The Global Co Lab Network Encourages YOU to

HOST A COLAB

Plan ahead. Successful Co Lab’s have a clear and narrow “problem set” derived from a young person and their passion for change. The first step is identifying a concrete issue that resonates with young people and then engaging stakeholders who can be supportive.

Local ideas are best. Big, broad questions yield more talk than action. Co Labs that ask specific questions benefit from a clearly defined issue or “problem set” and local impact.

Collaborate. Once you have that idea, look for a natural collaborator who might co-host the Co Lab as a partner, so that you are building upon existing efforts and not duplicating.

Build your guest list. Identify the issue you’ll address 6 or 8 weeks beforehand and then “curate” the right mix of people, aiming for a final attendance of 8-12 people. Focus on as diverse a group as you can muster. Invite a few extra guests to allow for no-shows.

Invites and Timing. Send out 2 weeks ahead; allot two hours for the Co Lab, from the opening “hellos” to the closing words of thanks. Evenings or weekend mornings or afternoons are often good.

Location. You could have a Co Lab around a campfire. You don’t need a fancy living room! It is about creating a safe, nurturing environment, in a circle. Have simple light food and drinks. The focus is on listening, brainstorming and collaboration, respecting other voices.

Structure. Co Labs have one facilitator, a volunteer photographer and a note-taker – or scribe, to document the conversation.
Here’s a sequence to Host a 2-hour Co Lab - use what makes sense to you!

**Welcome/introductions/instructions.** Begin with a message of welcome that outlines the Co Lab’s purpose. Introduce the co-hosts and the topic. Next, take a few minutes to review and refine the agenda, with input from the group. Tell them there are simple, basic guidelines for the conversation (see the Box below for suggested ground-rules). Establish the expectation of participation (not performance) and mutual respect. Check your egos at the door! Tell folks you want to make sure that everyone gets heard, and that you need their help. Let them know that notes and photos will be taken for a short-write-up on the Co Lab website. Make sure everyone’s settled with snacks and drinks, ready to work. Finally, do brief, round robin introductions – one or two minutes when people share their names and why they think they were invited OR what they hope to learn. **Budget 15 minutes**

**Lay of the land.** Using an easel or whiteboard and big sticky-notes, invite the group to brainstorm responses to open-ended questions: What does this issue look like now? What do we know? Who’s doing similar work? The facilitator can capture ideas on the sticky notes – or people can write their thoughts on small sticky notes and place their notes on the larger paper, sharing their ideas with the group. You want to develop a quick visual map of what exists in the area under discussion. It’s best accomplished with multiple voices. It won’t be perfect and that is entirely ok. **Budget 15 minutes.**

**Visioning.** Next, ask participants what they imagine the world would look like if they were successful addressing the problem set – say in 3-5 years’ time or in an ideal world. Maybe encourage folks to write on a small sticky note their vision and come up to front of room to share and put that on the bigger sticky note. Encourage specifics – there are no good or bad ideas – and ask for details. How will success be measured? **Budget 15 minutes.**

**Obstacles and challenges.** You have addressed the setting and vision, so now ask people to talk about the challenges to getting to that vision. Where’s the roadblock? Ask, what’s standing in the way? **Budget 15 minutes.**

**What now?** Building on the prior segments, ask the group, what makes sense right now, as a realistic next step? Is there anything that stands out as an opportunity for collaborative action that folks in the room could make happen? It’s important to focus on actions that are small, concrete, realistic and achievable, and build from success to success. Some Co Labs opt for a second round of conversation, to “go deeper into the agenda”; others generate actual plans and assignments. The ideal is that after one or two Co Labs, you understand the issue and have actions to take, and then start to build some fun, collaborative initiative that takes on a life of its own. **Budget 45 minutes.**

**Wrap Up.** The Facilitator summarizes the Co Lab, assignments are made; photos are taken; the note-taker agrees to send the notes and photos to the group, everyone is connected by email as well as to the Co Lab, where the event is documented on their website blog. Conversations conclude with thanks, hugs and two hours well spent. **Budget 15 minutes.**

The goal is to bring people in and energize them around an issue, and find like-minded collaborators and to “to spin out initiatives that run on their own,” without the Co Lab’s infrastructure support. The Co Lab asks that groups that adopt their model acknowledge the Global Co Lab Network and send outcomes – ideally a photo and blog that the Co Lab will place on its website. **Two hours is budgeted total, usually starting a few minutes late.**

The Global Co Lab Network utilizes guidelines developed by Living Room Conversations. As a baseline, it’s good to remember that conversation is as much about listening as speaking.

To share your Co Lab or for more information, contact info@globalcolab.net