

Facilitating for Ideas and Visioning: Marysville and Triangle District Community Engagement Day

By Andrew Gaines

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The purpose of the day is **ideas** and **vision**, not planning and decisions. Therefore it is appropriate to be playful and relatively unstructured, while at times keeping a clear focus. Essentially, we are after **creativity, interaction** and **enthusiasm**.

For those who are used to very structured facilitation processes — such as writing everybody's idea on a whiteboard or collecting post-it notes, then categorising and prioritising them — this is quite different. We want free-flowing interactions to occur.

The facilitator's job is to identify what is important to the group. We believe you will recognise what is important. These ideas will stand out if you're looking for them. They are the ones that carry group excitement. Listen for the themes that conversations cluster around.

Capture the ideas that are quite significant for the group (again, the ones that represent a theme or arouse clear group enthusiasm). Record these, adding associated ideas as you go along. Remember, it is impossible to record every idea, especially if the conversation is really flowing.

Naturally there will be divergent viewpoints. We are not seeking consensus, so argument or debate is inappropriate here. If someone has an idea that they feel strongly about, and it is different than a theme already started, write it down as the starting point for another 'thread' or scenario.

Ask your group to collaborate on developing each scenario even if they do not agree with it at first. You might tell them, "We are trying to collect a wide variety of viewpoints. Your turn will come. This is not the place to debate the relative merit of different proposals."

Overall,

- Keep your group on track with a light touch
- Make space for everyone to contribute
- Accept all contributions, even though not all will be written down.

The information recorded at each table, will be collected and integrated over the next few days. We also ask each facilitator, at the end of the session, to write up a quick note indicating

- What ideas you perceived as especially significant to the group (including divergent ones)
- Which participants have a clear vision (and ideally an open, collaborative attitude rather than a narrow focus on one topic); we are seeking your suggestions for those who might be appropriate to invite to a subsequent planning meeting in a few months.

We are aware that this procedure might seem undemocratic. Since we are acting in goodwill to the best of our ability and have no vested interest, we believe this is appropriate for our circumstances. We are coming from partnership & respect rather than domination & control.