



Orchard Cove Protocol

Developed by the NSRF Vermont Center of Activity, at Orchard Cove House, Shelburne Farms, Vermont, July, 2004.

This protocol is useful when there's a complex topic or set of questions that need attention from the group in a relatively short time. It divides the labor of thinking about the issues, but brings those thoughts back for general discussion that the whole group shares. In place of the standard "reporting out" summary, it engages the whole group in structured response to each report. The result should be enlarged understanding of the topic and/or greater clarity about the questions.

This will work best with a relatively small group of 6-8. A larger group would need to conduct two separate protocols simultaneously, and add a summary reporting discussion (10 minutes) before Step 4.

1. Paired Walkabout

Participants choose topics to discuss in pairs. 20-30 minutes

2. Insights

Each pair confers on no more than three "major insights" they had during discussion. These may be questions or statements; the purpose is to offer the group some progress on thinking about the topic. The pair writes its insights on chart paper or prepares to say them. 5 minutes

3. Reporting Out

Each pair presents in the "Save the Last Word" format, using the insights as the selected text. (If they have not written the text in step 2, the facilitator should scribe so the whole group can see the text.) Group members each take 1 minute to respond, and the presenting pair concludes with a 3-minute response. 7-10 minutes per round

4. Topic review

The facilitator invites the group to review the original list and the insights list, in a general discussion to see what new understanding has emerged. This is a chance for the group to look for connecting themes, new directions, or emerging consensus or solutions. 10-20 minutes

5. De-brief

The group discusses the protocol itself. How useful was this process? 5 minutes

Source note:

Orchard Cove is an inlet of Lake Champlain on the Vermont shore. The Vermont NSRF Center holds its retreats in a beautiful small house there, thanks to the generosity of the Bay Paul Foundation and Shelburne Farms, an environmental education and conservation center that owns the property. Melissa Kagle and Martha Rich thought up the protocol while walking through the farmland by the lake, and brought it back for trial and tuning by other members. We found it was a helpful way to get through one of those impossibly vast agendas, without the usual rush and stress. Orchard Cove is above all a peaceful place.