



Open Space Process: Brief Description

This day-long session allows participants to set the agenda, share what they know, and ask for advice on topics for which they don't have answers. The Open Space process is designed to respond to participants' interests for discussion and to build on the knowledge, experience and talents each participant brings into the room. The typical conference questions -- *Who are the speakers? What is the agenda? How long do we have for each topic? Which workshops are they offering?* -- are irrelevant.

How does Open Space work?

Participants identify the specific topics, issues and questions they want to explore within the general theme of the *National Conversations*. Together, participants create the agenda and place it on a community board for all to see.

Each participant may choose to take the lead to

- Present what s/he has learned and wants to share with others,
- Open a conversation on a burning question or topic s/he wants to explore with other participants,
- Attend only those sessions that truly interest and engage him/her, and
- Capture the specific ideas, suggestions, recommendations, and key themes from their small- group sessions and compile them into a set of *Proceedings* for all to share.

There will be different levels of knowledge and experience represented by each person participating in the group conversation. Open Space is grounded in the principle that there are no hierarchies, i.e., all participants have equal status. Everyone is a learner and real-world expert who is invited to share what s/he knows or to seek information on what s/he does not know. And, everyone has the responsibility to do what it takes to make the most of the discussions.

To make the Open Space Process work, participants may consider contributing in the following ways.

1. **Share/Teach** -- What EL-related session topics would s/he be willing to lead for discussion? Are there particular experiences and "lessons learned" s/he could share?
2. **Learn/Listen**- What EL-related topics are s/he interested in learning more about from other participants? Which would s/he be willing to lead or co-lead?
3. **Materials/Handouts**- Are there any materials or handouts s/he wishes to share when leading or co-leading a group discussion session? If so, please bring copies of these.
4. **Responsibility & Passion**- Each participant should bring his/her responsibility to make the process work for everyone, and most importantly, bring their passion.

Participants are asked to think ahead of time of any key topics they would like to address at the *National Conversation*. This day-long experience is highly informative and professionally stimulating because the agenda of discussion topics will be created and led by all of participants together.