

# World Café Planning Guide

The Yolo Family Strengthening Network (YFSN) Café Subcommittee put this Café Planning Guide together to help lead you through the process of planning a Café. We used the 7 Design Principles of the World Café model to organize this document. Information in this guide is drawn from two sources:

- **The *Café to Go Guide: A Quick Reference Guide for Hosting World Cafés*, which you can find at the following website:**  
<http://www.theworldcafe.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Cafe-To-Go-Revised.pdf>
- ***The World Café: Shaping Our Futures through Conversations that Matter*  
By Juanita Brown with David Isaacs and the World Café Community**

## Introduction

Conducting an exciting World Café Conversation is not hard—it's limited only by your imagination! The World Café format is flexible and adapts to many different circumstances. When these design principles are used together they foster collaborative dialogue, active engagement, and constructive possibilities for action.

## 7 Design Principles – An Overview

The seven design principles of the World Café model are as follows:

- 1) Set the Context
- 2) Create a Hospitable Space
- 3) Explore Questions that Matter
- 4) Encourage Everyone's Contribution
- 5) Connect Diverse Perspectives
- 6) Listen Together for Patterns and Insights
- 7) Share Collective Discoveries

We will explore these seven principles in more depth on the following pages.

If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact:

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**Before you plan a World Café, you need to decide if a World Café Gathering is appropriate for your situation.**

**World Café conversations are especially useful for these purposes and in these circumstances:**

- For sharing knowledge, stimulating innovative thinking, building community, and exploring possibilities around real-life issues and questions.
- For conducting an in-depth exploration of key challenges and opportunities.
- For engaging people who are meeting for the first time in authentic conversation.
- For deepening relationships and mutual ownership of outcomes in an existing group.
- For creating a meaningful interaction between a speaker and the audience.
- When the group is larger than 12 and you want each person to have the opportunity to contribute.
- When you have a minimum of 90 minutes (2 hours is much better). Some Cafés have spanned several days or become part of a regular meeting infrastructure.

**World Café Conversations are not an optimal choice under these circumstances:**

- You are driving toward an already determined solution or answer.
- You want to convey only one-way information.
- You are making detailed implementation plans and assignments.
- You have less than 90 minutes for the Café.
- You are working with a highly polarized, explosive situation (e.g., current politics). Hosting a World Café in this setting requires highly skilled facilitation.
- You have a group smaller than 12. In that case, consider a traditional dialogue circle, council, or other approach to fostering authentic conversation.

## 1) Set the Context

Setting the context is one of the most intense and challenging parts of the planning process, but if you spend time and energy on this step, the investment will be well worth it. The rest of the planning process will be easier if you and your planning team are clear on all of the components of this Design Principle.

### Planning Considerations

- **Purpose**
  - What is the purpose of your Café?
    - Why are you bringing people together? What do you want to achieve? What need (or needs) will this conversation fulfill?
    - What do you hope participants will get out of your Café?
    - If your Café is for parents, which of the following protective factors does it support?
      - Parental Resilience
      - Social Connections
      - Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
      - Concrete Support in Times of Need
      - Social and Emotional Competence of Children
  - What themes or questions will be most pertinent?
  - Who should be part of the Café planning team?
  - What should the name of the Café be? It should be appropriate to its purpose (e.g., Leadership Café; Knowledge Café; Strategy Café; Discovery Café; Café for Parents)
- **Participants**
  - Who should participate in your Café?
  - Who else do you want to join this conversation to help you achieve your purpose?
- **Parameters**
  - What is your budget?
  - How long should your Café be? (It is recommended that Cafés be at least 90 minutes.)

## 2) Create Hospitable Space

Café hosts around the world emphasize the power and importance of creating a hospitable space—one that feels safe and inviting. When people feel comfortable to be themselves, they do their most creative thinking, speaking, and listening.

### Invitation

Your invitation begins to set the space—make it creative, informal, and personal.

### How to Create a Café Ambiance

Whether you are convening several dozen or several hundred people, it is essential to create an environment that evokes a feeling of both informality and intimacy. When your guests arrive they should know immediately that this is no ordinary meeting ...

- Consider having a space with natural light or outdoor view.
- Consider making the space look like an actual Café, with small tables that seat four or five people. Less than four at a table may not provide enough diversity of perspectives, more than five limits the amount of personal interaction.
- Arrange the Café tables in a staggered, random fashion rather than in neat rows.
- Use colorful tablecloths and a small vase of flowers on each table.
- Consider adding greenery, lights, posters, or art to the room.
- Place large sheets of paper over each tablecloth along with a mug or vase filled with colorful markers. Paper and pens encourage scribbling, drawing, and connecting ideas.
- Put one additional Café table in the front of the room for the Café Host's materials.
- Play music as people arrive and you welcome them.
- To honor the tradition of community and hospitality provide beverages and snacks. A Café isn't complete without food and refreshments!

### Café Supplies

- Tables (enough for 4-5 participants per table; round is ideal, but square or rectangle work)
- Chairs
- Colorful tablecloths
- Flipchart paper or butcher paper for covering tables
- Colored markers for each table
- Mug or vase for colored markers
- Vases with flowers for each table
- Refreshment table
- Mural paper or flip chart paper for making collective knowledge visible
- Tape for hanging paper on walls
- Flat wall space or white boards for displaying information
- Food, coffee, tea, water, plates, napkins, cups, milk, sugar, cutlery

### Optional Café Supplies

- Overhead projector and screen
- Sound system for music
- Microphones
- Easels and flipcharts
- Basic supplies (e.g., stapler, paper clips, rubber bands, masking tape, pens, push pins, pencils)
- Post-its

**Consider**

- Location
  - Where will it be held?
  - How does your physical set-up contribute to setting up a welcoming environment?
- Invitation
  - What do you want your invitation to say?
  - How does your invitation create a welcoming atmosphere?
  - How will you deliver your invitation (e.g., mail, phone, email)?

### 3) Explore Questions that Matter

Knowledge emerges in response to compelling questions. Find questions that are relevant to the real-life concerns of the group. Powerful questions that “travel well” help attract collective energy, insight, and action as they move throughout a system.

The question(s) you use for a World Café conversation are critical to its success. Your Café may explore a single question or several questions may be developed to support a logical progression of discovery throughout several rounds of dialogue.

#### Keep in mind that...

- Well-crafted questions attract energy and focus our attention to what really counts. Experienced World Café hosts recommend posing open-ended questions—the kinds that don’t have yes or no answers.
- Good questions need not imply immediate action steps or problem solving. They should invite inquiry and discovery vs. advocacy and advantage.
- “The most energizing questions are those that engage people’s values, hopes, and ideals—questions that relate to something that’s larger than themselves, to which they can connect and contribute” (*The World Café* by Brown, Isaacs, and the World Café Community, p. 81).
- Frame your questions as opportunities for exploration rather than as solutions to problems.
- You’ll know you have a good question when it continues to surface new ideas and possibilities.
- Bounce possible questions off of key people who will be participating to see if they sustain interest and energy.
- You may use the same question for one or more rounds of conversation, or you may pose different questions in each round to build on and help deepen the exploration.

#### A Powerful Question

- is simple and clear
- is thought-provoking
- generates energy
- focuses inquiry
- surfaces unconscious assumptions
- opens new possibilities

#### 3 Dimensions of Powerful Questions

- Construction
  - Linguistic construction of a question either opens our mind or narrows possibilities.
  - Most powerful questions start with “how,” “what,” “why” and are open-ended.
- Scope
  - Match the scope of the question to the needs of the group.
  - Tailor the scope precisely—not too broad, not too narrow.
- Assumptions
  - All questions have implicit or explicit assumptions.
  - Check for assumptions or beliefs that may not be shared by participants.

**Consider**

- Do you want to explore a single question in all three rounds or use a progressively deeper line of inquiry through three rounds?
- What do you want the menu (i.e., agenda) to look like?
- How do you plan to divide your time during the Café? (A World Café generally consists of three rounds of progressive conversation lasting approximately 20-30 minutes each, followed by a dialogue among the whole group.)
- Will you have an introductory presentation? If so, what will it cover?

#### **4) Encourage Everyone's Contribution**

As leaders we are increasingly aware of the importance of participation, but most people don't only want to participate, they want to actively contribute to making a difference. It is important to encourage everyone in your meeting to contribute their ideas and perspectives, while also allowing anyone who wants to participate by simply listening to do so.

#### **The Café Host sets the stage for making everyone feel welcome and encouraging participation.**

Hosting a Café requires thoughtfulness, artistry and care. The Café Host can make the difference between an interesting conversation and one that truly matters.

#### **The Café Host should:**

- Work with others to create a comfortable Café environment.
- Welcome the participants as they enter.
- Explain the purpose of the gathering.
- Pose the question or themes for rounds of conversation and make sure that the question is visible to everyone on an overhead, flip chart or on cards at each table.
- Explain the Café guidelines and Café etiquette and post them on an overhead, an easel sheet or on cards at each table. Introduce the idea of a talking piece, if it will be a part of the Café.
- Explain how the logistics of the Café will work, including the role of the Table Host (the person who volunteers to remain at the end of a round of conversation and welcome new people for the next round). Explain that small conversations will involve 4-5 participants at each table.
- During the conversation, move among the tables.
- Encourage everyone to participate.
- Remind people to note key ideas, doodle, and draw on the tablecloth.
- Let people know in a gentle way when it's time to move and begin a new round of conversation.
- Make sure key insights are recorded visually or are gathered and posted during the Harvesting.

#### **Consider**

- What opening remarks do you want the host to make?
- What guidelines do you want to provide participants?
- What can you do to encourage everyone's contribution?
- Do you want each table to have a talking piece—a stone or other object—to slow down the conversation and encourage people to focus on the speaker?

## 5) Connect Diverse Perspectives

The opportunity to move between tables, meet new people, actively contribute your thinking, and link the essence of your discoveries to ever-widening circles of thought is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Café. As participants carry key ideas or themes to new tables, they exchange perspectives, greatly enriching the possibility for surprising new insights.

## 6) Listen Together for Patterns and Insights

Listening is a gift we give to one another. The quality of our listening is perhaps the most important factor determining the success of a Café. Through practicing shared listening and paying attention to themes, patterns and insights, we begin to sense a connection to the larger whole. Encourage people to listen for what is not being spoken along with what is being shared.

**Table Hosts not only encourage everyone’s participation, but they also help connect diverse perspectives and listen for patterns and insights.**

### Table Host Guide:

TASKS	TIPS
Welcome	Greet each person with a smile and a handshake as they arrive at your table.
Introductions	Ask each person to introduce themselves, in a go-around format.
Guidelines or Agreements	Gently remind people of the conversation Guidelines or Agreements.
Start the Conversation	Briefly share key insights from the prior conversation so others can link and build using ideas from their respective tables. Read the question out loud and invite participants to speak—ask, who would like to start? Then go around the table until everyone has an opportunity to speak.
Encourage Everyone’s Contribution	Invite participants to listen deeply, ask clarifying questions, notice and speak to commonalities and differences, and reflect. Make space for those who have not spoken yet.
Notes	Jot down key ideas, comments, questions. Encourage participants to write, doodle and draw.
Summarize	Summarize key ideas and ask participants if there is anything else they wish to add.
Offer Thanks	Thank participants for engaging in the conversation.

### Table Hosts tips:

- Remain at the table when others leave and welcome travelers from other tables for the next round of conversation.
- Because people are used to behaving in a certain way when they are a facilitator or “being facilitated,” there can be a danger with inexperienced Table Hosts taking on more of a role than is meant here.

- There are no facilitators in a World Café, only hosts. Everyone at the tables is responsible for hosting themselves and each other. For this and a variety of other reasons you may choose not to use Table Hosts in your World Café.
- If a table participant is dominating the conversation, there are a few ways to rein them back in.
  - Make eye contact and lean towards that participant (or place your hand on the table directly in front of them) and attempt to interject during any type of pause, by thanking them. Then break eye contact and look towards other table members for input.
  - If they continue to talk, hold up your hand for a few seconds before interrupting them. You can say something like, “Thank you for your input. Let’s hear from some of the other people at the table.”
  - If the problem persists, at the end of the round pull the person to the side and thank them for the passion, but also remind them that it is important that we hear from all people at the table.

### **Consider**

- How do you want to handle Table Hosts for your Café? Choose them in advance? Ask for volunteers?
- What guidelines do you want to give your Table Hosts to encourage connection of diverse perspectives and listening for patterns and insights?

## 7) Share Collective Discoveries and Evaluation

Conversations held at one table reflect a pattern of wholeness that connects with the conversations at the other tables. The last phase of the Café, often called the “harvest,” involves making this pattern of wholeness visible to everyone in a large group conversation. Invite a few minutes of silent reflection on the patterns, themes, and deeper questions experienced in the small group conversations and call them out to share with the larger group. Make sure you have a way to capture the harvest – working with a graphic recorder is very helpful.

### Five Ways to Make Collective Knowledge Visible

- Use a Graphic Recorder
  - In some Café events the whole group conversation is captured by a graphic recorder who draws the group’s ideas on flip charts or a wall mural using text and graphics to illustrate the patterns of the conversation.
- Take a Gallery Tour
  - At times, people will place the paper tablecloths from their tables on the wall so members can take a tour of the group’s ideas during a break.
- Post Your Insights
  - Participants can place large Post-its with a single key insight on each on a blackboard, wall, etc. so that everyone can review the ideas during a break.
- Create Idea Clusters
  - Group Post-its into “affinity clusters” so that related ideas are visible and available for planning the group’s next steps.
- Make a Story
  - Some World Café hosts create a newspaper or storybook to bring the results of their work to larger audiences after the event, using graphic recordings along with text as documentation.

### Tips for Harvesting for the Café Host (or other identified person)

- Identify the person who will be doing the harvesting and ensure that they are available during the rounds of questions to begin the process. (If this person is engaged in another task during the rounds of questions, harvesting can be done quickly at the break between the questions round and the large group share-out).
- As you collect the ideas/responses after each round of questions, begin to look for themes and similarities. Make notes of those similarities and decide which ones can be presented during the share-out.
- If no clear themes emerge, share that with the large group. Briefly review the ideas shared and as a group try and identify themes/ideas that seem like plausible places to define action steps.
- Allow for a few minutes of silence for individual reflection and note-taking prior to opening the whole-group conversation.
- Some questions that might be used by Café Hosts during the harvesting:
  - What key insight, idea, or discovery did you take from the conversations?
  - What did you most appreciate about the conversations?
  - What has had real meaning for you from what you’ve heard? What surprised you? What challenged you?
  - What’s missing from the picture so far? What is it we’re not seeing? Where do we need more clarity?

- If there was one thing that hasn't yet been explored but is necessary in order to reach a deeper level of understanding/clarity, what would that be?

### **Evaluation**

If you are hosting a World Café in Yolo County, the YFSN Café Subcommittee has written a Café Survey for Host Organizations, which should be filled out by the overall Café Host. This document collects data on café logistics, questions, and which protective factors were addressed.

If you are hosting a Café for parents in Yolo County, the YFSN Café Subcommittee has prepared a Café Survey for Parents to be filled out by each Café participant. Questions ask about satisfaction and whether protective factors were enhanced. This information will help assess the effects of World Cafés on parents throughout Yolo County.

For more information or to request the surveys, please contact Natalie Audage at Yolo County Children's Alliance: [Natalie.audage@yolocounty.org](mailto:Natalie.audage@yolocounty.org) or (530) 902-8249.

### **Consider**

- What creative ways for harvesting, documenting, and sharing discoveries will be most useful for a) the participants at the event and b) carrying the insights forward to other constituencies?
  - Why did you choose that method?
  - What do you want to make sure people get out of the harvesting?
- Evaluation considerations
  - If you are hosting a Café for parents
    - How will you introduce the Café Survey to participants?
    - How do you plan to share the Café Survey data with Natalie Audage (mail, email, or fill our Survey Monkey)?
  - If you are hosting a Café for other people
    - How will you evaluate your Café?
- Do you plan to have any follow-up activities or communication with participants? Please elaborate on what these might be.

## LINKS AND RESOURCES

The World Café process can be used to have "conversations that matter" on a wide variety of topics. "Café conversations are designed on the assumption that people already have within them the wisdom and creativity to confront even the most difficult challenges" (*The World Café* by Brown and Isaacs, page 4). Many groups have adapted the World Café model to address specific topics and populations. Several models for cafés for parents include Parent Cafés, Community Cafés, and Caring Conversations. The following resources are websites, books, webinars, and videos on café models for parents to help you learn more about how cafés can be used to engage and strengthen parents.

### WEBSITES AND BOOKS

#### ***The World Café: Shaping Our Futures through Conversations that Matter***

**By Juanita Brown with David Isaacs and the World Café Community (book)**

- Provides background on how the World Café model evolved and how it can be used.
- Discusses seven design principles of World Cafés

#### ***Using Café Conversations to Build Protective Factors and Parent Leadership***

**From the Center for the Study of Social Policy**

<http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengtheningfamilies/practice/body/CAFE-OVERVIEW-2015.pdf>

- Describes café characteristics
- Has a brief description of different café models
  - World Café
    - <http://www.theworldcafe.com/>
  - Parent Café-developed by parents convened by Strengthening Families-Illinois
    - <http://www.beststrongfamilies.net/>
  - Community Café-developed by volunteers as part of Strengthening Families Washington State
    - <http://thecommunitycafe.com/>
  - Caring Conversations-developed by ZERO TO THREE, working with Minnesota
    - <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/657-caring-conversations-cafe-model-facilitator-guide>
- Has a checklist of core elements that must be in place for a café that is intended to help parents build their protective factors and leadership. Describes core elements and what they look like.

***Café to Go Guide: A Quick Reference Guide for Hosting World Cafés***, used to create this guide:

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

### VIDEOS

There are many videos related to the various models of cafés. Here are a few samples:

#### **World Café Dialogue Workshop (10 minutes)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1cv82YI0H7M>

- Juanita Brown and David Isaacs talk about the World Café model to evoke collective intelligence and link it to effective action.

### **World Café Guidelines and Principles (5 minutes)**

<https://youtu.be/YrTKD8NpApY>

- Preparatory video for first-time participants and/or hosts of a World Café conversation. Originally made to introduce faculty at Florida State College at Jacksonville to the underlying principles of the café process.

### **World Café Creativity Technique (4 minutes)**

<https://youtu.be/qTiBLZJmd00>

- A quick, simple overview of the World Café process.

### **Art of Hosting - World Café (4 minutes)**

[https://youtu.be/YG\\_6iBcyP7w](https://youtu.be/YG_6iBcyP7w)

- Overview of the World Café model and how it works.

### **World Café: Deborah Gilburg at TEDxFenway (10 minutes)**

<https://youtu.be/TImexKYpSS0>

- Deborah Gilburg, Principal at Gilburg Leadership Inc., Practitioner at World Café, describes the power of World Café in broadening dialogue and facilitating change within a community.

### **Benefits of Be Strong Families Parent Cafés (20 minutes)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5ekAbwaayU>

- Describes evolution of Parent Cafés and the Strengthening Families Framework and 5 Protective Factors. Also addresses why child welfare agencies invest in Parent Cafés and how parents and staff benefit from Parent Cafés.

### **Parent Café at the Silvia Elementary School 2/4/15 (24 minutes)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqRel119LRM>

- Parents of children at the Silvia Elementary School were invited to attend a Parent Café at the school to engage them in dialogue with one another about their parenting experiences.
- Shows how facilitators introduced topics, including protective factors, and demonstrates the café experience.