

The Art of Check-in Questions

Adapted from Social Innovation Unlocked¹



Check-in questions are an invitation to be fully present—not just present with the “official story,” but with whatever is on our minds. Empathic listening is an integral part of the check-in process.

Empathic listening implies adopting an open, non-judgmental stance toward the speaker and positioning ourselves in his/her situation. It means asking ourselves questions such as, “How is the speaker expressing his or her truth?” “What does this truth reveal about his or her mental models?” “What does my reaction reveal about my mental models?” Check-in questions are an art and effective check-in questions are the ones that connect well with the purpose of the meeting/gathering and the relationships between and among the people in the group.

When designing your check in question, think about its purpose. What is the context and the general mood you are trying to create:

- How much time do you have for the check-in? Does the question invite a 3-5 minute story from each person, a word or two, or a sentence or two?
- How can the check-in connect and support the rest of the agenda and the overall purpose of the gathering?
- What kind of tone do you want to create? Playful? Serious? Connecting? Learning something new about each other?
- Consider: What has happened? What are they about to do? Has there been conflict? Is this a celebration?

The key is to adapt the question to your purpose - a check in question is a core part of the meeting, helping to set the tone, mood and atmosphere and supporting the group to move forward with curiosity and reflection. How deeply you go with check in questions will depend on the level of trust within the group. The main thing is to understand your purpose for asking a specific question: what you hope it will do for the participants and the group as a whole.

Here are some examples of check in questions and why you might want to use them:

Purpose: helping participants understand each other:

- What animal represents my mood today?
- What is a fun fact about yourself?
- What is my superhero power?
- What temperature am I today and a few words on why.
- What's one thing that brings me energy and joy?
- What is a recent success you've experienced?

Purpose: reflection on the subject matter of the meeting/gathering

- What is your connection to the community we're in/engaging with
- Describe a time when you were inspired by community builders (youth, seniors, architects...)
- What is your favourite thing about engaging in this kind of work/discussion
- When did you first enter into this kind of work/discussion?
- What was your first job?
- What was your first experience in leadership (in strategic planning/ in workshop design...)

Purpose: reflection on the subject matter of the meeting/gathering

- What path led you to being here today
- What is your vision for this group?
- What was your first impression when you were invited to this group?
- What are you hoping the culture of these meetings will be?
- What is one thing you like about meetings? What is one thing that you don't like about meetings?