Multicultural Conference Planning Guide

Sample Pages

UNITYWORKS

Praise for the Planning Guide

"After over two decades of planning Multicultural Conferences in our state, Randie Gottlieb's Multicultural Conference Planning Guide is long overdue! Covering the critical elements in organizing for this specialized event, this guide provides a practical, effective resource for the beginner as well as the seasoned multicultural conference planner. It's an important tool you'll use again and again!"

— Dr. Cynthia Rekdal, Founder and Executive Director
WA State Association for Multicultural Education (WSAME)

"Opportunities to gather, share resources, and collectivize on topics of multiculturalism, diversity, and social justice are needed now more than ever, but planning such conferences can be difficult, especially for the first-timer. I sure wish I had this guide when I first started planning conferences—thorough in detail, packed with user-friendly suggestions and resources, invaluable to any conference planner!"

— Kevin Kumashiro, Dean, University of San Francisco School of Education
Author, "Against Common Sense: Teaching and Learning toward Social Justice"

"The National Center for Race Amity holds as a core strategy the goal of placing proven resources and blueprints in the hands of everyday professionals and lay people to engage cross-racial/cross-cultural understanding. The Multicultural Conference Planning Guide is a prize tool to engage that tactic. Brilliant!"

— William H. "Smitty" Smith, Ed.D.
Founding Executive Director, National Center for Race Amity

"Dr. Gottlieb's Multicultural Conference Planning Guide is excellent! Colorful, easy to read and understand, packed full of stimulating and thought-provoking activities, time-tested from her experience in the field of multicultural education for over 20 years, this guide offers everything from conference theme ideas, to program activities, logistical considerations and more. For anyone interested in organizing a multicultural conference that will cultivate honest and meaningful exchanges through inspirational learning activities, this is one of the best investments you can make!"

— Maria D. Cuevas, ABD, Chican@ Studies & Sociology Instructor
Department of Social Sciences, Yakima Valley Community College

Conference Theme

A well-chosen conference theme can help unify the program and provide a focus for your efforts. If the theme aligns with the conference goals, it will serve as an umbrella concept under which the agenda, speakers, invitations, fliers, decorations, music, refreshments, giveaway items and all other activities and materials are made more coherent, memorable and effective. Presenters can also be asked to include a story, an example, or language that reinforces this centerpiece idea. Local history and customs might provide some thematic ideas. Examples of themes from previous conferences are listed below:

"Our Stories"
The goal of this conference was to demonstrate that sharing our personal histories can increase understanding and create bridges between those of different backgrounds. Our keynote speaker highlighted the need to show respect for others by truly listening to their stories, with the intention of understanding the life and worth of another person. Such careful listening can open a window onto the sacred and allow us to reach the depths, rather than just skimming the surface. This is how we should relate to those we teach—not on a superficial level, but with the deepest respect. If we do this, our students (regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, language or ability level) will feel that they belong.

"Talking the Talk"
This conference included sessions on working with English language learners, Native American oral traditions, the power of language, and responding to biased remarks. It closed with a recitation of student poetry in both English and Spanish, on various diversity themes.

"My Piece of the Puzzle"
This conference focused on the part we play individually and collectively in fostering multicultural attitudes and practices in our schools.

"The Sand in the Oyster: Creating Our Own Pearls"
This event was designed to help site teams learn how to create "pearls" when encountering resistance to their efforts. Like the sand in the oyster, these "irritating grains" can serve as a catalyst, providing new opportunities to learn and to promote growth from within.

"Planting Seeds of Hope: Nurturing Multicultural Learning"
This conference emphasized the importance of a grassroots approach—with site teams designing their own agendas for change. Like the seed, our multicultural goals and programs should start small and grow organically as capacity is built and resources become available. If the seed is to grow tall and strong, it will require ongoing care: water, fertilizer, weeding and sufficient sunlight.

In a moving ceremony at the close of the conference, each participant was asked to think of a personal action they could take to plant seeds of understanding or to nurture their team's Diversity Action Plan during the coming year. They then wrote their pledge on a brightly-colored sticky note, read aloud what they had written, and added it to a large flower poster that was "blooming" with each new "petal" at the front of the room. When turning in their evaluation forms, these "gardeners" also received a small seed packet as a reminder of their pledge.

Some Program Ideas

The Spring Conference should be designed to meet the evolving needs of the UnityWorks Program in your area. It can be as simple as an afternoon meeting where the participants have an opportunity to discuss what they have been learning during the year and to make suggestions for the future. As the Program grows, the Conference might become an all-day event—perhaps open to the public, or it could eventually develop into a popular weekend retreat and showcase with keynote speakers, panel discussions, catered meals, outdoor activities and an array of cultural performances.

Some program ideas that you may wish to consider are listed below:

- Official welcome
- Opening ceremony
- Introduction of Leadership Team, site teams and special guests
- Recognition of hosts and sponsors
- Warm-up activities related to the theme
- Keynote speaker
- Team presentations on their activities from the previous year
- Panel discussion (e.g. a presentation by teachers or students from different schools)
- My Story presentations (see p. 48)
- Displays of multicultural books, student artwork, items for sale
- Demonstrations (e.g. "My Best Multicultural Lesson")
- PowerPoint show with photos of UnityWorks activities from the past year
- Workshops on topics suggested by UnityWorks site team leaders
  (Previous workshops have included: Working with ELL Students, Handling Conflict in the Classroom, The Power of Language, Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement, Differential Discipline, Honoring Our Ancestors, How to Plan a Multicultural Symposium, Involving Parents and Community, Arts Infusion, Responding to Biased Remarks)
- Student performances (music, drumming, dance, drama, poetry)
- Time for collaborative project development
- Group discussion on challenging issues
- Question and answer session
- Music, singing, cooperative games
- Meals and snack breaks
- Door prizes (to bring people back quickly after breaks)
- Presentation of any awards or scholarships
- Video screenings
- Group photo
- Free time and recreational activities (nature hike, yoga, crafts)
- Announcements of upcoming local UnityWorks events
- Conference evaluation and closing ceremony

Mixed Group Activities

In addition to spending time with their own teams, the participants might be grouped into mixed teams for a variety of purposes. Two examples are given below.

Warm-up Activities

In order to "break the ice" and facilitate networking across teams, you might decide to plan one or more warm-up activities. One easy way to quickly divide people into mixed groups for such activities is to provide name tags with different-colored stickers and matching table tents.

| ● **Ana** Diaz School #1 | ● **Jeff** Rosen School #3 | ● **Amir** Nourani School #8 | Table 1 | Table 2 |
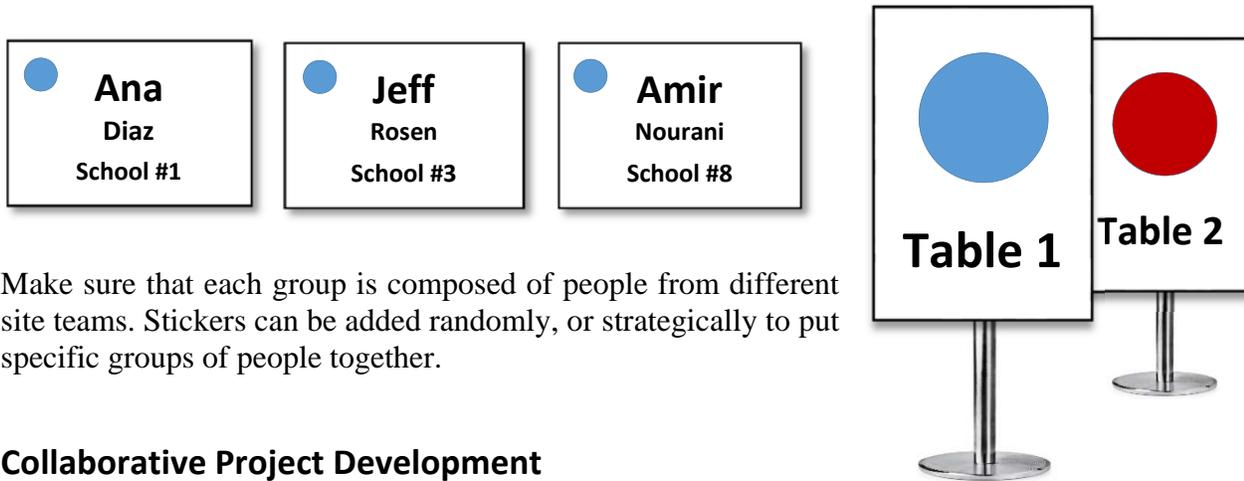
Make sure that each group is composed of people from different site teams. Stickers can be added randomly, or strategically to put specific groups of people together.

Collaborative Project Development

When the UnityWorks Program is first established in a particular area, activities will likely focus on individual schools and be organized separately by each site team. As the Program grows, the teams will often identify areas of common interest, and they may wish to share resources or develop collaborative projects involving two or more schools.

Suggestions for joint projects can be brainstormed during the conference or submitted beforehand. During the conference, for example, participants can be given index cards or large sticky notes, then asked to write down topics they wish to discuss, and post them in a "marketplace of ideas" along the wall. During a break, conference organizers can group similar topics, list them on the board, and ask participants to vote for the top four or five.

Topics receiving the most votes can each be assigned to a different table, and teams can send one or more representatives to those tables based on interest. Each group can then be asked to appoint a moderator and a recorder, and any resulting plans or proposals can be shared with the entire conference at the end.

| **Multicultural Resource Center** | **Summer Unity Camp** | **Student Leadership Conference** |