

Collaboration Compass
Fostering innovation-driven cooperation
between HEIs, NGOs, and CSOs

Guidelines to

DELIBERATIVE

MINI-PUBLICS



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BEFORE

the DMP

1. Introduction and Theoretical Foundations
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BEFORE

1. Introduction and Theoretical Foundations

From well-intentioned talk to deliberative infrastructure

Participatory initiatives often begin with goodwill and end with frustration. Rooms are full, voices are engaged, and time is generously offered, yet the outcomes fade as soon as the chairs are stacked. The problem is rarely a lack of commitment. More often, it is a failure of design.



Without structure, conversations drift, familiar hierarchies reassert themselves, and insight remains trapped at the level of individual contribution rather than becoming collective reasoning.

The **COCO World Café**, designed as a Deliberative Mini-Public, responds directly to this challenge. It treats conversation not as an end in itself, but as a means of producing shared understanding across difference. Drawing on the democratic logic of deliberative mini-publics, the COCO format combines the relational openness of the World Café with procedural safeguards that protect **equality of voice, transparency, and continuity**.

The result is not simply dialogue, but a form of **deliberative infrastructure**, a repeatable, low-threshold method through which **universities, civil society organisations, students, and territorial actors** can reason together about cooperation, rather than negotiate positions or defend institutional interests.

Within this framework, universities are positioned not as decision-makers or expert authorities, but as hosts of public reasoning. The **COCO World Café** creates a temporary critical space in which **academic knowledge, civic experience, and lived realities** are placed on equal footing. Cooperation is not assumed or prescribed; it is examined, questioned, and re-imagined through structured inquiry into needs, barriers, and opportunities. In this sense, the method operationalises co-production not as a slogan, but as a practice grounded in shared deliberation.

A distinctive feature of the COCO model and its primary theoretical anchor, is **mobility**. Participants rotate between tables, encountering fragments of evolving conversations rather than fixed positions. This physical movement mirrors the inner stages of deliberation itself: orientation *before* judgment, dialogue *before* positioning, synthesis *before* closure.

BEFORE

Mobility *redistributes* authority, *loosens* hierarchy, and *normalises* incompleteness. Ideas circulate independently of individuals, inviting participants to revise assumptions, build on others' insights, and engage reflectively without the pressure of ownership or performance. Psychological safety emerges not from agreement, but from the repeated experience that one can enter, contribute to, and leave a conversation without being fixed in place.

In this way, the **COCO World Café** translates deliberative theory into embodied practice. **It shows how careful design rather than facilitative charisma, creates the conditions under which diverse actors can think together productively.** The sections that follow move from this foundation into the concrete work of preparing participants, structuring sessions, harvesting collective reasoning, and ensuring that deliberation leads not only to insight, but to sustained cooperation beyond the room.



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2. Recruitment principles in practice

Recruitment should be intentional rather than convenient. This means resisting the temptation to rely solely on “easy-to-work-with” partners or established institutional contacts. Instead, preparation focuses on epistemic diversity, bringing together people who encounter cooperation challenges from different positions within the ecosystem.



Recruitment checklist (field-tested)

Ensure mandatory representation of the three core categories:

- **Students**
- **Academic staff**
- **NGO/CSO representatives**

Include additional stakeholders where relevant, such as:

- **Local or regional government representatives**
- **Companies or social enterprises**
- **Other territorially relevant actors**

Prioritise underrepresented or less-heard voices

(e.g. small NGOs, volunteers, early-career staff, grassroots actors)

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- Avoid over-representation of a single organisation or sector
- Aim for at least 3–5 civil society participants to prevent tokenism and ensure substantive exchange
- Select participants for the perspectives they bring, not solely for their formal authority or institutional status unchecked, will later need to be corrected through facilitation.



3. Diversity within categories

Balance in a deliberative mini-public is rarely achieved by ticking boxes. Having “a student,” “an academic,” and “an NGO representative” in the room is only the starting point. **What matters just as much is who those people are within their own worlds.**

A room where all the students are nearing graduation, all the academics are senior professors, or all the NGOs are large, professionalised organisations will quietly reproduce the very hierarchies the process is meant to suspend. Deliberation works best when these internal differences are allowed to surface.

Mixing ages and career stages, pairing long-established organisations with newer or smaller ones, and bringing together disciplinary knowledge with lived or experiential insight all help to widen the field of reasoning.

This kind of diversity does important work before the café even begins. It unsettles assumptions about who usually speaks, who is listened to, and whose knowledge counts.

Hierarchies are softened in advance, so facilitation does not have to fight them alone.

4. Invitations & Participant Preparation

The invitation is the first act of facilitation. Long before anyone sits at a table, its wording signals what kind of space is being created.

Clear, human invitations tend to outperform polished institutional messaging. They explain the purpose plainly and avoid inflated promises. Most importantly, they answer a question every invitee carries silently:

Why has my perspective been asked for?



Effective invitations make this explicit. They name the perspective the person brings and why it matters.

They are honest about what the session is, and what it is not, making clear that this is neither a debate to be won nor a decision-making forum where positions must be defended.

They also signal, from the outset, that participation will be active and shared: listening, contributing, and building on others' thinking are all part of the role.

A well-crafted invitation also looks beyond the event itself. Outlining what happens after the café, how insights will be synthesised, shared, and taken forward, signals respect and accountability. **Participants are more willing to invest when they know their contributions will not vanish into a report that no one reads.**



Preparation follows the same principle. The aim is not to load participants with background papers or pre-formed positions, but to help them arrive oriented and at ease.

Clear information about the purpose, the format, and the kinds of contributions expected is usually sufficient.



When preparation reassures rather than overwhelms, participants enter the room with openness rather than defensiveness.

Curiosity, not expertise, becomes the shared starting point and deliberation can begin from there.



5. Logistics & Readiness

Preparing the room so the process can work

Effective deliberation depends on conditions that are often invisible when they function well and painfully obvious when they do not. Skilled facilitation cannot compensate for poor logistics. Many difficulties that appear during discussion, uneven participation, frustration, repetition, originate not in the participants themselves but in the **physical environment**. Careful preparation reduces these risks before the first word is spoken.



The room should be arranged with intention. Three clearly identified tables, corresponding to **Needs, Barriers, and Opportunities**, must be visibly marked. Participants should be seated in groups of four to six.

This range supports diversity while still allowing each person to speak without competing for attention. Larger groups tend to silence quieter voices. Smaller ones reduce the range of perspectives.



Adequate space between tables is essential. Participants must be able to rotate without confusion or physical congestion. Movement should feel natural rather than disruptive. If transitions become awkward, the cognitive flow is interrupted.



Each thematic area requires a clearly visible harvest surface, whether a wall or board. The harvest must remain legible from a distance. Lighting conditions should allow participants to read post-it notes without strain. If individuals must lean forward, reposition themselves repeatedly, or raise their voices simply to be heard, the deliberative quality will decline. **Physical discomfort translates quickly into cognitive disengagement.**

Room preparation may appear procedural. **It is not.** It shapes the conditions under which equality of voice and cumulative reasoning become possible. When the space supports the method, participants focus on substance rather than navigating constraints.

And that distinction often determines whether the session **remains constructive or becomes fragmented.**

Room setup



- Arrange three clearly marked tables (Needs, Barriers, Opportunities).
- Ensure each table seats 4–6 participants comfortably.
- Leave enough space between tables to allow easy rotation.
- Designate a visible harvest wall or board for each theme.
- Check lighting: participants must be able to read post-its from a distance.

If participants have to squeeze, shout, or strain to see the wall, the deliberative quality will suffer.

✓ Materials checklist

Effective deliberation depends on preparation that is both careful and visible. Seemingly minor logistical oversights can weaken participation and undermine the integrity of the process. Materials therefore require advance attention.

Post-it notes in clearly differentiated colours should be available to distinguish thematic rounds, for example **yellow for Needs**, **pink for Barriers**, and **green for Opportunities**.

Colour differentiation is not decorative.



It supports visual cognition and cumulative reasoning across rotations.

Thick markers are preferable to fine pens. Legibility matters more than elegance. **Flipchart paper or large wall sheets** must be positioned so that participants can read contributions at eye level. **Masking tape** or wall-safe adhesive should be accessible, and a visible timing device is essential to maintain collective awareness of transitions. **Printed question prompts** for each table should be placed clearly in view.

Netiquette reminders must also be physically present in the space. Subtle cues shape behaviour.

It is advisable to prepare more materials than anticipated. Experience suggests that insufficient materials generate unnecessary interruption. And interruptions rarely improve deliberative quality.



BEFORE



Prepare in advance:

- Post-its in different colours (e.g., yellow = Needs, pink = Barriers, green = Opportunities)
- Thick markers (fine pens discourage clarity)
- Flipchart paper or large wall sheets
- Masking tape or wall-safe adhesive
- Visible timing device
- Printed question prompts for each table
- Netiquette reminder sheet

Have more materials than you think you need.



Facilitator and Moderator readiness

Preparation extends beyond materials to people.

Clarity of roles before participants arrive determines whether the process runs smoothly or fragments under pressure.

The **COCO World Café** distinguishes between two roles:

The Lead Facilitator holds overall responsibility for the process. This person **manages time, calls rotations, safeguards equality of voice, clarifies instructions, and intervenes when the deliberative contract is at risk.** The Lead Facilitator does not contribute substantive content. Their authority is procedural.

Table Moderators ensure continuity at each thematic table. They remain at the **same table throughout rotations, summarise what previous groups discussed, and support balanced participation.** In some settings, moderators are pre-appointed members of the organising team. In others, a table host may be nominated from among participants at the beginning of the session or during the preparation. In both cases, the role is procedural, not representational.



A shared agreement on the signal for rotation is also necessary. Small confusions accumulate quickly in live settings. And once confusion spreads, clarity is difficult to restore.



Before participants arrive

The Lead Facilitator and any pre-appointed moderators must align clearly on expectations. The following must be agreed:

- The purpose and logic of each round
- The approximate timing of rounds and transitions
- The content and length of table handovers
- Agreed intervention phrases for dominance, drift, or escalating tension
- The signal used to close rounds and initiate rotation



Moderators should know: what to do, when to intervene, and when to step back.

BEFORE



Ethical and GDPR Preparation

Ethical integrity requires procedural clarity before the session begins. Participant information and consent materials should be prepared where required by institutional or national regulations.

No personal identifiers should be recorded on post-it notes or clustering sheets. Recording devices must not be used without explicit consent. These are not administrative details. They are trust conditions.



Plans for storing and documenting harvest materials must be established in advance. Participants should leave the session confident that their contributions are respected, anonymised where appropriate, and handled responsibly. **Confidence supports openness.** And openness supports deliberation.

Ethical & GDPR preparation check-list:



- Prepare participant information and consent materials (if required). Ensure no personal identifiers are written on post-its.
- Confirm that no recording takes place without explicit consent.
- Plan how harvest materials will be stored and documented.

Participants should feel confident that their contributions are respected and protected.



Final readiness check (10 minutes before start)

Ten minutes before the session begins, a brief structured check is recommended. Are tables arranged to support balanced interaction? Are prompts visible and legible? Are materials within reach? Do moderators know how they will begin? Does the lead facilitator know the opening sentence?

If any of these elements remain uncertain, they should be addressed immediately. **Once participants enter the room, attention shifts from logistics to relationships.**

And at that point, structural adjustments become more difficult.

Preparation may feel mundane. It is not. Careful readiness establishes the conditions under which deliberation can unfold with integrity, clarity, and institutional credibility. Without it, even the strongest facilitation design struggles to hold.



Ask:

- Are tables balanced and visible?
- Are prompts clear and readable?
- Are materials within reach?
- Do moderators know their first sentence?
- Does the lead facilitator know the opening line?

If the answer to any of these is no, fix it now. Once participants arrive, attention shifts from logistics to relationships.

DURING

the DMP



1. Introduction to the Session Flow
2. Opening the Café: locking in the deliberative contract
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DURING

1. Introduction to the Session Flow

A three-hour deliberative rhythm that holds under pressure.

A **COCO World Café** follows a rhythm that is deceptively simple and carefully calibrated. The timing is not arbitrary. Three hours is long enough for participants to move beyond surface exchange and into reflective reasoning, and short enough to sustain attention and care. Structure here does not constrain the room; it carries it, especially when energy dips or power dynamics surface.

The arc is consistent: a focused opening that establishes shared ground; three rounds of rotating conversation moving from needs to barriers to opportunities; a visible harvest; and a plenary synthesis that deepens reflection before closing. **Each phase prepares the conditions for the next**, allowing deliberation to accumulate rather than sprawl.



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2. Opening the Café: locking in the deliberative contract

The opening is not a formality It is the moment when the facilitator establishes the legitimacy of the process and earns the right to intervene later.

Conceptually, **the opening sets a deliberative contract:** a shared understanding of what kind of space this is, how participation will be handled, and what counts as legitimate contribution. Participants need to know immediately that they are not entering a debate, a negotiation, or a forum for defending institutional positions. **They are entering a shared inquiry**

where different forms of knowledge will be treated as equally relevant.

In practice, a strong opening does four things clearly and without apology:

- **Names the purpose:** why this particular group has been convened and what shared inquiry lies ahead.
- **Defines the conversation:** what this process is, and what it is not.

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- **Explains how equality of voice will be protected:** not hoped for, but actively supported through structure and moderation.
- **Sets ethical and data boundaries:** clarifying anonymity, consent, and the use of analogue tools.



Netiquette is stated explicitly and treated as part of the method rather than a courtesy. Participants are invited to **listen actively, share the floor, challenge ideas rather than people, and contribute verbally or in writing.** When these norms are made visible at the outset, later interventions feel legitimate rather than intrusive.

3. The three inquiry rounds: depth through sequence

The order of the inquiry rounds matters. Each round builds the conditions for the next and blurring them weakens deliberative depth.

Round 1 – Needs

This is the most generative round. Participants are mapping gaps, unmet conditions, and cooperation requirements. Because the wall is initially empty, this round benefits from slightly more time to allow diverse entry points and examples to surface.

Needs come first. Participants articulate what cooperation genuinely requires and where current approaches fall short. The focus is on naming gaps and unmet conditions, not on proposing fixes. This round establishes a shared language that anchors the rest of the session.

(≈ 20 minutes)

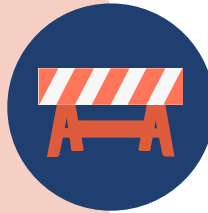
DURING

Round 2 – Barriers

Participants now work with visible material. The task shifts from generation to analysis. They identify structural, cultural, and relational constraints connected to the needs already named. Since the conversation builds on existing clusters, slightly less time is often sufficient.

Barriers follow. Structural constraints, cultural habits, funding logics, and power asymmetries tend to surface quickly. The key here is to keep attention on conditions rather than culprits. Once blame takes over, learning stalls.

(≈ 15–20 minutes)

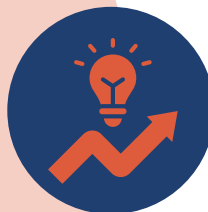


Round 3 – Opportunities

This round is connective and strategic. Participants refine ideas, link needs and barriers, and explore realistic pathways forward. The wall is now populated, so the cognitive task becomes sharper and more focused. Extending time does not necessarily improve quality; precision matters more than duration.

Opportunities come last. Only after needs and barriers are visible does it make sense to explore where cooperation could realistically move.

(≈ 15–20 minutes)



This is not blue-sky brainstorming, but grounded exploration of what might shift if even one barrier loosened.

Across all rounds, moderators earn their role by watching who speaks and who does not, inviting quieter participants in, slowing dominant voices without silencing them, encouraging concrete examples, and documenting contributions neutrally. Their task is not to improve meaning, but to protect it.

4. Managing flow and rotation: seating, movement, continuity

Deliberation does not happen by accident. Without structure, familiar dynamics quickly reassert themselves. The COCO World Café uses intentional movement to keep power fluid and reasoning cumulative.

After the opening, participants are invited to sit at initial tables of four to six people. Mixing is encouraged from the start; sectoral clustering is gently avoided. Seating is casual but intentional, allowing the conversation to begin without awkwardness or hierarchy settling in.

Rotation is the engine of the process.

At the end of each round, the lead facilitator calls time with a clear signal. The instruction remains consistent: table moderators stay, participants move, and all written material remains in place.

Participants carry their thinking with them, but leave the notes behind. **Tables** and **walls** become the collective memory of the conversation.

DURING

Where dedicated **moderators** are not pre-appointed, table moderators may be nominated from among the participants at the beginning of the session. In this case, their role should be clearly explained: **they remain at the table across rotations, offer brief handovers to incoming groups, and safeguard the neutrality and continuity of the harvest.**

Nominating moderators from within the group can deepen shared ownership of the process, provided expectations around balance, descriptive summarising, and equality of voice are made explicit from the outset.

Movement is purposeful and brief. If participants attempt to remain where they are out of comfort, redirection is gentle but firm. **Rotation is not optional.** Ideas travel when people do.

At the start of each new round, moderators provide a concise but meaningful handover, outlining the key themes, tensions, and open questions that emerged previously. The aim is not to rush through a summary, but to give incoming participants enough orientation to engage substantively. In some contexts, this may take a little longer than a minute, especially when discussions have generated **layered insights or unresolved tensions.**

Each deliberative round typically runs for approximately **20 minutes**, allowing sufficient depth without exhausting energy. Within that time, the handover should be proportionate: long enough to anchor continuity, short enough to preserve space for new contributions.

This structured continuity ensures that each group builds on what came before rather than restarting the conversation from zero, keeping the reasoning cumulative and connected across rotations.

5. Sticky Notes, Serious Work

Why post-its quietly carry the democracy in the room.

In many **COCO World Cafés**, the most consequential contributions are not spoken aloud. They are written, placed, moved, and revisited. The **post-it**, often dismissed as a facilitation gimmick, performs serious deliberative work. **It is one of the most reliable tools for redistributing authority and protecting equality of voice in mixed groups.**

Writing slows the conversation just enough to make thinking visible. It allows participants to contribute without interrupting, competing for airtime, or performing confidence. For those less fluent in the dominant language, newer to the topic, or simply more reflective, **writing provides a safer and often more precise entry point.** In practice, some of the sharpest insights surface on paper rather than in speech.

One idea, one note and writing as a legitimate voice

Effective use of post-its rests on a single, non-negotiable discipline: **one idea per note.** This is not pedantry. It is what keeps deliberation workable.

DURING

Single-idea notes can be moved, clustered, compared, and reconfigured as the conversation evolves. They prevent premature synthesis and allow tensions to sit side by side without being resolved too early. When multiple ideas are compressed onto one note, nuance is lost and disagreement hardens around wording rather than substance. **One idea per note avoids this trap and keeps reasoning flexible.**



Writing should always be framed as an invitation, not an obligation. **Some participants write first and speak later; others speak and then write.** Both are valid forms of participation. What matters is that writing is explicitly legitimised as equal to speaking.

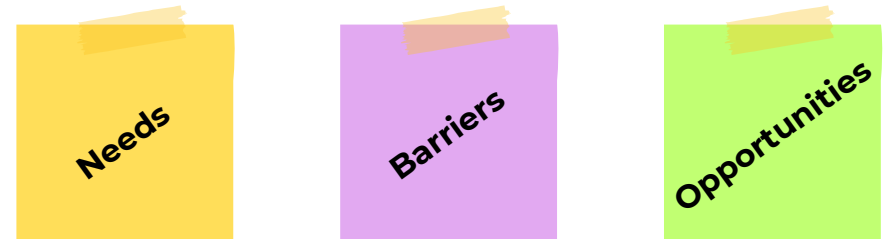
When this is stated out loud, the room often shifts: pens come out, shoulders relax, and silence becomes productive rather than awkward. **That silence is not disengagement, it is thinking.**

Over time, written contributions begin to speak back to the room. Participants respond to notes rather than personalities, and ideas gain traction independent of who authored them. **This is how post-its quietly flatten hierarchy without confrontation.**



Colour, placement, and visibility: letting the wall do the work

Colour-coding notes by round, commonly yellow for **needs**, pink for **barriers**, green for **opportunities**, helps the wall tell a story at a glance. Patterns and imbalances become immediately visible without explanation.



Placement matters just as much. Notes should remain visible on table surfaces or walls, never stacked or hidden. Clustering happens in the open, slowly and tentatively. Labels are tested aloud rather than imposed. This signals that sense-making is collective and provisional, **not expert-driven.**

The wall becomes a shared reference point that participants can point to, question, and return to as they rotate between tables. Memory is not entrusted to individuals; it is entrusted to the visible record. This visible continuity prevents repetition and keeps the conversation cumulative.

DURING

To make this work in practice, the arrangement of post-its must be intentional:

- **Designate one clearly marked surface per theme** (Needs, Barriers, Opportunities). Avoid mixing themes on the same board.
- **Place notes at eye level whenever possible.** If participants must bend down or stretch to read, they will not engage with the material.
- **Cluster in real time and in the open.** Move notes slowly and visibly. Do not cluster privately and present a finished result.
- **Leave space between clusters.** White space allows patterns to emerge and prevents premature merging of distinct ideas.
- **Use headings that are descriptive, not interpretive.** Short, neutral labels keep ownership with participants.
- **Keep earlier clusters visible throughout all rounds.** Do not remove “completed” work; the accumulation is the method.
- **Photograph only after clustering is complete and GDPR conditions are respected.**

Where space allows, consider a simple visual structure:

Writing as a safety net.

There are moments when talk stalls, loops, or overheats.

Writing is often the cleanest reset.

Inviting a brief period of silent writing—two minutes, no discussion—frequently:

- brings quieter perspectives into view,
- cools defensive exchanges,
- sharpens contributions by forcing clarity.



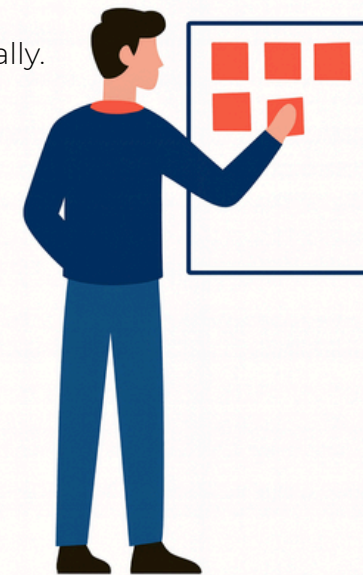
Because everyone writes at the same time, attention is redistributed without singling anyone out. Facilitation remains firm but non-punitive, and the process regains balance quickly.

A final word on respect for the material

Post-its are temporary, but what they hold is not. They should be treated with care.


Post-It Method Preferred

- They are not discarded casually.
- They are not rewritten into more polished language.
- They are not attributed to individuals.



- **Accessible to all, regardless of age or background**
- **Supports easy clustering and prioritization**
- **Reduces barriers to participation, especially in low-tech contexts**


DURING

Handled well, **these small pieces of paper become evidence of collective reasoning, a trace of how a diverse group thought together over time.** Participants notice when their words are respected, clustered thoughtfully, and carried through into the final harvest and report. That respect, more than any technique, is what makes people willing to engage again. 

In deliberative practice, **tools are never neutral.** Used carelessly, post-its become clutter. Used well, they become one of the **quiet guardians of democracy in the room.**

6. Roles: Moderators & Lead Facilitator

While moderators anchor individual tables, the **lead facilitator** holds the whole room. This role resembles air traffic control more than stage management. **The facilitator calls time, monitors the flow, scans for tables that are silent, stuck, or overheated, and intervenes sparingly to protect process integrity.**

Most interventions are quiet: a word to a moderator, a reminder to the room to build on what is already visible, a small adjustment to seating after a rotation. Visible authority is used only when necessary. 

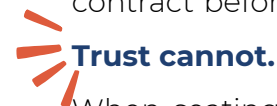
Certain patterns recur across sessions, and experienced teams respond quickly:

- **Dominant voices** are met with early, calm redirection and invitations to quieter participants.
- **Circular talk** is reset with brief silent writing.
- **Rising tension** is reframed toward patterns rather than people, with escalation to the lead facilitator if needed.
- **Low energy** is addressed by shortening rounds, inviting movement, and shifting back to writing.
- **Off-theme drift** is acknowledged and parked without derailing the inquiry.



These moves are not signs of failure. They signal that the process is doing real work.

One principle overrides all others: protect the deliberative contract before protecting the timetable. Time can be recovered.



Trust cannot.

When seating, rotation, and intervention are handled with care, the conversation remains cumulative, inclusive, and alive. Participants often notice this only when they feel momentarily uncomfortable, precisely the point at which reflective depth tends to emerge.

7. Pitfalls & Adaptations

When things go sideways and how to bring them back into balance.

No deliberative process unfolds without friction. **The COCO World Café** is structurally robust, but it operates in real rooms, with real people, carrying habits, hierarchies, fatigue, and emotion. What distinguishes a session that merely survives from one that produces genuine insight is not the absence of problems, but **the ability to recognise destabilising patterns early and respond decisively.**

The pitfalls outlined below recur across contexts. They are not failures of facilitation, but predictable stress points in deliberative work. Addressed promptly and calmly, they often deepen rather than derail the inquiry.

- **Uneven participation - when a few voices take over:** this is the most familiar pattern. One or two confident participants, often senior academics or experienced organisational leaders, begin to dominate airtime. Students, early-career practitioners, or quieter CSO representatives withdraw, sometimes within the first minutes of a round.
- **Early signal:** the same voices reappear repeatedly while others remain silent.

- **Intervention:** moderators step in early and without drama: *“That’s a strong point—let’s pause and hear from someone who hasn’t spoken yet.”*

“Could we bring in a student or NGO perspective on this?”

Jargon is addressed immediately. Asking for plain language lowers the threshold for participation and often brings new voices into the exchange.

- **If it persists:**

the lead facilitator quietly rebalances tables during rotation, relocating one dominant voice to a quieter group. Allowing imbalance to run unchecked quickly undermines deliberative legitimacy.

- **Stalled or circular discussion:** energy drops. Points repeat.

The table circles familiar ground without moving forward



What this signals:

cognitive overload, emerging tension, or limited entry points for some participants.

Reset move:

introduce a brief silent-writing pause:

“Two minutes, no talking. Write one fresh thought, example, or question.”

DURING

This interrupts repetition, cools escalation, and surfaces perspectives that struggle to enter fast-paced talk.

If the pattern continues, adjust the structure rather than forcing momentum. In later rotations, participants are not starting from scratch; they are working with existing clusters. Their task becomes more demanding: add depth, refine tensions, challenge assumptions, or connect themes across rounds.

Because of this, later rounds often require slightly less time than the first.



A shorter, focused exchange can be more productive than extending a discussion that is already circling. It is entirely legitimate to reduce a round by a few minutes once the wall is substantially populated. Deliberation shifts from generating volume to sharpening meaning.

The aim is not to maximise speaking time, but to protect cumulative reasoning.

- **Tension or defensive escalation:** critique becomes personal.

Tone sharpens. Positions harden.

- **Immediate response:** Shift attention from people to patterns: *“Let’s step back from who is involved and look at the condition or incentive creating this tension.”*

If defensiveness continues, moderators signal the lead facilitator. The facilitator intervenes neutrally, capturing the issue on the wall and deferring resolution to synthesis.

- **Preventive move:**

name this dynamic during the opening. When participants understand that tension often signals structural insight, defensiveness softens.

- **Low energy, fatigue, or post-lunch fade:** attention wanes.

Contributions thin.



Recovery options:

- shorten the current round,
- invite a brief stand-and-stretch,
- use a one-word check-in across sectors.

Shifting emphasis back to writing often restores focus faster than pushing discussion.

- **Structural adaptation:** plan time with a buffer. If energy collapses early, protect deliberative rounds and reclaim time from synthesis rather than rushing conversation.

- **Technical or logistical disruption:** microphones fail. Hybrid connections drop. Rooms change.

- **Rule:** pivot immediately to analogue tools.

No apologies, no delay.

DURING

Flipcharts, post-its, and clear voice often restore momentum faster than troubleshooting. In case of hybrid formats, a dedicated technical moderator handles issues silently while table moderators stay with the conversation.

- **Hybrid adaptation:** replace rigid rotation timing with a flexible window (e.g. 25–35 minutes), allowing movement when participants are ready.
- **Off-theme drift and time-consuming tangents:** discussion slides into unrelated grievances or personal projects.
- **Redirection:** use relational prompts:

“How does this connect to the needs or barriers we’re exploring?”

If drift continues, capture it on a visible “parking lot” note with a clear promise to revisit it later if time allows.

- **Contextual note:** in politically sensitive or culturally diverse settings, allow more narrative space early, then tighten focus in later rounds.
- **A final field principle:** effective adaptation is rarely elaborate. It is fast, calm, and anchored in purpose. When something wobbles, the guiding question is simple:



Is the process still protecting equality of voice and cumulative reasoning?

If the answer is no, intervention is not optional. The timetable can bend. The deliberative contract cannot.

Sessions that appear lost halfway through often become the most powerful precisely because facilitators respond with clarity rather than panic. Trust the structure.

Read the room. Adjust decisively. This is how a strong format becomes a living democratic practice rather than a scripted exercise.



8. Closing the Session

Clarifying the boundary between deliberation and documentation. The closing of a **COCO World Café** should make one practical distinction clear. Harvesting belongs to the deliberative session. **Documentation belongs to the follow-up phase.** When this boundary is blurred, participants may leave uncertain about what happens to their contributions or assume that additional work is expected of them after the formal discussion ends.

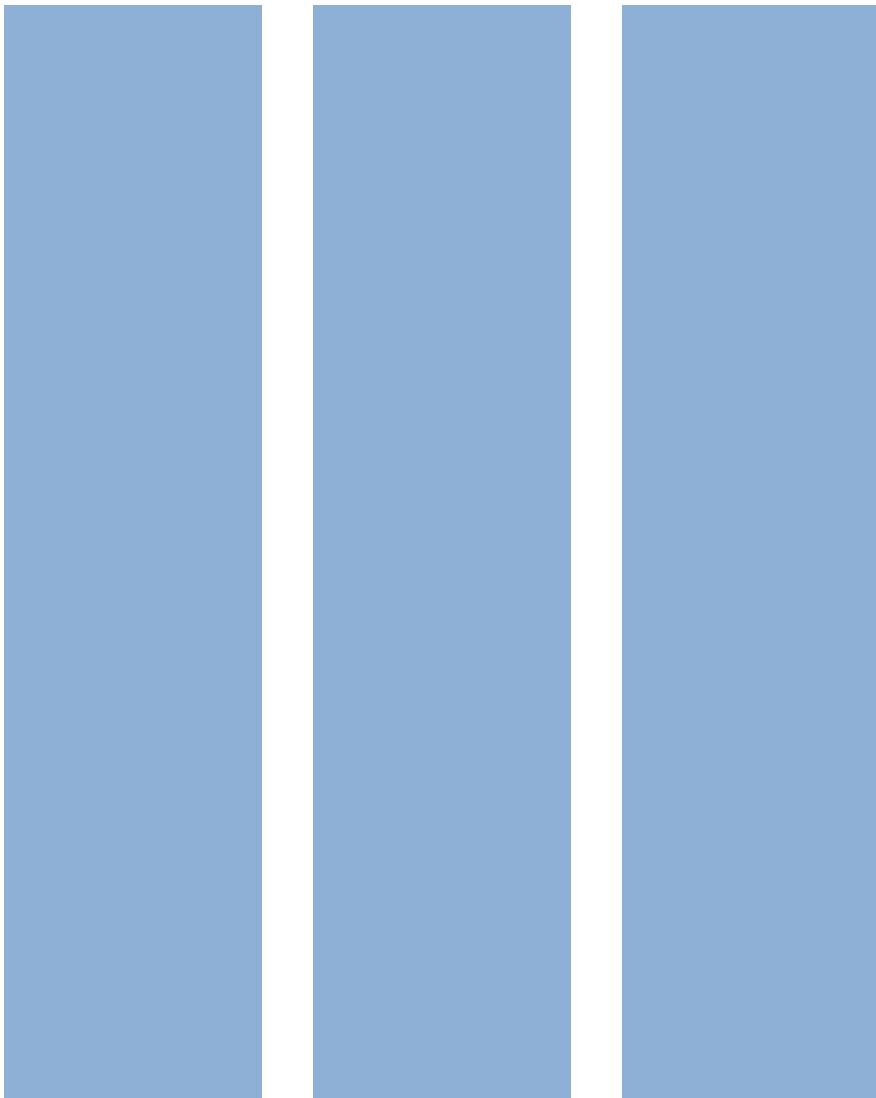
Harvesting takes place in the room. **Moderators** cluster the post-its visibly, summarise emerging themes, and present brief table-level reflections. The **lead facilitator** guides the plenary synthesis, including the Cartesian Questions. **Participants** remain present during this stage because it forms part of the collective reasoning process. It allows them to see how their ideas have been interpreted, to correct misunderstandings, and to recognise the broader patterns that have emerged. **This is still deliberation.**

Documentation, however, occurs after participants leave. The drafting of the **DMP Summary Report**, the structured evaluation synthesis, and the formal integration of results into mentorship pathways or institutional planning are tasks undertaken by the facilitation team. These steps require careful consolidation and neutrality. **They should not be improvised in the presence of participants, nor should they extend the session informally.**

Making this distinction explicit during the closing strengthens procedural clarity. Participants understand when their active role concludes and when institutional responsibility begins. **The session ends with shared reflection.** The follow-up begins with structured accountability. And that separation protects both the **integrity of deliberation and the credibility of its outcomes.**

AFTER

the DMP



1. Harvesting & Evaluation
2. Plenary integration and quality control
3. From wall to record: the DMP Summary Report
4. Documenting with integrity: the DMP Summary Report
5. Conclusion

1. Harvesting & Evaluation

When conversation becomes collective evidence.

As the final rounds conclude, the work of deliberation enters a **decisive phase**. What has been said, often quickly, sometimes cautiously, now risks dissolving unless it is carefully held. Harvesting is the practice that prevents this loss. It transforms dialogue into shared evidence, stabilising collective reasoning long enough for it to inform action beyond the room.

This phase does not add meaning; it reveals what has already emerged. When done well, harvesting allows participants to see their thinking reflected back with clarity, integrity, and proportion.

Table-level harvesting: stewarding what emerged

Harvesting begins at the table. Here, moderators take the lead, drawing on their close familiarity with the conversation they have stewarded across all rotations.

Their task is disciplined and deliberately restrained. **Post-its are clustered into themes**, not to tidy the discussion, but to expose its structure. Recurrent **needs**, persistent **barriers**, and nascent **opportunities** become visible through proximity rather than interpretation. Labels are added sparingly and descriptively, staying as close as possible to participants' own words.

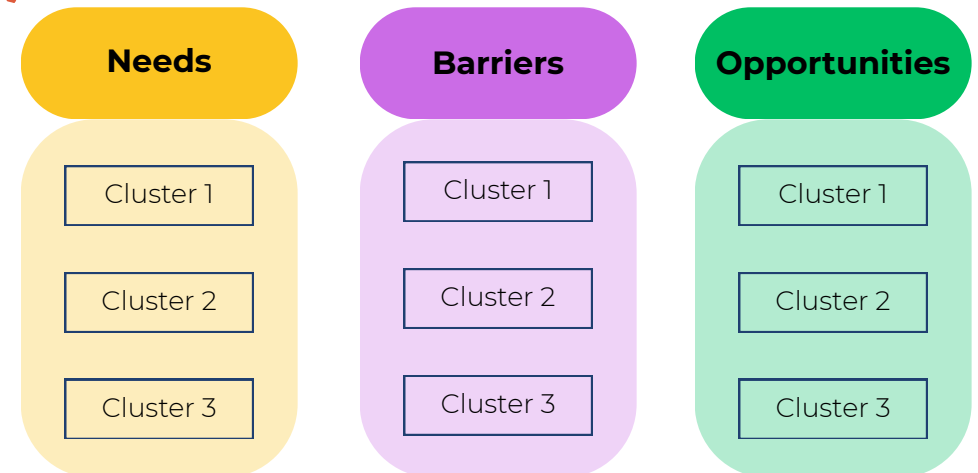
Clustering happens in the open. Notes are moved slowly and tentatively, with labels tested aloud rather than imposed.

Moderators invite brief confirmation or correction, enough to keep sense-making collective without reopening debate. Contradictions and minority perspectives are kept visible.

Resolution is neither expected nor required at this stage.


The outcome of this work is a **table-level evidence panel** clustered post-its, neutral labels, and any tensions or surprises that deserve attention in plenary. Moderators prepare a short, factual handover, two to three minutes at most, highlighting patterns, questions, and points of friction. **The role here is to**

bridge between groups, not to speak for them.



One idea per post-it / Cluster visibility
Use descriptive labels / Keep all themes visible across rotations

2. Plenary integration and quality control

While moderators harvest at table level, the **lead facilitator** holds the wider frame. This role is integrative rather than interpretive. 

As panels are assembled on the harvest wall, the facilitator scans for cross-table echoes, imbalances, and silences. **Which themes dominate? Which appear fragile? Which voices or perspectives risk disappearing in the aggregation?** When necessary, space is created for final contributions, often through a brief gallery walk or an invitation to name what feels missing before synthesis begins.

Plenary integration is guided through **Cartesian Questions** which deepen reflection without forcing consensus:

- What happens if cooperation succeeds?
- What happens if it does not?
- What does not happen if it succeeds?
- What does not happen if it fails?



These prompts slow the room down. They surface assumptions, consequences, and absences that often remain implicit. **Participants move from description to reflective projection, exploring future implications while remaining grounded in the evidence on the wall.**

The facilitator manages the rhythm of this exchange, ensuring that reflection remains anchored in the harvest rather than drifting into abstraction.

Convergences are named, tensions acknowledged, and unresolved questions left open. The aim is not closure, but clarity.

Evaluation as care, not control.

Evaluation follows naturally from harvesting and synthesis. It is not an external audit imposed on the process, but **an extension of deliberative care.**

Attention turns to how the conversation unfolded: whether participation felt balanced, whether different forms of knowledge were present, and whether perspectives shifted during the session. **Short participant feedback**, captured while impressions are still fresh, **often reveals dimensions that formal indicators miss.** Moderators contribute observations from their tables, noting moments of engagement, hesitation, or breakthrough.

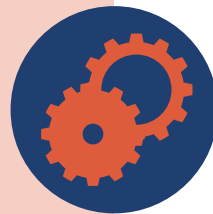
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The lead facilitator complements this with reflective notes on deliberative quality, including equality of voice, robustness of outputs, and integrity of the harvest.

The purpose is learning rather than judgement, understanding what supported reflective inquiry and where it remained fragile.

To support structured learning across institutions, **COCO Deliberative Mini-Publics** use three complementary evaluation instruments:

- A **Pre-DMP questionnaire**, capturing participant expectations, prior experience, and baseline confidence regarding HEI-NGO/CSO cooperation.
- A **Post-DMP questionnaire**, assessing perceived learning, clarity of needs and barriers, quality of facilitation, and overall experience.
- A **Lead Facilitator checklist**, completed within 24 hours, documenting process integrity, participation balance, and adherence to the COCO protocol.



Data collection can take place immediately after the session, through a digital survey link shared during the closing. Where appropriate, the link may also be sent by email within 24 hours to ensure higher response rates.



The evaluation tools are attached in the annex of this guide.



They provide consistency across partner institutions and strengthen the evidentiary basis for understanding how deliberation contributes to cooperation and institutional learning.

Evaluation, therefore, does not measure participants. It **strengthens the method.**



3. From wall to record: the DMP Summary Report

The final act of harvesting is documentation. The **DMP Summary Report** translates the wall into a durable record without flattening its complexity. Participant composition is described in **anonymised terms**. Table-level insights are reported faithfully. Cross-cutting patterns and tensions are named without being resolved prematurely.

Both moderators and facilitator contribute to this step. Moderators ensure accuracy and fidelity to what emerged at their tables; the facilitator ensures coherence across the whole and alignment with **ethical and data-protection commitments**.

One lesson recurs across evaluations. When facilitators resist the urge to interpret, prioritise, or polish participants' words, voices that are often marginalised remain visible. **Neutral harvesting** does not dilute meaning; **it amplifies what might otherwise be overlooked**.

Harvesting is not the end of deliberation. It is the hinge between conversation and consequence, the moment when collective reasoning is held steady long enough to inform learning, partnership, and sustained cooperation beyond the event.



How we know deliberation worked

Evaluation as part of the deliberative process.

COCO Deliberative Mini-Publics are evaluated not only by what they produce, but by how participants experience the process. Evaluation is built into the design and conducted immediately, while insights and impressions are still fresh. This ensures that deliberation remains accountable to participants' lived experience, not just to methodological intent.

Across all partner sites, three short instruments are used, before, after, and immediately following the event to capture **four essential signals of deliberative quality**:

- **Entry conditions**

Participants' prior experience, confidence, and expectations regarding HEI-NGO/CSO cooperation are captured through the **Pre-DMP survey**. This short questionnaire establishes a baseline before the deliberation begins and acknowledges that participants enter the room with different levels of experience, comfort, and institutional positioning. Recognising these unequal starting points allows facilitators to interpret shifts in understanding more accurately and supports fair evaluation of the process.

- **Deliberative experience**

Psychological safety, equality of voice, respectful listening, and the perceived value of moderation and table rotation. These indicators show whether the deliberative contract was upheld in practice.

- **Substantive outcomes**

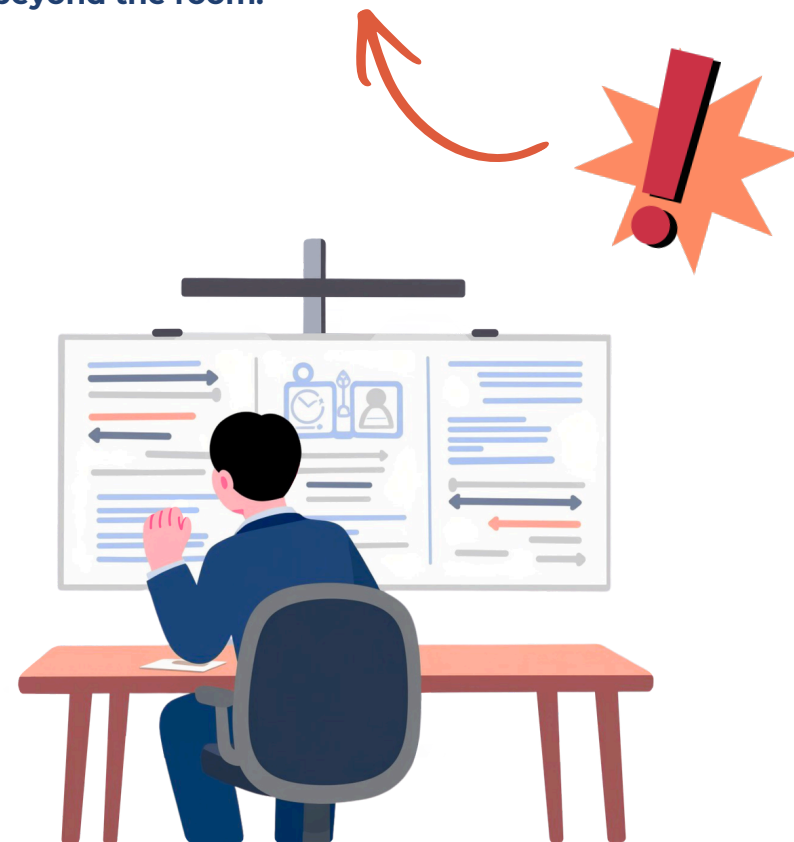
The extent to which the Mini-Public helped identify clear needs, barriers, shared resources, and realistic cooperation opportunities. These directly mirror the Needs–Barriers–Opportunities structure of the World Café.

- **Process integrity**

Fidelity to the COCO protocol, including participant balance, active moderation, rotation, analogue documentation, harvesting, Cartesian reflection, and ethical safeguards, is assessed through both the **Post-DMP survey** and the **Lead Facilitator checklist**. The Post-DMP survey captures participants' perceptions of fairness, balance, and clarity, while the checklist documents procedural adherence from the facilitator's perspective. Together, these instruments ensure that the deliberative contract was upheld in practice and not only in design.

Evaluation is not used to rank participants or score success. It functions as **deliberative care**: a way to learn from each session, strengthen facilitation practice, and ensure that the collective reasoning generated can credibly inform mentorship pathways, institutional learning, and longer-term cooperation.

When evaluation is treated as part of the process rather than an external audit, participants recognise that their contributions matter and that deliberation is meant to travel beyond the room.



4. Documenting with integrity: the DMP Summary Report

The **DMP Summary Report** translates the wall into a durable record, preserving the deliberative journey without distorting it. Participant composition is described in anonymised terms. Table insights are reported faithfully. Cross-cutting patterns and tensions are named without smoothing them away.

Why evaluate?

To honor contributions and inform mentorship pathways, ensuring deliberation yields impact.

Why take this step seriously?

It signals that contributions mattered and that they will inform what comes next, whether mentorship pathways, institutional reflection, or future cooperation initiatives. Without this bridge, deliberation risks becoming performative.

Both moderators and facilitator contribute to this step. Moderators help ensure accuracy and fidelity to what was discussed at their tables; the facilitator ensures coherence across the whole and alignment with **ethical** and **GDPR commitments**.

In practice, harvesting typically unfolds through a small number of intentional steps:



1. Moderators cluster post-its thematically at each table.
2. Clusters are labelled descriptively, using participants' language.
3. Panels are displayed together on a shared harvest wall.
4. The facilitator guides plenary reflection using Cartesian prompts.
5. A summary report is compiled, evidencing reflective deliberation.

One lesson recurs across evaluations. When moderators and facilitators resist the urge to interpret, prioritise, or polish participants' words, voices that are often marginalised remain visible.

Neutral harvesting does not dilute meaning; it amplifies what might otherwise be overlooked.

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In deliberative practice, harvesting is not the end of the process. **It is the hinge between conversation and consequence**, the moment where collective reasoning is held steady long enough to inform action, learning, and future cooperation.

TOP TIPS

Tip :

Avoid interpretive bias in synthesis, stick to participants' language, as one evaluation revealed how neutral harvesting amplified underrepresented voices.



5. Conclusion

A **COCO World Café**, when held well, does not end with polite applause or a hurried thanks. It closes by reasserting purpose and continuity. The final minutes matter because they determine whether the deliberative work remains contained in the room or begins to travel.

As the session draws to a close, the lead facilitator gathers the group one last time. Attention returns to the harvest wall, where clusters, tensions, and pathways are still visible. Voices may have quieted, but the work is not finished. **This is the moment to consolidate meaning, acknowledge effort, and project the outcomes beyond the event.**

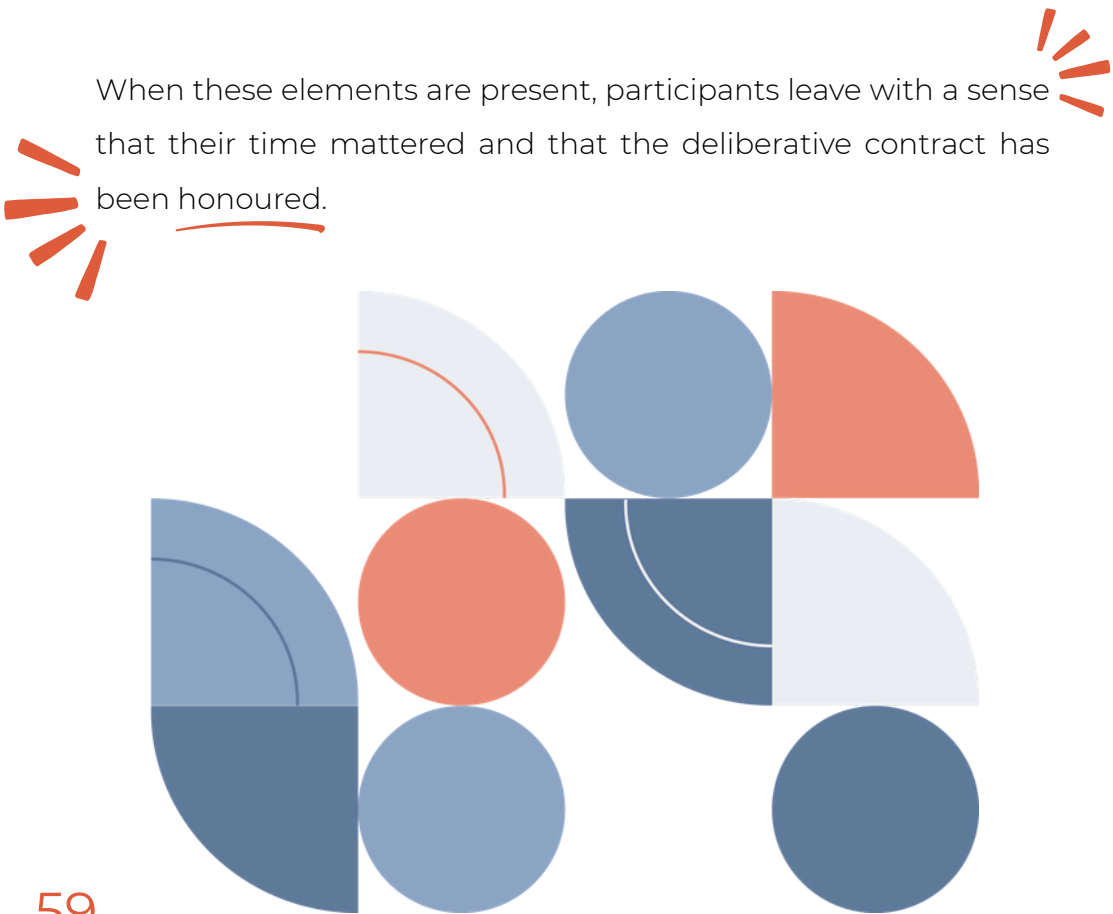
A strong close is brief, deliberate, and forward-looking. Typically lasting no more than three to five minutes, it rests on three pillars: **recognition, legitimacy, and follow-through.**

An effective closing does not summarise content, that work has already been done on the walls. Instead, it performs several critical functions at once.

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It acknowledges the collective effort in specific terms, naming the diversity of perspectives and the willingness to engage with difficult questions. It reaffirms the legitimacy of the process, reminding participants that what they see on the wall is not opinion or anecdote, but evidence of shared reasoning across sectors and experiences. **And it makes explicit what happens next, linking the harvest to concrete pathways of use and accountability.**

When these elements are present, participants leave with a sense that their time mattered and that the deliberative contract has been honoured.



Lead facilitator closing

“Thank you for the honesty, attention, and care you have brought to this space. In just a few hours, this deliberately mixed group, students, academics, NGO and CSO representatives, and other local actors, has identified concrete needs, examined persistent barriers, and outlined realistic opportunities for cooperation between universities and civil society in this territory.”

What is visible on these walls is not abstract reflection. It is documented evidence of shared reasoning across lived experience, institutional realities, and sectoral perspectives. The themes, tensions, and pathways developed today will now move into a structured follow-up phase.

Within the next two weeks, a draft DMP Summary Report will be prepared and shared with all participants for review and factual validation. After incorporating comments, the final version will be formally published through the COCO project website and disseminated to partner institutions and relevant territorial stakeholders.

A direct link will be sent to all participants.

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The results of this Mini-Public will not remain descriptive. Identified cooperation pathways will inform mentorship pairings under Work Package 2. Selected priorities will be discussed with institutional leadership and integrated, where appropriate, into Third Mission strategies and partnership development plans. Key findings will also contribute to the COCO Awareness Guide, ensuring that lessons learned are documented and accessible to a broader audience.

Evaluation results will be analysed across partner institutions and fed into the project's long-term impact monitoring framework. This allows us to track whether the process strengthens cooperation over time.

This session therefore marks the beginning of structured follow-through. Your contributions will be documented carefully. Anonymity will be respected where required. The harvest will not disappear. It will move into reporting, mentorship design, institutional dialogue, and publication.

If today's discussion has sparked a new connection or idea, we encourage you to stay engaged. You will receive a follow-up message outlining the reporting timeline, the publication link, and the next opportunity for collaboration.

The COCO website will serve as a central resource hub where reports, tools, and updates are publicly available.

Cooperation advances when reflection is followed by visible action.

Thank you for strengthening the deliberative capacity of this room and for contributing to a process that is designed not only to converse, but to endure.”

A well-closed **COCO World Café** does more than complete a session. It plants the conditions for ongoing university–civil society ecosystems. When participants leave knowing that their thinking will shape mentorships, reports, and institutional priorities, the deliberative contract extends far beyond the three-hour window.

Adapt the tone of the closing to local culture. Adjust its length to the energy in the room. But never skip the forward link. Deliberation without follow-through is conversation. With it, deliberation becomes democratic infrastructure.

The tools are here. The structure is proven. What remains is to convene, adapt, and continue building, one carefully held conversation at a time.

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| Version 0.2 | 02.03.2026 | Second draft with revised contents |
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