

GUIDE TO THE WORLD CAFÉ METHOD

World Café in Action¹



OVERVIEW OF THE WORLD CAFÉ

What is a World Café?

The World Café method is designed to create a safe, welcoming environment in which to intentionally connect multiple ideas and perspectives on a topic by engaging participants in several rounds of small-group conversation.

When should I use this method?

The World Café method is particularly useful when you want to be sure to explore a topic from multiple perspectives, to ensure that everyone in a room contributes in a conversation, and/or when you want to encourage participants to make new connections. The method can also be useful for gathering information from grantees and beneficiaries at the community level.

How can a World Café support systems thinking and practice?

- ✓ Context
 - Explore how contextual factors (e.g., key social, economic, political, and cultural factors) influence a topic or goal (and each other).
- ✓ Connections
 - Encourage participants to make new connections.
 - Strengthen relationships and build trust among participants.

¹ Source: <http://www.theworldcafe.com/2008/06/>

- Break old thought patterns; catalyze new ideas and thinking.
- Identify areas of common interest, concern, or excitement.
- ✓ Patterns
 - Determine where the energy is in the system and where there are gaps or blockages.
 - Understand how policies, structures, or social/cultural norms are changing.
 - Understand the relationships between outputs/outcomes and external factors.
- Explore a topic or issue from multiple diverse perspectives.
- Ensure equal footing among participant voices.
- ✓ Perspectives
 - Understand partners' and other stakeholders' perspectives on the topic or goal (e.g., why it matters).
 - Understand beneficiary experiences of the topic.
 - Identify partners' and stakeholders' learning priorities.

WORLD CAFÉ, PART ONE: FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT

1. Is a World Café right for your project?

Considerations	Use World Café	Don't Use World Café
Objective	✓ You want to explore a clearly articulated topic, question, or set of questions.	✗ You need to agree or decide by the end of the discussion.
Credible informants	✓ Participants are familiar with the topic selected for the mapping activity and the organization's or initiative's work related to it.	✗ Participants cannot credibly speak to both the topic and/or the organization or initiative's work in that area.
Level of facilitation needed	✓ Minimal level of facilitation required to generate conversation and insight from participants.	✗ The topic or question requires skilled facilitation to get participants to contribute their thoughts.
Group size	✓ You have a large group (more than 15–20 people).	✗ You expect a small gathering (fewer than 15–20 people).
Room setup	✓ Tables and chairs can be moved to create 4-top tables, allowing participants to sit knee-to-knee.	✗ Furniture is not flexible. ✗ There is not enough space for small group conversations.

The Beauty — and the Specificity — of the World Café Method²

“The Innovative design of the World Café enables groups – often numbering in the hundreds of people – to participate together in evolving rounds of dialogue... while at the same time remaining part of a single, larger, connected conversation.”

It’s important to understand that hosting a World Café is not the same thing as facilitating break-out groups. As you will see in the facilitation guide below, a properly facilitated World Café is about more than just enabling a discussion among a subset of people in a larger group. Some core features of a World Café are:

- **A feeling of welcoming.** *“Attention is paid to creating a hospitable space... Café facilitators are true hosts – creating a spirit of welcome that is missing from most of our processes.”*
- **Diversity.** *“How can we create an accurate picture of the whole if we don’t honor the fact that we each see something different because of who we are and where we sit in the system?”*
- **Movement.** *“In the World Café process, people generally move... As we move, we leave behind our roles, our preconceptions, our certainty... and become bigger.”*

Proper etiquette for a World Café conversation includes:

- Speak with your mind... and heart
- Play, draw, and doodle
- Focus on what matters
- ... and more!

Additional information about World Café etiquette may be found on the World Café website, www.theworldcafe.com.

2. What do I need to properly facilitate a World Café?

A World Café session can last from 90 minutes to 2.5 hours, depending on the number of rounds of conversation desired. Preparation requirements are outlined below.

	Description
Participant prep time	No prep required for participants
Facilitator prep time	3–4 hours
Facilitator prep work	Set up the activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Determine the topic for the World Café.• Identify the question(s) that participants will be asked to answer.
Required materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilitation agenda and talking points• 3–4 large sheets of paper for every table• Markers, crayons, and pens in multiple colors for every table• Flip chart and markers

² Brown, J., Isaacs, D., and the World Café Community. *The World Café: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005.

WORLD CAFÉ, PART TWO: PREP³

Prep steps:

- **Develop discussion questions.** You can use a World Café to explore a single important question from multiple perspectives (i.e., by having multiple rounds of conversation on the same question), or you can structure the process to include several questions on a given topic (i.e., by having multiple questions throughout the World Café). Determining which approach you will use is the first step in preparing for the World Café.
 - If using multiple questions, you will need to (a) determine how many rounds of conversation you would like to have and (b) how many rounds will feature new questions (as opposed to giving participants the opportunity to discuss the same question more than once with different people).
- **Invite participants** whose perspectives on the chosen topic are desirable. Participants need not prepare in advance of the session.
- **Identify and invite select participants to serve as “hosts.”** In a World Café, each table has a “host” who remains at their table through the entire exercise. The host’s role is to welcome participants to the table, provide an overview of the discussion question, and summarize key ideas shared by previous guests at the table. At the end of the exercise, the host is responsible for sharing a summary of the discussion points from his or her table.
- **Set the table.** *A hallmark of the World Café method is its emphasis on creating a safe and welcoming environment for discussion. Facilitators should plan to spend more time than usual on room setup when using this method.*
 - Choose a room that is large enough to allow all participants to move freely. Arrange the room so that it includes one table per small group, each with four chairs. (If tables and chairs are not movable, it’s okay for people to gather closely, sitting knee-to-knee.)
 - At the front of the room, provide a large flipchart or whiteboard and markers in several colors. Write out the discussion questions, one per page, on the flipchart. (See below for guidance on developing discussion questions.)
 - Set each table to mimic a café environment (consider using tablecloths and vases of flowers).
- Assign each table a question. (Refer to the prep instructions above; depending on the number of questions and tables you have, each table could discuss a different question, or multiple tables could discuss the same question.)
- At each table, provide several large sheets of butcher paper and markers or crayons in multiple colors.

³ This World Café guide was created based on the following resource: <http://www.theworldcafe.com>

WORLD CAFÉ, PART 3: FACILITATION STEPS AND SUGGESTED TIMING

Design Notes

A World Café is most effective when each small group includes four people; however, the total number of participants can vary significantly, as long as they can all be seated in one room for their small group conversations.⁴

Note that each round of small group conversation on a new topic is 20–25 minutes. (If the World Café is structured to focus on just one question, the time can be reduced in each round, for example, by starting with a 25-minute discussion, then 20 minutes, then 15 minutes.) Regardless of whether the group focuses on one or more questions, we recommend at least three rounds of discussion. Multiple rounds allow participants to dig deeply into the question and generate substantive comments and insights on the topic. Depending on how many rounds of conversation you wish to have, sessions can range from 90 minutes (for three rounds of discussion and report-outs to the large group) to 2.5 hours (for four or five rounds of discussion and report-outs).

A World Café session can last from 90 minutes to 2.5 hours, depending on the number of rounds of conversation desired.

1. Introduction (10 minutes)

- Begin by sharing a brief introduction to the World Café method and the purpose of the present conversations. Be sure to highlight what makes World Café different from typical breakout sessions.

2. Small Group Discussions (20 minutes per round, plus 2–3 minutes for re-settling)

- Instruct each table to begin the first round of conversation. Be sure to remind participants of the following:
 - Timing of the conversation
 - Props available (e.g., markers, large pieces of butcher paper)
 - Role of the host
 - Question(s) for discussion
- Note that table hosts are sometimes given a 4-by-6-inch index card and asked to take notes on the conversations.
- At the end of each round of small group conversations, ask all participants except the host to move to new tables. Participants at one table should not all move to the next table together — instead, they should spread out, so that ideas spread around the room. The host should remain at his or her table to share insights from the first conversation with the next group.
- At the end of the final round, call everyone’s attention together for a full group report-out.

⁴ If the group does not evenly divide into fours, it is okay to have a couple tables of three.

3. Report-out

Note: There is no strict rule regarding the number of large-group report-outs that are included in a World Café discussion. The number of report-outs will depend on several factors, including the number of unique questions posed, the relevance or importance of large group discussion, and the time available for the session. For example, you may wish to pause for a report-out after each round of conversation, or you may wish to hold just one report-out at the end of the World Café.

- For each report-out, begin by asking participants to silently reflect on their small group conversation(s) for 2-3 minutes.
- Following this reflection period, invite each table host to share a few (often two to three) ideas, insights, or other responses to the guiding question(s) with the large group. (Additional participants may contribute to this report-out, as appropriate.)
- Record the room's responses to the guiding question(s) at the front of the room, using a whiteboard, flipchart, or graphic facilitation board. Try to group responses together as appropriate, highlighting patterns, key topics, and insights.

NEXT STEPS

At the conclusion of the World Café session, consider providing participants with a clear overview of next steps. For example, you may wish to share how the insights from the session will be used within the organization or initiative, or whether the transcribed comments will be shared with participants. Consider converting the comments from the session into a brief memo of insights, observations, and questions for consideration.

RESOURCE: WORLD CAFÉ ETIQUETTE POSTER

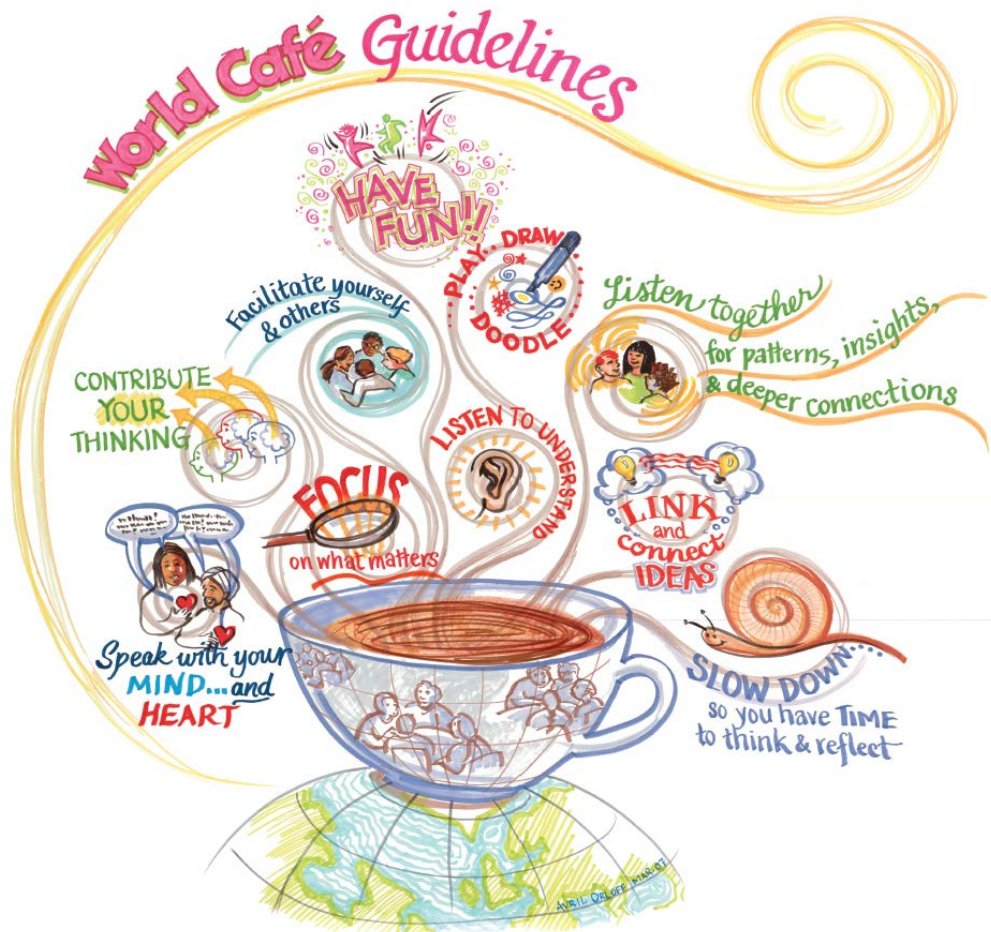


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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [The World Café: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter](#). (2005) Juanita Brown, David Isaacs, and the World Café Community.
- [World café hosting toolkit](#). Curated by The World Café, this link contains an online suite of resources for those interested in conducting a World Café exercise.
- [Building Corporations as Communities: Merging the Best of Two Worlds](#). (1994) Juanita Brown and David Isaacs. From *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, Peter Senge, et al.
- [The Knowledge Sharing Toolkit](#). Collection of growing resources curated by CGIAR, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the KM4Dev Community, the United Nations Children's Fund, and the United Nations Development Programme.
- <http://www.theworldcafecommunity.org/forum/categories/storynet-1/listForCategory>



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