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INNOVATION SPACES

INNOVATION SPACES

Purpose/Overview

- To identify the characteristics and qualities of Innovation Spaces and what makes them a powerful mechanism for creating change.

- To use the Innovation Space Tool and be able to use this tool in your organization.

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Innovation Space Tool

You want to turn outward so you can accelerate and deepen your impact.

But those changes won't just happen on their own. After all, the kinds of meetings and conversations that we're used to having quite often pull us back inward, away from the community. With days spent in planning meetings, focusing on ever growing to-do lists, activity chokes out action. And in all those meetings we rarely bring in people from across the organization or group; instead we retreat to silos and turf battles.

To create the change we want out in the community, we need to turn outward. That means we need to create room for a new, different kind of meeting and conversation, one focused on working across silos, learning from one another, and innovating.

That means creating an Innovation Space. Innovation Spaces are regularly scheduled conversations (once every four weeks) that bring different departments and groups together to focus on what you're learning as an organization and how to use what you're learning to create change. These aren't your usual staff or project meetings; here the goal is learning and innovation, not just planning and assigning.

This tool will guide you step by step through creating an Innovation Space.

The Power of Innovation Spaces

"This has been a culture-changing activity." When a public broadcasting station wanted to turn outward and connect more authentically with its community, the station manager used Innovation Spaces to create a different conversation internally. These conversations led to changes in how the station assessed staff performance, who they engaged in the community, what they put on the air, and where they invested resources. Innovation Spaces "helped us move from one culture to a new culture. We are healthier because of it."

"I couldn't imagine my job now without Innovation Spaces." Innovation Spaces can be a powerful way to brainstorm and create together, but they are also key drivers of accountability. As one leader in an early childhood collaborative shared, "I could not imagine our community without them," but "the key is being intentional, and holding the meetings to a higher standard."

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KEYS FOR LEADING AND HOLDING INNOVATION SPACES

The key to a successful Innovation Space is creating the conditions that generate a certain kind of conversation. As you set up, create, and hold your Innovation Spaces, these are key ideas to keep in mind.

> Remember these spaces only work over time— schedule them every four weeks.

The conversation is about learning, not planning.

- Use the questions provided. They work.
- Use the ground rules to create a safe place to have this kind of conversation.
- Designate someone to take good notes. Track what you're learning.
- Post what you are learning in the space so others can see. Refer to it.

Involve people from across the organization.

- Include people from different departments; go beyond the "regulars."
- Invite and push to include senior leadership, so what's learned can be applied.
- After a few conversations, encourage others to lead the Innovation Space from time to time. Don't go it alone.
- Let people come and go. Not everyone has to attend every Innovation Space. The key is creating a different space—not creating perfection.

The group must hold itself accountable for making this work.

- Set aside a specific time. Don't fold these conversations into other meetings.
- Assure people the meeting will start and end on time—then keep to it.
- Innovation Spaces only work over time. If people push back or it gets rocky after a few meetings, keep going. You're creating new norms—that takes time. Stick with it.

Gauging Success

As you set up your Innovation Space, ask yourself:

- Have we set aside a dedicated time for Innovation Spaces?
- Is it a safe space with clear ground rules?
- Are we sticking with this and keeping the space open over time?
- Are we continually drawing lessons from our work?
- Are we applying what we are learning?
- Do we check in and discuss the group's performance from time to time?
- Are we creating a culture of accountability?
- Does the space include others in this work, from different parts of the organization?

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ALA American Library Association

HARWOOD The Institute for Public Innovation

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Innovation Space Agenda

Allow 60 minutes for this conversation. Designate someone to take good notes. Make sure you hang up what you learned from the last Innovation Space.

START ON TIME

1. Welcome participants (5 minutes)

Remind people that this is an Innovation Space and the focus is on learning and innovation, not planning and evaluation. Go over Ground Rules.

2. Four key questions (35 minutes)

Ask these questions and discuss:

- What are we learning? Why is this important? What are the implications?

- Where else could we use what we are learning?

- What are we seeing that suggests things are changing in the community or the organization?

- What possibilities are there for moving ahead?

At least every six months, instead of the four questions above, use the "Are We Turning Outward?" questions with the Harwood Rating Scale.

Ground Rules

- Have a "kitchen table" conversation. Everyone participates; no one dominates.

- There are no "right answers." Draw on your own experiences, views, and beliefs—you do not need to be an expert.

- Keep an open mind. Listen carefully and try hard to understand the views of those who disagree with you.

- Help keep the discussion on track. Stick to the questions; try not to ramble.

- It is okay to disagree, but don't be disagreeable. Respond to others how you want to be responded to.

- Have fun!

3. Harvest what you learned (15 minutes)

Ask the group:

- What insights did this conversation spark? (Write them down.)

- What do we want to make sure we carry forward for next time? (Write down.)

4. Wrap up (5 min); set date for the next Innovation Space (ideally every four weeks)

- The next Innovation Space is in _____ weeks. What date is that? _____

ADJOURN ON TIME

INNOVATION SPACES

Intentionality and Innovation

Creating Innovation Spaces and turning outward require that we act with intentionality. Without being intentional about our choices and actions, nearly any effort can seem plausible. Acting with intention is crucial for sustaining change. It is easy to get derailed. These questions will let you check in and see how you are doing and ensure you're focused on the things that really matter in terms of creating change.

Use the Harwood Rating Scale with these questions. Discuss the scores you give each. Record and save the group's answers. Chart your progress over time.

- Are we turned outward toward the community?
- Are our actions rooted in people's shared aspirations?
  Could we stand on a table and talk to people about their aspirations and concerns for their community, and would they believe us?
- Do we reflect the reality of people's lives, and do they believe we have their best interests at heart, even when we disagree?
- Are we living up to the pledges and promises we have made?
- Are we staying true to our urge within?

THE HARWOOD RATING SCALE

Rating	What it means
We've Got It	We feel good about saying we've got this factor.
Real Progress	We're steadily improving and moving in the right direction. Still room for improvement.
Starting to Improve	We're beginning to demonstrate genuine effort. Things are starting to get better.
Lip Service	We're talking a good game, but our actions are not in line with what we're saying.
Business As Usual	We haven't changed at all—it's "business as usual."
Not Applicable	This factor is either not relevant to our work or not on our radar.

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Small Group Innovation Space Notes

- Reflecting on the past two days, what are we learning and why is this important?

- What are the implications?

- Where could we use this learning?

- What possibilities are there for moving ahead?

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INNOVATION SPACES

Large Group Innovation Space Notes

- What do we want to harvest from this Innovation Space?

- Implementation questions?

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