

FAC Net Facilitator's Guide: Hosting a Learning Exchange



What is a Learning Exchange?

A learning exchange is an in-person mutual exchange of information among two or more parties that are interested in learning from each other's successes and failures.

A learning exchange is **not** a conference where there are "experts" talking at "learners." An exchange is reciprocal, active, adaptive and participatory. Engagement should extend beyond just a "question and answer period." Use collaborative and participatory facilitation and field trips to explore the learning agenda that is the basis of your exchange.

"Transparent discussion about post-fire recovery was the largest takeaway for us. There are relationships that need to be built that we weren't even aware of, such as a local community group that can handle recovery money."
-PNW Learning Exchange Participant

What to Do as a Host

- Start by co-designing the learning agenda with participants, the planning team and local presenters.
- Provide a needs list in addition to your learning agenda. Make sure you are equipping participants with all the information they'll need to be prepared to learn and share.
- Ensure that everyone involved with the exchange (including local presenters) understands the learning agenda, goals and format of your exchange. People might assume this is a show-me tour and need coaching on how to play the role you need.
- Plan a spacious agenda. Leave time for in-depth conversation and emergent topics.
- Build in time for debriefing. This is particularly important if the group will be exploring potentially sensitive topics (i.e. home loss).
- Identify and record next steps or action items for each participant.
- When feasible, document the learning of the group to share more broadly.
- Keep the exchange to a small group of participants. Small groups facilitate more intimate, honest and useful discussion.
- Be thoughtful about who you include from the beginning planning stages. Consider inviting content experts; however, be wary of inviting too many people who aren't participating in the whole exchange.



What to Do as a Participant

- Attend the entire event. Leaving early or arriving late is disruptive to emergent events like learning exchanges.
- Be an active participant and learner.
- Disconnect from phone and email.
- Invest in relationship-building with other participants.
- Share your knowledge and experience and ask critical questions.
- Remember, in an exchange the learning is the joint responsibility of all participants, not just the host!



Exchange Design and Learning Objectives

“One lesson learned was limiting the size of the group in the learning exchange. Having a small group facilitated an open discussion and learning environment for the participants and partners. Also, go into the exchange with a clear set of objectives.”

–PNW Learning Exchange Participant

The foundation of a learning exchange is the learning agenda. Putting care into developing the learning questions and objectives for the exchange helps hosts plan the most fertile experiences and allows all participants to articulate their questions. We’ve all been trained to do “show and tell” tours of our programs and projects. Do not fall into this methodology when planning or executing an exchange. In an exchange, the learning questions are the dominant factor, the locations and experiences of the hosts are just primer for the learning discussion that is the focus of the event.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

1. Pacific Northwest (PNW) Learning Exchange Video: <https://fireadaptednetwork.org/pacific-northwest-fac-learning-exchange-video-release/>
2. PNW Learning Exchange - Deschutes County: <https://fireadaptednetwork.org/more-than-just-another-fire-truck/>
3. PNW Learning Exchange- Southern Oregon: <https://fireadaptednetwork.org/fire-adapted-communities-regional-learning-exchange-ashland-oregon/>
4. Austin-Boise Fire Department Learning Exchange Video: <https://fireadaptednetwork.org/resource/austin-boise-fire-department-learning-exchange/>