

What is an Open Space Technology Meeting?

Introduction

- Open Space meetings are a contrast to most conferences where participants listen to presentations of topics that are selected months prior to the gathering. An Open Space Meeting is a gathering of peers brought together through common interests and concerns. It is understood that participants bring to the table the experience and expertise necessary to address current issues and topics in their professional field. If this will be your first time at an Open Space gathering, please review this paper as it will address the format and logistics of this unique form of collaborative work.
- ***Please note that Open Space Technology requires participants prepare in advance for the meeting.*** We ask that all attendees to spend time before arriving to the conference to think through agenda topics that they feel would be most relevant and meaningful to themselves and the group.

How does an Open Space Meeting begin?

- The Open Space Meeting has a facilitator who keeps the group focused on the principles listed below. The facilitator opens the meeting in a large room with a blank wall and moderates the steps leading toward the finalization of an agenda. The agenda is created by the people in the room who identify topics that are important to them regarding the theme (**our theme for this gathering is: Current Issues Relevant to Directors of Resident Environmental Learning Centers**).
- **This process acknowledges the potential for leadership in every person.** Passion and responsibility are the two keys to a successful session. Without passion, an idea will soon wane, and without responsibility, there is risk that the ideas will never move forward.

The four principles of an Open Space Meeting:

1. Whoever comes are the right people (this reinforces the idea that the wisdom to achieve solutions is present in the room and the group should not to worry about who is not present nor to panic about who is).
2. Whatever happens is the only thing that could happen (this keeps the attention in the present, not worrying about what we "should have done").
3. Whenever it starts is the right time (this reminds people that creativity cannot be controlled).
4. When it is over, it is over (encourages people to continue their discussion so long as there is energy for it. This may result in a short session not filling the entire time allotted, or it may result in a session longer than the time allotted).

Lastly, the Law of Mobility states that if persons find themselves in situations where they are neither learning anything or contributing anything, they are responsible for moving to another place, for example to another group meeting. These principles and law enable people to participate in ways that are most meaningful to them.

Resources:

- [Open Space Technology A Users Guide](http://www.openspacetechnology.com) – Harrison Owen Barrett-Koehler Publishers Info at: www.openspacetechnology.com
- Great Smoky Mountain Institute at Tremont