

May 20, 2009

Hello Learning Exchange Leaders:

Thanks again for agreeing to lead a session at the **No Better Time** conference at UNH this summer. We're pleased (OK, ecstatic) by the positive response and brisk registrations. We also appreciate your patience in receiving your "orders" as session leaders. We still get special requests daily ("Please schedule my session on Friday" or "Can you move me to a different learning exchange ...") We're doing our best to accommodate these requests, but it's slowed us up a bit with respect to solidifying teams and giving you the green light to start planning.

Here are some questions we think you'd like answered:

How many people are attending the conference?

We're expecting between 225 and 250. Our capacity is 250, and as of today, 195 people have registered. We're running a little betting pool if you want to weigh in. The winner gets a jar of jelly beans, or something. Just to demonstrate how cut-throat this is, Nancy bet 250, and Matt followed with 251. Nice.

How many learning exchanges are there?

45. We received many, many more proposals. In some cases, we steered people to existing sessions. In others, we said OK. We then ran the survey and learned which sessions might be the most and least popular, and based on those results, we combined a few. Our goal is 8-10 concurrent learning exchanges per time slot.

How many people can we expect in our session?

Based on the survey results, we guess that 11 sessions are going to be very popular, so we've put those in rooms that can handle a slightly larger group, about 45 people. Those sessions are:

1. Embedding deliberative practices in local democracy
2. The dark side of deliberative democracy
3. Neighborhood democracy
4. Community organizing and deliberative democracy
5. A tech savvy citizenry
6. Making the case for this work: Improving the way we collect, report, and explain outcomes
7. Stakeholders, citizens, or both: the interplay between conflict resolution, collaborative governance, and deliberative democracy
8. Campuses and communities: Better together
9. Combining, mixing, and adapting methods or models
10. Using democratic strategies in the classroom
11. New frontiers for assessment and measurement

All of the other sessions will be in rooms that hold about 25 people.

Some sessions might attract a small number, and we're OK with that. These are supposed to be in-depth discussions about a particular dimension of this work – we think that a few people can be very effective, perhaps more-so than a large group.

To the learning exchange leaders of the sessions that might be oversubscribed: if you would like to keep your group smaller, let us know. We'll think of something.

What happens if the room is packed beyond capacity?

You'll have to send people on to another session. You can probably squeeze in more (we're not sure how many more), but you should only do that if you are willing to work with a larger group and the space is still comfortable.

Based on the survey results, we think this is likely, and we considered moving some sessions to larger spaces. Instead, we decided to keep them small but add plenary time during the conference for sharing/reporting out. There are also options of breakfast roundtables both Friday and Saturday mornings. Participants and/or learning exchange leaders can volunteer to host breakfast tables to involve people who were not at the original session.

How many concurrent "time slots" are there for the learning exchanges?

5 – The math works out. It comes to 8-10 concurrent learning exchanges per time slot.

When is my session scheduled?

The schedule will be posted on line at <http://www.unh.edu/democracy/conference2009/schedule.html>. We're still working out a few small details. Look for it in a few days.

How long are the sessions?

Sessions range from 90 minutes to 2.5 hours. Check the schedule to see what you've got. If you are doing a session that you suspect needs *less* time, please let us know. We'd like to give the longer time slots to those who really need them, if we can.

What if we think we'll need more time?

We've tried to build into the schedule flexible time in the wee-morning hours and after 5:30 pm. You can meet for meals to continue your conversations. You can convene at the end of the day. And for the really, really determined, we have reserved one extra break-out room so that groups who want to forgo the next round of activities can go there (assuming another group hasn't beaten you to it). Your best bet, however, is to try to accomplish what you want to accomplish in the time you have.

We co-leaders have communicated, and we think the title and/or description of our learning exchange needs to change. Can we still do that?

Yes, but sooner is better than later. The conference schedule will go into print on June 20. We cannot make changes after that date.

We want to post advance readings, links, or a reading list. Can we do that?

Yes, we're constructing a site for documents relating to each learning exchange. You do not have to post anything, but you can. We'd like to have everything by June 20.

Do you have a "template" for the learning exchanges?

No, but in an earlier memo to you, we made some suggestions on how to structure your time:

1. Spend some time talking as a group about how to frame your topic (What assumptions are you bringing to this? What core questions do you have? And so on),
2. Invite stories, case studies, and research findings from participants (as well as the leaders), and

3. Move the conversation from the descriptive to the strategic. Develop some proposed next steps (There are some different ways to approach this: How might people in this room work together? How might researchers and practitioners and researchers, or campuses and communities, work together? What research questions does the field need to tackle next? “Where are we? Where do we want to be? And How are we going to get there?” or “What, so what, and what next?” And so on).

For the most part, the agenda is up to you – we just wanted to be clear about the kind of interactivity, dynamism, and scope we were hoping these discussions will achieve.

How will the rooms be set up? Can we rearrange the furniture or request a particular arrangement?

There are basically two types of rooms. Seven of them hold 25 people (maybe 30) each if the chairs are arranged in a circle, with no tables. Three of them will have round tables with 8 chairs at each. You can rearrange the chairs in seven of the rooms, but the rooms with the round tables have to stay put. Please note that the rooms with the round tables are also the rooms that will accommodate more people – so this will, again, affect the leaders of the sessions listed above.

Will we have to produce something to report? What, how, when? What is our role in reporting out?

The short answer is yes. We’re working on exactly what, when, and how.

Will there be reporters/recorders in each session?

We’ve been looking for money to pay graduate students to attend the conference and serve as recorders/reporters for each session, but so far, we’ve had no luck finding a funder. We’re still looking, and we hope to surprise you with your very own graduate student, but for now, the burden rests with you – either to do it yourselves or find volunteers.

What supplies and technology will be in the breakout rooms?

- Newsprint on easels (2) (either the paper will be self-sticking or there will be tape)
- Markers
- Post-its

All of the rooms have **free** wireless access, but anyone wanting wireless access will have to register while in the building with the UNH computer services. That will take a few minutes, so you should factor it in if you want to create a google-groups site or wiki-document, or something like that.

We can make arrangements for you to have an LCD projector, if you want one. Again, you have to let us know soon if you need it.

You probably won’t need microphones, but those too are an option. There will be no recording equipment.

We’re happy to work with you, if you have other ideas. It just has to be before June 20. We won’t be able to do much during the conference.

Will learning exchange leaders have a chance to meet before the conference?

We will be convening learning exchange leaders on Wednesday, July 8, 2009, right before the informal reception, 5:00 – 6:00 pm. This meeting is not mandatory, but if you’d like to get together, meet each other, and ask last minute questions, this will be an opportunity to do so.

What should we do now?

1. Review the schedule (a separate document) and tell us if there are conflicts we missed (e.g., “I am leading two sessions at once. That might be hard.”)
2. Contact your co-leaders. If you don’t have any, and still want someone, please let us know. Work together to develop goals and an agenda for your learning exchange.
3. Review and edit, if you are so inclined, your title and description.
4. Get back to us if you want less time than you were allotted.
5. Get back to us if you’ve are managing one of the sessions listed above, but you want to cap your session at 25 people. (In other words, you’d prefer to work with a smaller group.)
6. Send us your advance readings, links, resources lists, etc.
7. Tell us if you want any audio equipment.
8. Some of the sessions are lean because there are too few people attending who are interested in that topic (e.g., public school administrators). We don’t need a lot of any one group, but we need a few to make this a comprehensive conference. Please reach out to “your” constituents – people who are likely to be interested in your sessions – and remind them of the conference.

Send questions, changes, comments, etc. to nancy.thomas@unh.edu and/or mattleighninger@earthlink.net