

# Suggested conference session formats

## ● World Cafe

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The world café is a format designed to mimic a cafe environment to enable a better flow of conversation between participants. The session normally consists of 4 meeting stations / tables positioned around the room where a question or theme is posted for participants to discuss, with a facilitator and note-taker posted at each table.

Participants are encouraged to rotate round the room to engage with the conversations at each table, with a suggested timeslot of 10-15 minutes per table.

Themes and questions are set up at the start of the session by speakers delivering short 5-10 minute paper presentations, where they raise with key questions or provocations. The facilitator at each table reports back to the whole group at the end of the discussions, which can then be closed by a whole group discussion.

This format is designed to facilitate wider audience participation and more sustained discussion. This is often very productive for the progression of ideas as dialogue can flow in a less restrained manner. It is, therefore, a very useful session format to develop work in progress and brain-storm ideas.

### Resources needed

In addition to the normal facilities for delivering presentations (projector, computer, etc.), resources needed include: 4 tables or meeting stations, with chairs arranged in an appropriate fashion around these, and writing materials, usually including a flipchart. If presenters do not facilitate and take notes at the table allocated to their question, additional staffing is also required. This can be achieved by asking participants to volunteer for these roles on the day or arranged in advance.

### Tips for running the session

In the Call for Papers session organisers need to make it clear to presenters that they should focus on the delivery of one key question that they would like the audience to engage with and that presentations need to be restricted to 10 minutes each.

Session organisers should be prepared to spend some time working out appropriate questions with the presenters before the conference. For example, it is important to ensure diversity in the questions to be raised, as well as ensuring clarity for the audience. Questions should be written down on flipchart paper to be posted at each table before the session starts.

For the discussion section it is important for session organisers to ensure that presenters are comfortable in their role as facilitators and note-takers, and assist where necessary (additional staffing may be required here, so make sure you discuss these requirements with presenters beforehand).

To draw the session to a close it is also important to leave sufficient time for a final discussion where ideas from each table are brought back to the whole group. This ensures that everyone can be party to all the ideas shared, and gives the organisers and presenters time to make some final comments, reflecting back on how the session has informed their initial ideas and questions.

### Follow-up and outputs

Experience shows that participants may feel quite 'invested' in the questions and discussion by the end of the session, so it is worth considering what outputs and follow-up could lead from it. For example, notes from flip charts and discussion could be written up and used as the starting point for a blog/article/funding application/practical intervention.

### For further information and inspiration

- <http://www.theworldcafe.com/method.html>
- <http://www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/Methods/World+Cafe>