

How Can We Design and Facilitate for Hospitality

by Jeanette Romkema

To feel a sense of belonging is important because it will lead us from conversations about safety and comfort to other conversations, such as our relatedness and willingness to provide hospitality and generosity. Hospitality is the welcoming of strangers, and generosity is an offer with no expectation of return. These are two elements that we want to nurture as we work to create, strengthen, and restore our communities. This will not occur in a culture dominated by isolation, and its correlate, fear.

Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (2009), p3

Ten graduate students from [Wycliffe College](#) in Toronto created the list below of ways to build hospitality in courses, workshops, conferences, and meetings. Indeed there is much we can do to create a sense of community and connectedness, and grow a sense of belonging in our learning events.



The Space and Place

- Arrange the furniture to help people connect easily with each other and the content
- Bring flowers and/or plants in the room
- Orient the room for warmth, comfort and learning
- Have snacks and drinks in the room
- Buy snacks with the uniqueness of the group in mind
- Open the curtains and let the natural light in
- Cover tables with colourful table clothes
- Remove unnecessary clutter from the room i.e. extra furniture
- Strip the walls of distracting visuals and items
- Have a welcome sign outside the room, welcoming people in

- Set up a variety of seating areas for people to use during breaks.

The Facilitation

- Warmly welcome people as they arrived
- Smile!
- Set ground rules that help ensure safety and respect
- Use the language of your audience
- Listen for cues and be flexible to respond
- Connect authentically to people before, during and after the event
- Call people by name
- Affirm all stories, questions and ideas shared
- Be genuinely curious about what the group has to offer
- Listen deeply
- Speak authentically.

The Learning Design

- Give people choice in how to engage, where to sit, etc.
- Use a diversity of learning tasks to invite all types of learners in
- Ensure all voices are invited in and heard
- Check in with the group from time to time re: energy, pace, etc.
- Include a warm welcome in the learning design and/or printed material for learners.

A Few More Ideas

- Give people clear instructions to the venue
- Welcome people in advance and invite their input
- If learners are new to the city, have maps and restaurant ideas on hand for them to take with them
- Arrange child care, if needed
- Have the room and all resources ready when people arrive, so you can focus on welcoming each person
- Chat with people during the breaks
- Have name tags so everyone can use names.

What ideas can you add to this list?