Cultivating the Art of Hosting at the University of Minnesota

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What is the Art of Hosting?
Art of Hosting originated in Denmark in the 1990’s and has spread globally. It is an emerging set of practices for facilitating group conversations of all sizes, supported by principles that: maximize collective intelligence; welcome and listen to diverse viewpoints; maximize participation and civility; and transform conflict into creative cooperation.

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Background
Art of Hosting core practices include:
- Open Space Technology
- World Cafe
- Appreciative Inquiry
- Powerful questions
- Circle
- Harvest
The first UMN AoH training was held in summer 2011. Since then, hundreds around the state have been trained in the Art of Hosting philosophy and tools.

Goals
- Understand concepts & practices of the Art of Hosting and Harvesting conversations;
- Collect data on how and where practices are being used within UMN system;
- Evaluate the effectiveness of and barriers to those practices; and
- Develop recommendations for effective implementation in the University setting.

Findings
- Research found that University staff were utilizing a small number of Art of Hosting techniques
- Identified as “low-hanging fruit,” these techniques are: listening practices, world cafe, check-in, and harvesting
- The big question: “Where do we go from here?”
- UMN Art of Hosting Community of Practice/Practitioners

Barriers
- Logistical hurdles, including registration costs and multi-day training sessions
- A lack of clear definitions and examples of the core methodologies
- Language/jargon has a risk of alienating certain populations
- Bridging the existing power structures at the University.

Recommendations
1. Provide resources to improve understanding
   - Case Studies
   - Annotated Bibliography
2. Offer Art of Hosting experiences at multiple access points
   - UMN Community of Practice Group
   - Easily replicable presentation
   - Where is Art of Hosting’s “home” at the University?
3. Grow Art of Hosting at UMN
   - Easily replicable presentation
   - “Taster” sessions

Methodology
Our methods included 3 levels of interaction with Art of Hosting:
- Interviewed 23 UMN-affiliated training participants about their experiences with AoH
- All 5 team members attended “Art of Participatory Leadership” workshop held by College of Design in Jan 2012
- Sought opportunities to practice our skills: members of hosting team, community events, using targeted listening in our group meetings.

Landscape graphic provided by Julie Weisenhorn, State Master Gardener Program Director