Question Formulation Technique

Introduction

Through this activity participants will explore maps that visualize the production and consumption patterns in the Roxbury, Dorchester and Somerville neighborhoods. Participants will brainstorm questions about one of the maps. These questions can then be used to help participants learn more about the food system in their area through presentations, activities, discussions and research.

This activity was developed by the Right Question Institute and adapted for this workshop. For more information about the Right Question Institute visit the website: http://rightquestion.org/.

Time

Step 1 – 3 min
Step 2 – 7 min
Step 3 – 5 min
Step 4 – 5 min
Step 5 – 5 min
Step 6 – 5 min
+ __________
Total – 30 min

Materials

• Chart paper or large paper
• Markers
• Maps – hand outs or printed large
• Question Formulation Technique handout

Preparation

1. Determine how you will break participants into groups
2. Make copies of Question Formulation Technique handout (2-3 per group)
   a. Can be double sided to save paper
3. Enlarge maps (1 of each map: production, processing, wholesale distribution, retail, consumption, and nutrient recycling) or print copies of each map so that each group has of few copies of their map
4. Read “Facilitating the Question Formulation: Best Practices”

Procedure

STEP 1: Introduction and Rules (3 min)

1. Explain to the group that you will be doing a question brainstorm process.
2. Pass out the “Question Formulation Technique” handout
3. Read the rules for brainstorming
4. Ask the group what might be difficult about following the rules. Call on participants to discuss.

5. Explain group roles and ask groups to decide who will play each role.
   a. Facilitator The facilitator will help keep the group on task and make sure they are following the four rules.
   b. Recorder - The recorder will write the question on the chart paper.
   c. Presenter – Shares priority questions and reflections to the larger group.

STEP 2: Produce Your Questions (~7 min)
1. Make sure each group has one of the maps at their table.
2. Explain that the maps along with the phrase below will be the question focus.

   **Question Focus (QFocus):**
   
   [Filled in with map title]

3. Tell groups to brainstorm as questions using the four rules and the question focus.
4. When it seems all groups have asked as many questions as they can, move on to the next step.

STEP 3: Categorize Your Questions (5 min)
1. Explain what open and closed questions are, giving an example of each.
2. Explain the steps of categorizing questions.
3. Instruct groups to start the categorization process.

STEP 4: Prioritize Your Questions (5 min)
1. Announce that each group should now choose the three most important questions to them.
2. Remind them they will be asked to share their priority questions and their reasoning for choosing these questions.

STEP 5: Share out and Establish Next Steps (5 min)
1. Have each group’s presenter share out their priority questions and how they decided on those questions.
2. Discuss with the group how the questions should be used. Some examples include doing research online, bringing in speakers who can help answer the questions, the facilitator could use them to guide future sessions or discussions, etc.

STEP 5: Reflect (5 min)
1. Ask for volunteers to share what they learned from the process.
2. Ask for volunteers to share what values they saw represented through this process.
FACILITATING THE QUESTION FORMULATION TECHNIQUE: BEST PRACTICES

Here are some suggestions for facilitating the Question Formulation Technique™ (QFT™).

Materials/Preparation:

- Decide how you will break participants into small groups.
- Make sure to have either newsprint or large pieces of paper for groups to write their questions. It is important that all group members see the questions being produced.
- Have different colored pens or markers available.

Starting and Facilitating the Process:

Be brief when introducing the process. Resist over-explaining or lecturing. Repeat or rephrase the instructions if needed.

Expect some participants to initially struggle with the process. Avoid answering questions that interrupt the thinking process or that show your preferences.

Try not to give examples of questions or you risk setting the agenda and leading the direction of the questions.

Acknowledge and validate all participant contributions equally and be consistent with the words you use. You can use a simple “thank you” for validation.

Have a strategy for using participant questions. You, the participants or you and the participants can decide how to use the questions.

Make visible to participants the actions to be taken with the questions. Taking action with participant questions (research, readings, discussions, experiments, etc) will help them take ownership and will motivate them to continue using the question formulation process.

Do not cut the reflection piece from the process. The reflection helps participants internalize the process and is key in developing their metacognitive thinking abilities. Use the reflection step to help participants think about the work they did, what they learned and how they can use it.

Manage the Time and Pace:

Give participants a time limit for each step but make adjustments (extend or reduce time) based on your observations.

Trust “pockets” of silence and resist hurrying their thinking process.

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THE QUESTION FORMULATION TECHNIQUE™

Step I: Review the Rules for Producing Questions

- Ask as many questions as you can
- Do not stop to discuss, judge or answer the questions
- Write down every question exactly as it is stated
- Change any statement into a question

What might be difficult about following the rules?

Step 2: Produce Your Questions

Question Focus (QFocus):

1. As a group ask questions about the QFocus.

2. Have the group recorder list and number your questions on large paper.

Step 3: Categorize Your Questions

- **Closed-ended questions** – they can be answered with “yes” or “no” or with one word.
- **Open-ended questions** – they require an explanation and cannot be answered with yes” or “no” or with one word.

3A. Review your list of questions. Mark the open-ended questions with an O and the closed-ended questions with a C.

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3B. Name advantages and disadvantages of asking **closed-ended** questions:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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3C. Name advantages and disadvantages of asking **open-ended** questions:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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3D. Change one closed-ended question into an open-ended, and change one open-ended question into a closed-ended one.

**Step 4: Prioritize Your Questions**

a) Choose the three most important questions from your list. Mark them with an star.

b) What was your reason for selecting those three?

**Step 5: Establish Next Steps**

How will you use your questions?

**Step 6: Reflect**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>What did you learn?</th>
<th>What value did you see represented?</th>
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