



Facilitating Generative Gatherings

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Gatherings are opportunities for teams to grow and evolve.

When meetings are threaded with appreciation, purpose, open dialogue, and reflection, organizations develop and thrive. Over the past year, I've had the privilege of working with Daniel Student, facilitation specialist and senior consultant, to convene numerous staff and board retreats. These are my observations on the ingredients for generative gatherings:

1 | Define Purpose While Allowing Room to Roam

Productive gatherings hinge on a clear understanding of why attendees are meeting. In an era where meetings abound, framing a purpose ensures we respect the time of each participant. However, the art lies in creating opportunities to explore and think expansively. While outlining clear objectives is vital, allowing room for spontaneity and unconventional thinking can foster creativity,

innovation, and strategy—and it also deepens connection among teams. Brainstorming is a great way to work collaboratively towards a clear purpose while embracing “outside the box” ideas.

2 | Co-create Spaces That Nurture Creative and Strategic Thinking

One theme that echoed through the most generative retreats was the importance of acknowledging and appreciating each other. It serves as a powerful reminder of the shared history, trust, and collective commitment that fuels social impact work. Commencing with appreciation and creating a space where individuals feel valued for who they are, we lay the foundation for a balanced and dynamic organizational and board culture.

Sharing an understanding of each other’s strengths is not just a team building exercise; it generates an environment that nurtures creative and strategic thinking. As participants strengthen relationships with each other, they pave the way for inspired problem-solving and visions of the future. We recommend that leaders put in the work and set the stage pre-gathering on creating [psychologically safe spaces](#) for their staff.

Inspired by the [Museum of the Future](#), Potrero Group asks participants to imagine tangible aspects of how their organization has grown or changed in the future, using their current goals and inspirations as “exhibits” from the past. We find this experiential exercise, literally walking through the “museum” of their collective ideas, prompts collaboration and opens minds to audacious, unrestricted, ideal future states.

3 | Navigate Difficult Conversations

No gathering is without its challenges. Embracing complex topics and navigating through disagreement are integral to the experience. Treat difficult conversations as expeditions to discover what possibilities exist that could resolve challenges. Rather than directly disagreeing with or disregarding an idea, encourage open dialogue with language like “I wonder, what if, let’s try” (yes, we can still learn from

[Sesame Street](#)). The [Johari Window](#) is another tool that deepens mutual understanding among teams.

4 | Build on the Momentum

The conclusion of a gathering doesn't mark the end; it is a checkpoint in an ongoing organizational journey. Sometimes the power of a gathering is lost when we return to the whirlwind of our day-to-day work. Leadership can play a critical role in maintaining momentum by asking everyone to dedicate time to reflect on the gathering, allowing thoughts and ideas to marinate.

Translating insights from the gathering into actionable steps also ensures that their impact extends beyond the meeting room. Organizations can foster a more sustainable and resilient path to change by breaking new initiatives into smaller, manageable actions.

We believe in cultivating a culture of experimentation and calculated risk-taking. Encourage your teams to test new strategies soon after the gathering concludes. In doing so, your team can glean valuable insights and refine their approaches before energy fades.

For more about facilitation, contact us at info@potrerogroup.com.



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