

The Art of Gathering Assessment & Planning Tool

This assessment tool was created by Convergence based on the study of Priya Parker's book, *The Art of Gathering*. The material is taken directly from her book and modified for consideration in Christian worship and discipleship. *The Convergence Gather 2019 – 2020 Re-imagining Worship for Rising Generations project was made possible through a Vital Worship Grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, Grand Rapids, Michigan, with funds provided by the Lilly Endowment Inc.*

PART I: COMMIT TO GATHERING ABOUT SOMETHING

Let purpose be your bouncer

1. **WHAT IS THE SPECIFIC LARGER ISSUE OR CHALLENGE WE ARE ADDRESSING THROUGH THIS GATHERING?:** *Specificity is a crucial ingredient. The more focused and particular a gathering is, the more narrowly it frames itself and the more passion it arouses.*
2. **WHAT IS THE SPECIFIC PURPOSE FOR GATHERING IN THIS WAY AT THIS TIME? WHY, WHY, WHY?** (Chart on pg 25): *Keep asking why until you hit a belief or value. Think about what larger needs in the world this gathering might address. What problem might it help solve?*
3. **WHAT IS OUR DESIRED OUTCOME FOR THIS GATHERING?** *This allows people to make better choices about whether they need to be there.*
4. **WHAT DO WE WANT TO WALK AWAY WITH?**
5. **WHAT KINDS OF CONNECTIONS DO WE WANT TO CREATE?**
6. **GIVEN OUR PURPOSE FOR GATHERING, WHAT DO WE NEED TO SHIFT OR CHANGE ABOUT THE WAY WE COME TOGETHER TO MEET OUR GOALS?** *How does the way we typically gather need to change? What do we need to add to, or subtract from the gathering? How might we do things differently?*
7. **HOW DOES THIS EVENT STICK ITS NECK OUT A LITTLE BIT? DOES IT TAKE A STAND?**
 - a. **IS IT AS SPECIFIC AS WE CAN GET IT?**

- b. **IS IT UNIQUE?** *Why is this gathering different from all other gatherings of this general type? What is this that other gatherings aren't? (In our organization? In other organizations?)*
- c. **IS IT DISPUTABLE?** *Does it take a stand? Does it have a disputable perspective? Can you name multiple alternatives to your purpose for gathering? – PICK ONLY ONE!*

EX: *The Art of Gathering* by Priya Parker pg. 25

Gathering Type	Your purpose is a category (i.e. you don't have a purpose).	Basic, boring purpose, but at least you are trying	Your purpose is specific, unique and disputable (multiple alternatives)
<i>Company offsite</i>	<i>To get out of the office together in a different context</i>	<i>To focus on the year ahead.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To build and to practice a culture of candor with one another. • To revisit why we're doing what we're doing and reach agreement about it. • To focus on the fractured relationship between sales and marketing, which is hurting everything else.

PART II: WHO IS THIS FOR?

You will have begun to gather with purpose when you learn to exclude with purpose...The thoughtful gatherer understands that inclusion can in fact be uncharitable, and exclusion generous.

- 1. WHO IS THIS FOR?** *Who is this gathering for first? Who not only fits but helps fulfill the gathering's purpose?*
- 2. WHO IS THIS NOT FOR?** *Who threatens the purpose? Who despite being irrelevant to the purpose, do you feel obliged to invite? (In trying not to offend, you fail to protect the gathering itself and the people in it...When I talk about generous exclusion, I am speaking of ways of bounding a gathering that allow the diversity in it to be heightened and sharpened, rather than diluted in a hodgepodge of people.)*
- 3. WHOM SHOULD WE INVITE AND WHY?** *What is the match? Are they wanting to attend for the right reasons? Do they really have a genuine interest in connecting with this community/gathering/purpose? (With certain types of gatherings, over-including can keep*

connections shallow because there are so many different lines through which people could possibly connect that it can become hard to meaningfully activate any of them.)

4. HOW MANY PEOPLE SHOULD WE INVITE? (pg51)

6 – Conducive to intimacy, high levels of sharing, and discussion through storytelling.

12-15 – Small enough to build trust and intimacy. Large enough to offer a diversity of opinion and to allow for mystery and intrigue or constructive unfamiliarity. (Table Group)

30 – Starts to feel like a party. Has a distinctive crackle of energy and sense of possibility. Generally too big for a single conversation.

(70) 150 – Ideal conference size. Intimacy and trust is still palpable at the level of the whole group and before it becomes an audience. Everyone can still meet everybody and is the natural size of a tribe.

PART III: WHERE

A venue is a nudge

- 1. WHAT IS THE “SCRIPT” OF OUR SPACE?** *The environment should serve the purpose...the people walk into the space will immediately fall into a type of behavior. Figuring out the venue is about deciding how you want to nudge those present to be the fullest versions of themselves and the best guests.*
- 2. DOES OUR CHOSEN SPACE EMBODY THE REASON FOR OUR CONVENING?** *(Alternatively: How can the chosen space embody the reason for our convening? – how might the room be reconfigured/redesigned?) When a location inspires a client and makes them feel closer to their purpose, it makes my job as a facilitator much easier, as they are already halfway there.*
- 3. HOW CAN OUR SPACE “DISPLACE” PEOPLE?** *Simply put, how does this space break people out of their habits and ordinary routine? How does the space contribute to a sense that something special is about to happen and create a sense of expectation?*
- 4. ARE THERE GOOD PERIMETERS IN OUR SPACE?** *Gathering need perimeters. A space for gathering works best when it is contained. Make sure the “energy isn’t leaking out.” A*

contained space for a gathering allows people to relax, and it helps to create the alternative world.

- 5. DOES THE SIZE OF THE GATHERING'S SPACE SERVE OUR PURPOSE** *Is it too big? Too small? How can we use furniture, white boards, decoration, etc. to adjust the space to feel more appropriate? Or, is there another space that would work better? Would it make sense to use different spaces for different parts of the gather?*

6. DENSITY CHART FROM THE ART OF GATHER PG. 69

EXAMPLES: SQ. FT. PER GUEST	SOPHISTICATED	LIVELY	HOT
Dinner party	20 sq. ft	15 sq. ft	N/A
Cocktail party	12 sq. ft/	10 sq. ft.	8 sq. ft.
Into the night/dance party	8 sq. ft.	6 sq. ft.	5 sq. ft.

PART IV: HOSTING

If you don't establish and enforce your purpose, direction and ground rules, others will step in and enforce their own purposes, directions and ground rules. If you compel people to gather in a particular way, enforce it and rescue your guests if it fails. Generous authority is a commitment – you must sustain the protecting, equalizing, and connecting of guests throughout your event.

- 1. WHO (IN OUR CASE IT COULD BE SEVERAL PEOPLE) WILL HOST AND GUIDE THE EVENT WITH GENEROUS AUTHORITY AND HOW?** *Generous authority is imposing in a way that serves your guests and helps them have the best experience of your gathering while protecting them from potentially unwanted experiences.*
- 2. WHAT DO WE AS HOSTS NEED TO CONSIDER IN ORDER TO PROTECT OUR GUESTS EXPERIENCE AT OUR GATHERING?**
- 3. HOW CAN WE AS HOSTS EQUALIZE OUR GUESTS AT OUR GATHERING?** *How might we set ground rules and our world to help do this? (Ex. Name tags with only first names, rule that you can't talk about work, perhaps – religious jargon free zone?)*
- 4. HOW WE WILL AS HOSTS CONNECT OUR GUESTS TO ONE ANOTHER?** *You have to design your gatherings for the kinds of connections you want to create... (Ex. "water minister,"*

“make two new friends,” 60 second sharing rule)

- 5. HOW MIGHT OUR AUTHORITY PRIMARILY SERVE OUR GUESTS EXPERIENCE RATHER THAN OUR OWN NEEDS/FEARS?** *The host most likely to succumb to ungenerous authority are institutions and those who fear losing control. The risk factor is among the biggest reasons many institutional gatherings leave the generosity out of their authority.*

PART V: CREATE A TEMPORARY ALTERNATIVE WORLD

- 1. HOW CAN OUR GATHERING MAKE AN EFFORT TO TRANSPORT US TO A TEMPORARY ALTERNATIVE WORLD?** *Ex. Dinner en Blanc; Ce Soir Noir.*
- 2. IN WHAT WAYS MIGHT EXPLICIT RULES OVERCOME THE UNSPOKEN RULES THAT CAN MAKE CHURCH SCARY? HOW CAN WE COMMUNICATE THESE RULES AHEAD OF TIME? WHAT WOULD THEY BE? HOW WILL WE ENFORCE THEM? (EX: First names only, you cannot talk to the person next to you – you can only talk to the whole table, take tremendous photos but post nothing, unplugged – turn off phones and cameras).**
- a. Closed System:** *Ex. Etiquette. Implicit rules. Within a certain social milieu or professional class, it is helpful to have a common set of norms and behaviors. Sharing this common code allows people to coordinate more easily, to avoid embarrassing one another and to minimize the social risk of situations.*
 - b. Open/Fluid System:** *Explicit pop-up rules are better for gathering across difference. Rules based gatherings, controlling as they may seem, are actually bringing freedom and openness to our gatherings. The behaviors are temporary and can allow for boldness and experimentation. Rules can create an imaginary, transient world.*

A rule requires no advance preparation so anyone can participate. The explicitness levels the playing field for outsiders. Etiquette allows people to gather because they are the same. Pop-up rules allow people to gather because they are different – yet open to having the same experience.

- 3. HOW DO WE USHER PEOPLE INTO OUR GATHERING: CREATING A THRESHOLD INTO OUR NEW WORLD.** *Hosts often don't realize that there tends to be unfilled, unseized time between guests' arrival and the formal form of opening. Make use of this no-man's land.*
- a. How can we create passages and doorways?** *If not physically, are there psychological thresholds? Are there questions people could be discussing?*

4. **HOW WILL WE FUSE OUR GROUP?** *A talented gatherer doesn't hope for a disparate people to become a group. She makes them a group. How can we create an opening ritual? Ask a question? How can you get the group involved even before the panel/worship leaders begin? Is there a story you can weave; "I want you to imagine..." "What if..."*
5. **HOW WILL WE CREATE DEEPER ENGAGEMENT?:** *Sprout speeches, not stump speeches; Consider the darker and stranger quotient; Fresh Eyes; Ask for experiences not ideas (stories): "Story is about a decision that you made. It's not about what happens to you. And if you hit that and you get your vulnerability and you understand the stakes, and a few other things, people will intuitively find great stories to tell, and as soon as they do, we know them. We know them as human beings. This is no longer my boss's colleague. This is a real person who had a heartbreak. Oh, I know that.*

VI: PRIMING YOUR EVENT

Before your events starts, it has begun.

1. **HOW WILL WE HOST FROM THE MOMENT OF DISCOVERY?** *How can we focus during the "pregame" window on preparing human beings and not just logistics? From the moment someone receives an invitation the journey has begun, how we host them in advance will shape how they show up to the gathering. You need to attend to your guests during the pregame window in proportion to the risk and effort you are demanding of them. The pregame should sow in guests any special behaviors you want to blossom right at the outset of the event. (Ex. Send an article, testimony, video clip, ask people to bring something to contribute, fill out a questionnaire, bring a story or questions)*
2. **HOW DOES THE TITLE REFLECT THE SPECIFIC PURPOSE OF OUR EVENT?** (pg18) *To name a gathering affects the way people perceive it; its purpose and what is expected. Names help guests decide whether and how they fit into the world you're creating. (use image, video etc. to signal the tone and mood you are gathering for.) Titles can also be a helpful way to generously exclude. Ex. Bring your single friends and leave those strollers at home.*
6. **HOW CAN WE CONTINUE TO KINDLE INTEREST AND ENTHUSIASM AFTER THE INVITATION** *Ex. Create a good convening questions: Something that helps the person connect with and remember their own sense of purpose as it relates to the gathering. Something that gets them to share honestly about the nature of the challenge they're trying to address.*

7. **HOW DO WE LAUNCH OUR GATHERING?** *The opening, whether intentionally designed or not, signals to guests what to expect from the experience. This is a vital opportunity to sear your gathering's purpose into your guests minds. Do not use this as a time to go over logistics. Once you have captured people's attention, then you can take care of business, thank people, attend to housekeeping.*
8. **HOW DOES OUR GATHERING AWE AND YOUR GUESTS?** *When guests are made to feel slightly overwhelmed while at the same time welcome; their attention is gripped even as their nerves are soothed.*

VII: LAST CALL

Ending your event is just as important as the beginning.

1. **HOW WILL WE ISSUE A LAST CALL?**
2. **WHAT IS OUR THRESHOLD FOR RE-ENTRY-** *Two elements: Looking inward: meaning-making and connecting one last time; and turning outward: Separation and reentry (What of this world do I want to bring back into my other worlds? – Help people find a thread to connect the world of gathering to the world outside. (ex. Write something down, a questions, a postcard to receive later).*
3. **ARE OUR LOGISTICS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS SECOND TO LAST?** – *don't end with logistics and announcements! (Do it the second to last).*
4. **WHAT IS OUR DRAMATIC CLOSE** *(perhaps recall your purpose, then an exit line – a way that people will feel “this gathering was different from all the others.”)*