

# GUIDE

## HOW TO RUN AN OPEN SPACE EVENT

People:	People in your group who want to run open space
Time:	Varies on the length of the open space session
Resources:	This guide explains what you need to run open space

### *How can this help us?*

Open Space is a powerful tool for engaging large and small groups of people in discussions to explore particular questions or issues. It can be used with groups from anything between 10 and 1,000 people. In Transition it is particularly important because it enables people with ideas and energy to connect creating the opportunity to turn ideas into action. It is the foremost tool used by Transition groups to move from 'we have no idea' to action.

### *The guide:*

Open Space has Four Rules and One Law (the Law of Two Feet), and two insects, and a coffee/tea area.

The Four Rules state:

1. Whoever come are the right people
2. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have
3. Whenever it starts is the right time
4. When it's over, it's over

The Law of Two Feet states that:

"If, during the course of the gathering, any person finds themselves in a situation where they are neither learning nor contributing, they can go to some more productive place."

The insects are:

- Butterflies.
  - o These people hang out, maybe drinking tea, and don't appear to do much
  - o However they may just be involved with the most important discussions of the day
- Bees.
  - o They flit from conversation to conversation bring new ideas, and fresh eyes to the table
  - o They can also encourage mingling for those for whom the Law of Two Feet feels a bit rude

You will need the following materials:

- Lots of marker pens
- Lots of pieces of paper to write questions on
- Big pieces of flipchart paper to record discussions
- Bluetack

Cont..

# GUIDE

## The question is very important

Key to a successful Open Space event is the question. The question you ask and how you frame it will determine who comes so be mindful of this. It can be tempting to just want people who agree with you to turn up, but this will limit the diversity of your group -and the success of Transition! Usually this is in the title of the event as it helps set the ground for what is to be under discussion at the session. Some examples from Transition Town Totnes have included:

- How Will Totnes Feed Itself Beyond the Age of Cheap Oil?
- Powering Totnes Beyond Cheap Oil . . .
- The Economic Revival of Totnes – how can we build a sustainable, equitable and healthy economy in Totnes?

You may choose to invite specific people, or just leave it open to whoever turns up. It is important that the question is stated clearly on the invitations and all publicity.

## You need a suitable venue

Your venue needs to be:

- Large enough to take those who attend sitting in a large circle
- Has walls on which you can stick things
- Has enough space for several discussions to happen

## Running the open space

Setup a circle of chairs so when people arrive they take a seat in the circle (maybe after a cup of tea).

- In the centre of the circle is a pile of sheets of A4 paper and pens, and on the wall or floor have an empty timetable with the timings of the different sessions on left and the various discussion areas on the top like below

	1 Table by window	2 Table with flowers on	3 Side room	4 Room Upstairs	5 Dining room
Opening	The Event all Together			9.15 -	10
10am - 11.30am					
11:30am - 1pm					
Lunch break					
2pm - 3.30pm					
Closing	session all together			3.30 -	4.30

Explain to people the four rule, the Law of Two Feet, the insects and how to record discussions. You also might include a bit about how to facilitate at the tables. For instance making sure one or two voices don't always dominate discussions, or the art of making people feel safe and welcome so they have the confidence to take part.

Then offer people the opportunity to propose a question, if they do this then they must:

- Host that discussion
- Record the conversation themselves or arrange someone else to do it for the benefit of anyone unable to participate
- Write their name on the sheet

Then they post the question on the timetable.

Then say "Go!". This is the nerve-racking bit. You may worry that no one will come forward, but then one person does and often loads more then follow. Then the following needs to happen:

- Ten minutes of people proposing questions and sticking them up on the timetable
- You may well end up with more questions than you have slots available, in which case put those on similar topics together
- Once your timetable is full, allow people a few minutes to look at it and work out what they want to go to, and then ring a bell, or something similar, to announce the start of the first session
- People then go to the space where there question is being hosted and the discussions begin

In theory, the rest of the day will organise itself as long as you do the following:

- Ensure each break-out space has plenty of flip-chart paper and pens
- Tell people when each session starts, and remind them about the Law of Two Feet
- At the end of each session, ring a bell to let people know it is finished
- Go round and collect up the note filled sheets
- Put them up on the wall in the area you have pre-designated as the 'Market Place'
- You may also choose to have someone typing up the sheets, if you are posting the proceedings live on the web or if you want it typed up to send out quickly
- Leave 30-40 minutes or so at the end to allow one person to feedback from each discussion and for everyone to feedback on the process
- The notes generated can be typed up and circulated to everyone who attended

## Harvesting and Completion

You may decide that this day is about harvesting ideas, and no specific decisions are reached. Future activities might well emerge from the session, but you might want actions to be agreed and taken forward. This will determine what shape the closing session takes. It could be a brief thank you and hope you had a good time, to a more specific planning, setting up working groups or anything else that needs to happen. In which case more time is needed to come to agreements.

## GUIDE

Open Space is surprisingly easy to run, and an amazingly powerful way of exploring issues. What it does is draw out all those who are really passionate about a subject. For your first one you might find it useful to have someone with prior experience of running Open Space to facilitate it, but once you have a successful Open Space under your belt, you'll marvel at how simple it is!

You will find a really good short film about running Open Space, based around the one we ran at the Inaugural Meeting of the Transition Network here:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ux\\_LFjFeCvg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ux_LFjFeCvg)

You can also run open space over a longer period of time with larger groups see Harrison Owen's book 'Open Space Technology 2' if you want to do this.

### More support:

For more support and information on community involvement go here:  
<http://transitionnetwork.org/do-transition/starting-transition/7-essential-ingredients/community-involvement/>

Check out the 7 essential ingredients of Transition here:  
<http://transitionnetwork.org/do-transition/starting-transition/7-essential-ingredients/>

This document is released under <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>