

Open Space - Tool for Participant Led Conversations [Program]

Trainer Names:

Learning Objectives:

Skills, Knowledge, and Attitude which learners should take away from this session.

- Understand Open Space Technology as a tool to facilitate emergent group conversation.

Achievement Objectives:

- Learn from fellow participants through exploring topics and creating caucus spaces.

Time: 1-2 group planning sessions (30 - 45 mins each), 2-6 open space sessions (45-90 mins each)

Normal = say out loud

Underlined = flipchart this!

Italics = trainer notes/instructions

Bold = key point

0. Pre-Work to Set the Open Space

Many Sprogers have said that their learning at Sprog comes from not just the training team, but being in community with folks working for a more just world. Many Sprog teams like to find ways to build Sprogger led conversations into their macro agenda to help facilitate this learning. Open space is a tool to do that. In Open Space, Sprogers and trainers hold conversations about the work they are doing or a topic they are interested in exploring that is not covered in our curriculum - for example: running a divestment campaign, dumpster diving, theater of the oppressed, Black Lives Matter, etc. It is also a space for Affinity/Identity and Caucus Group Meetings.

Supplies you might need: *Sticker dots and/or post-it notes, paper, masking tape, a wall to create an open space schedule.*

Determine Your Scheduling Method: *Think about your participants - how many are their? How might all of their voices be heard in a conversation about what sessions to hold? There is a process for this outlined below, but modify it to meet your groups needs!*

Find Your Space: *Where will each of the open space groups meet? Where will the schedule be posted? How long will your sessions run? How will participants be alerted it is time to switch?*

1. What is Open Space? [5 mins]

Open Space Technology comes from the idea that the best connections and learning happens outside of an agenda and emerges from participants in a space. In Open Space, participants create their own agenda of parallel working sessions around a central theme, such as: How will we build a better world together?

There are four principles and one law to apply to how you navigate in open space.

Four principles:

- 1) **Whoever comes is the right people** - Whoever is attracted to the same conversation are the people who can contribute most to that conversation—because they care. So they are exactly the ones—for the whole group-- who are capable of initiating action.
- 2) **Whatever happens is the only thing that could've** - We are all limited by our own pasts and expectations. This principle acknowledges we'll all do our best to focus on NOW-- the present time and place-- and not get bogged down in what could've or should've happened.
- 3) **When it starts is the right time** - The creative spirit has its own time, and our task is to make our best contribution and enter the flow of creativity when it starts.
- 4) **When it's over, it's over** - Creativity has its own rhythm. So do groups. Just a reminder to pay attention to the flow of creativity -- not the clock. When you think it is over, ask: Is it over? And if it is, go on to the next thing you have passion for. If it's not, make plans for continuing the conversation.

The Law of Two Feet

"If, during the course of the gathering, any person finds themselves in a situation where they are neither learning nor contributing, they must use their feet and go to some more productive place."

1. Setting an Open Space Agenda [35 mins]

Setting the agenda can be time consuming, as participants will have many ideas they want to discuss.

The process of choosing the topics is learning in of itself. There are many ways to set the agenda - here is a process that you can use!

- 1) *Invite participants to write a topic or questions they would like to talk about on a piece of paper. If a participant doesn't feel comfortable sharing they can give a paper to a trainer or other Sproger to read. If you propose a question/topic you are invited to host that discussion and ensure that there is a point person for a report back to the group. You may take notes if you wish.*
- 2) *Everyone with a topic reads the topic/question they would like to discuss out and places it on the schedule on the wall. Similar topics are consolidated. There will be 5-6 discussions per time slot.*
- 3) *If there are more topics than fit in the time slots, folks will vote for the ones they would like to do most with sticker dots. Extra topics can be saved until next open space.*
- 4) *5-10 minutes will be given for the group to move around the schedule to try to accommodate everyone's needs. This can be down by one facilitator taking suggestions, or participants moving sessions themselves.*

5) *Once the schedule is set, open space can begin!*

A Note on Caucus Group Meetings - *a caucus group is a closed and confidential space where members holding an identity (POC, LGBTQ+, etc.) hold a conversation with others who share their identity. Caucuses are different from affinity/identity group meetings in that they are (1) closed and (2) confidential. That is, a caucus is a closed group for folks who share a marginalized identity. It should also be default that what's said in caucus spaces and who attends them are confidential (e.g. if you go to a caucus, don't talk about who was at that caucus with anyone who didn't share that space). Caucus spaces should not be voted on in open space - as long as a group is willing to meet this definition of a caucus space, they should be put on the schedule. It may be helpful to share this definition of a caucus space with participants.*

3. Running the Open Space Sessions

And open space begins! Remember to make sure everyone has access to clear and simple directions as to where each session is, and there is an easy way for participants to know that the session is over.

4. Reflecting on Open Space [10 mins]

Once you have run the open space sessions you would like to for the day, come back together to debrief your conversations. Have the group discuss and reflect on these questions. You could prompt this as a personal journal reflection, a pair share, or a group discussion, depending on the energy of the room.

- 1) What happened at the session(s) you attended? What did it feel like to be in the space y'all created?
- 2) What new things did you learn? Were you surprised by anything? Did anything about this open space process challenge you?
- 3) What will you do with what you learned going forward? Will the conversations you had affect the way you live your life in the future?