

CREATING THE IDEAL MEETING ENVIRONMENT

PURPOSES & BENEFITS

Setting the stage for creative, collaborative work from the beginning includes creating the ideal meeting environment. The use of relevant environment themes helps to establish the right tone for the work to be accomplished in a non-threatening and creative setting, as well as to set the stage for helping a group to gather and collectively understand their purpose. The environment also serves as a distraction from anxiety as a person enters the room, which is helpful to gathering. This tool provides:

- Theme ideas
- The theme-related meaning(s)
- The theme-related props ideas

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

This document provides example ideas of setting up a meeting environment, which is an important component of bringing a collaborative group together. This tool can also be useful when convening stakeholders for community organizing strategic planning in Step 3 – Put Together An Informed Plan.

The most important thing to remember when convening a group around a theme is to match the theme to the work to be accomplished and to the audience. Also useful are tactile objects, such as themed toys, play-dough, pipe cleaners, etc., as such objects can help to “shift” participants out of usual ways of thinking and stimulate creativity. In addition, having the right facilitation supplies, such as flipcharts, markers, etc. will help to ensure that a meeting runs smoothly and efficiently, with shared input and collective understanding.

The ideas provided don’t necessarily have to cost a great deal of money to implement either. The thrift store, the yard sale, and donations to the shelter can be good resources. Be creative and have fun!



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Theme	Theme Meaning(s)	Theme-Related Props Ideas
Reweaving the Social Fabric	Combining ideas that together better strengthen the work to be accomplished (e.g., prevention and intervention, community organizing and the roots of the anti-sexual and domestic violence movement)	Potholder looms and fabric loops; yarn; knitting and crocheting needles; hook rug items; macramé items
Puzzle	Putting the pieces together in order to see the bigger picture; solving the puzzle; collaboration; coming together; getting it together; the whole is greater than the sum of the parts	Puzzle pieces; small party favor puzzle game toys; pages from puzzle books
Construction; Building a Plan or Dream; Building for the Future	Putting together the elements to construct a plan	Toy trucks; construction hats; yellow caution tape; toy or real tools; borrowed construction cones; construction toys – legos, building blocks, tinker toys, erector set pieces, Lincoln logs
Let's Get Cooking; We're Cooking Now	Putting the ingredients together, using a recipe (or process) to create the desired outcome (or dish); creating forward movement; celebrating progress	Small kitchen utensils (e.g., measuring cups and spoons, spatulas, etc.); hot pads; oven mitts; make the agenda look like a recipe
Tools for Success	The elements needed for success	Garden tools; toy or real tools
Safari	Adventure; taking in the relevant sights and important components along the way; "it's a jungle out there;" moving out of chaos	Stuffed or toy jungle animals; artificial vines/foilage, trees, flowers and plants; netting; toy compasses and binoculars; maps; safari hats; disposable or toy cameras
Steps; Footsteps	Taking the steps necessary to get to the end goals/destination	Footprint or shoeprint cut outs; shoeprints on a map to a "X" marks the spot
Journey; Travel; Train	Adventure; taking a trip to a destination; "get on board" with an idea or process because "the train is leaving the station"	Maps; toy cars or train sets



Let's Play Ball; Get In the Game	Coming together; collaboration; "play ball" with an idea or process	Baseball-themed items; baseball bats; baseball hats; plastic batting helmets; gloves; baseballs; salted peanuts on the table; red and white popcorn boxes or Cracker Jack boxes
Kick Off	Coming together; collaboration	Football-themed items; toy footballs and helmets; jerseys, etc.
Get Ready for Launch; Visioning	Getting ready for the journey; visioning the ideal future	Space toys; plastic or confetti stars; solar system poster or pictures printed off the computer
The Big Picture	Visioning the ideal future	Movie-themed items; popcorn boxes; old film on the tables; old movie reels; DVDs; boxes of candy; movie tickets printed on the computer (with the name of the meeting as the movie title)
Painting a Picture; Creativity	Coming together; collaboration; creative problem-solving; going through the creative process in order to realize the art or see the bigger picture	Art supplies – paints, brushes, paint cans; serve food in paint roller trays with plastic liners; use drop cloths on the tables or in other decorative ways
Planting Seeds; Growing; Plowing New Ground; Fall Harvest	Planting the seeds today in order to reap the harvest in the future; reaping the harvest/celebrating successes or efforts	Flower pots; seed packets; garden tools and gloves; seed catalogs; artificial flowers; freebies from the local John Deere dealer; farm toys; cornucopias; assorted gourds; leaves
Treasure Hunt; Pots of Gold	Searching for the treasure that lies within; searching for and bringing the relevant pieces together to create a collective treasure chest	Gold coins (can also be chocolate gold coins); toy treasure chests; "X" marks the spot maps; pirate gear – hats, eye patches, toy swords, bandanas; pots with gold coins or a rainbow on a stick coming out of the pot; clover cutouts