

What is Cultural Sharing?

This tool provides information about what cultural sharing events look like, how they are structured, and the different forms they can take.

Definition of Cultural Sharing

Cultural sharings provide a space for people to come together across cultural lines to learn from one another while re-asserting their cultural traditions, meanings and voices to themselves and others. Doing so helps establish the sense of belonging and connection necessary for meaningful civic participation.

Why are Cultural Sharings Important?

Cultural sharings are a key strategy for building more inclusive communities in ethnically diverse places such as California’s Central Valley because they provide opportunities for community relationship-building through intercultural learning and awareness. Cultural sharings encourage first-hand learning, visiting one another’s communities, and building a safe, respectful cultural learning environment where people from all backgrounds feel welcome.

How are Cultural Sharings Structured?

Cultural sharings are one-day events that can take the form of a cultural kitchen, a bus tour, thematic sharings and dialogues, or story circles through artistic mediums such as photo exhibits, videos, and/or performances. They can also take the form of community visits by attending a traditional celebration, cultural center, community garden or a community tour.

FORMS OF CULTURAL SHARINGS

Cultural Kitchen: The cultural kitchen provides an opportunity to learn and listen to stories of how diverse cuisines make their way to Valley homes and markets.

Dialogues/Pláticas: We intentionally use the word platica because that is the atmosphere we would like to create. It is a space in which we invite experts to give a brief exposition on the topic of the platica to prompt a conversation in which all or most attendees participate, either by asking questions or adding to the conversation.

Thematic Cultural Sharing: An example could be around the theme of traditional medicine, folk tales, oral traditions, poetry, music, dance, or any other central theme.



Principles

- Provide a welcoming learning space
- Provide safe space where people can share life experiences
- Provide space for deeper cultural diversity insights and knowledge
- Offer space for socially excluded communities to share their cultural history and traditions in their own voices

Tips

- We recommend bringing a small group of participants to allow dialogue, interaction and opportunities for deeper learning

References

- The Theory Behind Our Work booklet
- Glossary
- Cultural Sharing Section
- Popular Education Section How to Make it Work I



Visiting Events: These provide an opportunity for first-hand learning by visiting one another's culture and art events.

Success Story

On a hot summer morning, participants of the Tamejavi Cultural Organizing Fellowship Program (TCOFP) and members of the coordinating group were invited to an intimate cultural kitchen hosted by Cher Teng Yang (also known as Bee Yang), a TCOFP fellow and his family. He invited the group to his home to learn how to prepare egg rolls and traditional papaya salad. All participants had the opportunity for the hands-on experience of making egg rolls, which Cher Teng Yang explained are from China, but were adapted by the Southeast Asian community make the recipe their own. He shared that when there is a big family event in the Hmong community, everyone has a role to play in preparing food for the entire family. Cooking together is seen as passing on culinary traditions, especially to the younger generations. Cher Teng Yang also gave participants a tour of his garden while sharing stories of his family life back in Laos. He further explained how his family finds ways to recreate important traditions as they learn new cultural practices.

Convening a Cultural Sharing

This tool provides the steps for convening a cultural sharing, as well as some protocols to consider.

Purpose: To create an intentional and meaningful space for cultural exchange and building cross-cultural relationships.

STEPS FOR CONVENING A CULTURAL SHARING

1. Convene a meeting with your learning, planning or coordinating group to decide if and why the time is right to facilitate a cultural sharing
2. The group should decide what they want the event to accomplish; identify the central focus of the cultural sharing, including the short and long-term impacts and changes you would like to see result from the event
3. Decide the kind of cultural sharing that will be most suitable for accomplishing the group's goals
4. Contextualize your cultural sharing within the present social and political climate related to immigrants and refugees or other groups involved.
5. Create a theme/title for your cultural sharing; the title is the key message, not just a name
6. Conceptualize your cultural sharing as a strategy for building cross-cultural relationships and ties of solidarity for working together to address issues of interest to the immigrant communities in your area
7. Make a list of who you would like to include in the cultural sharing and the various organizer and volunteer roles
8. Develop an outreach plan
9. Be mindful of the artistic component, as this is a key element of cultural sharings
10. Identify the artist, cultural holders or story tellers for your cultural sharing
11. Generate a general planning document that includes a detailed logistical list and tentative program flow

CULTURAL SHARINGS PROTOCOLS

- Value the fact that a community is willing to share their culture, and be mindful and respectful
- Cultural sharings are not parties or events, but intimate gatherings among diverse cultures with the sole intent of learning from each other and building relationships



Principles

- There are no set formulas: by encouraging diverse participants to design gatherings and festivals, something is created each time and learning occurs along the way
- Creating a safe space takes patience and is important when convening diverse groups



Tips

- Tips are included in the tool

References

- The Theory Behind Our Work booklet
- Glossary
- Cultural Sharing Section
- Tamejavi Festival Section



- Learn about the protocols of the community you are visiting and keep them in mind throughout your visit
- Entering into a community has to be facilitated by a member that has deep cultural knowledge and community trust
When visiting another community, come with an open mind and heart; leave all prejudices and preconceptions aside, or come prepared to challenge those prejudices
- Have an attitude of mutual exchange, meaning that if you want people to learn about your community, you need to be open to learning about their community, including tasting their food
- There has to be a certain level of trust within the group
- Do not extend the invitation to others without first consulting the organizers of the gathering, and avoid bringing people who want to visit an “ethnic” community for their own benefit
- Ask if you can take photos before doing so as this is not a photo opportunity, but a learning opportunity
- Cultural ceremonies and faith practices require special guidelines and preparation before attending

Cultural Kitchen: Who's at the Table?

This tool provides information on what a cultural kitchen is and the steps to take when organizing one.

Background: The cultural kitchen concept initially began in the late 1990s and early 2000s with the Pan-Valley Institute's women's group, but wasn't well defined until the second Tamejavi Festival in 2004. As a pre-festival event, cultural organizers would gather and share dishes that were significant in their communities as a way to build new relationships and trust among the group.

Purpose: The cultural kitchen provides space to explore cultural identity through traditional dishes from diverse communities and allows for dialogue around food to redefine what "gourmet" means. The cultural kitchen presents immigrant cuisines from the chefs and entrepreneurs emerging from immigrant communities and displays how the U.S. is gaining new flavors, adding to an already rich cultural diversity.

Definition: The cultural kitchen provides an opportunity to learn and listen to stories of how diverse cuisines make their way to homes and markets. This cultural space will activate participants' senses while they enjoy the aromas and flavors of different herbs, spices and crops. It serves as an exercise to strengthen multiethnic relationships by learning about the common migration journeys of people who carry with them their cultural practices.

Creating Space for a Cultural Kitchen: Ask each participant (chef) to come prepared with a traditional dish they would like to share, specifying that it should have special meaning to them and/or their community. During the cultural kitchen, there will be stations assigned to each chef.

Aesthetics: Encourage each chef to design and curate their space by displaying ingredients they use for their meal, as well as traditional utensils they use for cooking and serving.

Sharing: The facilitator will begin the presentation by going from station to station. Some questions the chefs should be prepared to answer could include:

- Talk about the ingredients and nutritional value of your dish.
- Are the ingredients easy to find here; how do you get access to them?



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Tips

- Make sure you have an estimate of attendees prior to the cultural kitchen so the chefs know how much food to prepare
- Choose a location that can accommodate a cultural kitchen
- Ask the chefs to arrive two hours early to set up their stations

References

- The Theory Behind Our Work booklet
- Glossary
- Cultural Sharing Section
- Tamejavi Section

- How did you learn to cook what you will be sharing?
- How long does it take to prepare?
- Is it prepared only for special occasions?
- Have you modified the dish since arriving to the U.S.?
- Share a story associated with your dish.
- Talk about the cultural meaning of your traditional kitchen utensils and tableware.

Success Story: In May 2006, cultural organizer Rosa Lopez, along with other community members, organized “Our Cultural Kitchen,” inviting diverse indigenous communities from Madera, Calif. The groups who participated were from the Zapoteco, Mixteco, Otomi and Purepecha communities. The cultural sharing engaged many people, especially youth.

During the cultural kitchen, participants created a space where they shared a dish significant to their cultural identity and community. Organizers hoped that through the cultural kitchen, non-indigenous people would have a better understanding of how they contribute to the Central Valley. They felt that by sharing their culinary expertise, it would share a message of cultural pride and honor the traditions they hope to pass on to future generations. As part of the cultural kitchen, there was a photo exhibit that illustrated the contributions of farmworkers.

Central Valley Bus Tour

This tool illustrates an example of a cultural sharing learning activity that took place in the form of a bus tour through California’s Central Valley.

Background

The Central Valley Bus Tour was created for the Civic Action Network (CAN), a small grantee program of the former Central Valley Partnership for Citizenship. CAN was formed by grassroots non-profit organizations from throughout the Central Valley, and organizers thought a bus tour would provide a unique opportunity for South Valley CAN members to visit organizations in the North Valley, and vice versa. The intent was to help them learn and understand more about one another’s communities by experiencing them firsthand.

Story

CAN participants from the south and central areas of the Valley gathered at the Tower Theater in Fresno to embark on a trip to visit North Valley CAN members for a day of collective sharing and learning. To get things started, eight local poets and musicians, complete with journals and a sparse assortment of instruments, began tackling (through words) a wide array of social issues.

First Stop: Fresno Metro Ministries

Started in 1970, Fresno Metro Ministries focuses on relationship building within the community. They are a faith-based organization that works to create a more respectful, compassionate and inclusive community that promotes social and economic justice.

Bus Ride

As the bus traveled through the Valley via Highway 99, Professor Isao Fujimoto acted as tour guide and shared various facts about the Central Valley. He pointed to signs indicating where Japanese concentration camps were located during World War II, explaining that concentration camps were easily made; all that was needed was a racetrack or fairgrounds and some barbed wire to create a confined territory.

Second Stop: Portuguese Education Foundation of Central California, Turlock

In Turlock, we met with Elmano Costa and Fatima Fontes, coordinators of VALER and the Portuguese Education Foundation of Central California. VALER helps the community by figuring out what services



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Tips

- Know beforehand how many people will be participating to help plan for food and transportation logistics
- Choose destinations that can accommodate the whole group
- Ask all participants to arrive 30 minutes before scheduled departure

References

- The Theory Behind Our Work booklet
- Glossary
- Cultural Sharing Section
- Tamejavi Festival Section

a person needs and helping them fill out the forms necessary to get those services.

Final Stop: COPAL:

The C.O.P.A.L. program started two years ago. It teaches young people about the importance of things passed on from indigenous communities.

Conclusion: Professor Isao Fujimoto ended the evening by inviting the group to look at a map of the Central Valley and asked that they remember the purpose of the tour: “Don’t take anything for granted, look further, and ask questions.”