONVERSATION

- Invite participants to post photos using a tag on Flickr or an event-specific page on Facebook.
- Share cleaned-up photos of any graphic recordings, ideally printed and in color. (For more on graphic recording, see the end of the chapter on "Structuring the Work.")
- Share minutes of key discussions, augmented by the accompanying flipchart notes.
- Ask participants to share written reflections of the experience and what they took away.
- Record audio or video of key sessions to provide for download.
- Publish any tangible output of the work, whether that is a set of scenarios, innovation proposals, new directions for a field, policy goals, or another product of the group's effort.

Finding the Right VENUE

"MEETINGS AT CONVENTION CENTERS AND HOTELS SEEM EASIER TO PLAN AND GET TO BUT MAKE IT HARDER TO SQUEEZE SOMETHING GOOD OUT OF THE GATHERING."

–CONVENING DESIGNER

WORKSHEET

THE LOCATION AND SURROUNDINGS of a convening have far more effect on the group's productivity than most people realize. The qualities of a space determine the options you have for what activities you can create for the group. Here is a checklist of qualities you may want to consider beyond the usual basics of location, size, and cost:

ALWAYS VALUABLE

- **EASE OF TRAVEL**–Whether centrally located or remote, so participants have a smooth, non-stressful arrival and departure
- **NATURAL LIGHT**–To provide physical and mental energy
- **GOOD SIZE AND ACOUSTICS**–To promote sound projection so that everyone can be heard given the size of the group

CAN OPEN UP MORE OPTIONS FOR YOUR DESIGN

- **MULTIPLE ROOMS**–For breakout groups or parallel sessions
- **MOVABLE CHAIRS AND TABLES**–For easy setting and resetting of the space, such as from a single circle to small groups
- **MULTIPLE SEATING OPTIONS**–To promote an informal and open group conversation (e.g., sofas, high chairs, or café tables)
- **THE OPPORTUNITY FOR LEISURE**–Walks, entertainment, and other outings can promote connection within the group
- **SUBSTANTIAL FLAT WALL SPACE**–For graphic recording and working with flipcharts. (Alternatively, use a pair of easels and large foamcore as a surface.)

NICE TO HAVE

- **ACCESS TO THE OUTSIDE**–To provide the opportunity for more refreshing breaks
- **OFF-SITE AND PERHAPS FAR AWAY**–To maintain focus, separate participants from everyday concerns, and allow for deep conversation
- **OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY**–To aid in inspiration, relaxation, and reflection
- **THEMATIC CONNECTION TO THE PURPOSE**–Such as being in the home country of key participants, or the topic's global hotspot
- **UNIQUENESS**–To help the experience stand out in a way participants will appreciate, in the moment and in recollection

When to meet ONLINE Instead of in Person

VIRTUAL MEETING SPACES are very flexible and are naturally suited for speeches, seminars, training courses, or meetings of far-flung teams and already established networks. But while online gatherings may sound like an easier way to achieve the same goals as an in-person gathering, the lack of in-person connection makes it quite difficult to achieve a visceral sense of community and a high level of interactivity, both of which are crucial to a group becoming greater than the sum of its parts. Yet there are many situations when a virtual convening is a good choice. Below are some guidelines for how to use virtual space well.

CONDITIONS for Convening Virtually

IF...

...Participants have at least moderate comfort with socializing online

...And they all have sufficient connectivity for easy participation

...And there are too many people to gather in person

...And the urgency is high enough that organizing an in-person meeting would take too long

...And there are participant availability issues, they lack resources, or there are some other hard constraints that prevent meeting in person

Virtual convenings vs. virtual communities

A VIRTUAL CONVENING is a one-time gathering for a specific purpose, whereas a virtual community is an ongoing meeting-place where a group can meet repeatedly and for a variety of purposes.

One example of virtual convening would be if a group of 30 content experts provided input into a scenario planning exercise through a time-bound conversation on a mailing list, led by a strong facilitator.

By contrast, an example of a virtual community is PreventObesity.net, a site hosted by the American Heart Association where local leaders of the movement to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic can meet, discuss approaches, and find advocacy efforts within their communities.

> "IF YOU'RE TRYING TO BUILD TRUST, I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU GET AROUND BEING THERE IN PERSON."
>
> –CONVENING DESIGNER

EXAMPLE of an Entirely Virtual Convening

The Case Foundation's Millennial Donor Summit

When the leaders of Case Foundation wanted to highlight the latest trends in giving and engagement by the Millennial generation, they considered both in-person and virtual options for bringing together about 1,000 executives across business, government, and nonprofits. Both formats would have served their goal of broadening the dialogue around the second annual Millennial Donor Survey, but they felt it was especially important to engage individuals from a wide range of backgrounds and industries who might not usually join.

What they chose to create was a highly interactive format for convening online. Just like at a standard in-person conference, the "event" was divided into a series of plenary sessions (webinars) and breakouts (chat rooms). Participants could listen to speakers and ask questions in the plenaries, join a facilitated breakout conversation in one of the public "lounges," or strike up private conversations with one another in a chat session. Vendors could share materials and be available for conversation in an "exhibit hall," and conference materials were provided for download in a "briefcase." Meanwhile, many participants shared their reflections live on Twitter and in blogs. The combination of formats achieved a familiar conference-style atmosphere and added a few bonuses: the ability to find anyone at any time, have side conversations without interrupting the speaker, and join for only as much of the time as was relevant.

The result was a gathering that the Case Foundation's leaders felt was quite successful, with low barriers to entry and widespread participation, and requiring the same level of effort to organize as an in-person gathering but at a lower cost. The main challenge they reported: keeping participants' attention with a format that makes multitasking so easy. To learn more, read the Case Foundation's reflections at http://bit.ly/tQAZC9.

E

STRUCTURING THE WORK

CREATING a Designer's Agenda

NOW THAT YOU HAVE ESTABLISHED the purpose of your convening, the group of people you hope will attend, and how long you will spend together, you should now be well positioned to work out the highest and best use of that precious time.

We're all used to creating simple hour-by-hour meeting agendas, but that won't do the trick for a convening, where you need to put far more thought into the flow of the conversation. You'll need to organize your ideas in a format that can capture the current state of your thinking, convey it to your team, and accomodate easy changes as the details evolve.

A typical solution is to create a "designer's agenda" that describes how you will use the time from beginning to end. It is usually a good idea to describe each block of time in terms of its length, the goals you are trying to achieve in that time, and the specific methods (or activities) that you will use to achieve them.

It can be helpful to start drafting a designer's agenda as soon as you begin developing ideas for how to use the time, creating simple outlines that are easy to rearrange. As you home in on a structure that you trust, you can then add greater detail. The designer's agenda should cover every detail you decide about the sequence of activities.

Don't be surprised, or alarmed, if it becomes as long and specific as the script for a movie or play. While you won't be able to (and shouldn't) speak every word as it's written, writing down what you plan to say can be a helpful forcing mechanism. And when you're wrapped up in delivering the event, having all of the process instructions written out in advance will keep you on track and your team coordinated in real time.

CREATING
a Designer's Agenda

Experienced designers create a process they believe in but then treat it as simply a strong hypothesis, remaining open to adapting it in real time if the needs of the group develop in unexpected directions.

Follow this format to begin creating your own designer's agenda:

SEGMENT LENGTH	GOAL(S)	METHODS
How many minutes the segment will take, and/or what time it will start and end	In one brief sentence, explain how the methods you describe (on the right) serve your convening's purpose.	Name each action you'll take during this segment, describe what you plan to say or include the exact talking points, and include any hand-offs if there are multiple people speaking. List any physical materials you'll need and any changes to the arrangement of the room.
Next duration...	*Next set of goals...*	*Next segment's methods...*

PRINCIPLES for an Effective Agenda

DEVELOPING AND REFINING your designer's agenda will always be more art than science, as you work toward a series of activities that will serve your purpose with the people, place, time, and budget that you have available. As you go through that inherently iterative process with your team, there are a wide range of best practices that can help ensure that you end up with a truly co-creative gathering.

Keep participants at the center

- **FACILITATE PARTICIPANT OWNERSHIP** of the convening. Plan for how each participant can make a meaningful contribution, and design opportunities for them to start contributing early—including by providing input to the agenda.
- **SERVE MULTIPLE LEARNING STYLES** by mixing up the modes of interaction to include variation between textual and visual, analytical and emotional, creating and reflecting.
- **ENGAGE PARTICIPANTS' WHOLE SELVES** by breaking up work that is mental and analytical with activities that are creative and intuitive such as storytelling, collage, or contemplation.
- **STEER CLEAR** of standard meeting formats (e.g. rows of tables, PowerPoint from a podium, everyone seated but the presenter) by using alternatives such as frequent breakouts, movement around multiple stations, working on flipcharts, speaking without slides, and graphic recording.
- **PLAN TO IMPROVISE**. Have a strong script but expect that it will need to be adjusted in real-time in order to meet the group's needs. Outline fall-back plans, especially where there is uncertainty about how the group will react.
- **DESIGN FOR INTROVERTS**, so that everyone has a comfortable way to contribute. Give participants a chance to contribute in advance, provide time to think and write after new ideas are shared, design interactions around groups of three to six, and avoid cold-calling.

"YOU WANT CLARITY OF PURPOSE, BUT ALSO TO EMPOWER THE COMMUNITY TO AMEND, ADAPT, AND CO-CREATE ITS OWN SENSE OF PURPOSE."

–CONVENING DESIGNER

PRINCIPLES for an Effective Agenda

Create connections

- **CREATE EXPERIENCES** that encourage new relationships to be born. For example, think carefully about who to seat together at dinner or who to place on a team. Default to diversity: only group participants with others from their organization, sector, or perspective when necessary. And encourage personal connection, such as by kicking off the first meal by having everyone turn to a neighbor and talk about a recent book they read or film they saw.
- **WHEN WORKING** on sensitive topics, invest extra time in establishing connection and trust among participants, so that there is a safe "container" for the exchange of emotionally or politically charged perspectives.
- **PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES** and information that enable participants to connect in advance of the convening.

Pay attention to flow of the agenda

- **BALANCE** structured and unstructured time. A more co-creative design stance will require more unstructured time for one-on-one connection. You may want to leave as much as 40 percent of the time unstructured if building person-to-person relationships is a high priority and participants will be able to put it to good use.
- **BALANCE** serious contribution with playfulness, fun, and creativity.
- **REMEMBER** the importance of openings, closings, and transitions from one activity to the next. For example, when you return to plenary after a breakout, you might skip the often-monotonous round robin of report-outs and do something quicker such as asking for volunteers to share brief highlights from their conversations, or holding a fast-paced competition for the most convincing proposal.
- **WORK WITH** natural biorhythms: expect low energy first thing in the morning, after lunch, and at the end of the day. At those times, try to avoid long speeches and focus instead on interactive activities—the more talking and movement, the better.

PRINCIPLES
for an Effective Agenda

Establish ground rules

- **DISCUSS PRINCIPLES** at the start for how the group wants to interact. For example, if part of your goal is for people to step out of their organizational roles, you could state explicitly that you would like people to speak from their personal perspective. Or, if part of your goal is open brainstorming, you might propose a ban on saying "that's impossible!"
- **ESTABLISH** how the conversation will be captured and communicated beyond the room. That begins with an agreement of how participants will share what is said, whether in real-time, via social media, or afterwards. It should also include a discussion of any organized method of capturing and harvesting the group's insights. If the conversation is sensitive, you may want to adopt the Chatham House Rule (nothing said can be attributed without permission) or declare certain segments of the agenda to be off the record.
- **SET NORMS** with participants about when and where to use computers and mobile phones during the convening. Make sure to provide adequate breaks for people to make phone calls and catch up on email.

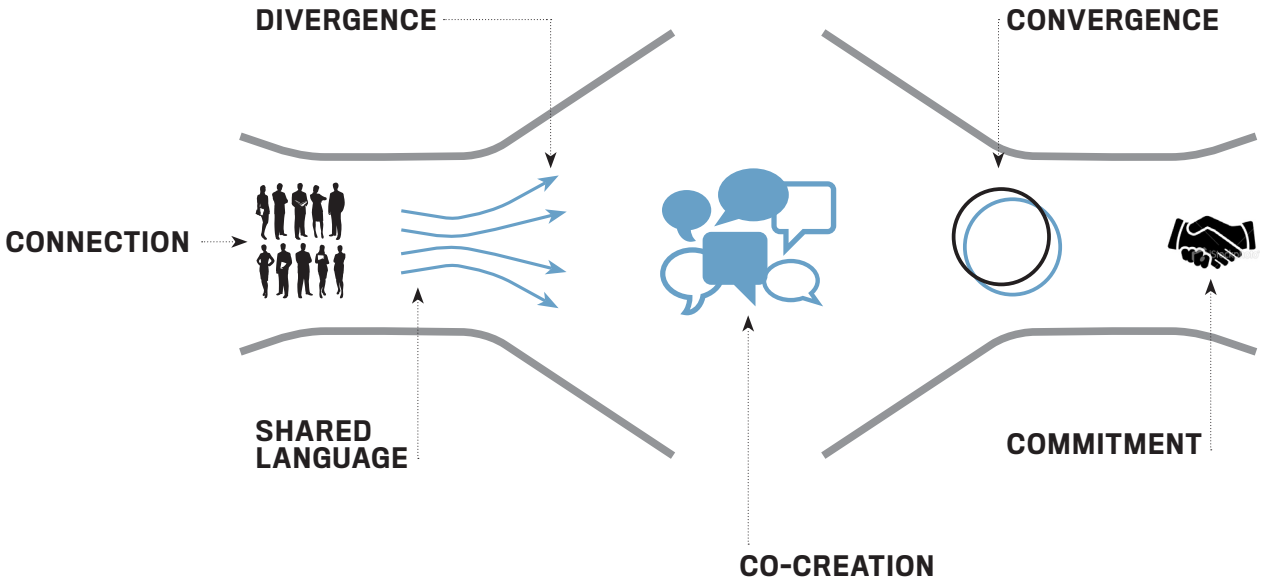
"YOU HAVE TO PAY ATTENTION TO THE FACT THAT YOU'RE INITIATING PEOPLE INTO A NEW BELONGING, AND MAKING THAT BELONGING FEEL GOOD."

–CONVENING DESIGNER

STRUCTURING the Flow of Activities

Six commonly used stages

THERE ARE NO HARD AND FAST RULES for how to structure the blank slate of your designer's agenda. But most well-designed gatherings are structured around a particular series of stages.* The event begins with connection, establishes a shared language, and then presents a divergent set of views on the topic. Depending on the convening's purpose, that divergence may be followed by the co-creation of new ideas, convergence on a certain set of answers, or even commitment to take action.



"A CONVENING IS A DANCE BETWEEN JOINING AND DIFFERENTIATION. PEOPLE CAN ONLY HAVE A JOINING EXPERIENCE FOR SO LONG BEFORE THEY NEED TO DIFFERENTIATE. AND, FOR THE GROUP TO KEEP DOING ITS WORK, THAT DIFFERENTIATION CAN ONLY HAPPEN FOR SO LONG BEFORE THERE NEEDS TO BE SOME JOINING."

–CONVENING DESIGNER

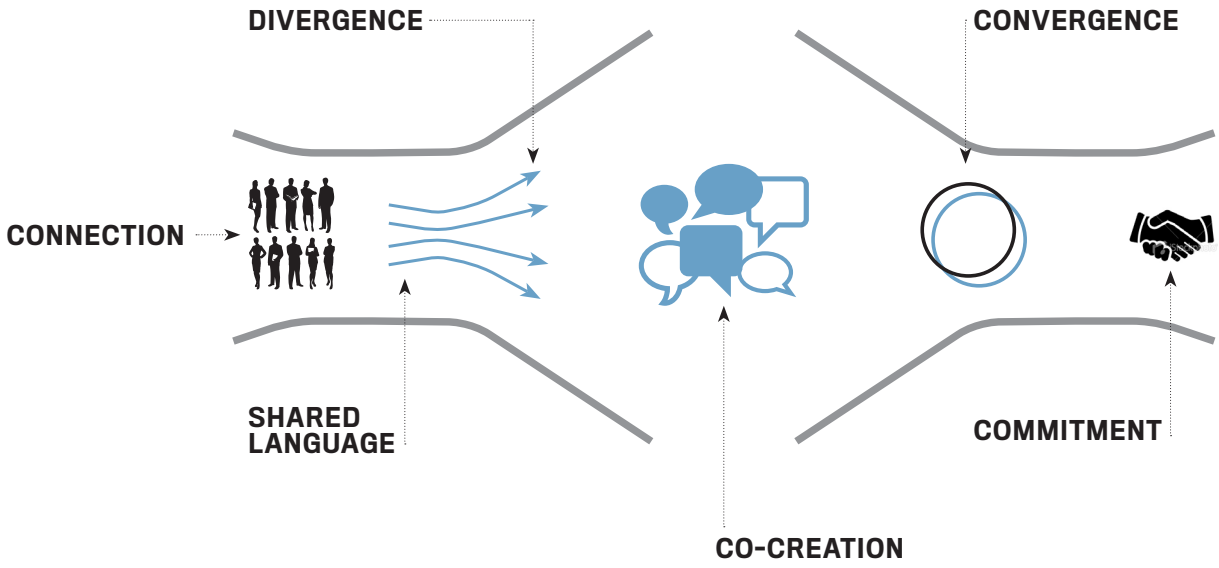
* The concept that participation leads to divergence, and that divergence can be used productively to arrive at shared understanding, was established by Sam Kaner et al. in the Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making (2007). The open-to-close framework above is based on their work.

STRUCTURING
the Flow of Activities

Connection

WHAT TO DO: Welcome participants, give them the opportunity to connect with one another on a personal level, and help them establish a sense of group identity.

WHEN IT'S IMPORTANT: Important at every convening. Spend more time here if the group has never met, there is opposition within the group, or building networks is the primary purpose.



SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

STRUCTURED GO-AROUND: Participants take turns sharing introductions (clockwise around a circle, tossing a beanbag, or popcorn-style).[1]

GROUP TIMELINE: Participants place themselves on a visual timeline of the group's previous work.[2]

NETWORK-MAPPING: Visually map the relationship connections among participants.[3]

STAND UP, SIT DOWN: Have participants stand or sit in response to questions about their background.[4]

HUMAN SPECTOGRAM: Describe two opposing perspectives that form a spectrum, and ask participants to line up along it to show where they stand.[5]

ASSET MAPPING: Participants from an existing community build mutual understanding of one another's capabilities and needs to find ways to support one another.[6]

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY: Participants interview one another about the strengths of the community or field.[7]

WORLD CAFÉ: Participants rotate among small groups to discuss the topic, building on the previous conversation and sharing the results in plenary.[8]

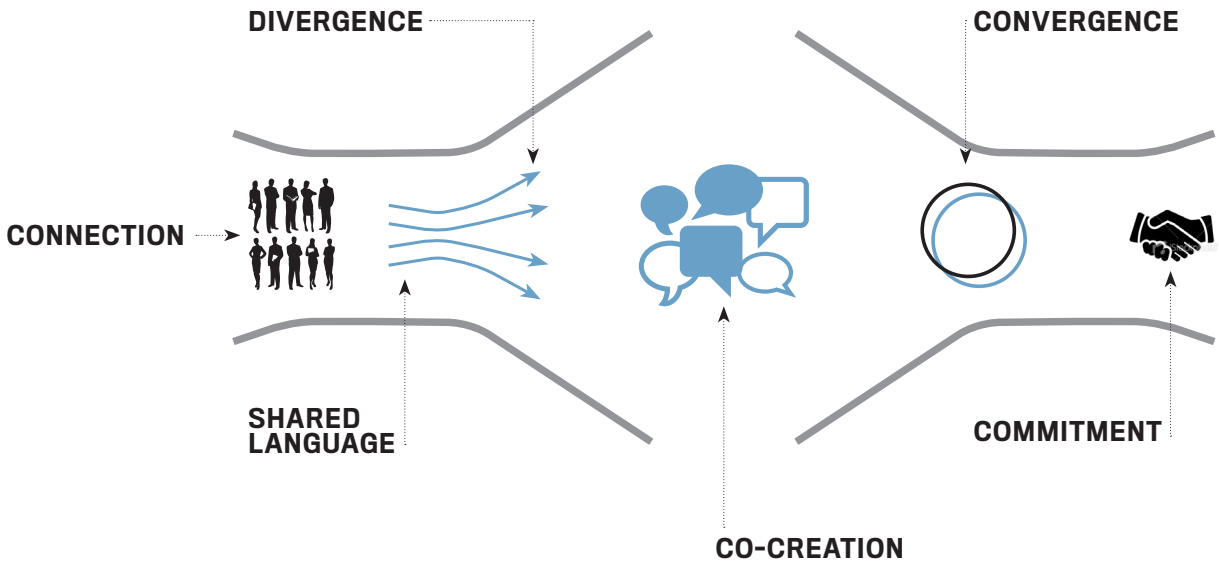
TO LEARN MORE ABOUT EACH ACTIVITY, SEE THE LIST OF RESOURCES LISTED AT THE END OF THE SECTION.

STRUCTURING
the Flow of Activities

Shared language

WHAT TO DO: Orient the group to the substance of the conversation—the state of play, relevant history, important facts, and other shared understanding that is foundational to the work.

WHEN IT'S IMPORTANT: Important at every convening. Spend more time here if participants understand the topic from very different angles, if they need to be caught up on recent changes, or if sharing learning is the primary purpose.



SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

ASSET MAPPING: (see "connection")

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY: (see "connection")

WORLD CAFÉ: (see "connection")

FACTS AND OPINIONS: Create a separate list of facts and opinions about the issue in order to get information on the table quickly.[9]

JIGSAW: Participants self-segregate into groups to discuss key themes, then re-form groups that contain at least one person from each interest group to report and reflect on their group's ideas.[10]

TRADE-SHOW PRESENTATIONS: Participants split into several groups and rotate through multiple speakers.[11]

FISHBOWL: A small group sits in a circle and converses about the topic while participants listen—or join in by moving their chair to the middle.[12]

SYSTEMS MAPPING: Gather insights on the workings of a large social system, diagram them visually, and identify key levers for creating change.[13]

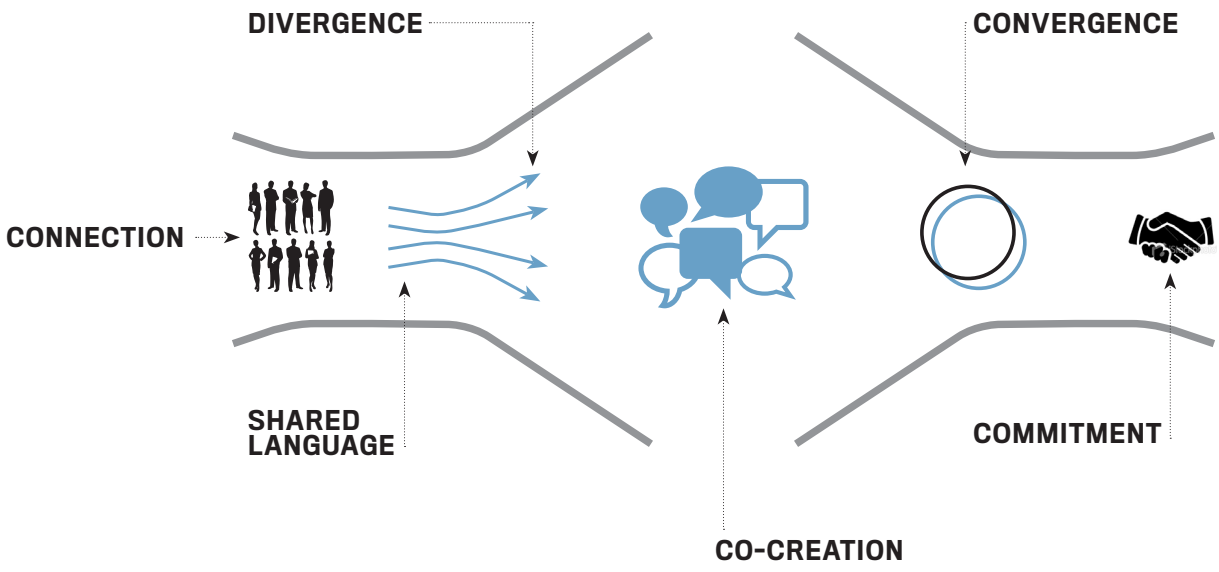
TO LEARN MORE ABOUT EACH ACTIVITY, SEE THE LIST OF RESOURCES LISTED AT THE END OF THE SECTION.

STRUCTURING
the Flow of Activities

Divergence

WHAT TO DO: Give participants the space to spell out their perspectives and identify similarities and differences among them. Also, create opportunities for participants to brainstorm expansively about the topic at hand.

WHEN IT'S IMPORTANT: Important at every convening. Spend more time here if it is important for participants to understand one another's perspectives in detail, or if sharing learning is the primary purpose.



SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

HUMAN SPECTROGRAM: (see "connection")

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY: (see "connection")

WORLD CAFÉ: (see "connection")

FACTS AND OPINIONS: (see "shared language")

JIGSAW: (see "shared language")

TRADE-SHOW PRESENTATIONS: (see "shared language")

FISHBOWL: (see "shared language")

SYSTEMS MAPPING: (see "shared language")

OPEN SPACE: Participants volunteer to lead a discussion on a topic; others join the sessions they find most interesting.[14]

BREAKOUT GROUPS: Divide participants into small groups either to work on parts of a large task or to work in parallel on the same task.[15]

RAPID PROTOTYPING: Identify pain points, generate potential solutions, and flesh them out into plans for a testable prototype.[16]

SCENARIO PLANNING: Participants contribute a range of perspectives about how the issue could evolve in the future in unexpected ways and construct narratives of the divergent possibilities.[17]

BRAINSTORMING: Generate ideas by speaking off the cuff and treating all ideas as valid, using flipcharts and post-its in various combinations.[18]

ROLEPLAYING: Some participants take on the role of key outside stakeholders and either brainstorm or provide reactions in that role.[19]

POPCORN REACTIONS: Ask the group for quick, informal reactions to something they've just heard or done, to move the conversation forward without taking the time for a longer conversation.

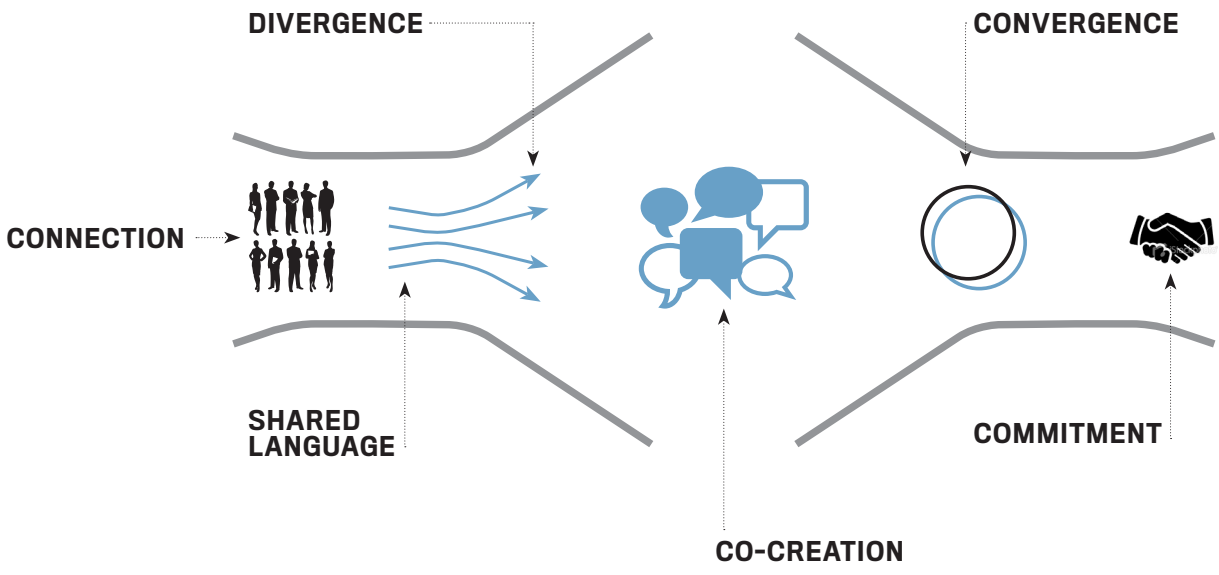
TO LEARN MORE ABOUT EACH ACTIVITY, SEE THE LIST OF RESOURCES LISTED AT THE END OF THE SECTION.

STRUCTURING
the Flow of Activities

Co-creation

WHAT TO DO: Using the group's shared language and divergent views as raw material, participants work together on one or more new outputs such as options, designs, prototypes, solutions, paths, plans, or principles.

WHEN IT'S IMPORTANT: Important at most but not all convenings, when there is a collective task for the group to accomplish. This is typically true when the primary purpose is to innovate, develop foresight, or align and act–but often not when it is to influence.



SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

BREAKOUT GROUPS: (see "divergence")

RAPID PROTOTYPING: (see "divergence")

SCENARIO PLANNING: (see "divergence")

DYNAMIC PLANNING: Participants from multiple stakeholder groups provide input into a collaborative "charrette" that develops a variety of options and refines them into to one that is mutually agreeable.[20]

SYSTEMS MAPPING: (see "shared language")

OPEN SPACE: (see "divergence")

JIGSAW: (see "shared language")

POPCORN REACTIONS: (see "divergence")

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT EACH ACTIVITY, SEE THE LIST OF RESOURCES LISTED AT THE END OF THE SECTION.

STRUCTURING
the Flow of Activities

Convergence

WHAT TO DO: Prioritize and refine what has been created and note areas of remaining divergence. Build toward a shared overall understanding of the issue and develop specific options for action.

WHEN IT'S IMPORTANT: Important at some convenings, when there is need for participants to come away with some greater degree of shared perspective. This is typically true when the primary purpose is to influence or align and act.

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

WORLD CAFÉ: (see "connection")

SYSTEMS MAPPING: (see "shared language")

ROLEPLAYING: (see "divergence")

BRAINSTORMING: (see "divergence")

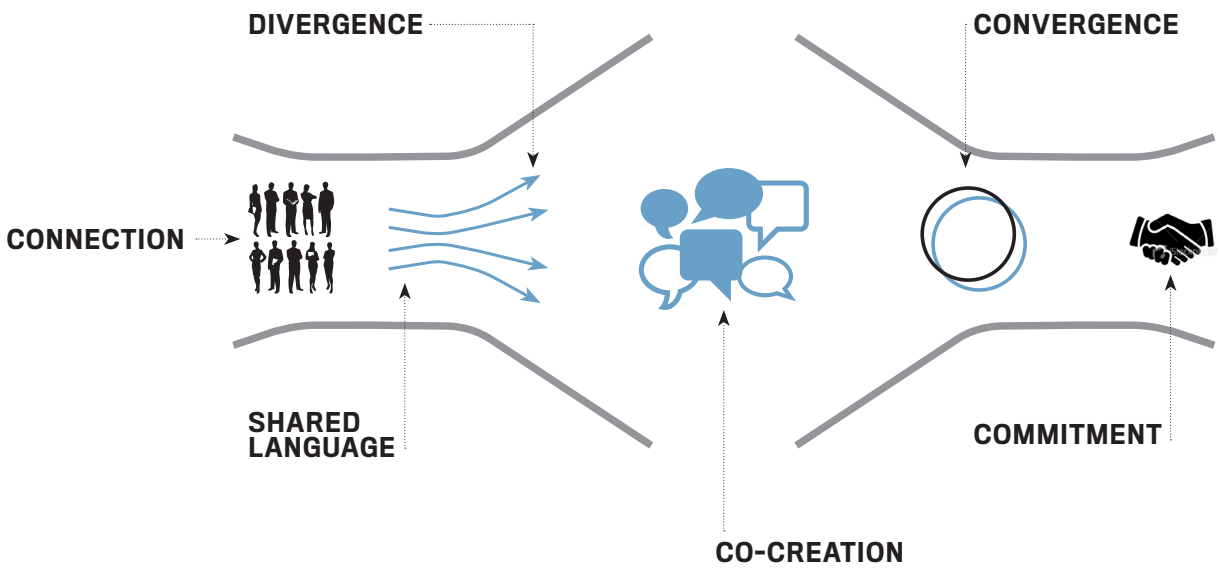
THREE HORIZONS: Generate or evaluate proposals under the headings of basic hygiene, new ideas for focused exploration, and novel experiments.[21]

BREAKOUT GROUPS: (see "divergence")

RAPID PROTOTYPING: (see "divergence")

POPCORN REACTIONS: (see "divergence")

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT EACH ACTIVITY, SEE THE LIST OF RESOURCES LISTED AT THE END OF THE SECTION.

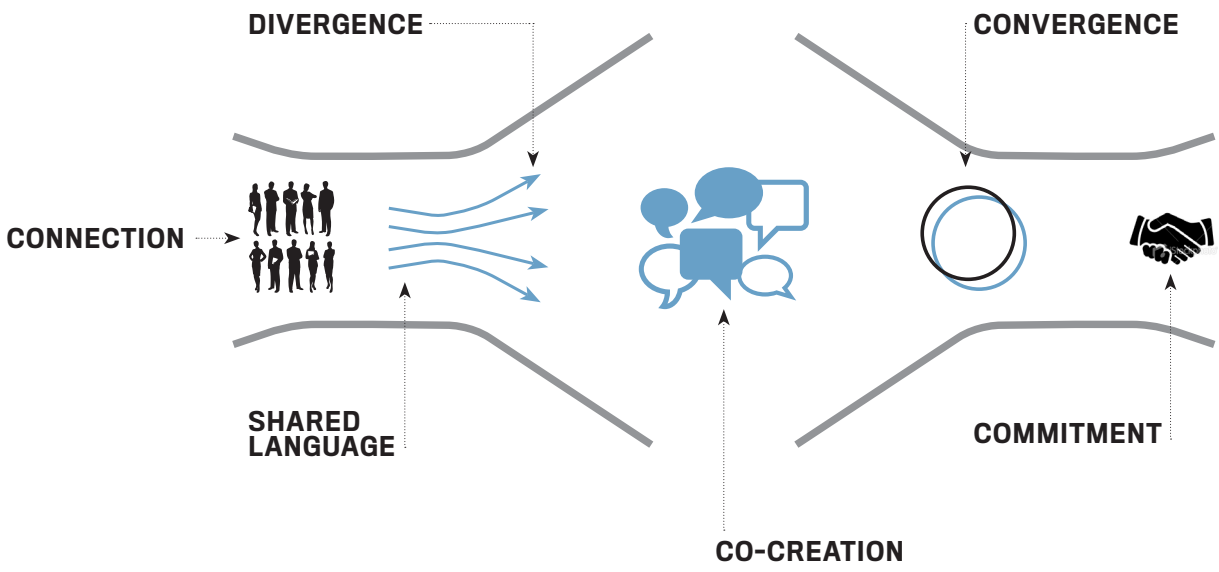


STRUCTURING
the Flow of Activities

Commitment

WHAT TO DO: Refine and finalize the options, come to the appropriate degree of alignment and closure on the issue, define next steps for participants, and choose a method of staying accountable to these goals.

WHEN IT'S IMPORTANT: Important only for convenings that require follow-up action, typically when the primary purpose is to influence or align and act.



SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

DYNAMIC PLANNING: (see "co-creation")

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION ON NEXT STEPS: Participants work independently to list ideas, create a first draft of the output, or reflect on their personal next steps.[22]

THE GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT: Give participants a numerical scale for indicating their level of agreement and use it to measure support for each idea.[23]

DEFINING GOALS AND MILESTONES: Place the goal and three to five milestones on a long sheet of butcher paper, then break into groups to list the steps required for each one.[24]

SYSTEMS MAPPING: (see "shared language")

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT EACH ACTIVITY, SEE THE LIST OF RESOURCES LISTED AT THE END OF THE SECTION.

STRUCTURING the Flow of Activities

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES: RESOURCES FOR FURTHER READING

[1] Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making. Book by Sam Kaner et al., 2007, pp. 101, 146-7.

[2] Visual Teams: Graphic Tools for Commitment, Innovation, and High Performance. Book by David Sibbet, October 2011, pp. 101-102.

[3] "How Networked Nonprofits Visualize Their Networks." *Beth's Blog*, January 25th 2011. http://www.bethkanter.org/network-mapping/.

[4] "Stand Up Sit Down." *Teampedia*. Available at http://bit.ly/rHkUQf.

[5] "Human Spectogram." *The Knowledge Sharing Toolkit.* Available at http://bit.ly/rFkmYM.

[6] "Community Summits." The Change Handbook. Book by Peggy Holman et al., 2006, pp. 365. For the original theory, see Building Communities from the Inside Out, by John Kretzmann and John McKnight, 1993.

[7] Ibid, pp. 73.

[8] For a summary, see p. 179 of The Change Handbook, a book by by Peggy Holman et al., 2006. For the original book, see The World Café, a book by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs, 2005.

[9] Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making, pp. 210.

[10] Ibid, pp. 95, 113, 149.

[11] Ibid, pp. 95, 109.

[12] Ibid, pp. 95, 111, 149.

[13] A video introduction to systems mapping from Innate Strategies is available at http://bit.ly/s025EF.

[14] Open Space Technology: A User's Guide. Book by Harrison Owen, 2008. For a summary, see page 135 of The Change Handbook, a book by Peggy Holman et al., 2006.

[15] Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making, pp. 104-5, 115, 164, 174, 178.

[16] Monitor Institute's innovation toolkit for philanthropy is available at http://bit.ly/w4Guww.

[17] What If? The Art of Scenario Thinking for Nonprofits. Book by Diana Scearce, Katherine Fulton, and the Global Business Network Community, 2004. Complete book available for download at: http://bit.ly/rDRiGz.

[18] Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making, pp. 98, 120-2, 154, 209, 214, 229.

[19] Ibid, pp. 95, 110, 215.

[20] The Change Handbook, p. 300.

[21] "Enduring Ideas: The Three Horizons of Growth." Article in *McKinsey Quarterly*, December 2009. Available at http://bit.ly/tMDmcT.

[22] Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making, pp. 95, 106, 178, 219, 228.

[23] Ibid, pp. 278.

[24] Visual Teams, pp. 101-102.

Using TEMPLATES to Guide Custom Breakout Activities

Many of the activities described above involve moving back and forth between plenary conversation

and smaller group work. These stock designs are a good place to start, but it's easy to move beyond them and develop your own custom approach. The basic tool to master is the template—a piece of printed material with instructions for the breakout group to follow and a place for them to capture what they produce. It is often possible to give breakout groups detailed enough instructions that they can self-facilitate, with the facilitator floating between groups to answer questions as needed. One of the most common formats for a template is a flipchart-sized sheet, that can be easily taped up over a flipchart pad sitting on an easel next to the table.

STARTING POINTS

- **BREAK DOWN THE PROCESS** into simple steps that the group can understand, discuss, and complete with minimal help.
- **BE REALISTIC** about the amount of time it will take the group to complete each step.
- **END THE STEPS** with clear instructions on how to report out quickly, or how to create any other form of output that you expect the group to produce. When the report-outs begin, be explicit and firm about the need for brevity.
- **FOR WORK IN SMALL GROUPS,** consider two template sizes: a flipchart template (approximately 25x30" placed on a flipchart that is mounted on an easel) or a tabletop template (placed on the table and sized to fit). Letter-sized templates can also be useful for individual activities.
- **LARGER TEMPLATES** on banner or bond paper can be useful for extended work or to capture a substantial output. These can be mounted on 4'x8' foamcore, held up with a pair of easels, or taped to the wall if one is available.
- **SIZE THE FONT** to be legible from the distance at which the template will be viewed, and leave space for large handwriting.
- **HIGH-RESOLUTION PHOTOS** are an easy way to capture the content of a filled-out flipchart.
- **TEMPLATES** can easily be combined with large sticky notes that capture multiple answers to a question, as can be seen at the top of the example to the right.

Using GRAPHIC RECORDING to Capture and Augment Conversation

"Graphic recording" is the real-time creation of illustrated high-level notes, capturing what is being said in a group so that it can be seen by everyone. Participants can better understand and retain what they hear if it is reinforced by what they can see. Some graphic recorders are also able to guide the conversation at the same time, a practice often called "visual facilitation." Graphic recording can enrich a speech or conversation by capturing the progression of key concepts and show it as a trail that is easy to take in at a glance. Because graphic recording can be used in many different ways, give thought to what you want it to accomplish, and work with your graphic recorder in advance to make sure he or she is set up for success.

Why to use it

Graphic recording can fuel and amplify participants' engagement when you want to:

- Show participants that their input was heard in real-time
- Help participants track a complicated conversation
- Maintain agreement about what was said
- Clarify a set of options or any other conceptual content in real-time
- Bridge language barriers
- Present ideas as flexible and open for discussion
- Encourage creative and systemic thinking over linear analysis
- Share with others both the key points and the emotional affect of the experience

When to use it

Graphic recording is most often useful for:

- Speakers who use few slides or whose slides have very little detail
- Panel discussions or interviews
- Q&A following a speech
- Report-outs when the group representatives will be speaking for at least a few minutes and won't have their own visuals
- Group conversations on a certain topic, particularly with many points of view

When to avoid it

Graphic recording is usually not useful for:

- Speakers using content-rich slides that contain most of their message
- The facilitator's explanations of the process
- Report-outs that are rapid-fire or where groups already have their own material to share on a flipchart
- Unstructured group conversations that jump from topic to topic

How to set up your graphic recorder for success

ONCE YOU'VE ESTABLISHED the value that you want your graphic recorder to provide, the following logistics are helpful in setting up her or him to deliver it effectively:

- Place the recorder "in the center of the action," typically at the front of the room to one side of the speaker/facilitator and viewable by participants.
- Prepare the facilitator to engage with the graphic recorder in real-time so that the capture can accurately represent the most important concepts.
- Provide at least a 4'x8' area of smooth wall space for the recorder to work, either on a wall of the room or a portable wall (e.g., a pair of easels and a 4'x8' sheet of foamcore board).
- Ensure that the recorder has ample light (ideally natural light), especially if the room is dimmed to show slides.
- Choose a venue with space to hang the recordings afterwards, ideally where people can congregate around them at breaks.
- Ask the recorder to take high-resolution photos of the recordings afterwards and send you a cleaned-up set to share with the group as part of the follow-up.

F

FOLLOWING THROUGH

ASSESSMENT

Designing a Convening

MANY CONVENINGS are part of larger efforts to change complex systems. Assessing that work is challenging because causality is hard to assign and the time horizons required for change are long. Assessing the impact of an isolated convening within a broader systems change effort is a similarly difficult proposition. Below are some guidelines for how to evaluate the effectiveness of your convening.

Short-term follow-up

- **SURVEY PARTICIPANTS** at or immediately after the event, asking questions that dig into the quality of their experience. Be as comprehensive as you can without demanding too much of their time. If the event is part of a series, keep questions constant for longitudinal comparison.
- **DEBRIEF THE PROCESS** with all the organizers in a way that is open and honest, and capture detailed notes on how to improve the process in the future, for this specific group or for convening in general.
- **FOLLOW UP PERSONALLY** with participants and key stakeholders after enough time has passed that they can see what value the convening produced for them (often two to three months after the event). A phone call will likely yield a more thoughtful response than an email.
- **PLAY BACK WHAT YOU HEAR** about the event's effectiveness, so that participants can see that you're paying close attention and learn what value it provided to others. If you're tracking longer-term indicators with a formal assessment, you may want to provide further updates as you gather more evidence of impact.

Long-term assessment

- **DRAFT** the assessment plan at the start of the work, in tandem with defining the convening purpose and intended outputs.
- **IDENTIFY** where the convening fits within a broader theory of change and plan for action.
- **ASSESS** at intervals—e.g. immediately after a convening, at two to three months, and at six months.
  - ☐ **EMPHASIZE** learning, action, and lasting change over simply the transfer of information, since convenings often plant seeds for the future.
  - ☐ **FOCUS ON** meaningful contribution toward impact, rather than attribution.
- **CAPTURE AND SHARE** what is learned, adding to institutional knowledge about holding effective convenings, as well as programmatic learning.

Common INDICATORS of Convening

DIFFERENT ASPECTS of a convening's impact can be measured at different intervals after the event. Every convening serves a different contextual purpose, so there can be no single standard, but the list below is a starting place for what indicators are often relevant.

Prior to the convening, be sure to gather data on participant expectations—what they say they want to get out of the gathering—and integrate this into your indicators of impact.

CONVENING

DURING & IMMEDIATELY AFTER

- Level of participant engagement
- Strength of community (e.g., new connections established, level of trust)
- Extent to which participants are energized and motivated to act (e.g., commitment or demonstrated willingness to take part in follow-on activities)
- Level of knowledge retained from what was communicated and discussed during the convening
- Tangibility and usefulness of outputs (e.g., a new prototype or protocol) and concreteness of next steps

2-3 MONTHS

- Levels of ongoing communication and other information flow among participants (e.g., listserv activity)
- Level of knowledge applied that was developed during the convening
- Progress made on next steps articulated at convening
- Continued work on the outputs
- Extent to which participants initiate new projects or activities inspired by convening
- Emergence of new collaborations among participants who connected at the convening

6+ MONTHS

Same as two to three months after, plus...

- Whether the convening is viewed as making an important contribution to:
- Shifts in the public discourse
- New tools or services being developed
- Stronger performance by organizations and groups working in the system
- Progress on desired field-level outcomes

FOLLOWING UP on the Convening

FOLLOW-THROUGH can take a number of forms depending on the convening's purpose. For example, if the purpose is influence there will be more focus on spreading ideas from the gathering and broadening the conversation. If the purpose is action-oriented, make sure the infrastructure is in place to enable next steps.

Enabling action

- **MAKE SMALL SEED GRANTS** quickly available for developing ideas that emerged (if you have the ability or can secure the funds).
- **PUT DEDICATED RESOURCES** in place for post-convening communication and coordination (such as part-time staff to steward an action plan) and check up on participants' progress against any commitments they made.
- **IF THE CONVENING CONCLUDES** with a set of action-oriented goals, schedule a check-in after an appropriate period of time, to provide accountability and continued support.
- **ENGAGE CONVENING PARTICIPANTS** in follow-on discussions of implementation and planning.

Maintaining engagement

- **FOLLOW UP INDIVIDUALLY** with particularly valuable participants to thank them and discuss whether they would be interested in other opportunities to engage in convenings that fit their capabilities. Maintain a database of these individuals that is shared across the organization.
- **IF THERE IS A SPECIFIC** conversation that at least a portion of the group would like to continue, a strong moderator can sustain it on an email list, bulletin board, or Facebook/LinkedIn group.
- **MANY CONVENINGS** are held in series, to engage different groups or address different aspects of an issue. If that is the case, give participants the option to stay up to date on what happens at later gatherings.

Broadening the conversation

- **IDENTIFY** already-scheduled gatherings related to the convening topic and introduce relevant ideas and actions from the convening into those conversations.
- **HOLD BRIEFINGS** for stakeholders who weren't able to attend, such as through a webinar that communicates the event's key ideas.
- **SHARE IDEAS** from the convening online and invite public comments, whether in the informal format of a blog post, a public op-ed sharing a perspective, or a longer report that builds on what was shared at the event with deeper research.

EXAMPLE of Following Through

Rallying international donors to prevent widespread famine in the Global South

Famine was threatening developing countries in 1969, with the output of their traditional farming systems predicted to fall short of the needs of their rising populations within six years. Many observers believed the situation was dire and that food aid from governments and existing institutions could not fill the gap.

The leaders of the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation saw the potential for a solution in the recent advances made by their four recently created international agricultural research centers. These centers focused on improving methods for cultivating staple crops and had found ways to increase farmers' yields. The foundations' leaders invited the heads of 15 aid agencies to convene at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio conference center, along with the head of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, and asked for their support in continuing the work.

The response was more than the two foundations had bargained for. Impressed by the research centers' achievements and galvanized by the specter of famine, the agency heads decided not only to support the existing centers but to use them as a model for establishing new centers that could broaden the search for ways to increase developing-world farm yields.

Acting on that decision required a series of follow-on gatherings. Rockefeller and Ford held a second convening of agricultural experts to develop ideas for what the new centers could study. The donors met at a third convening to settle on the final research agenda, and then a fourth gathering established the formal structure of the new network of organizations.

These conversations led to establishing a new organization, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), whose research in the following years played a central role in the "Green Revolution." While many have criticized the shortcoming of their methods, CGIAR and other actors in the Green Revolution continue to be widely credited with averting famine. The results of their work can be seen in the approximately 250 percent rise in global grain production from 1950 to 1984.

G

TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

THE COMPLETE VISION

YOU'VE EXPLORED the various building blocks of convening design. And if you've been working along with each step, you should have a fairly clear idea of what you want to accomplish. Now it's time to step back and think about how it all fits into an integrated whole.

This is the most artful of all the steps: putting it all together. You have to build a vision for the experience you want participants to have, what they will produce together, and what activities will enable them to reach that goal. No matter how objectively important your purpose or analytical the nature of the work, the power of a convening is giving participants an emotional setting where they will be inspired to contribute their best thinking.

It helps to create a list of qualities that you are aiming for in participants' overall experience.

What words do you hope participants will use when they talk about the event to their friends and colleagues? Try to pick three that are the highest priority, using the following as a starting point:

CREATIVE	DEMANDING	DIVERSE
EXCITING	INNOVATIVE	UNUSUAL
INFORMATIVE	ENLIGHTENING	CUTTING-EDGE
THOUGHT-PROVOKING	GROUNDBREAKING	PROVOCATIVE
RELAXING	MOTIVATING	INSPIRING
COLLABORATIVE	MEANINGFUL	ENGAGING
IMPORTANT	PRODUCTIVE	

WHAT WILL IT MEAN TO ACHIEVE THESE? There is no worksheet or simple series of instructions that can make this final step easy. Your initial decisions about your purpose and design stance will establish the outlines of a vision but will not fill in the details. And your designer's agenda can be the container for expressing that vision, but will be disjointed without it.

Two tools can help. A purpose-specific lens will help you reflect on how the broad guidelines above might apply in your particular situation, and a purpose-specific sample outline will paint a picture in broad brushstrokes of one way that you might choose to organize the group's time together.

FLIP TO THE FOLLOWING PAGE FOR YOUR PURPOSE-SPECIFIC DESIGN LENS AND OUTLINE:

INFLUENCE P.69

INNOVATE P.71

DEVELOP FORESIGHT P.73

ALIGN AND ACT P.75

Purpose: INFLUENCE

DESIGN LENS

IF YOUR PURPOSE IS TO INFLUENCE, you may want to consider the following additions to the general guidance we've given in the sections above.

Forming your team

- **THE FACILITATOR** and speakers must have strong credibility on the topic in the eyes of participants.
- **IF YOU ARE PRODUCING RESEARCH** or point-of-view material to share, you will need assistant designers or another appropriate team to support that work.

Building the group

- **THE MOST IMPORTANT** participants to recruit should naturally be the people whose points of view you are trying to shape. But also consider whether there are broader groups whose views you are trying to inform, and include people whose points of view are respected in those communities.
- **THE CHALLENGE IS TO DESIGN** an experience that influences but still remains exploratory and collaborative. Choose participants who are already interested in learning more about the topic and are open to forming new views, rather than those who are already deeply committed to their perspective.
- **USE SPEAKERS** to inspire and inform, not to make direct advocacy.
- **YOUR PLANNING TEAM** will easily think of hundreds of potential participants who might make valuable contributions, but ideally no convening should be larger than 80 people, so that everyone has a chance to meet and the group can hold a single conversation in plenary.
- **IF YOU'RE PROVIDING MATERIALS** ahead of time, use them as inputs into a conversation that will inform participants and raise questions on the topic without answering them, leaving space for meaningful conversation.

CONTINUED →

SAMPLE OUTLINE

Let's imagine that your purpose is to influence, and that you are gathering a group of 70 participants from a wide variety of backgrounds for one full day, to learn and share ideas about promising new approaches for addressing a social challenge of shared interest. The outline of your activities could look something like this:

CONNECTION

Have participants create a group timeline of when they started working on the issue, then flesh it out by adding recent key events.

DIVERGENCE AND SHARED LANGUAGE

Have four participants each give a 10-minute talk to share a range of differing perspectives on the nature of the challenge.

- Divide participants into groups of five to share reactions to the talks and develop questions for speakers to address.
- Come back to plenary, have a panel of speakers address the groups' questions, then take follow-up questions.

CONNECTION

- Let participants connect over a long lunch, allowing them to test their perspectives on the problem with people from different backgrounds.

CONTINUED →

DESIGN LENS (CONTINUED)

Structuring the work

- **LET PARTICIPANTS INFLUENCE** one another by designing in both structured and unstructured time for them to hear different perspectives and form new relationships.
- **SET CLEAR NORMS** for what is to be shared from the conversation. Don't invite media if open and honest dialogue is the goal, particularly if you're asking any participants to consider perspectives that are at odds with what they or their organization would currently state in public. Or, invite media but use the Chatham House Rule so that comments cannot be attributed in public. If you plan to share output from the event, be explicit about what will be included and excluded.

Following through

- **EVEN IF YOUR PURPOSE** is not to influence action, you can still assess what people learned immediately afterwards and whether they found it useful after a period of time.
- **IN ADDITION TO NAMING** what you hope to shape about participants' own understanding and views, also map out any others who you hope they will influence in turn.
- **TO THE EXTENT** that the discussion involved exploring a topic and building a point of view, make a clear promise about how that input will be used, and follow up with any updated materials that reflect it.

SAMPLE OUTLINE (CONTINUED)

DIVERGENCE AND SHARED LANGUAGE

- Repeat the morning's format for a second round, with a second small group of speakers who share promising new approaches to addressing the problem.

CONVERGENCE

- Break into small groups to allocate fictional "venture capital" to the ideas that were shared or other ideas that haven't been mentioned, and then return to plenary for each group to share the rationale for its priorities.

COMMITMENT

(not necessary)

Purpose: INNOVATE

DESIGN LENS

IF YOUR PURPOSE IS TO INNOVATE, you may want to consider the following additions to the general guidance we've given in the sections above.

Building the group

- **SPEAKERS CAN INSPIRE** the group about the potential for making advances on the issue, by sharing provocative new points of view or promising recent advances in the field.
- **NEW IDEAS** and approaches are often found by applying a concept from one specialty to an issue found in another, so participants should represent a wide range of functional expertise related to the topic.
- **THE SIZE** should be at most in the high forties, which is the largest ideal size for generative ideation where participants all have the chance to build on one another's concepts.
- **FIND A VENUE** that can be easily transformed into a hands-on workspace. Wall space, whiteboards, or at least space for flipcharts and easel-mounted foamcore are worth having, as is space for multiple breakouts.
- **A VENUE** that is in a beautiful setting and is far away from participants' offices is preferred, to inspire them and help them separate completely from their daily work.

Structuring the work

- **GIVE PEOPLE PERMISSION** to brainstorm by setting the bar for sharing a new idea to just above the floor and the bar for criticism to almost as high as you can reach.
- **NON-STANDARD FORMATS** are a must to shake people out of their daily work rhythms and encourage them to think creatively.

CONTINUED →

SAMPLE OUTLINE

Let's imagine that your purpose is to innovate, and you are gathering a group of 50 participants who are all part of an industry association. This group of people all serve similar functions in their respective organizations. They structure their work in a way that has long been commonplace across the industry, and the association has long provided a way for them to trade information and advice. The group's aim is to develop improvements that would not only work well within their own organizations but also be attractive to others across the industry, ideally worldwide. If the event produces ideas that the association's president considers promising, she has promised to dedicate resources to creating a pilot.

CONNECTION

- Have participants do stand-up/sit-downs around what they did before joining their current organization and the nature of their current role, then form a human spectogram based on how long they've been working in this function.

SHARED LANGUAGE

- Introduce the idea of innovation as a deliberate process, and explain what it takes for new ideas to spread from one organization to another.
- Share a simplified map of the commonplace workflow, created ahead of time, and check with participants for any important corrections. Then ask them to dot-vote on the stages where they see the most need for improvement. Where there are clusters, ask for volunteers to share their perspectives with the group.

CONTINUED →

DESIGN LENS (CONTINUED)

- **LEAVE TIME UNSTRUCTURED** for a substantial portion of the gathering, so that participants can develop ideas by working directly with one another.
- **FEW PEOPLE WILL BE CAUGHT** up on promising new developments across all of the areas of practice relevant to the topic. It can be helpful to provide a landscape scan ahead of the conversation—or to generate it in the room.

Following through

- **EVEN THE BEST** new ideas are easily ignored, or forgotten, so support for their further development is critical to include in your plans. Even if you are not in a position to provide seed funding, at least consider facilitating further connection among participants who developed a new concept, and share the results of any new development with the other participants.
- **THE MOST IMPORTANT** measure of success should be the quality of the new ideas created, as judged by your team and participants, and secondarily the extent to which participants develop them further.

SAMPLE OUTLINE (CONTINUED)

DIVERGENCE AND CO-CREATION

- Ask participants to form teams of up to eight people around the areas where they would like to innovate and feel they have something to offer, encouraging them to join groups with people they haven't worked with before. Give each group a prepared template that guides them through the process of zeroing in on the problem, generating potential solutions, fleshing out those ideas, and prioritizing the ones with the most promise.

CONVERGENCE

- Returning to plenary, share the ideas that each group developed, and ask participants to re-form into groups around the ideas that they consider promising enough to prototype. Using another template, guide those groups through the process of developing the idea from a concept into a comprehensive project plan. Ask them to address details such as what resources it will require, who the end users will be, how it will overcome any barriers to adoption, and how long it will take to create.

COMMITMENT

- Have each group make a case for their prototype and make a public statement about whether they would be willing and able to push it forward if it is approved for support by the president.

Purpose: DEVELOP FORESIGHT

DESIGN LENS

IF YOUR PURPOSE IS TO DEVELOP FORESIGHT, you may want to consider the following additions to the general guidance we've given in the sections above.

Building the group

- **FOR THE CONVERSATION** to break out of the conventional wisdom, participants need to represent the full range of perspectives that exist on the topic, with higher representation of unorthodox views that challenge the mainstream. Think broadly when looking for these people, as they often hold their views because they work outside of the organizations and specialties that are most commonly considered relevant. It is by including them that you can provoke discussion about what unlikely but plausible outcomes are important to consider.
- **A GOOD SIZE** range is the low thirties to high forties, so that there are enough people to represent a diversity of views but a small enough group that there can still be productive plenary discussion.

Structuring the work

- **CREATE** a safe space for open conversation by setting a norm that what is said at the event is not to be shared, especially if you're asking any participants to consider perspectives that are at odds with what they or their organization would currently state in public. If you plan to share output from the event, be explicit about what will be included and excluded.
- **SINCE THE FUTURE** can never be known with certainty, keep the conversation playful and creative, such as through the use of storytelling about future possibilities. Graphic recording can be especially valuable for capturing these stories visually.

CONTINUED →

SAMPLE OUTLINE

Let's imagine that your purpose is to develop foresight on what social challenges could emerge for a major metropolitan area over the coming 15 years, with the aim of informing the actions of both governmental and social-sector actors. You are gathering a group of 60 participants to spend two full days developing scenarios. They represent government, nonprofits, funders, business, and other key constituencies within the city.

CONNECTION AND SHARED LANGUAGE

- In groups of five, ask participants to share what brought them to the city and what keeps them there. Re-forming into new groups, ask them to take 10 minutes to list as many things as they can about what makes the city strong. Re-forming into new groups, again, ask them to list what makes the city vulnerable.

DIVERGENCE

- Ask one participant from each type of stakeholder to give a short presentation about their view of what this moment means for the city, focusing on what is changing and what remains the same. Provide ample time after each for the group to react and dig deeper.

CO-CREATION

- Split participants into groups of six to eight to generate lists of what may change over the coming 15 years and what is nearly certain to remain the same.

CONTINUED →

DESIGN LENS (CONTINUED)

- **OFFER A PRE-READING** summarizing the recent trends and the current state of play in the spaces that are relevant to the topic, to provide a common starting point for participants joining the conversation from very different backgrounds. The conversation about the current situation can then be much shorter when the group comes together.

Following through

- **STRUCTURE YOUR ASSESSMENT** around the audience you hope to influence, whether this is the leadership within an organization, leaders across a certain field, or a broader constituency.
- **THE ARBITER OF SUCCESS** for foresight work should not be its precision at pinpointing future occurrences, but rather its ability to productively inform the choices of your target audience, even if specific details turn out differently. The highest value that foresight can provide is not prediction but the surfacing of important new possibilities to consider.
- **IN THE NEAR TERM,** ask the target audience whether they found the foresight work informative and relevant for their work. Then, after half of the timeframe for the foresight has passed, check back and see whether the audience still feels the same.

SAMPLE OUTLINE (CONTINUED)

Give each group a set of cards with previously researched suggestions for each category, and ask them to use them as a starting place for creating a prioritized list of the most important items of each type.

- Coming back to plenary, compare lists, combine duplicates, and dot-vote to arrive at a final list of the most important things that may change or stay the same.

CONVERGENCE

- Provide ample time for the group to digest this in person-to-person conversations, then come back to create scenarios. Ask for volunteers to propose different visions for the future of the city that they would like to develop, and have participants join the team that interests them most. Have each team develop a story about what could happen to the city over 15 years, incorporating the key variables that the group identified, and share that story with the full group.
- Splitting back into groups around the new scenarios, with each person working on a different scenario than they created, have participants develop a set of implications for the different stakeholder groups. Ask each group to arrive at a clear list of recommendations for each stakeholder group, and then re-form the groups a second time to allow participants to work on one additional scenario.

COMMITMENT

- Ask each of the people in positions of substantial power or influence to share their reactions to the scenarios, and (if they're comfortable) to outline how the work has changed their view of where to focus their organization's efforts.

Purpose: ALIGN AND ACT

DESIGN LENS

IF YOUR PURPOSE IS TO ALIGN AND ACT, you may want to consider the following additions to the general guidance we've given in the sections above.

Forming your team

- **IF AT ALL POSSIBLE,** the facilitator should be a person who participants already respect as a leader within the group, and who has a history with the group that puts them in a strong position to call for collaborative effort.

Building the group

- **SINCE THE GOAL** is to have this group agree to take some degree of action together, it will need to include people who are already close to that point. This means avoiding any divisions around relative status or perspectives on the topic that are too deep to resolve in the course of the gathering.
- **IN MOST CASES** there is a specific group that needs to take collective action. Decide who those key participants are and stick to that list. If you can't get the right group together, don't substitute others who are less relevant for the sake of having the event.
- **MAKE SURE** that the people who come are in a position to take the kind of action you're hoping for, not deputies who will have to convince their bosses.
- **THE MORE OF A STRETCH** it will be for participants to take action, the smaller the group should be. If your goal is for the group to take a significant new step together, your total number should probably be in the teens to low twenties.

Structuring the work

- **INVEST IN CREATING** a sense of ownership over the process among participants, making it clear that they are being treated as equals.

CONTINUED →

SAMPLE OUTLINE

Let's imagine that your purpose is to gather a group of 25 director-level organizational leaders, each of whom is doing very similar work but on different issues, to spend a day exploring whether they have enough in common to spend time sharing information and (over time) align their strategies. You've selected the group carefully to include people who are likely to respect one another's work and inclined to collaborate well in a group setting. Many in the group know each other by reputation but not personally. To kick-start the networking process, you take the time to interview each of them about their point of view and compile a briefing book that includes those interviews alongside their bios and a description of their current work.

CONNECTION

- Provide the briefing book a week in advance, and bring participants together for a group dinner the night before.

SHARED LANGUAGE

- After briefly introducing to the reason for the gathering, interview a speaker who you've selected for her prominence in doing the same type of work as other participants. Guide the speaker through a set of topics that you selected based on what you know about participants' interests from the interviews, drawing out what problems she has solved and the tools that she used.

CONTINUED →

DESIGN LENS (CONTINUED)

- **SET ASIDE** substantial unstructured time for participants to discover and discuss ways of working together one on one, which will build their readiness to join a collective effort.
- **KEEP THE DESIGNER'S AGENDA** loose, have several backup plans, and make sure the facilitator (if it is not yourself) is ready to reshape the activities in order to help the group make progress.
- **PUT THE PROBLEM "IN THE CENTER"** by focusing the conversation on the nature of the issue at stake, so that participants build a shared perspective on the structure of the problem that they can then use as the foundation for finding a new set of solutions. This process can begin ahead of time through interviews, surveys, and even systems mapping.

Following through

- **STRUCTURE YOUR FOLLOW-UP** work to support whatever specific action participants have agreed to take at the close of the event. You can usually anticipate the range of outcomes but not the exact landing point.
- **WHILE IT IS TEMPTING,** avoid placing yourself in an enforcer-like role for participants' commitments—instead, hold them accountable to one another by creating forums where progress and setbacks are visible.
- **TO THE EXTENT** that participants have agreed to any continued engagement as a group, show immediate support for moving the work forward—by acting as (or providing) the technical backbone, hosting future gatherings, or providing a network weaver.

SAMPLE OUTLINE (CONTINUED)

DIVERGENCE AND CO-CREATION

- Split participants into two to three groups around topics that you know from the interviews are on their minds, allowing them to choose the one that interests them most. Lead one discussion yourself and use co-facilitators to lead the others, encouraging the speakers to join the tables and take an active role. Let participants drive the conversations, encouraging them to share what they find challenging about that facet of their work and what tools or approaches they've found particularly powerful.
- Use a similar format for a second round: do a second speaker interview over lunch, then hold an open space, asking participants to propose discussions they would like to lead and breaking into groups according to interest.

CONVERGENCE

- Close with a final interview and then a simple plus/delta about the day, providing space for any energy for further collaboration to emerge but not demanding it if it does not.

COMMITMENT

- In a survey after the event, ask participants whether they would be interested in another gathering, and in how much time.

APPENDIX

GLOSSARY

CO-CREATION: Creating something collaboratively as a group, often the central work of a convening.

CONVENING: A gathering that brings together a diverse group of participants for a clear purpose and generates insights or action beyond what any single participant could achieve on his/her own.

CONVERGENCE: Moving from many ideas toward greater alignment of perspectives on the issues being discussed.

DIVERGENCE: Putting multiple ideas, possibilities, and questions on the table as input to participants' dialogue and co-creative work.

FACILITATOR: The person who guides participants through a set of interactions that will help them achieve their shared goals.

GRAPHIC RECORDING: Capturing the critical concepts and remarks from a dialogue in real-time using an artful combination of images and words.

HASHTAG: A short word inserted into a tweet that starts with a pound sign, such as "#rockfound," used to identify that tweet as being related to a certain topic, organization, or event.

LIVE-BLOG: Covering an event in real-time using short blog posts that describe what happened and offer play-by-play commentary.

LIVE-TWEET: Covering an event in real-time using tweets that capture key quotes, ideas, and reflections from the dialogue.

LIVE-STREAM: Broadcasting live audio and/or video of an event over the web to either the public or a selected audience.

NETWORK MINDSET: Exercising leadership in a way that prioritizes openness, transparency, making connections, and sharing control.

STAKEHOLDER: In the context of a choice being made, a person, group, or institution that could be affected and whose interests should therefore be considered.

TEMPLATE: A big piece of paper (often the size of a table top) that serves as a worksheet for guiding conversation in small breakout groups and capturing their output.

RESOURCES
An Annotated Bibliography

GENERAL RESOURCES

The Art of Convening.
Book by Craig and Patricia Neal, February 2011. Provides in-depth guidance to the convener on how to attend to the overall emotional and psychological subtleties of participants' experience—before, during, and after the event.

The Back of the Napkin.
Book by Dan Roam, March 2008. How to think and problem-solve using simple sketches.

Building Communities from the Inside Out.
Book by John Kretzmann and John McKnight, 1993. Explains the theory of asset-based community development: that convening and other forms of network-weaving can help communities support themselves through mutual aid.

Catalyzing Networks for Social Change: A Funder's Guide.
Report by Monitor Institute and Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, October 2011. Describes the work that funders are doing to catalyze networks and to create new opportunities for harnessing network potential, in which convenings play an integral part.

The Change Handbook.
Book by Peggy Holman et al., 2006. More than 60 tools for facilitating group process for a wide range of goals, many of which span a full convening. Includes the key methods of appreciative inquiry, community summits, dynamic planning, open space, scenario planning, and world café.

The Graphic Facilitator's Guide.
Book by Brandy Agerbeck, 2012. A set of 25 guiding principles for becoming a more visual facilitator.

The Handbook of Large Group Methods.
Book by Barbara Bunker and Benedict Alban, June 2006. Methods for facilitating interactive conversation in groups of hundreds or thousands, illustrated with in-depth case studies.

Interaction Associates.
Instructors in facilitation tradecraft, who offer both public seminars and private training sessions. Website: http://www.interactionassociates.com.

International Association of Facilitators.
The IAF offers a public Methods Database at http://www.iaf-methods.org/methods, which contains more than 500 user-contributed group process methods. It also offers a limited directory of facilitators who hold IAF certification at http://bit.ly/vAeAob. However, note that this and any other directory should be used as a supplement to trusted recommendations.

International Forum of Visual Practitioners.
A global community of graphic recorders and other types of visual practitioners, including a directory for finding one nearby. Website: http://ifvp.org/.

Kantor Institute.
Trainers and consultants in a unique and powerful method for overcoming the most challenging group dynamics. Website: http://www.kantorinstitute.com.

Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change.
Book by Adam Kahane, January 2010. Reflections from a veteran practitioner of multi-stakeholder dialogue, arguing that achieving change requires harnessing and balancing the positive sides of two drives: the drive for power (progress) and the drive for love (unity).

RESOURCES
An Annotated Bibliography

Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future.
Book by Peter Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers, 2004. A philosophy and methodology for (re)connecting any shared project to its deeper underlying role in social progress, and for mapping the areas where progress is most needed.

Visual Teams: Graphic Tools for Commitment, Innovation, and High Performance.
Book by David Sibbet, October 2011. Instructions on the use of graphic recording and visual facilitation for high-productivity teamwork, written by the field's pioneer.

PROCESS TOOLS

A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life.
Book by Parker Palmer, June 2009. Describes the use of "circles of trust" where open sharing in an uncritical setting is used to lay the foundation for finding the way forward in difficult situations.

Enduring Ideas: The Three Horizons of Growth.
Article in McKinsey Quarterly, December 2009. Available at http://bit.ly/tMDmcT. Describes the concept of separating a group's proposals between current work, emerging possibilities, and white-space experiments, so that each can be handled accordingly.

Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making.
Book by Sam Kaner et al., 2007. Describes the overall process stages from divergence to convergence, with specific process tools and facilitation tips for guiding each stage, along with additional guidance on the craft of facilitation.

How Networked Nonprofits Visualize Their Networks.
Blog post on Beth's Blog, January 25th 2011. Available at http://bit.ly/u3oM0i. Provides a basic introduction to the tools and process of network mapping, both inside and outside of a convening.

Human Spectogram.
Page from The Knowledge Sharing Toolkit. Available at http://bit.ly/rFkmYM. Instructions on how to use this opening exercise.

Introduction to Systems Mapping.
Video by Innate Strategies. Available at http://bit.ly/sO25EF. A brief step-by-step overview of what systems mapping is, the process it requires, and the ways it can be used.

Open Space Technology: A User's Guide.
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