

Tips for Harvesting Input

When you are organizing a roundtable event, multi-party stakeholder meeting, or Executive Team session to share and review data, you need to have a plan to collect the input. Time and space have been made to consider how data will inform action, and you want to ensure the ideas, steps or plans are not lost.

Here are three (3) techniques to consider:

1. **World Café.** This is a tried and tested approach for idea sharing. Although it is often used with large groups, it can be extremely helpful in groups as small as six. The simplest way to use this technique is to divide everyone into equal table groups, and then give each group different data or information and an open question to engage with. The idea is that each group digs deeper with a different question and the data. Each table needs a supply of large paper and dark markers to record the input.



After enough time is given to engage with the question, everyone gets up and moves together and in the same direction to another table. These rotations continue until everyone has been at each table, allowing for the conversation to deepen with each iteration. A final debrief is important and time to review everyone's work is helpful. [See www.worldcafe.com](http://www.worldcafe.com) for a fuller description – of course this technique can be adapted to serve your purpose.

Harvest: the ideas written on flip chart paper at each table

2. **Gallery Walk.** This is a technique for sharing work or data. Whether ideas have been shared using World Café or table work, the input has been written or drawn and is now posted on the walls in the room. The invitation is for everyone to get up and walk around the room (with others or solo) to review and consider what is offered there. Usually the group is given a question or two to discuss or consider as they walk. Sometimes more ideas are offered, sometimes connections are made and recorded at each station. Data can also be shared in this way with a question posted to invite dialogue or input.

Harvest: the ideas posted on paper on the wall

3. **Affinity Grouping.** This technique is one way for people to make order out of a divergent set of ideas. Typically, people are invited to brainstorm in silence and standing together as many ideas as they have for 10 minutes. Then, they post all their ideas on a flip chart or wall (depending on the number of ideas and people) and arrange them through dialogue. As they do this, themes will emerge, and they group/cluster the ideas. Once they have their groupings, together they decide on a title for each and write them at the top of each.

Harvest: the groups of ideas posted and titled on paper

Sometimes it is helpful to start the thinking before digging deep into the data. Or you may want to summarize the recommendations and the positive impact you imagine it will have. This is also worth harvesting/collecting. Here are two (2) ways to do this:

1. **Synthesis statement.** Invite everyone to take some time to reflect on all that was shared or accomplished. Then, invite them to synthesize their thoughts into one sentence.

Example: “Write a sentence that synthesizes the most important lesson for us in the data we engaged with today. We will hear everyone’s wisdom before moving to name next steps.”

2. **Drawing.** Sometimes the best way to respond to data is to *draw it out*. Not everyone feels equally comfortable with this technique. However, if presented carefully, accessing a different part of our brain in order to uncover new ideas and thoughts can be helpful.

Example: [Here](#) is an example of how you can start with a drawing to share how people see themselves today, then data can be shared and can alter that image. A follow-up question may be: “How may your drawing change in 2 years if we do nothing to change ____? What may we need to do right away to prevent this from happening?” [Here](#) is a second example.

Design a meaningful session to engage your participants with the data you want to present, offer everything people need to engage thoughtfully and deeply, host the space to ensure everyone feels respected and included, offer clear instructions to generate the desired input, and collect this input in easy ways. What you collect should be used to write a report or action plan, and be a tool for further action, as needed.

Direct recording of what is shared is key. Insert snap shots of the drawings made, images selected and word maps created. Transcribe the word-for-word written documents, notes and Post-it notes. The hard work and magic is in the dialogue and work people do together. Don’t be caught without an exact record.