

# Systems Thinking Toolkit

Putting Systems Thinking Into Practice  
in Your Organization



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## About FSG

FSG is a mission-driven consulting firm supporting leaders in creating large-scale, lasting social change. Through strategy, evaluation, and research we help many types of actors—individually and collectively—make progress against the world’s toughest problems.

Our teams work across all sectors by partnering with leading foundations, businesses, nonprofits, and governments in every region of the globe. We seek to reimagine social change by identifying ways to maximize the impact of existing resources, amplifying the work of others to help advance knowledge and practice, and inspiring change agents around the world to achieve greater impact.

As part of our nonprofit mission, FSG also directly supports learning communities, such as the Collective Impact Forum and the Shared Value Initiative, to provide the tools and relationships that change agents need to be successful.

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# Choosing the Right Tool

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# PRINCIPLES OF PRACTICE

Putting systems thinking into practice begins by understanding the key characteristics of complex systems and the implications those characteristics have for how we work within those systems. Below are a few “principles of practice” that we have found to be applicable for efforts to influence systems change.<sup>1</sup>

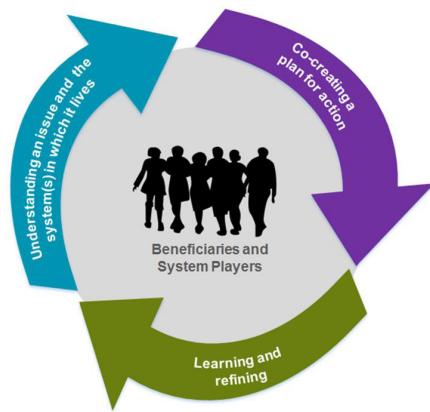
CHARACTERISTICS OF COMPLEX SYSTEMS	PRINCIPLES OF PRACTICE FOR WORKING ON COMPLEX ISSUES
<b>CONTEXT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Context matters; it can often make or break an initiative</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pay particular attention to contextual factors; seek to understand, describe, and/or respond to changes as they occur</li></ul>
<b>CONNECTIONS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Relationships between entities are equally if not more important than the entities themselves</li><li>• Everything in a complex system is connected; events in one part of the system affect all or some of the other parts</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Understand, describe, respond to, and/or plan to influence the nature of relationships and interdependencies within the system</li><li>• Understand, describe, respond to, and/or plan to influence the whole system, including components and connections</li></ul>
<b>PATTERNS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cause and effect is not a linear, predictable, or one-directional process; it is much more iterative</li><li>• Patterns emerge from several semi-independent and diverse agents who are free to act in autonomous ways</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Understand, describe, and/or respond to the non-linear and multi-directional relationships between an initiative and its intended and unintended outcomes</li><li>• Understand, describe, and/or respond to patterns (both one-off and repeating) at different levels of the system</li></ul>
<b>PERSPECTIVES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A system cannot be fully understood from one perspective; complex problems cannot be solved by any one actor</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Triangulate multiple diverse perspectives (or “lenses”) in any research, planning, or reflection process</li><li>• Remain open to different ways of seeing and doing things</li></ul>

1 Preskill, H., Gopal, S., Mack, K., and Cook, J. *Evaluating Complexity*.

# APPLYING SYSTEMS THINKING

The first step in selecting an appropriate tool is to consider where you are in the systems thinking cycle. This cycle has three inter-linked phases:

- 1. Understanding the issue and the system(s) in which it lives**, which includes inquiring deeply into how various beneficiaries and stakeholders experience the system.
- 2. Creating a plan for action** by engaging system players around goals and assumptions and looking together for points of leverage.
- 3. Learning and refining as you go** by involving key stakeholders in an adaptive learning and sense-making process to discuss the “so what?” and “now what?” implications of what is being learned.



The next step in selecting an appropriate tool is to determine your learning objective(s). (It can be helpful to think of the questions you are trying to answer.) We have identified nearly two dozen different learning objectives that are relevant when looking at an issue from a systems perspective. The System Tools Matrix sorts these learning objectives into four categories, aligned to the characteristics of complexity identified on Page 3:

- Understanding context
- Understanding connections
- Identifying patterns
- Incorporating diverse perspectives

Next, you can use the matrix to identify one or more tools that may be useful in achieving your learning objective(s).

# THE SYSTEMS TOOLS MATRIX

## How to Use the Systems Tools Matrix

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### STEP 1

Select the segment of the cycle that best matches where you are in your journey.



### STEP 2

Use the color-coded matrices on the following pages to match your learning objectives to one or more systems tools.

	Mapping / visualization tools				Conversational / Story-Based	
	Trend mapping	Actor mapping	Timeline mapping	Ecocycle mapping	World Café	AI
<Sample learning objective>	✓				✓	✓
<Sample learning objective>			✓			
<Sample learning objective>				✓		
<Sample learning objective>	✓				✓	✓
<Sample learning objective>		✓				✓
<Sample learning objective>			✓		✓	✓
<Sample learning objective>	✓	✓				✓

### STEP 3

Use the tool guides included in this report to facilitate a systems thinking activity.

## UNDERSTAND AN ISSUE AND THE SYSTEM(S) IN WHICH IT LIVES

I WANT TO...	MAPPING/VISUALIZATION TOOLS				CONVERSATIONAL/STORY-BASED TOOLS	
	ACTOR MAPPING	TREND MAPPING	TIMELINE MAPPING	ECOCYCLE MAPPING	WORLD CAFÉ	APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY
<b>Understand Context</b>						
Understand an issue's landscape/context and history (e.g., key actors, organizations, initiatives, activities)	✓	✓	✓			
Explore how contextual factors (e.g., social, economic, cultural) influence a topic/goal (and each other)		✓	✓		✓	✓
<b>Understand Connections</b>						
Identify key actors; consider who is, has been, or should be involved	✓					
Explore various actors' roles in the system	✓					✓
Encourage participants to make new connections					✓	✓
Strengthen relationships and build trust among participants					✓	✓
<b>Identify Patterns</b>						
Understand how an organization is allocating its energy and resources across the lifecycle				✓		
<b>Consider Multiple Perspectives</b>						
Explore a topic/issue from multiple diverse perspectives					✓	✓
Ensure equal footing among participant voices					✓	✓
Understand beneficiary experiences of the issue/initiative						✓
Understand partners' and other stakeholders' perspectives on the issue or initiative (e.g., why it matters)					✓	✓
Understand participants' values, beliefs, and priorities						✓

## CREATE A PLAN FOR ACTION

I WANT TO...	MAPPING/VISUALIZATION TOOLS				CONVERSATIONAL/STORY-BASED TOOLS	
	ACTOR MAPPING	TREND MAPPING	TIMELINE MAPPING	ECOCYCLE MAPPING	WORLD CAFÉ	APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY
<b>Understand Context</b>						
Understand an issue's landscape/context and history (e.g., key actors, organizations, initiatives, activities)	√	√	√			
Explore how contextual factors (e.g., social, political, economic, cultural) influence a topic/goal (and each other)		√	√		√	√
<b>Understand Connections</b>						
Identify key actors; consider who is, has been, or should be involved	√					
Explore various actors' roles in the system	√					
Diagnose the strength of connections among actors	√					
Explore relationships, momentum, and energy among key trends		√				
Encourage participants to make new connections					√	√
Strengthen relationships and build trust among participants					√	√
<b>Identify Patterns (cont. on next page)</b>						
Determine where the energy is in the system and where there are gaps or blockages	√		√	√		
Identify key trends (e.g., increases, decreases, appearances, disappearances, evolutions, adaptations) that may influence the topic/goal		√				
Understand the group's role or focus and how it has shifted over time			√			

## CREATE A PLAN FOR ACTION (CONT.)

I WANT TO...	MAPPING/VISUALIZATION TOOLS				CONVERSATIONAL/ STORY-BASED TOOLS	
	ACTOR MAPPING	TREND MAPPING	TIMELINE MAPPING	ECOCYCLE MAPPING	WORLD CAFÉ	APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY
<b>Identify Patterns (cont. from previous page)</b>						
Explore how the focus of other actors (or the larger system in general) has shifted over time			✓			
Break old thought patterns; catalyze new ideas and thinking					✓	✓
Understand how an organization or initiative is allocating its energy and resources across the lifecycle				✓		
Identify risks and diagnose challenges related to "traps" in the ecocycle				✓		
Identify areas of common interest, concern, or excitement					✓	✓
<b>Consider Multiple Perspectives</b>						
Consider who is, has been, or should be involved	✓					
Identify opportunities to build new relationships and explore other parts of the system	✓					
Explore a topic/issue from multiple diverse perspectives					✓	✓
Ensure equal footing among participant voices					✓	✓
Understand beneficiary experiences of the issue/initiative					✓	✓
Understand partners' and other stakeholders' perspectives on the issue or initiative (e.g., why it matters)					✓	✓
Understand participants' values, beliefs, and priorities						✓
Identify partners' and stakeholders' learning priorities					✓	✓

## LEARN AND REFINE AS YOU GO

	MAPPING/VISUALIZATION TOOLS				CONVERSATIONAL/STORY-BASED TOOLS	
I WANT TO...	ACTOR MAPPING	TREND MAPPING	TIMELINE MAPPING	ECOCYCLE MAPPING	WORLD CAFÉ	APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY
<b>Understand Context</b>						
Explore how contextual factors (e.g., social, political, economic, cultural) influence a topic/goal (and each other)		✓	✓		✓	✓
Put a group's progress/challenges in context (e.g., relative to external factors, key activities, funding levels)			✓		✓	✓
<b>Understand Connections</b>						
Explore how relationships, roles, or information flows are changing or have changed	✓		✓			✓
Explore the relationship between the group's activities/achievements and other actors' activities/achievements			✓			
<b>Identify Patterns (cont. on next page)</b>						
Determine where the energy is in the system and where there are gaps or blockages	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Identify key trends (e.g., increases, decreases, appearances, disappearances, evolutions, adaptations) that may influence the topic/goal		✓				
Understand the group's role or focus and how it has shifted over time			✓			
Explore how the focus of other actors (or the larger system in general) has shifted over time			✓			
Visualize momentum, traction, and trends over time			✓			
Understand how an organization is allocating its energy and resources across the lifecycle (and/or how this allocation has changed over time)				✓		

## LEARN AND REFINE AS YOU GO (CONT.)

I WANT TO...	MAPPING/VISUALIZATION TOOLS				CONVERSATIONAL/ STORY-BASED TOOLS	
	ACTOR MAPPING	TREND MAPPING	TIMELINE MAPPING	ECOCYCLE MAPPING	WORLD CAFÉ	APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY
<b>Identify Patterns (cont. from previous page)</b>						
Identify risks and diagnose challenges related to "traps" in the ecocycle				✓		
Understand how policies are changing		✓	✓		✓	✓
Understand how structures are changing	✓		✓		✓	✓
Understand how social and cultural norms are changing		✓	✓		✓	✓
Understand how a strategy or initiative is evolving from a lifecycle perspective				✓		
Understand the relationships between outputs / outcomes and external events		✓	✓		✓	
<b>Consider Multiple Perspectives</b>						
Consider who is, has been, or should be involved	✓					
Identify opportunities to build new relationships and explore other parts of the system	✓					
Explore a topic or issue from multiple diverse perspectives					✓	✓
Ensure equal footing among participant voices					✓	✓
Understand beneficiary experiences of the issue or initiative						✓
Understand partners' and other key stakeholders' perspectives on the issue or initiative (e.g., why it matters)					✓	✓

*“Business and human endeavors  
are systems...we tend to focus on  
snapshots of isolated parts of the  
system. And wonder why our deepest  
problems never get solved.”*

*Peter M. Senge*

# Actor Mapping

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Identify key organizations and relationships  
within a system

# OVERVIEW OF ACTOR MAPPING

## What Is An Actor Map?

An actor map is a visual depiction of the key organizations and/or individuals that make up a system, including those directly affected by the system as well as those whose actions influence the system.

Note: Actor maps are sometimes referred to as stakeholder maps; however, given that important influencers (e.g., government) are not always stakeholders in a systems change initiative, we use the more inclusive term “actor maps” for the purposes of this guide.

HOW CAN ACTOR MAPPING SUPPORT SYSTEMS THINKING AND PRACTICE?	
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Understand general landscape (e.g., key actors, organizations, initiatives).</li></ul>
Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Determine who needs to be involved.</li><li>Explore various actors’ roles in the system.</li><li>Diagnose the strength of connections among actors.</li><li>Consider how relationships, roles, or information flows are changing.</li></ul>
Patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Determine where the energy is in the system and where there are gaps or blockages.</li><li>Understand how structures are changing.</li></ul>
Perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Consider who is, has been, or should be involved.</li><li>Identify opportunities to build new relationships and explore other parts of the system.</li></ul>

## Actor Mapping Versus Stakeholder Analysis

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Actor mapping is related to, but fundamentally distinct from, traditional stakeholder analysis. Stakeholder analysis is “a process of systematically gathering and analyzing qualitative information to determine whose interests should be taken into account when developing and/or implementing a policy or program.”<sup>1</sup> Stakeholder analysis seeks to assess individuals’ or groups’ ability to influence specific projects, policies, or outcomes. The goal of these analyses is typically to produce a prioritized list of key individuals or groups to target as part of an action plan. By contrast, actor mapping explores the relationships and connections among actors, as well as their relationships to a given issue, project, or intended outcome. The purpose of actor mapping is to identify opportunities to improve a system’s overall performance by, for example, strengthening weak connections or filling gaps in the system.

In addition, we avoid using the word “stakeholder” because some actors that may not have a “stake” in a particular initiative or outcome may still wield influence over the initiative or be influenced by it.

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<sup>1</sup> Stakeholder Analysis Guidelines. (undated) Kammi Schmeer. Available online [here](#).

# PART ONE:

# FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT

## Is Actor Mapping Right for Your Project?

CONSIDERATIONS	USE ACTOR MAPPING	DON'T USE ACTOR MAPPING
Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The "Who" of the system</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The "What" or "Why" of the system</li></ul>
Boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Agreement on the boundaries of the system actors being mapped (e.g., by geography, specificity)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Lack of agreement on the boundaries that would be used to map system actors</li></ul>

## What Do I Need to Properly Facilitate an Actor Mapping Session?

An actor mapping session typically takes 1.5 – 2 hours to facilitate. Preparation requirements are outlined below.

REQUIREMENT	DESCRIPTION
Prep Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>8-10 hours</li></ul>
Facilitator Prep Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Frame Activity<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Identify the topic and set clear boundaries</li><li>Frame the system</li><li>Identify an initial set of key actors</li></ul></li><li>Prepare a Draft Map (optional)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Populate the draft frame with key actors</li></ul></li></ul>
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Facilitation agenda and talking points</li><li>A large (approximately 36" x 48") printed copy of the draft system frame or actor map</li><li>Blank sticky notes</li><li>Sharpie markers in multiple colors</li></ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>A set of prepopulated sticky notes (to be developed during the prep process, below)</li><li>Dot stickers in multiple colors</li><li>Flip chart and paper</li></ul>

## PART TWO:

# PREPARING FOR AN ACTOR MAPPING SESSION

Careful preparation in advance of a live actor mapping session is critical to success. During the preparation process, as we describe below, the facilitator or facilitation team will make several important strategic decisions. For example, they might consider questions such as: What will be the boundaries around the issue at hand? What is the right altitude to focus the map on? What level of detail is appropriate for the actor map? They will then develop a draft “system frame” (see Page 17) for participants to build on. This preparatory work will provide guidance to mapping participants and help ensure a productive, energizing session.

Follow the guidelines below to prepare for an actor mapping session.

### 1. Identify the Topic and Set Clear Boundaries

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The first step in the mapping process is to identify the topic for the map and set boundaries around that topic. The specificity of your topic will depend on a few factors, including:

- The desired geographic scale of the map (e.g., local, regional, national).
- The degree of specificity desired of the map (a generic actor map focuses on different types of actors, such as schools, government agencies, and service providers, whereas a specific actor map focuses on specific organizations, initiatives, and/or individuals). Several factors are likely to inform this strategic decision, including the intended purpose of the map, the backgrounds and expertise of mapping session participants, the desired degree of input or direction from participants, the time available for the mapping session, and the plan for refining and finalizing the actor maps.
- When determining the level of specificity for the map, aim for a level of detail that allows you to meaningfully summarize the behavior of an individual actor or type of actors, capture relevant variation, and illustrate relationships between actors. Aim for a level of aggregation that allows users to interact with the map and generate meaningful insights without becoming overwhelmed.

### HELPFUL HINT

If needed, you can create separate maps on subtopics and/or different levels of detail to reduce complexity. For example, an early childhood map might include one map on the care and education sector and another on the health sector. Additionally, one map could be created with a local community landscape lens and one with a state or national policy lens.

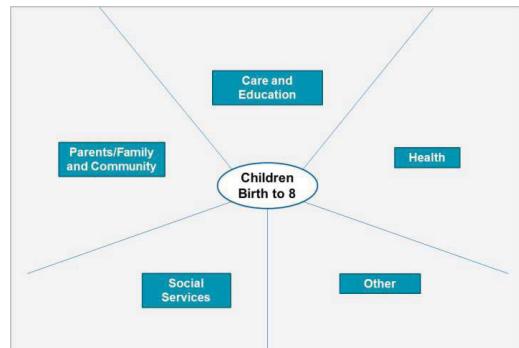
## 2. Frame the System

The “system frame” refers to the loose organizing structure for the actor map that identifies the map’s core (e.g., the core beneficiaries of, or primary stakeholders in, the systems-change work) and the related subsystems that influence the main system. The frame serves as a conceptual guide for session participants.

#### Follow the steps below to create a system frame:

- Identify the core of the map and place the core at the center of the page.
- Draw a circle around the core and label it (e.g., “Children birth to age eight”).
- Identify related subsystems that influence the core. (For example, in an early childhood actor map, related subsystems might include health, education, childcare, and social services.) Designate space for each related subsystem around the core.

SAMPLE SYSTEM FRAME



## 3. Identify an Initial Set of Key Actors and Roles in the System

Identifying actors and roles (e.g., provider, practitioner, funder, policymaker) is a useful preparatory step that helps participants get started efficiently and effectively on an actor mapping session. Participants will continue to add additional actors and roles

throughout the actor mapping process.

Follow the steps below to identify the actors that will populate your draft map:

- Identify relevant actors and roles from internal documents (e.g., strategic plans, evaluation reports) and existing research (e.g., landscape assessments).
- Brainstorm additional relevant actors and roles using these prompts.
  - What people or places do core stakeholders interact with on a regular basis? (For example, in a map focused on third grade reading, this category of actors might include schools, teachers, principals, coaches, and local faith-based leaders, among others.)
  - What organizations support or influence those that interact with the core? (For example, a teachers association would provide support to teachers.)
  - What types of local, regional, national, or international organizations influence the core's experiences related to the topic? (For example, local school boards.)
  - Who funds relevant people, places, or organizations?
  - Who conducts relevant research?
  - Who sets policy?
- Filter the list for the most influential actors based on perceived level of influence over the core. Write these actors' names on sticky notes so each group of participants has a set.

#### HELPFUL HINTS

- The number of actors identified in this step will vary based on the complexity of the system and the desired level of detail to be provided in the map. One simple heuristic is to think about three levels—"the part, the whole, and the greater whole."<sup>2</sup>
- When assessing influence, it may be helpful to consider factors such as size/footprint, evidence of past achievements, key relationships, and commitment to the issue, among others.

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Glenda Eoyang and her colleagues at the Human System Dynamics Institute. FAQs about Tools and Patterns of HCD. Undated. <http://www.hsdinstitute.org/about-hsd-institute/simple-rules.html>.

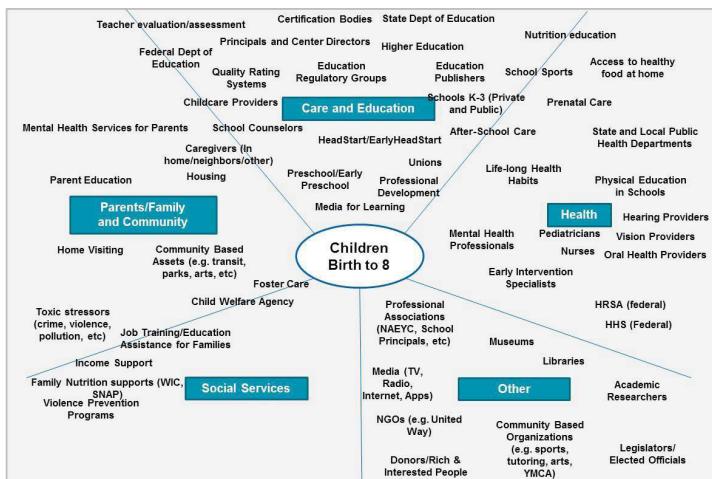
#### 4. Populate a Draft Map and Share It with Participants (Optional)

Depending on how well developed the facilitation team wishes the draft actor map to be, an optional final step in the preparation process is to place the actors identified in Step 3 onto the draft system frame and share the draft actor map with participants in advance of the session.

The cover email to participants should do the following:

- Provide context, including a reminder of the objectives of the mapping session and a review of key decisions made in the preparation process (e.g., how the core of the system is defined or bounded). It may be helpful to indicate what, if any, feedback the facilitation team seeks on these basic strategic decisions during the live mapping session.
  - Encourage participants to set aside a half hour to review the draft actor map before the session and reflect on the following questions.
    - What are your responses to the structure of the map (e.g., the core, the system boundaries, the related systems)?
    - What changes might you suggest to the current placement of actors on the map?
    - What organizations, agencies, companies, or individuals would you suggest adding to the map? How do these actors connect to what's already depicted?

## SAMPLE PRE-SESSION DRAFT MAP<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> Example is from FSG's work with the Institute of Medicine to develop a system map of the early childhood space.

## ACTOR MAPPING IN ACTION

On our **blog**, we explore the use of actor mapping by the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council of The National Academies as they worked to understand the impact had by workplace structures in professions such as education and health on children from birth through age 8.

### An actor mapping session helped the organizations by:

**Encouraging a broader view of the system:** The systems mapping process encouraged the authoring committee and project staff to develop a broader view of the landscape (e.g., libraries, religious institutions, and even toy companies can play a role in a child's healthy development), while simultaneously digging deep into particular sub-systems or components within the system (e.g., the role credentialing and accreditation bodies play in practitioner preparation and ongoing professional learning).

**Helping the committee draw conclusions related to their questions of interest:** For example, one observation the committee had while looking at the "practitioners and settings" map was that some practitioners are more isolated than others in the settings they work in (e.g. a family child care owner often works alone in a home setting while a Head Start teacher might engage with a number of other practitioners in a Head Start setting), which

led them to ask: What implications might this have on the professional learning supports available to a family child care owner? Who else in the system can this practitioner interact with, learn from, and share resources with?

**Prompting new perspectives from early care and education practitioners who interacted with the maps:** Committee members were able to hear first-hand perspectives from practitioners including a pre-K social worker, a home visitor, and a family child care owner in the field as they interacted with the maps. Some practitioners noted where connections between practitioners were particularly weak or strong, while others identified other actors, organizations, and policies that have had an impact on their access to professional learning. In this case, the maps themselves prompted conversations that ultimately provided important information for the committee's recommendations.

Read "System Mapping in Action": <http://fsg.org/blog/system-mapping-action>

## PART THREE:

# FACILITATING AN ACTOR MAPPING SESSION

The section below offers practical tips on how to structure and facilitate a 1.5- to 2-hour actor mapping session. The ideal group size for a session of this type is approximately 10 to 25 people who represent a diversity of perspectives on the target issue (e.g., those who come from different organizations or teams or have different backgrounds, areas of expertise, or life experiences).

## Getting Started: Room Setup and Materials Needed

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- Allocate 1.5 – 2 hours for the mapping session.
- Divide participants into groups of four or five. Distribute participants so that groups have a diversity of content expertise, level of seniority, level of tenure, etc.
- Note: You can ask each small group to work on the same actor map, or you can assign each small group a specific subsystem to work on. In either case, the facilitation team will need to combine the small groups' efforts after the session.
- Arrange the room so each group has a workspace with:
  - A large (approximately 36" x 48") printed copy of the draft system frame or actor map
  - A set of prepopulated sticky notes (from the preparation process, Page 18)
  - Blank sticky notes, sharpie markers, dot stickers in multiple colors, and a flip chart

## Facilitation Steps

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### 1. INTRODUCTION (5 MINUTES)

Provide a brief introduction to the exercise (see sample verbiage below).

## Stage-Setting Introduction

The facilitator should adapt the introduction below to correspond with the selected topic.

### Introduction to Actor Mapping

- “A *system map* is a visual depiction of the parts, interactions, and relationships between actors, organizations, and other components of a system at a point in time.”
- “An *actor map* is a type of system map that focuses on relationships and interconnections between various actors. These maps help show how the parts of, or people within, a system are connected, identify weak connections or gaps, bring out ideas for intervention points in the system, and help identify ways of determining whether these changes have occurred.”

### Overview of Activity

- “Today, we will participate in an actor mapping activity to better understand the roles, engagement, relationships, momentum, blockages, and opportunities in our system. Our activity will include several steps: populating actors, refining the map, identifying engagement, relationships and/or connections, mapping momentum and blockages, and identifying opportunities for influence.”
- “We will use these maps to discuss our observations and implications for future action.”

## 2. POPULATING THE MAP WITH ACTORS (15-20 MINUTES)

In this step, participants begin to build the actor maps. The prelabeled sticky notes provide participants with examples to stimulate additional brainstorming.

*Note: For simplicity's sake, the guidance below assumes that the facilitation team skipped Step 4 of Phase 2 above (i.e., that the team did not share a draft actor map with participants in advance of the session). If a draft was shared with participants, the facilitation team should skip this step and move to Step 3 below.*

- Ask participants to take 15 minutes to place the prelabeled sticky notes on the actor map frame by reading the instructions below aloud to the group.

### Speaking Notes

- “You will see that we have prepared a draft frame for the actor map, identifying related sub-systems where you may wish to place the sticky notes.”

- “Each group has a set of sticky notes with names or descriptions of key actors already written on them. Take 15 minutes as a group to place each sticky note where you think it belongs on the map, following these guidelines.
  - Place actors on the map in a way that illustrates which subsystem they belong to. If the actor cuts across two subsystems, place the sticky note in between. You may modify the frame by adding or crossing out related subsystems as needed.
  - Place actors on the map in a way that illustrates their degree of influence (e.g., *place actors with direct influence on the system in or close to the center*).
  - Place actors on the map in a way that illustrates their “proximity” to one another (e.g., place an individual school next to its related school district). ”

*Note: You may need to adjust the draft language above if you are asking each small group to work on a different subsystem within the actor map.*

### 3. REFINING THE ACTOR MAP (20 MINUTES)

In this step, participants are given the opportunity to react to a draft actor map, refine earlier work, and/or make changes to adjust for external context.

*Note: This step is an appropriate starting point for groups that are building on a more well-developed draft map or revisiting existing actor maps.*

- Guide participants through a 20-minute activity to refine the actor map using the instructions below.

#### Speaking Notes

- “Now we want to leverage your diverse expertise to improve the map.”
- “Are there additional types of actors/organizations at play that are important to <topic>? What’s missing?”
- “Please take 3 minutes to write these actors/organizations on sticky notes. Note that we are not trying to build a comprehensive list of actors; rather, we are trying to capture the most relevant actors.” (3 minutes)
- “Please take 10 minutes to discuss these new additions and plot each where it belongs on the actor map.” (10 minutes)
- “Are there types of actors/organizations depicted here that are not important to <topic> and should be excluded? If yes, please move/remove these sticky notes.” (5 minutes)

## 4. MAPPING LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT, RELATIONSHIPS, AND CONNECTIONS (15 MINUTES)

In this step, participants identify levels of engagement of different actors, as well as relationships and connections among actors, organizations, and related systems.

- Guide participants through a 15-minute activity to map level of engagement, relationships, and connections among actors on the map. Choose among options below (could be a hybrid), based on the specific context and need.

### Speaking Notes

#### Option A: Level of Engagement of Various Actors

- “Discuss the level of engagement in the initiative for each actor on the map. The level could be strong (S), moderate (M), weak (W), or no engagement (N).”
- “Draw an S, M, W, or N on the relevant actors.” (Note: These could also be depicted through colors and gradations if/when the map is transferred to an electronic format.)

#### Option B: Relationship of an Organization/Initiative to the Actors

- “Discuss your organization’s/initiative’s relationship with each actor on the map. Use the dot stickers to indicate your engagement with each actor. (Use different color dots, if needed, to represent the different departments/groups that have the relationship.)
- “Feel free to place multiple stickers on a single actor if multiple participants or departments hold relationships with that actor.”

#### Option C: Connections Between Actors

- “Discuss relevant connections between actors on the map. Note these connections on the map by drawing lines between relevant actors. Use solid lines for strong or established relationships and dotted lines for weak or emerging relationships.”
- “Write the type of relationship above the line. For example, is it a funding relationship? A partnering relationship on a key initiative?”
- “Again, we are not attempting to be exhaustive, but rather to capture the most important strong and weak relationships in the system.”

## 5. IDENTIFYING MOMENTUM, BLOCKAGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES (15 MINUTES)

In this step, participants identify momentum and blockages in the system based on their understanding of the relationships among actors, organizations, and related subsystems.

- Guide participants through a 15-minute activity to identify momentum and blockages.

### Speaking Notes

- “Now that we have a sense of the connections and gaps among key actors and organizations in the system, we can begin to understand momentum and blockages and think about opportunities for influence.”

### Areas of Momentum or Blockages in the System

- “For 5 to 6 minutes, review the connections among actors and discuss what parts of the system have positive energy and momentum. Place a green dot on those actors or clusters of actors.”
- “Take the next five minutes to consider where the main blockages, challenges, or gaps are in the system. Place a red dot on those actors or clusters of actors.”

### Potential Opportunities for Influence

- “For the next 5 minutes, step back to take a bird’s-eye view of the actor map. Based on where the green and red dots fall, draw amoeba-like shapes around different groups of actors that form clusters that indicate opportunity for leverage and influence. Name the clusters if possible (e.g., policy change).”

## 6. DISCUSSING IMPLICATIONS (15-45 MINUTES)

The discussion of implications will vary, depending on the goals of the actor mapping exercise (e.g., strategy development, evaluation). Sample guiding questions are below.

### Sample Questions (Strategy Development)

- What parts of the system are ripe for action? If relevant: To what extent are we engaged in these areas?
- What key opportunities are we poised to build on? To what extent are we ignoring obstacles that pose a risk to our strategy’s success?

- What new people or organizations need to be involved moving forward? What is the best way to get them engaged?

### **Sample Questions (Evaluation)**

- Where in the system has our organization/initiative had the most/least influence?
- To what extent did we bring the right people to the table to create the desired change?
- Where have we made progress on our intended outcomes, and where have we experienced challenges?

## **SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION**

Open the discussion using the speaking notes below, adjusting the time as appropriate.

### **Speaking Notes**

- “It is important that we dedicate time to bring out insights and questions about the system.”
- “For the next 20 minutes, each group will discuss a series of questions (sample questions above) posted on this flip chart and in your handout.” (If a handout was provided.)
- “Appoint one person in each group to take notes and report out to the large group after the discussion. You will be asked to report on key takeaways from your discussion.”

## **FULL GROUP REPORT-OUT**

In the remaining time, facilitate a full group report-out and discussion using the speaking notes below.

- [Open with a brief reflection about similarities and differences between the different groups’ maps and discussions]
- Going around the room, ask each group to please share:
  - “What was your experience like with the actor mapping? What was easy about it? What was challenging? What did you learn?”
  - “What are 1 or 2 of the major additions or changes you made to the actor map?”
  - “What are 2 or 3 key takeaways from your group’s discussion?”

- Once each group has had a chance to share, ask the full group: “Based on your experience and what you have heard from the other groups, what additional interesting observations do you have about the maps? What questions has today’s activity raised about the system? What initial implications are you seeing for future efforts toward [your goal]?”

## 7. REVIEW NEXT STEPS (5 MINUTES)

At the conclusion of the mapping session, it is helpful to provide participants with a clear overview of next steps. For example, you may wish to share the following.

- Information about if or when participants will have another opportunity to work on the maps. (We recommend going through at least two iterations with each major stakeholder group.)
- Information about who else may have an opportunity to view and/or edit the maps.
- Plans regarding the final format of the maps (e.g., conversion to PowerPoint or online software).
- Plans regarding how the maps will be used within and outside the organization.
- Information about whether the maps will be made publicly available, and if so, to what end and with what audiences.

## ACTOR MAPPING TECHNOLOGIES: FSG'S EXPERIENCE

Over the past few years, several technology platforms have emerged to support system change leaders in visualizing actors and networks. FSG has used one of these tools, **Kumu**, to develop a series of detailed, interactive maps.

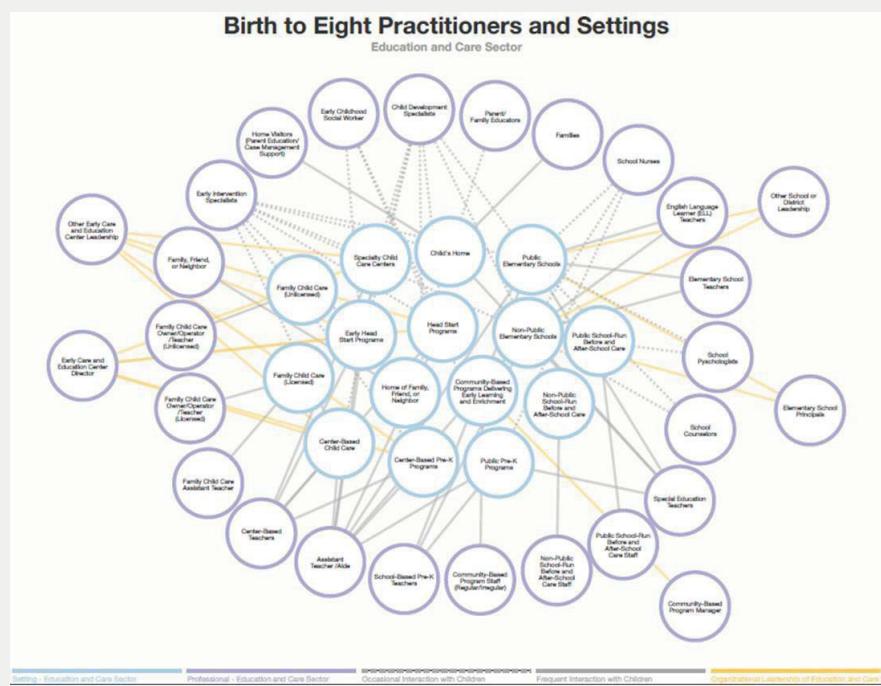
## How We Used Kumu

In one instance, we used Kumu's technology to develop several maps that illustrate the complex landscape of systems that provide or support services for young children and their families, including the settings, professional roles, and other actors and organizations involved in supporting the development, learning, and health of children from birth through age eight.

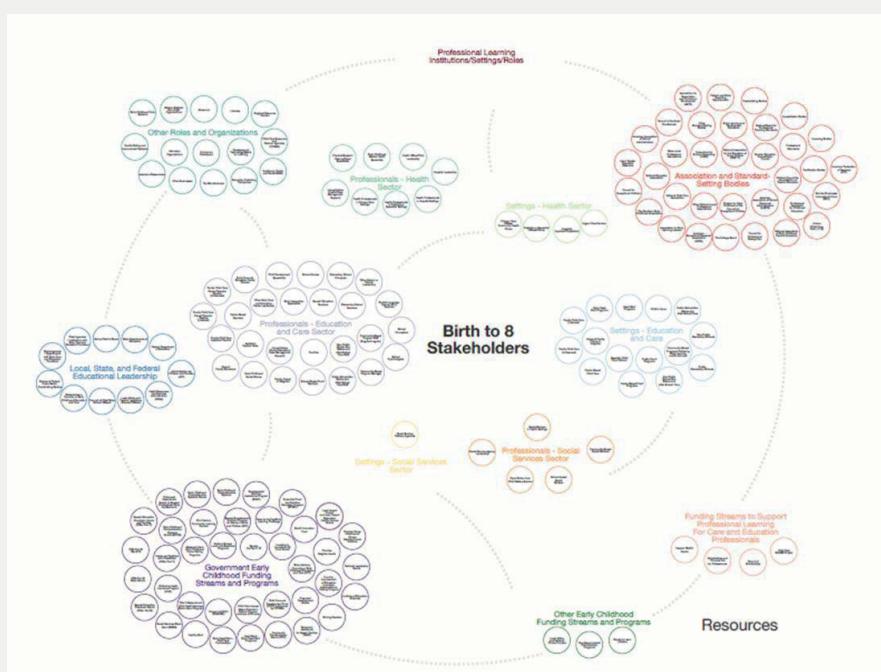
## How We Used the Maps

The maps provided a framework to help us and our clients explore, in a specific context, how to strategically engage stakeholders in strengthening supports for the early childhood workforce and identify potential levers of change in these systems, including what connections were already relatively strong and what connections needed to be strengthened.

## SAMPLE KUMU MAP: RELATIONSHIPS AMONG KEY EARLY CHILDHOOD ACTORS



## SAMPLE KUMU MAP: KEY ACTORS BY ROLE



## *PART FOUR:*

# REFINING AND REVISING THE ACTOR MAPS

In most cases, it may be necessary to revisit the actor map generated through the facilitation process above. For example, some participants can benefit from additional time to reflect on the actor map or to conduct research; in other cases, it is important to socialize the map with key partners or stakeholders who did not participate in the original mapping session. In these cases, we recommend beginning with Step 3 ("Refining the Actor Map") and continuing through the next steps of the process outlined above. Once there is a certain comfort level with the map, it can be transferred to an electronic format.

We would also suggest revisiting and updating the map at least every six months or around key decision-making points. One approach might be to reflect on the map with members of the original stakeholder groups and/or new participants and discuss the ways the composition of actors and their relationships, momentum, and blockages have changed. Depending on participants' depth of knowledge/immersion in the area, consider grounding these updated actor mapping sessions in a series of external interviews and/or light-touch secondary research.

# *FINAL CONSIDERATION*

## EXPLICIT DATA VERSUS IMPLICIT KNOWLEDGE

One last consideration to keep in mind is how much we want the steps in the mapping process to be informed by explicit data and to what extent we are comfortable using participants' implicit knowledge.

We would recommend using data from sources such as evaluation reports, landscape assessments, and subject matter experts to identify the level of engagement, type and nature of connections, and evidence of energy and momentum and/or blockages in the system. However, in our experience, this type of data isn't often readily available, and we have to rely more on the implicit knowledge and judgment of participants. This raises two implications: 1) ensuring that we have the right set of participants who bring expertise on different aspects of the system, and 2) utilizing the actor mapping process as one, but by no means the only, input into an overall evaluation or strategy development effort.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **Introducing Systems Thinking.** The Systems Practice team at the UK Open University.
  - **Guide to Diagrams**
- **Systems Change: A Guide to What It Is and How to Do It.** Guide authored by Ellen Harries, Rachel Wharton, and Rob Abercrombie. *New Philanthropy Capital*, June 2015.
- **Introduction to System Mapping.** Blog post authored by Joelle Cook. FSG, August 2015.
- **System Mapping in Action.** Blog post authored by Lauren M. Smith. FSG, November 2015.
- **Learning to Love the Process, and Other Lessons in System Mapping.** Blog post authored by Srik Gopal. FSG, December 2015.
- **Resource List** from the “System Mapping Made Simpler” workshop designed by Tanya Beer and Julia Coffman (Center for Evaluation Innovation), delivered at the 2015 Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO) Learning Conference.

# Appreciative Inquiry

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Explore what gives life to systems performing at their best

# OVERVIEW OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

## What is Appreciative Inquiry?

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Appreciative Inquiry<sup>1</sup> (sometimes referred to as AI) is the study and exploration of what gives life to human systems when they function at their best. This approach to personal change and organizational change is based on the assumption that questions and dialogue about strengths, successes, values, hopes, and dreams are themselves transformational. Appreciative Inquiry suggests that human organizing and change, at its best, is a relational process of inquiry, grounded in affirmation and appreciation.<sup>2</sup>

AI is *not* about looking at the world with rose-colored glasses and being overly positive. Instead, it focuses on how the future can be built on the best parts of the past, believing that we all have experienced what success looks like, even if only fleeting, and we have the capacity to create the world we want. AI is both a philosophy and a set of principles and practices based on the following assumptions:<sup>3</sup>

1. In every society, organization, or group, something works.
  2. What we focus on becomes our reality.
  3. Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities.
  4. The act of asking questions of an organization or group influences the group in some way.
  5. People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known).
  6. If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be only the best parts.
  7. It is important to value differences.
  8. The language we use creates our reality.
- 

1 This guide was largely developed by Hallie Preskill and Arani Grindle in 2015.

2 Whitney, D. and Trosten-Bloom, A. (2010). *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry*. 2nd Ed. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

3 Hammond, S. A. (2013). *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*. 3rd. Ed. Thin Book Publishing. Pp. 20–21.

While the benefits of AI are many, the following stand out as good reasons to use this approach where systems change is desired. Appreciative Inquiry:

- Reframes the study of problems into the study of successes.
- Offers new language that allows greater honesty about difficult topics.
- Unleashes creativity through whole-systems, participatory, and energizing processes.
- Creates opportunities for developing new relationships, networks, and communities of practice.

As a complete process, Appreciative Inquiry involves engaging participants (from a small group to many hundreds) in a four-phase process. However, it is possible to implement only one or two phases, depending on the purpose of the inquiry. As the literature has shown, the process is highly adaptable to many cultures, contexts, and purposes. (See the AI Commons for many examples of its use <https://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu>.)

HOW CAN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY SUPPORT SYSTEMS THINKING AND PRACTICE?	
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify how various contextual factors (<i>e.g., social, political, cultural, or economic developments and events</i>) influence a topic or goal.</li><li>• Put a group's progress and challenges in context (<i>e.g., relative to external factors, key activities, funding levels</i>).</li></ul>
Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explore various actors' roles in the system.</li><li>• Encourage participants to make new connections.</li><li>• Strengthen relationships and build trust among participants.</li><li>• Consider how relationships, roles, or information flows are changing.</li><li>• Explore the relationship between the group's activities/achievements and other actors' activities/achievements.</li></ul>
Patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Break old thought patterns and catalyze new ideas and thinking.</li><li>• Identify areas of common interest, concern, or excitement.</li><li>• Determine where there is energy in the system and where there are gaps or blockages.</li><li>• Understand how policies, structures, or social/cultural norms are changing.</li></ul>
Perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explore a topic from multiple diverse perspectives.</li><li>• Ensure equal footing among participant voices.</li><li>• Understand beneficiary experiences of the issue or initiative.</li><li>• Understand partners' and other key stakeholders' perspectives on the issue or initiative (<i>i.e., why it matters</i>).</li><li>• Understand participants' individual values, beliefs, and priorities.</li><li>• Identify partners' and stakeholders' learning priorities.</li></ul>

## APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY IN ACTION

On our **blog**, Stephen Downs, chief technology and strategy officer at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, reflects on his experience using Appreciative Inquiry.

### Stephen had the following advice for others using Appreciative Inquiry:

The main advice I have on these tools is to **know the purpose** going in and determine what you're trying to accomplish early. Then, design the experience making sure it's connected to your overall purpose.

The other thing, it sounds obvious, but you have to **go in the exercise feeling open**. You don't use a

process like this to confirm a direction or set up a case you know you want to make. The value you get out of a process like this is the willingness to open yourself up and hear the insights from others, rather than have it bolster a narrative you've already created. If all the decisions have already been made, it's not a good time to use Appreciative Inquiry.

Read "New Systems Thinking Tool: Appreciative Inquiry":

<http://fsg.org/blog/new-systems-thinking-tool-appreciative-inquiry>

# WHEN TO USE (AND NOT TO USE) APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

AI is extremely well suited to addressing complex systems change issues and challenges and is best used when there is a desire to:

- Create a positive change; develop new and exciting images and plans for the future.
- Support a participatory and collaborative evaluation process.
- Catalyze whole-system culture shift.
- Facilitate high-participation planning.
- Enhance strategic cooperation, overcome conflict or competition, and move away from silos.
- Mobilize design and development.
- Facilitate organizational learning.
- Integrate multiple change efforts.
- Support mergers and acquisitions.

However, when the following conditions are present, Appreciative Inquiry would not be an effective approach when:

- You are already getting what you want.
- The issue is technical, and the solution is clear and known.
- There is no commitment to positive change (clinging to deficits, problems) or a willingness to implement the outcomes of the AI process.

As noted earlier, Appreciative Inquiry involves engaging participants in one or more of the following phases. The number of participants can be as few as six, or as many as hundreds or thousands. It is important to note that each phase builds upon the findings of the previous phase. Therefore, one likely wouldn't start with Phase 3 because the foundation for Phase 3 conversations wouldn't have been built unless participants had been engaged in Phases 1 and 2. See Appendix A for additional facilitation guidelines.

The following section briefly describes the four phases of AI and includes the minimum time estimate needed to implement each phase. It is useful to note that in much of the literature, AI is described as using the 4-D model (Discover, Dream, Design, and Destiny) (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). After using Appreciative Inquiry with a wide variety of groups, Preskill and Catsambas (2006) decided to replace the 4-D terms with the "4-I" set of labels: Inquire, Imagine, Innovate, and Implement. Regardless of the terms used, the process is exactly the same.

## Phase 1: Inquire—What Gives Life? What's Working?

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This phase is for the discovery and appreciation of the best of “what is” by focusing on peak moments of excellence from the organization or community’s history. In this phase, participants discover the unique factors (e.g., leadership, relationships, culture, structure, rewards) that made those moments possible. This builds the capacity for effective and sustainable change. Members become ready to let go of parts of the past and become aware of what they want to take into the future. This phase involves paired interviews, sharing stories, identifying themes, and observing similarities and differences across groups (about 60–90 minutes).

## Phase 2: Imagine—What Might Be? What Are We Being Called to Become?

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In this phase, participants challenge the status quo by envisioning more valued and vital futures. Images of the future emerge out of the stories and examples from the best of the past. They are compelling possibilities because they emerged from the extraordinary moments of the organization or community’s history. People have a tendency to move toward the shared, positive images of the future. Together, the organization or community creates a positive image of its most desired and preferred future. This phase involves individual reflection, small group conversations, identifying themes, visualizing the future, and observing similarities and differences across groups (about 45–90 minutes).

## Phase 3: Innovate—What Should Be? What's Next, and Who Will Benefit?

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The goal of this phase is to envision how the organization or community should be designed to fully realize the shared dreams and ideals. Elements, or the “social architecture” (e.g., values, leadership, culture, staff/people, structures, strategy, communications, processes, practices, results), are first identified. Participants then create “provocative propositions” or “possibility statements” about what the organization or community would look like if it were doing more of its “bests.” In this phase, the organization or community begins to set new strategic directions and align its visions of the future with its systems and processes. This phase involves individual, pair, or small group brainstorming, sharing, and development of themes (about 75–120 minutes).

## Phase 4: Implement—Who Will do What, by When? What Else is Needed to Support the Changes?

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The task in this phase is to implement the provocative propositions from Phase 3 and to “set the organizational compass.” It is a time of continuous learning, using monitoring and appreciative evaluation tools and processes as well as improvising or making course corrections in pursuit of the shared vision. The momentum and potential for innovation, creativity, and productivity is high by this stage of the inquiry. This phase involves individuals or groups choosing which actions they wish to be responsible for making a reality (about 60–120 minutes).

# GUIDELINES FOR USING APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

In this section, we briefly describe the best times to use AI within systems change efforts and provide implementation guidance that is important for ensuring success. Note: refer to Appendix A (Page 46) for additional suggestions on how to structure your appreciative inquiry session.

## Phase 1: Inquire

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This phase helps establish relationships, develop understandings of success, and identify the best of the past—to build on the future.

### BEST TIME TO USE

When stakeholders are coming together to discuss what success would look like in their work.

### IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

Determining a specific and focused topic is essential to the success of the AI exercise. Pick one topic for discussion and craft a stage-setting introductory paragraph and interview guide. Participants get into pairs (preferably with someone they don't know and haven't worked with) and interview each other for 7–20 minutes, depending on the time available. The interview guide typically includes the following types of questions relevant to the AI topic (see Appendix B, Page 48, for sample questions):

- **Best or Peak Experience:** Reflect for a moment and remember a time when [insert topic], and it was exciting, effective, and memorable! In fact, remembering this time fills you with pride and joy. Describe this experience and the qualities that made it so satisfying and successful.
  - What was it about this experience that made it so memorable?
  - What were the conditions that made this experience so successful?

- What did you do to make it so successful? What did others do?
  - What do you think was the root cause of this success?
- **Values:** What do you value most about both:
    - Yourself?
    - This topic?
  - **Three Wishes:** If you had three wishes that would ensure a more successful experience like the one you just described, what would they be?

The quality of the stage-setting introduction and peak experience questions is essential for promoting rich stories versus sound bites. The following guides should be shared with participants:

- Be honest about your story.
- Remember that there is no right or wrong story; try not to change your story as you hear what others are saying.
- Be respectful of each other's stories; listen hard as your partner is sharing his or her story; take notes.
- Be mindful of time restrictions and allow everyone the opportunity to share their stories and opinions.
- Respect the privacy and confidentiality of others in the group; we ask that you not share what individuals say in this meeting outside this group.

Once participants have interviewed each other, they join two or three other pairs (forming groups of six or eight). Each person in the circle shares her or his partner's story in 2 minutes or less. Someone in the group should be assigned the time keeper role to ensure everyone has the same amount of time to tell their stories. The group is instructed to listen for themes in the stories as they are told.

After all of the stories have been shared, the group (of six or eight) discusses the themes they've heard and notes them on a flipchart page (three to five themes is typical, but more can be offered if desired).

Once all of the themes have been flipcharted, each group reports out. The facilitator asks the large group, "What do you see across the flipcharts (themes)?" He or she would then facilitate a conversation about what was surprising, what the activity and its outcomes reinforced, and any other observations.

## ENSURING SUCCESS—IMPORTANT FACILITATION GUIDELINES

- To put participants “in the mood” to reflect on an experience, first read the framing paragraph out loud. Then, provide them with 3–5 minutes to think, to remember, and to write down a few notes to help them tell the story. Most of us cannot pull a coherent story out of the blue, so it’s important to provide this quiet time for participants to recall their peak experiences. After this reflection time, instruct participants to pair up and share their stories.
- Ask listeners to just listen to their partner’s story and not to try to tell their own story at the same time—it’s not a dialogue. When roles are switched, they can tell their own story.
- Ask listeners to listen hard—with curiosity, focus, and authentic interest; they can ask probing questions to gain clarity and deeper understanding. And remind them that they will be telling their partner’s story, so taking a few notes will help!
- If someone thinks she doesn’t have a story to tell, ensure her that the story can be small—it could have been a momentary experience. Remind them that it’s a time when they felt proud, excited, emerged, and happy about what they were seeing or feeling.

## Phase 2: Imagine

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This phase engages participants in envisioning the future based on the best of the past or co-generating a desired vision of the future.

### BEST TIME TO USE

When developing a vision and strategic direction; to align hopes, dreams, and aspirations; to find commonality and agreement as preparation for moving forward; to develop guiding principles; to generate ideas about additional stakeholders for engagement.

### IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

This phase requires developing a scenario that is 3, 5, 10, or even 20 years from now. In this scenario, all of the hopes, dreams, and wishes (and best parts of the past as identified in the participants’ stories) have come to fruition. After reading the scenario to the group (let them listen and start to imagine), provide the following instructions:

- Reflect individually for 2–3 minutes; jot down some thoughts.
- Share your ideas with the others at your table. Speak in the present tense as if the future were now (this is critically important to the success of this activity) (15–45 minutes, depending on the time available and how much discussion might be possible).
- Discuss and flipchart the themes represented in your visions (10–15 minutes).
- On a separate piece of flipchart paper, draw a picture of the themes noted on the flipchart paper (5–10 minutes).
- Each group reports their themes; the larger group discusses similarities, differences, and implications (30–60 minutes, depending on size of group and amount of discussion desired).

### ENSURING SUCCESS—IMPORTANT FACILITATION GUIDELINES

- To achieve the goals of this phase, participants MUST speak in present tense. If participants are not doing this, politely ask them to do so.
- Since the goal is for participants to engage in a generative conversation about their imagined future, listen in on their conversations to ensure that they are building off of one another’s comments—that they are co-constructing their vision in new, expansive, and provocative ways. This activity should not be people just throwing out ideas one at a time.
- To ensure that different kinds of learners can see their visions reflected in the synthesis, consider using visual and tactile methods, in addition to text (which would be on a flipchart page). More innovative ways could involve having them build something with manipulatives (e.g., Legos, pipe cleaners, tinker toys) or using stickers, colored markers, sticky notes, and other craft materials to create another visual representation of their visions.

## Phase 3: Innovate

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This phase focuses on translating the vision—the themes from the Imagine phase—into reality to generate concrete and innovative ideas for living in the desired future.

### BEST TIME TO USE

When a commitment to act on the vision has been agreed to, and now it’s a matter of articulating the necessary changes.

## IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

Participants are provided with a brief overview of what a social architecture means and what is expected in this phase. They are then asked to reflect individually, and then in pairs or triads, to develop three to five provocative propositions (i.e., possibility statements) written in present tense that would bring the vision into reality. These may be paragraphs or individual sentences and should be action-oriented and stretch the status quo. The provocative propositions should be grounded in the stories, wishes, and imaginings participants developed in Phases 1 and 2. Participants are asked to write each provocative proposition on a sticky note (30 minutes).

While participants are doing this, the facilitator labels a series of flipchart pages with the themes that have emerged from the previous two phases. As participants finish writing their propositions, they place them on the flipchart pages that match the theme of their proposition.

When this is all done, participants are invited to view all the provocative propositions on the flipchart pages. The facilitator might read some or all of them as well. The facilitator might also ask participants for their reactions to and thoughts about what was generated.

In constructing provocative propositions, the task is to describe what is needed to create the conditions for the future state. The beginning point is to consider the current organization or community's architecture, that is, the social and technical elements that make up the organization or community. Typical elements of the social architecture include:

- Strategy
- Societal purposes
- Communication
- Leadership
- Structures
- Systems
- Culture
- Values
- Competencies
- Staff/people
- Relationships
- Business processes
- Results
- Management practices

It is important to note that at this stage, there is usually a great deal of excitement and momentum in the room. The future and how to proceed are coming into focus, and what seemed impossible earlier is now possible. Thus, it's critical that the work from this phase continue into Phase 4 where participants (and others they invite into this work) actually commit to making the provocative propositions "come alive."

## ENSURING SUCCESS—IMPORTANT FACILITATION GUIDELINES

Tell participants that it's important to make sure that the propositions are aligned with the vision(s) and are provocative — they go beyond the status quo. And they should not be challenging whether something is possible. This phase is about making the vision more concrete and actionable, and therefore, should be written as if the future were now. Encourage participants to think hard about what would be happening if their vision were a reality.

Once the provocative propositions are written on sticky notes, participants should place them on a sticky wall or a series of blank flipchart pages. If possible, they should be labeled and grouped by common theme (e.g., Values, Structures, Relationships).

To debrief, the facilitator should read each of the provocative propositions to the whole group, move those that are not categorized accurately, and remove any obvious duplicates. Be sure to invite the group to add any final propositions that might have surfaced during the report out.

## Phase 4: Implement

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In this phase, participants create commitments to implementation while maintaining learning, celebrating successes, and identifying the next cycles of affirmative topics and appreciative inquiry.

### BEST TIME TO USE

When the provocative propositions have been developed and participants are ready to move forward in making them a reality.

### IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

It's important in this phase to ensure participants keep the vision as a driving force in their work and take responsibility for acting on their commitments. This is particularly critical as a raft of changes will likely be occurring simultaneously as a result of the AI process.

While this phase can be accomplished in several ways, one is to invite participants to reflect on all of the provocative propositions and to select one or more that would be desirable for their organization or community (and relevant to their ongoing work). Being able to self-select the provocative propositions individuals are most interested in

and passionate about is critical to this phase. They would then discuss next steps for implementation and develop action or project plans that include others they would reach out to. This could be followed with a large group debriefing where people volunteer to share what they have discussed and planned.

## ENSURING SUCCESS—IMPORTANT FACILITATION GUIDELINES

- Invite participants to sign up to work on the propositions that they are most excited about. Not everyone has to work on all aspects of the vision. Encourage them to begin developing an action plan with clearly articulated actions, timelines, and responsibilities.
- Invite participants to reach out to others not in the room to work with them on making the propositions a reality.
- Encourage participants to celebrate accomplishments along the way—this will be important for maintaining momentum and commitment to the vision.

## Next Steps

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At the conclusion of the appreciative inquiry session, consider providing participants with a clear overview of next steps. For example:

- If participants did not complete all four phases, you may wish to share information about whether or when they will continue the Appreciative Inquiry process.
- Inform participants about how the information and insights shared during the session will be used and with whom they will be shared.

# APPENDIX A:

# ADDITIONAL FACILITATION GUIDELINES

## Room Set-Up

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- Round tables that seat 6–8

## Materials Needed

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- Flipchart paper for each table
- Markers
- 2" x 2" sticky note pads
- Interview guides and other handouts as needed

## Ground Rules

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- All ideas are valid
- Everything is captured (flip charts, PC)
- Listen—really listen
- Observe time frames
- Seek common ground and action
- Differences and problems are acknowledged—but not worked on
- Confidentiality—Understand that what participants say is part of a process

## Group Member Roles

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Each small group manages its own discussion, data, time, and reports. Here are the roles for self-managing this work. Roles should be rotated. Divide the work as you wish:

- Discussion Facilitator—Ensures that each person who wants to speak is heard within the time available. Keeps group on track to finish on time.

- Timekeeper—Keeps group aware of time left. Monitors report-outs and signals time remaining to person talking.
- Recorder—Writes group's output on flip charts using speaker's words. Asks people to restate long ideas briefly.
- Reporter—Delivers report to large group in time allotted.

## Characteristics of Great AI Questions

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- Are stated in the affirmative.
- Help forge a personal connection between the interviewer and interviewee.
- Build on the assumption that “the glass is half full” (rather than half empty).
- Give a broad definition to the topic. They give room to “swim around.”
- Are presented as an invitation to tell stories rather than abstract opinions or theories.
- Value “what is.” They spark the appreciative imagination by helping the person locate experiences in the past or present that are worth valuing.
- Convey unconditional, positive regard.
- Evoke essential values, aspirations, and inspirations.
- Draw on people’s life and work experience.
- Suggest action.

## APPENDIX B:

# SAMPLE APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- As you reflect on your experience with the program, tell me a story about a high-point.
- At what point in time did you feel most alive?
- When did you know it was working? How did you know it?
- When did you feel most successful in terms of your contributions to the project?
- Thinking about your department's contribution to the mission of the organization, what have you done to make the biggest difference?
- What are the most outstanding moments or stories from this organization's past that make you most proud to be a member of this organization?
- What are the things that give life to the organization when it is most alive, most effective, and most in tune with the overarching vision?
- What are we doing that should be preserved as we make changes?
- What were major milestones along the way?
- What kept you going and what was nurturing to you?
- Can you think of incidents or times that were exhilarating for you?
- Were there times when you said to yourself, "This is working, this is working!" What was happening during those times?
- If you could have waved a magic wand and the project would have turned out exactly as you had planned, what would it look like?
- Where might you have planted seeds that may sprout? What would things look like if these seeds did sprout and grow? What can you do to further support this growth?
- Looking at your entire experience, can you recall a time when you felt most excited about what you were doing? What were you doing? Who else was involved?
- What is the best team experience you've ever been involved with?
- What would be three wishes you have for this program/organization/community?

- Describe a time when you felt listened to. What was happening in the group?
- Describe a time when someone went out of his or her way to do something for you. What made it possible?
- If you could transform the ways in which you do your work, what would it look like and what would it take to happen?
- Tell me about a time when you were forced to do more with less and the results exceeded your wildest expectations. Who was involved? How were the results achieved? What did each person specifically do or contribute?
- When you think of a time when you collaborated with another group and did so successfully, what comes to mind? What circumstances allowed the collaboration to occur?
- Think about a time when you felt incredibly well supported by someone or a group of people from another organization. Tell me about that time.

# APPENDIX C:

# SELECTED REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

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# Ecocycle Mapping

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Understand where initiatives, programs, and organizations are operating on a renewal cycle

# ECOCYCLE MAPPING OVERVIEW

## What is an Ecocycle?

The concept of an ecocycle draws on biological research into the closed-loop system of development, conservation, destruction, and renewal that is seen in natural (ecological) systems.<sup>1</sup> The ecocycle suggests that the long-term sustainability of adaptive organizations requires that elements of those organizations undergo periodic, natural processes of destruction and renewal.

## What is Ecocycle Mapping?

The ecocycle framework is a visual depiction of where on the ecocycle different initiatives, programs, or even parts of an organization are currently operating.

HOW CAN ECOCYCLE MAPPING SUPPORT SYSTEMS THINKING AND PRACTICE?	
Patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Understand how an organization or initiative is allocating its energy and resources across the lifecycle (or how this allocation has changed over time).</li><li>Determine where the energy is in the system and where there are gaps or blockages.</li><li>Identify risks and diagnose challenges related to “traps” in the ecocycle (e.g., what we need to do more or less of to facilitate a healthy balance in our work).</li><li>Understand how a strategy or initiative is evolving from a lifecycle perspective.</li></ul>

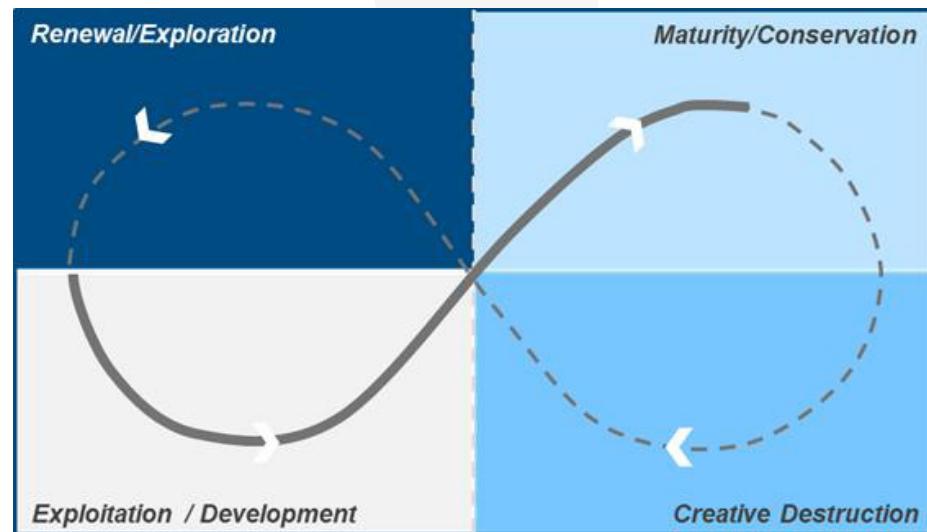
<sup>1</sup> Descriptions of the ecocycle framework throughout this guide are excerpted and lightly adapted from: David K. Hurst and Brenda J. Zimmerman, "From Life Cycle to Ecocycle: A New Perspective on the Growth, Maturity, Destruction, and Renewal of Complex Systems," *Journal of Management Inquiry* December 3 (1994): 339-354.

# PART ONE: FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT

## Is Ecocycle Mapping Right for Your Project?

CONSIDERATIONS	USE ECOCYCLE MAPPING	DON'T USE ECOCYCLE MAPPING
Boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>You have a clear topic for exploration</li><li>Your focus is "looking within" an organization, initiative, or strategy</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The topic for ecocycle mapping is not yet clear</li><li>You want to understand the connections or relationships between activities, actors, or trends</li></ul>
Credible Informants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Participants are familiar with the topic selected for the mapping activity and the organization or initiative's work related to it</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Participants cannot credibly speak to the topic and the organization or initiative's work in that area</li></ul>

BLANK ECOCYCLE MAP



## What Do I Need to Properly Facilitate an Ecocycle Mapping Session?

An ecocycle mapping session typically takes 75–90 minutes to facilitate. Preparation requirements are outlined on the next page.

REQUIREMENT	DESCRIPTION
Prep Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Participant: None</li><li>Facilitator: 2 hours to frame the activity; more for interviews (if applicable)</li></ul>
Facilitator Prep Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Setup for the activity<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Determine the topic for the mapping activity</li><li>Determine for whom activities are being mapped (e.g., the organization, initiative, strategy, or program)</li></ul></li><li>Conduct background research (optional)</li><li>Conduct interviews or document review to identify an initial set of activities that could be included on the ecocycle map</li></ul>
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Facilitation agenda and talking points</li><li>A large (approximately 36" x 48") printed copy of the ecocycle framework (you can also use a whiteboard, if available)</li><li>Sticky dots (multiple colors)</li><li>Sticky notes for adding or moving information on the ecocycle</li><li>Markers, pens</li><li>Flip charts (one per group)</li><li>Ecocycle handouts (one per person, see appendix)</li></ul>

# PART TWO: PREPARATION

- Select a topic for discussion.** The two most common types of topics for an ecocycle mapping activity are:
  - Efforts occurring within a system or set of related systems that influence a desired outcome (e.g., efforts to improve early childhood health equity, efforts to curb tobacco use)
  - Efforts within or related to an organization's particular area of work (e.g., a program or set of programs, a grant portfolio)
- Do some research.** Consider preparing for the session by making an initial list of efforts that may be appropriate to place on the ecocycle. Information can be gathered through secondary research and interviews with people knowledgeable about the topic from different perspectives (internal and external).
- Create groups.** Consider assigning participants to small groups (six to eight people each) before they arrive, so that each group has a good mix of people from different backgrounds and perspectives.
- Prepare room setup and materials.**
  - Allocate about 75–90 minutes for the ecocycle mapping session.
  - Arrange the room so each group has a workspace with:
    - A copy of the ecocycle framework (either on a poster-sized piece of paper taped to a wall or a large whiteboard)
    - Blank sticky notes, sharpie markers, dot stickers in multiple colors, and a flip chart
  - No preparation is required for session participants.
- Prepare seating.**
  - Divide (or assign) participants into groups of approximately six to eight people. The groups should be large enough to include participants with a diversity of content expertise, levels of seniority, levels of tenure, and other relevant characteristics, but small enough that every participant can actively engage in the activity and discussion.
  - Distribute an ecocycle mapping handout to each person. A sample handout may be found at the end of this guide.

## ECOCYCLE MAPPING IN ACTION

On our **blog**, we explore the use of ecocycle mapping by Minnesota Philanthropy Partners as they reflected on their portfolio of grant programs, initiatives, and emerging partnerships in light of newly articulated values and objectives.

Using the tool, staff quickly realized that program officers and organizational leaders spent the majority of their time managing activities and initiatives within the “Reframe or Exit” phase of the ecocycle. Notably, one grant program represented a substantial portion of the effort. While all recognized that reframing this program was a high priority, seeing the portfolio through this lens helped clarify where staff hoped to refocus time, attention, and energy to align internal resources with impact objectives.

**An ecocycle mapping session helped the network identify new strategic questions, such as:**

- What would the ideal distribution of time, energy, and resources across the ecocycle look like? What might need to change internally to achieve this balance?
- Is Minnesota Philanthropy Partners’ pipeline of new opportunities strong enough? What will it take to strengthen the pipeline? Should the organization shift more time and energy to idea sourcing?
- How well is the organization doing at identifying promising ideas and growing them into new grantmaking initiatives or programs?
- What does it mean to revisit and reframe existing activities or initiatives that represent the majority of the organization’s focus? What degree of change is desired? How can the organization responsibility exit from initiatives or programs that are less aligned with its strategic objectives?

Read “New Systems Thinking Tool: Ecocycle Mapping”:

<http://fsg.org/blog/new-systems-thinking-tool-ecocycle-mapping>

# PART THREE: FACILITATION STEPS AND SUGGESTED TIMING

An ecocycle mapping session typically takes about 75–90 minutes to facilitate.

## Introduction (15 minutes)

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When participants are seated with their small group, provide an introduction to the ecocycle model and the mapping exercise, referring to the handout as appropriate.

### (OPTIONAL) BRAINSTORMING (5–6 MINUTES)

Ask each participant to take 5–6 minutes to brainstorm a list of major activities, practices, policies, and other efforts related to the topic of discussion.

## Plot Major Internal and External Efforts on the Ecocycle Framework (15 minutes)

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Ask each small group to take 15 minutes to plot major activities, programs, practices, policies, and other efforts on the ecocycle, based on their stage of development. Encourage the groups to briefly discuss the rationale for their plotting as they go along.

## Analysis (15-25 minutes)

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### OPTION ONE: TRAPS AND CHALLENGES (20–25 MINUTES)

This analytical approach is most appropriate when the topic for the mapping exercise is a set of efforts within or related to a particular area of work (e.g., a program or set of programs, a grant portfolio). The purpose of the analysis is to understand where there are blockages or challenges to movement through the cycle.

- Prompt each group to reflect on which quadrants within the map show the greatest and the least amounts of activity. Where does there seem to be a lot of energy? Where might there be blockages in the movement of the system? (10 minutes)

- Encourage the groups to reflect on what, if any, traps the organization, department, or initiative is struggling with (e.g., scarcity trap). Refer to the handout for details on each trap (10 minutes).

## OPTION TWO: IMPACT VERSUS RESOURCES (15–20 MINUTES)

This analytical approach is most appropriate when the topic for the mapping exercise is a set of efforts within a system or related systems that influence a desired outcome (e.g., efforts to improve early childhood health equity, efforts to curb tobacco use). The purpose of the analysis is to understand how resources are allocated relative to perceived impact.

- Prompt each group to use green dots to identify activities that have had (or are likely to have) the greatest impact on the goal (5 minutes).
- Prompt each group to use red dots to identify the activities that have taken (or are likely to take) the greatest amount of time and resources at the organizational or initiative level (5 minutes).
- Encourage the groups to reflect on where there are significant mismatches between resource allocation and perceived impact (5–10 minutes).

## Reflection and Discussion (20–30 minutes)

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- **Gallery Walk.** Invite participants to pair up or form small groups and take 10 minutes to walk through the room, observing other groups' work. Encourage participants to note similarities and differences across the groups' ecocycles.
- **Discussion.** Engage the full group in a discussion based on a selection of the following questions:
  - What general patterns do you see in the way activities, efforts, programs, practices, and policies are distributed across each stage?
  - Are there opportunities to shift attention between phases to achieve greater balance?
  - *For groups that chose Analytical Option 1:* What trap(s) do we appear to be struggling with based on the distribution of efforts on the ecocycle? Do the descriptions of the traps ring true to you? What implications for action are there related to these traps? What might cause us to take these actions?
  - *For groups that chose Analytical Option 2:* To what degree do we appear to be focusing our time and resources on the efforts or activities that we believe have the greatest potential for impact? Which potentially influential activities might require more resources? Where might we (or others) scale back our resource investment due to low anticipated impact? What implications for action do we see in this map? What might cause us to take these actions?

# NEXT STEPS AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

At the conclusion of the ecocycle mapping session, consider providing participants with a clear overview of next steps. For example, you may wish to share:

- Plans regarding how the maps will be used within the organization or initiative;
- Information about whether or when participants will have another opportunity to work on the maps (typically, additional iterations with the group will not be required, but they might be desirable in some situations);
- Information about who else may have an opportunity to view or edit the maps; and
- Information about whether the maps will be made publicly available, and if so, to what end and with what audiences (typically, ecocycle maps are not made public; however, this might be desirable in some situations).

Consider revisiting and updating the map on a regular basis (e.g., every six months) or around key decision-making or learning junctures. For example, you could use this time to reflect on the map with members of the original stakeholder groups or new participants and discuss the ways the distribution of efforts across the ecocycle has changed over time.

## Additional Resources

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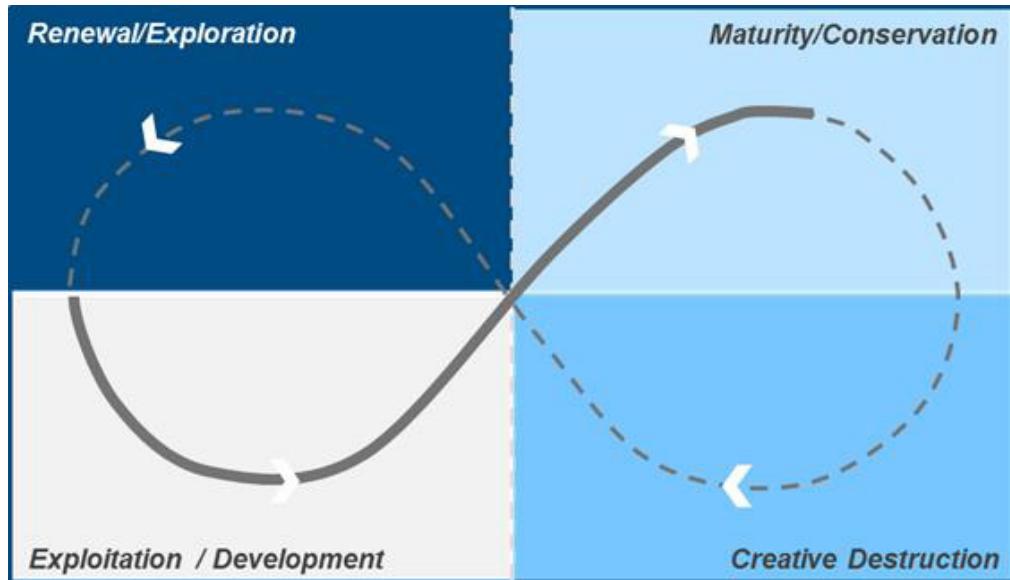
- **Liberating Structures: Ecocycle Planning Exercise**
- **The Ecocycle: A Mental Model for Understanding Complex Systems.** David Hurst writes about some additional ideas about the ecocycle and its adaptation, March 2012.

# PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

## Introduction to the Ecocycle Framework

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- The ecocycle framework will help us understand where we are currently allocating our energy and resources, and:
  - Identify what we need to further invest in or deliberately stop doing to facilitate the health and renewal of our work
  - Determine the approaches and capacities needed for different phases of work
  - Achieve diversity in our work to allow for successful adaptation over time
- The ecocycle framework takes the shape of an infinity curve, symbolizing that there is no beginning or end to living systems and the interconnectedness of all things. The ecocycle has four stages, each representing a different “life phase” of an activity. Each stage is characterized by unique features that play a role in ongoing adaptation, and each can pose a “trap” that prevents an organization’s activities from continuing to adapt.
- The “front side” of the curve may be familiar to students of management studies or organizational development theory as the “S-curve.” This part of the loop focuses on moving from developing new ideas to engaging in deliberate planning and streamlining of efforts toward predictable success and efficiency. It usually stands alone in traditional management thinking. The ecocycle framework adds the “back side” of the curve — the recognition that creative destruction and renewal are natural and essential for the ongoing viability of a system or organization.
- A useful analogy for understanding the ecocycle is to think of the complex system of a forest. The table on the next page outlines the features of each phase of the cycle, beginning with moving up the traditional “S” curve. Throughout the table, the forest metaphor is employed to bring the ecocycle to life.



- A healthy forest has patches — it has parts in each of the four phases. This looks disorganized, but keeps the forest viable and resilient over the long term. Recognizing this, firefighters now selectively let fires burn or even set fires intentionally to clear away dead wood and free nutrients for new generations of growth.
- The ecocycle shows us that it is not enough to move up the front side, the “S” curve. We also have to engage in creative destruction and renewal. The activities and structures we use to do our work are not the essence of our work. Letting go and experiencing change are essential aspects of keeping our work vital and viable to achieve our aims over the long term.

## OVERVIEW OF ECOCYCLE PHASES AND POTENTIAL TRAPS

PHASE	POTENTIAL TRAP
<b>Exploitation/Development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This phase is like an open patch in a forest. A wide variety of species all compete for the same resources, and none is dominant. There are a lot of births in this stage; however, many of the new births do not reach maturity.</li> <li>In organizations, this is an entrepreneurial period of high energy, lots of new ideas, and trial and error learning. Resources are spread over a variety of projects or activities.</li> </ul>	<b>Parasitic Trap</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In time, we need to consolidate resources and invest in the most promising ideas. Having too many activities in this stage for too long creates challenges to growth and sustainability.</li> </ul>
<b>Maturity/Conservation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the forest, competition starts to require efficiency. Resources become consolidated or conserved in a few trees that begin to dominate the space.</li> <li>In organizations, this phase involves planning, allocating resources to predictably successful activities, and streamlining operations for efficiency. Moving up the curve to this phase has been the aim of traditional management thinking.</li> </ul>	<b>Rigidity Trap</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activities can become too rigid and fail to adapt to current needs. Fear of failure or lack of exit plans can arise.</li> </ul>
<b>Creative Destruction</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the forest, this phase is the forest fire. The system is not fully destroyed in the fire. The fire releases nutrients and genetic material into the soil to create the conditions for new growth.</li> <li>In organizations, this phase involves letting go of activities that have become too rigid and similar and are not responsive to current needs to free up resources and create the conditions for developing new ideas.</li> <li>It can be hard to acknowledge that some activities have lost their vitality or are not meeting current needs.</li> <li>But this phase can be a time for new insights and is crucial for freeing up resources to invest in new ideas that have more promise for the future.</li> </ul>	<b>Chronic Disaster Trap</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organizations find themselves spinning and unable to form a compelling vision and set of values. There is weakened trust and difficulty agreeing on a vision for the future.</li> </ul>
<b>Renewal/Exploration</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In a forest, this is the phase after the fire where open spaces have been created. The soil is rich with nutrients, and there are many possibilities for how these nutrients will be recombined. It is rich with potential, but it is not clear what combinations will be most successful.</li> <li>In organizations, this is a stage of creating connections to mobilize resources and skills to create the next generation of effective ideas.</li> </ul>	<b>Scarcity Trap</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compelling, credible ideas fail to emerge due to underdeveloped decision-making; energy is spread too thinly.</li> </ul>

# Timeline Mapping

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Visualize relationships and context through the chronological plotting of events and activities

# OVERVIEW

## What is Timeline Mapping?

Timeline mapping is the process of arranging important events, activities, grants, actions, achievements, and other milestone markers in chronological order, enabling insight into their relationships to one another and to key contextual factors (e.g., social, economic, political, demographic, and cultural events and trends).

HOW CAN TIMELINE MAPPING SUPPORT SYSTEMS THINKING AND PRACTICE?	
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Understand an issue's landscape/context and history.</li><li>• Identify how contextual factors influence a topic/goal.</li><li>• Put a group's progress/challenges in context (e.g., relative to external factors, key activities, and funding levels).</li></ul>
Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explore the relationship between the group's activities or achievements and other actors' activities or achievements.</li></ul>
Patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Determine where the energy is in the system and where there are gaps or blockages.</li><li>• Understand the group's role or focus and how this has shifted over time.</li><li>• Explore how the focus of other actors (or the larger system in general) has shifted over time.</li><li>• Visualize momentum, traction, and trends over time.</li><li>• Understand how policies, structure, or social and cultural norms are changing.</li><li>• Understand the relationship between outputs/outcomes and external events.</li></ul>

## EXAMPLE TIMELINE MAP<sup>1</sup>

### R4S Timeline: What has happened in the community during the time R4S has been around?

R4S		Community Climate	Organizational	Economy
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business Council</li> <li>7 Task Forces (Faith, Employers, Medical, etc.)</li> <li>Began data collection on common metric – DIBELS, parent survey</li> <li>Develop Readiness Defn.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Building Bridges</li> <li>Head Start Childcare Training</li> <li>Summer Institute</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>R4S Preschool Tuition Program begins</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3rd Kellogg Grant (3 yrs) - evaluation, innovation, sustainability phase out staff reduced)</li> <li>Associate Director becomes President/CEO Transition of home health workers</li> <li>“Pause” in play groups Development Director transitions out</li> </ul>
2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pushback from parents on the importance of preschool</li> <li>Superintendents agree to use DIBELS R, S, R, SCOL mark distributed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>R4S decision to focus preschool</li> <li>Festival R4S collaboration</li> <li>Beginning of quality rating system: Start Quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Task Forces &amp; LAUP joint efforts</li> <li>Expectations for Kindergarten readiness</li> <li>Talent is embarrassed early childhood issues</li> <li>Expectations for Kindergarten readiness</li> <li>Increase</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2nd Kellogg Grant (3 yrs) – capacity building and organizational development</li> <li>Asst Director becomes full-time Director hire</li> <li>Steering committee becomes board</li> <li>Healthier Beginnings Begins</li> <li>More 4x staff hired (size up to 8)</li> <li>“Please don’t try this!” that ECE position</li> </ul>
2008				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3rd Kellogg Grant (3 yrs) - evaluation, innovation, sustainability phase out staff reduced)</li> <li>Associate Director becomes President/CEO Transition of home health workers</li> <li>“Pause” in play groups Development Director transitions out</li> </ul>
2009				
2010				
2011				
2012				
2013				
2014				
2015				

1 Slide included as part of the Phase 1 Activity Highlights Report for Ready for School's Strategic Review.

# PART ONE:

# FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT

## Is Timeline Mapping Right for Your Project?

CONSIDERATIONS	USE TIMELINE MAPPING	DON'T USE TIMELINE MAPPING
Time Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Retrospective: You want to look back over a specific period.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Present/prospective: You want to understand what is happening now or what might happen in the future.</li></ul>
Credible Informants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participants can credibly verify, add to, or refute information that will populate the timeline.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You do not have access to credible sources that can confirm or refute information on the timeline.</li></ul>

## What Do I Need to Properly Facilitate a Timeline Mapping Session?

A timeline mapping session typically takes about 90 minutes to facilitate. Preparation requirements are outlined below.

REQUIREMENT	DESCRIPTION
Prep Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participant: Minimal - review draft timeline</li><li>• Facilitator: 6-12 hours</li></ul>
Facilitator Prep Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Setup for the activity</li><li>• Determine the timeframe for the mapping activity.</li><li>• Set the boundaries for the mapping ("what's in and what's out").</li><li>• Prepopulate template</li><li>• Use existing data (grant reports, strategy documents, evaluation reports, other publications, interviews) to prepopulate timeline mapping template.</li><li>• Add contextual data as appropriate (e.g., enactment of key policies).</li></ul>

<b>Required Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitation agenda and talking points</li> <li>• Individual printed copies of the prepopulated timeline so that people can reference it during the session</li> <li>• Sticky notes for adding or moving information on the timeline</li> <li>• Large printed posters (24 by 36 inches) with dates for the timeline and key pieces of information or thematic areas identified</li> <li>• Markers, pens</li> <li>• Flip charts (at least two) and wall space for hanging flip chart paper on wall (eight sheets long ideally)</li> </ul>
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# PART TWO: PREPARATION

Unlike most other types of visualization tools, timeline mapping often requires significant pre-meeting work to be successful. (This is especially true if key inputs, such as grants data, need to be retrieved and analyzed before they can be added to the template.) Below are the recommended steps in preparing for a timeline mapping session.

## Choose a Topic and Set Boundaries

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- Select a topic for the analysis and set topical boundaries. For example, a chosen topic could be “progress toward early childhood care objectives” in a particular county, with “early childhood” defined as birth to age eight and loose boundaries around the social determinants of health.
- Determine who will participate in the timeline mapping session, and whose activities, strategies, and investments will be included as part of the mapping exercise.
- Select a scale of analysis (e.g., national, state, regional, or local). In general, the broader the topic selected (above), the smaller the scale of analysis should be. Your map should stick to no more than three to four “levels” of analysis (e.g., program, organization, and context).
- Set a timeframe for the analysis to capture relevant history. For most topics, a 5- to 10-year retrospective timeline will suffice.

## Create the Template

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Create a two-page, or longer, template that session participants can use to populate the timeline. Follow the steps below to create the template. Refer to Page 66 for an example.

## PREPOPULATE DATA ON A TIMELINE DOCUMENT

The timeline map records the factual information that session participants will use to reveal connections among relevant data points (e.g., trends in policy or funding; participant events, strategies, or investments; specific efforts relevant to the subject of the timeline). To the extent that this factual information is available in advance of the mapping session, you should incorporate it into a template that includes timeframe, key external trends and events, high-level participant and partner outputs and activities, and participant and partner investments. (Factual information could come from a number of sources, such as grant reports, evaluation reports, the media, academic research, subject matter experts, and many others).

### Timeframe

At the top of the page, mark the timeframe and identify period markers as appropriate (e.g., months, years, and decades). As a rule of thumb, aim for about 10 period markers per page to ensure there is adequate space for details and comments.

### Internal Activities and Events

Provide space to record data on participants' (and partners', if desired) strategic focus, activities, achievements, and leadership/internal transitions. For example, you may wish to include data on:

- Major initiatives or focus areas during the timeframe (e.g., RFP announced, sites selected, conference hosted or attended, partnerships established)
- Changes in vision, mission, or core strategies
- Changes in organizational leadership (e.g., date that a new Executive Director joined)

### Optional: Major Investments

To the extent that they are relevant, create space to record major investments by participants and partners. In many instances, there will be more grants and investments relevant to a topic than can be feasibly depicted on a timeline. In such instances, it is important to define and apply criteria to narrow the list.

- Define and Apply Criteria: Decide what criteria would be ideal to apply to the data (e.g., magnitude or significance of the effort, scale or location of the effort, targeted population, program or portfolio). Decide how the data would ideally be sorted (i.e., how the data will be organized and in what order the criteria will be applied).
- Gather the Data: Obtain data from relevant and credible sources.

- Plot the Data
  - Consider developing a color-coding system for information related to different sub-topics (e.g., for a map focused on early childhood, blue could indicate infancy, purple could indicate nursery school, red could indicate pre-school).
  - Plot the data in the relevant spaces on the timeline template. You may need to adjust the template or the dataset to accommodate the information you've gathered. It is okay to adjust the number of years on each page and the size of the efforts included in the dataset.
  - After the data is plotted, check it for accuracy. Consider running the draft by two or three key members of the participant group before sharing it with the full group.

## External Events

Next, provide space to record key external factors (e.g., public policies, funding changes, and media coverage of key events). These factors are included in the timeline mapping process in order to prompt participants to consider how they responded to shifts in external context and energy regarding a given topic. In general, it is best to focus on external events with strong, meaningful connections to the subject of the timeframe. The below table provides guidance on external factors that could be considered as well as potential criteria to use in filtering information to be added to the template.

### *Categories of External Events to Consider:*

- Enactment of new policies or major shifts in existing policies
- Major investments or divestments in the space (could be public or philanthropic)
- Changes in organizational or political leadership
- Major news stories, public events, or campaigns
- New breakthroughs in technology or research
- Changes in economic conditions
- Changes in demographics

Remember that data on the map should be expressed in date format. For example, rather than adding a trend such as "increased attention to childhood obesity issues," it is preferable to add specific dates or periods, such as the timing of a local media campaign on healthy eating, or the date that a new school food policy took effect, or the period when local policymakers considered that policy.

If needed, you can create different timeline pages to track the influence of different categories of external events.

## DEVELOP GUIDING QUESTIONS

The final step in the prep process for a timeline mapping session is to develop the guiding questions that will frame how participants review the information and what types of insights they generate. Questions will help participants move from the “what” to the “so what.”

Good guiding questions will:

- Be open ended
- Progress from looking backward to looking forward; make connections between past events and future objectives
- Prompt participants to read between the data or make connections
- Think at the systems level

The following set of guiding questions can serve as a strong starting place and can be customized for the specific objectives of the conversation.

### Sample Guiding Questions

The facilitator should adapt the questions below to correspond with the topic of discussion.

- What themes or insights did this timeline provide?
  - What appear to be some particularly noteworthy events, activities, factors, actors, or organizations? What makes them noteworthy?
    - How have the initiative or members of the group responded to key changes in external context?
  - What relationships do you notice in the map? (*Tailor this question to different scales/segments of the map, e.g., participant efforts, external context.*)
    - How have the initiative and its context influenced each other?
  - What findings will be most important to keep top-of-mind for future work?
- What questions or implications does this timeline raise for you? (*You should tailor this question to the objectives of your meeting/engagement.*)
- What's not here that should be here? What's here that should not be here?

## Room Setup and Materials Needed

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- Allocate 90 minutes to the session.
- Print poster-sized (24-by-36-inch) copies of key pages in the timeline (this can be done at Staples or FedEx). Hang the posters so that participants can visually reference the timeline during the conversation.
- Arrange the room so that each member of the group can see one another and the posters.
- Distribute a printed copy of the timeline to each person so they can reference it during the conversation.
- Have at least two flip charts, flip chart pads, and markers available, with window or white-board space available to hang up to eight flip chart sheets.
- Have sticky notes and pens available.

## Pre-Work for Participants

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Ideally, you should have time to share the prepopulated timeline with session participants before the meeting. In your email to participants, provide an overview of the purpose of the session and a preview of how it will be useful. Encourage participants to review the template in advance and reflect on the guiding questions (above) as time permits.

# PART THREE: FACILITATION AND SUGGESTED TIMING

A timeline mapping session typically takes about 75–90 minutes to facilitate.

## Introduction (15 minutes)

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- Begin by sharing a brief introduction to timeline mapping and the purpose of the activity.

## Facilitate the Discussion (30–50 minutes)

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- Use the guiding questions you developed (see Part Two, above) to help frame the conversation. Select two to three questions that you want to be sure to ask directly; the other questions can be reserved as probe questions. See the box below for example primary questions, probe questions, and suggested time allocations. These questions should be the same as the guiding questions shared in the pre-read.
- During the discussion, draw the group’s attention to themes and insights they share, past examples of how the organization or initiative has emerged or adapted, and ways the group responded to or missed external shifts in the system. Invite the group to share stories that illustrate best practices or learning moments.
- Record the group’s comments and insights in the “observations” row of the timeline template.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	SUGGESTED TIME
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What themes or insights did this timeline provide?</li> <li>• What appear to be some particularly noteworthy events, activities, factors, actors, or organizations? What makes them noteworthy? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How has the initiative or members of the group responded to key changes in external context?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What relationships do you notice in the map? (<i>Tailor this question to different scales/segments of the map, e.g., participant efforts, external context.</i>) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How have the initiative and its context influenced each other?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What findings will be most important to keep top-of-mind for future work?</li> </ul>	30 minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What questions or implications does this timeline raise for you as it relates to where and how the group should prioritize its activities, investments, and relationship-building work moving forward?</li> </ul>	10 minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What's not here that should be here? What's here that should not be here?</li> </ul>	10 minutes

## Close the Conversation (10–15 minutes)

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- A strong conclusion to the conversation reinforces key insights and motivates the group to apply what they've learned to their work moving forward.
- Refer to the flip chart notes to develop brief concluding remarks touching on the following topics:
  - Purpose of the activity and discussion.
  - Key insights and themes that surfaced during the discussion, including insights about the organization or initiative's past work as well as implications for the future.
  - Lingering questions that surfaced but were not answered. Propose next steps for addressing the lingering questions.
  - Guidance for how to carry this conversation forward into future work.

## TIMELINE MAPPING IN ACTION

On our **blog**, we explore the use of timeline mapping by Ready for School as they worked to understand their organization's community work and resulting impact.

### A timeline mapping session provided the organization with:

- A detailed look at how Ready for School had developed from a community-wide initiative into a nonprofit organization.
- An opportunity for participants new to Ready for School to understand the organization's historical context and the community influences on its work.
- An improved understanding of Ready for School's relationships with other community stakeholders, such as Great Start, Head Start, the business community, and the intermediate school districts. This helped the group reflect on where dupica-
- tion had occurred, what new coalitions had been formed, and where communication patterns had facilitated or created barriers to improved early childhood education and kindergarten readiness.
- A basis for understanding and talking about the fluid dynamics of state funding decisions in early childhood education and how these affect Ready for School.
- A detailed examination of how economic trends and changes in poverty dynamics were influencing Ready for School's organizational decision-making.

Read "New Systems Thinking Tool: Timeline Mapping":

<http://fsg.org/blog/new-systems-thinking-tool-timeline-mapping>

# NEXT STEPS AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

At the conclusion of the timeline mapping session, consider providing participants with a clear overview of next steps. For example, you may wish to share:

- Information about whether or when participants will have another opportunity to work on the timeline (typically, additional iterations with the group will not be required, but they might be desirable in some situations);
- Information about who else may have an opportunity to view or edit the timeline;
- Plans regarding the final format of the timeline (for example, whether it will be converted to a PowerPoint slide and distributed);
- Plans regarding how the timeline will be used within the organization or initiative;
- Information about whether the timeline will be made publicly available, and if so, to what end and with what audiences.

Consider revisiting and updating the timeline at least annually or around key decision-making or learning junctures. One approach might be to reflect on the timeline with members of the original stakeholder groups and new participants and discuss how the timeline has changed. Depending on the participants' depth of knowledge/immersion in the area, consider grounding these update timeline mapping sessions in a series of external interviews or light-touch secondary research.

## Additional Resources

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- **The KS wiki toolkit: Timelines - Historical mapping.** Tools and resources sourced from CGIAR.
- **Putting Data in Context: Timelining for Evaluators.** AEA Conference presentation, November 2015. See also handout [here](#).
- **Artineh Samkian and Joelle Greene on Graphic Timelines to Capture Qualitative Process Data.** Blog post containing quick tips on AEA's website, January 2014.
- **Visualizing Process: How to Create a Stakeholder-friendly Graphic Timeline of Process Data.** AEA Conference presentation, November 2013.

# Trend Mapping

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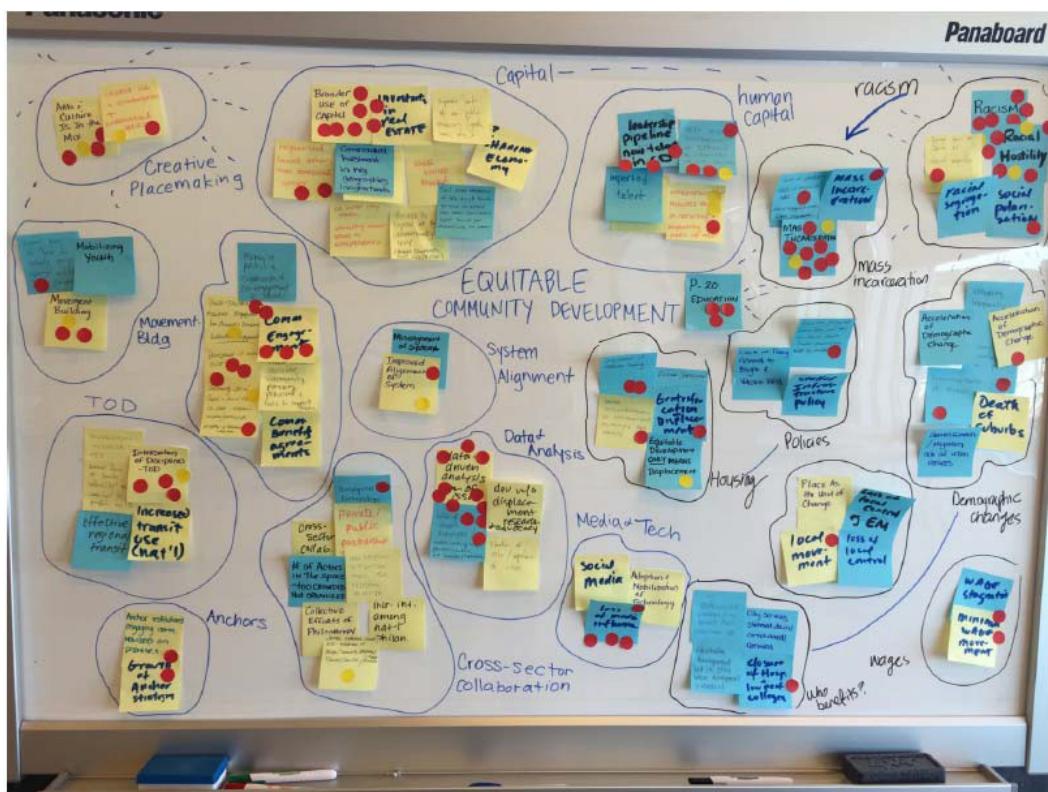
Discover relevant trends influencing the system around a given topic

# OVERVIEW

## What is A Trend Map?

A trend map is a visual depiction of relevant trends influencing the system around a given topic. It is developed using the collective knowledge and experience of a group of people familiar with a given system and its context.

### EXAMPLE TREND MAP<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> This trend map was developed during an internal meeting at the Kresge Foundation in 2016. For more information on this session, please refer to this [blog post](#).

#### HOW CAN TREND MAPPING SUPPORT SYSTEMS THINKING AND PRACTICE?

Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Understand an issue's landscape/context and history.</li><li>• Identify how various contextual factors (e.g., social, political, cultural, and economic developments and events) influence a topic or goal.</li></ul>
Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explore relationships, momentum, and energy among the trends on the map.</li></ul>
Patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify key trends (e.g., increases, decreases, appearances, disappearances, evolutions, and adaptations) that may influence the topic or goal.</li><li>• Understand how policies or social and cultural norms are changing.</li><li>• Understand the relationships between outputs and outcomes and external factors.</li></ul>

# PART ONE: FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT

## Is Trend Mapping Right for Your Project?

CONSIDERATIONS	USE TREND MAPPING	DON'T USE TREND MAPPING
System Boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>You have a clear understanding of the system and its boundaries in order to identify relevant trends and their implications.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The boundaries of the system and its components and subcomponents are unclear.</li></ul>
Credible Informants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Participants are familiar with a given system and have knowledge and experience of relevant trends.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Participants cannot credibly speak to trends in the system and their implications.</li></ul>

## What Do I Need to Properly Facilitate a Trend Mapping Session?

A trend mapping session typically takes 60–90 minutes to facilitate. Preparation requirements are outlined below.

REQUIREMENT	DESCRIPTION
Prep time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Participant: Minimal</li><li>Facilitator: 3-7 hours</li></ul>
Facilitator prep work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Frame the activity<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Identify the issue and boundaries for the mapping activity. (Note: This can be done with or without input from participants.)</li></ul></li><li>Background research (optional)</li></ul>
Required materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Facilitation agenda and talking points</li><li>Large sheet of paper (approximately 36" x 28"), landscape orientation, on the wall</li><li>Tape, markers (multiple colors)</li><li>Flip chart and paper</li><li>Sticky notes (at least two colors)</li><li>Sticky dots</li></ul>

# PART TWO: PREPARATION

## Choose a Topic

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The topic can vary, but will likely be a current or potential focus of the organization's work. This could take the form of an outcome, setting, service, experience of a group of core stakeholders, or other topic.

## Conduct Research

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Consider preparing for the session by collecting an initial set of trends through secondary research or external interviews with people knowledgeable about the topic with various vantage points into the system.

## Prepare the Meeting Space

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- Trend mapping is intended to be a group discussion about a collaboratively created diagram. Arrange the room so participants are gathered around the large sheet of paper.
- Write the topic for discussion inside a circle in the center of a large (approximately 36" x 28") sheet of paper, landscape orientation.
- Have markers available in multiple colors; have post-its available in red and green; have sticky dots available; have a flipchart available.
- Optional: Ask participants to prepare for the session by reflecting on trends that are supporting or impeding progress related to the topic from their experience.

# PART THREE:

# FACILITATION AND SUGGESTED TIMING

The section below is designed to support you in preparing for and facilitating a 90-minute trend mapping session.<sup>2</sup> This activity can be conducted with any size group. Ideally, participants will represent a diversity of teams as well as levels of seniority and tenure across the organization or initiative. The group may also include external participants such as beneficiaries or grantees.

## Introduction (15 minutes)

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Begin by sharing a brief introduction to trend mapping and the purpose of the activity.

## Brainstorming (3–5 minutes)

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Prompt participants to write down a list of trends<sup>3</sup> that they believe influence the topic. (These could be supporting trends or impeding trends.) Encourage participants to list 10–15 trends.

## Building the Map (35 minutes)

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- **Modeling:** Invite a participant to share one of the trends on his or her list and to identify whether the trend is “supporting” or “impeding” progress toward the organization’s goal. Write the trend on a post-it (green for supporting trend, red for impeding trend) and place it near the topic at the center of the map. Invite someone else to share another trend influencing the topic and whether it is supporting or impeding progress. Before placing the post-it on the map, ask the participant if the trend he or she has just named is related to the first trend. If so, place the new

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2 This section of the trend mapping tool was informed by the instructions included in the following resource: <http://www.mind-mapping.co.uk/mind-mapping-information-and-advice/how-to-make-a-mind-map/>.

3 It may be helpful to define a trend as something that is increasing or decreasing, or appearing or disappearing.

post-it near the first one; if not, place the post-it on its own in another spot near the topic. Repeat this process 8–10 times until you have started to form small clusters of trends.

- **Engaging:** At this point, you can invite participants to come up to the map, one at a time, to place their own post-its while explaining to the group what they are doing. Continue this process for the remainder of the time allocated to this part of the exercise, or until all of the trends are mapped. At the end of this part of the session, you should see multiple clusters of trends laid out around the topic at the center of the page.

## Identifying Energy in the System to Prioritize Trends (15 minutes)

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- Give each participant five sticky dots.
- Prompt participants to place their dots on the map to identify individual trends that they believe the organization or initiative should be paying the most attention to. This could be trends with the strongest energy supporting systems change or trends with the greatest potential to impede systems change. (Note: Participants can spread their dots out among five different trends, or place all their dots on one trend.)
- After all of the dots have been placed, ask participants to draw a line around the different clusters of trends and give each cluster a descriptive name. (You could also ask participants to draw lines to highlight any special connections or relationships that they see between trends at this time.)

## Group Discussion (45 minutes)

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- Ask participants to reflect individually for one minute on what they are seeing on the trend map (e.g., what themes were named, what connections the group saw, how the dots are arranged on the map, and what this may indicate about organizational priorities).
- Facilitate a discussion about the themes that emerged from the mapping exercise. Note any new insights or implications for the group's work on the topic, including potential actions that can be taken to facilitate systems change in light of these themes. Potential discussion questions could include:
  - What is most exciting or inspiring about this map?
  - What concerns you about this map?
  - What appears to be a central issue or key problem for us?
  - What trends or clusters have we influenced or tried to influence in the past?  
What happened?
  - What have we learned?
  - What are some examples of how these trends have played out?
  - Given what we see here, what options are open to us?
  - What applications or ideas for action has this session triggered for you?

## TREND MAPPING IN ACTION

On our **blog**, Chera Reid, director of strategic learning, research, and evaluation at The Kresge Foundation, reflects on her experience using trend mapping.

### Chera had the following advice for others using trend mapping:

- **Continue to iterate:** Trend mapping is a very flexible tool: you can use it to talk about a really broad issue, or something specific and narrow. I mentioned that we had some follow-up sessions on criminal justice and on race and racism to dig deeper into the high-level trends that came out in the first mapping session. If I had more time, I would also take the original map we made on equitable community development and bring it to all the individual programs to ask them to identify where the greatest energy is for their program, and to pull out 1-2 trends and go deeper on those topics.
- **Display the map:** It's really interesting to me to think about the map as a living document and a visual learning agenda. Throughout the iteration process, we left the map up on the wall so people could see it and observe how it was evolving as we dug deeper into specific parts of it, such as criminal justice. Having the map posted in a public place lets staff reference it and use it to help them look at their work from different angles. It's also a really powerful reminder of what can come out of the process of learning together. Typically, when we develop a grantmaking strategy, we assume that the data we should be using is from our previous grants and evaluations from those grants and maybe some research, but how do we account for these important internal conversations and shared learning experiences? In 3 years, if criminal justice shows up in a strategy discussion, we might not have traced that back to an internal conversation. But, now that we can actually see how we were learning together as an organization, it will be easier for us to connect those dots.
- **Take photos of the map at every stage:** I would encourage people to take pictures of the process—it's pretty neat to see the map evolve as you connect topics and move things around.

Read "New Systems Thinking Tool: Trend Mapping":

<http://fsg.org/blog/new-systems-thinking-tool-trend-mapping>

# NEXT STEPS AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

At the conclusion of the trend mapping session, consider providing participants with a clear overview of next steps. For example, you may wish to share:

- Information about whether or when participants will have another opportunity to work on the map (typically, additional iterations will not be required, but they might be desirable in some situations).
- Information about who else may have an opportunity to view or edit the map.
- Plans regarding the final format of the map (e.g., if it will be converted to a PowerPoint slide and distributed).
- Plans regarding how the maps will be used within the organization.
- Information about whether the maps will be made publicly available, and if so, to what end and with what audiences.
- Consider revisiting and updating the trend map every six months, or around the time of key decisions or learning junctures. Additionally, depending on participants' depth of knowledge and immersion in the areas highlighted on the map, you could consider incorporating findings from some external interviews or light-touch secondary research into these follow-up mapping sessions.

## Additional Resources

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- **Trend map examples** from *Trends in the Living Networks* blog. Offers ideas and examples.

# World Café Method

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Connect multiple ideas and perspectives

# OVERVIEW

## What Is a World Café?

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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.

### WORLD CAFÉ IN ACTION<sup>1</sup>



## When Should I Use This Method?

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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.

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

HOW CAN A WORLD CAFÉ SUPPORT SYSTEMS THINKING AND PRACTICE?	
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore how contextual factors (e.g., key social, economic, political, and cultural factors) influence a topic or goal (and each other).</li> </ul>
Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage participants to make new connections.</li> <li>Strengthen relationships and build trust among participants.</li> </ul>
Patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Break old thought patterns; catalyze new ideas and thinking.</li> <li>Identify areas of common interest, concern, or excitement.</li> <li>Determine where the energy is in the system and where there are gaps or blockages.</li> <li>Understand how policies, structures, or social/cultural norms are changing.</li> <li>Understand the relationships between outputs/outcomes and external factors.</li> </ul>
Perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore a topic or issue from multiple diverse perspectives.</li> <li>Ensure equal footing among participant voices.</li> <li>Understand partners' and other stakeholders' perspectives on the topic or goal (e.g., why it matters).</li> <li>Understand beneficiary experiences of the topic.</li> <li>Identify partners' and stakeholders' learning priorities.</li> </ul>

# PART ONE:

# FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT

## Is a World Café Right for Your Project?

CONSIDERATIONS	USE WORLD CAFÉ	DON'T USE WORLD CAFÉ
Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>You want to explore a clearly articulated topic, question, or set of questions.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>You need to agree or decide by the end of the discussion.</li></ul>
Credible Informants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Participants are familiar with the topic selected for the mapping activity and the organization's or initiative's work related to it.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Participants cannot credibly speak to both the topic and/or the organization or initiative's work in that area.</li></ul>
Level of Facilitation Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Minimal level of facilitation required to generate conversation and insight from participants.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The topic or question requires skilled facilitation to get participants to contribute their thoughts.</li></ul>
Group Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>You have a large group (more than 15–20 people).</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>You expect a small gathering (fewer than 15–20 people).</li></ul>
Room Setup	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Tables and chairs can be moved to create 4-top tables, allowing participants to sit knee-to-knee.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Furniture is not flexible.</li><li>There is not enough space for small group conversations.</li></ul>

## THE BEAUTY—AND THE SPECIFICITY—OF THE WORLD CAFÉ METHOD<sup>2</sup>

"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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

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](http://www.theworldcafe.com).

## What Do I Need to Properly Facilitate a World Café?

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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.

REQUIREMENT	DESCRIPTION	
Prep time	• Participant: None	• Facilitator: 3-4 hours
Facilitator prep work	• Set up the activity • Determine the topic	• Identify the question(s) that participants will be asked to answer
Required materials	• 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

## WORLD CAFÉ IN ACTION

On our **blog**, we explore the use of a World Café exercise by Challenge Scholars as they worked to understand how a college and career culture was emerging within their schools and the broader community.

### A World Café activity was selected because the group wanted to:

- Explore the topic of “college and career culture” from multiple perspectives in the school “system.”
- Ensure that everyone in the room regardless of role or tenure would contribute.
- Generate conversation that would lead to a more collective vision of “college and career culture” across functions within the school.
- Provide an opportunity for different actors within the system to learn from and relate better with each other.

Read “New Systems Thinking Tool: World Café”:

<http://fsg.org/blog/new-systems-thinking-tool-world-cafe>

# PART TWO: PREPARATION

## Prep Steps:<sup>3</sup>

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- **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.)

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

- 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.

# PART THREE: FACILITATION STEPS AND SUGGESTED TIMING

## Design Notes

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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.<sup>4</sup>

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.

## Introduction (10 minutes)

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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.

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

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

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- Instruct each table to begin the first round of conversation. Be sure to remind participants of the following:

- Timing of the conversation	- Role of the host
- Question(s) for discussion	- Props available (e.g., markers, large pieces of butcher paper)
- 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.

## Report-out

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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 AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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.

## Additional Resources

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- **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/list-ForCategory>**

# World Café Guidelines

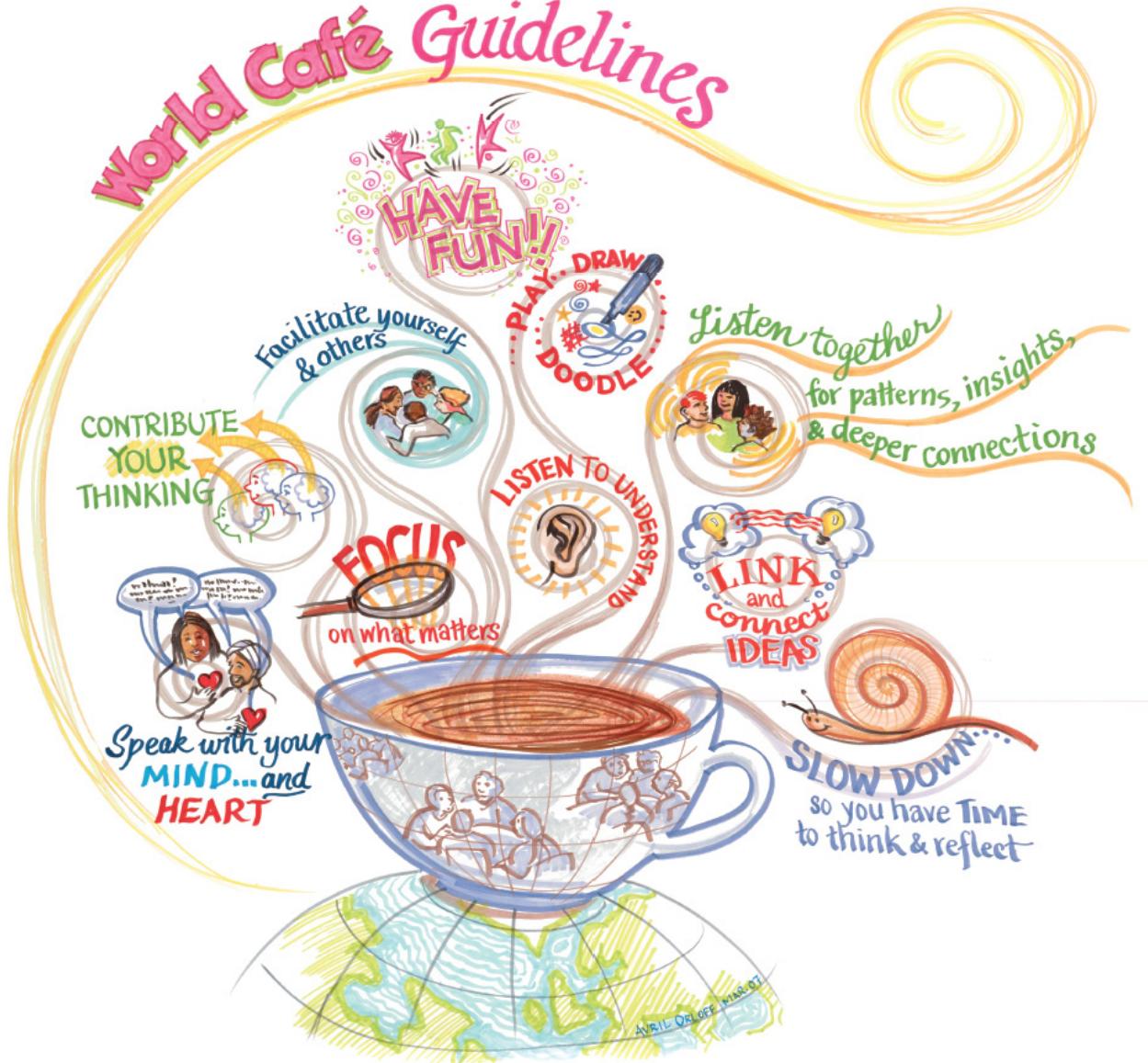


Illustration by Avril Orloff. © 2015 The World Café Community Foundation, [www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com)

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON SYSTEMS THINKING FROM FSG**

### **"The Dawn of System Leadership"**

Co-authored by Peter Senge, Hal Hamilton, and John Kania, this article illustrates the core capabilities required for system leadership through the stories of successful practitioners.

### **Evaluating Complexity: Propositions for Improving Practice**

Hallie Preskill offers propositions that can help evaluators navigate the unique characteristics of complex systems and improve their evaluation practice.

### **Facilitating Intentional Group Learning: A Practical Guide to 21 Learning Activities**

For organizations to be successful, individuals need opportunities to share data, as well as their knowledge and experiences, with others. Facilitated, intentional group activities create the ideal environment for reflection and dialogue that lead to new insights and understandings. From quick 20-minute activities to multi-hour gatherings, this guide provides detailed instructions on how to conduct high-energy, inclusive, and productive experiences.

### **"Systems Change in a Polarized Country"**

Mark Kramer's *Stanford Social Innovation Review* article on how foundations are adopting systems change in the current political environment.

**Learn more about FSG's systems change work at  
<http://fsg.org/areas-of-focus/systems-thinking>**

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