



Equitable Research Partnerships Toolkit

Tool 1 - Equity Café

Tool 1: Equity Café

What is the tool?

The Equity Café is a dialogue-based tool informed by the [World Café Method](#). The method draws on the metaphor of a café, a space synonymous with friendly and informal, but often creative and critical, conversation. The Equity Café tool is designed to create a space for collaborative but critical discussions about equity, including what equity means and what it might 'look like' within a partnership.

Why use the tool?

The Equity Café is a valuable tool to increase awareness of the different definitions, and ways of thinking about equity, that various members bring to the research partnership. Participating in an Equity Café exercise also helps partnership members get to know each other better and develop the confidence to share their ideas and opinions throughout the partnership.

This tool addresses equity by:

1. creating a 'safe' and friendly space for all partnership members to share perspectives about what equity means and what they think it should 'look like' within the partnership.
2. documenting strategies that will be used to make the research partnership equitable.

When to use this tool?

Phase	Rating	Descriptions
Planning	•••	Equity café is intended to be implemented in the planning stage, to develop understanding and plan for how to make a research partnership equitable from the outset.
Implementing	•	The tool could be adapted to focus on equity in the implementing stage.



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Disseminating	•	The tool could also be adapted to focus on equity in the disseminating stage.
Sustaining	••	Equity café could be implemented to evaluate if and how equity was achieved, and/or how equity might be addressed in the future, as a strategy for sustaining the research partnership

Ratings

••• Designed for this stage | •• Can be used as is in this stage | • Can be adapted for use in this stage

How long does it take to use the tool?

Rapid approach

- When time is limited, an Equity Café can be conducted rapidly with just one or two short (10-15 minute) rounds of dialogue.
- Equity Café dialogues can also be implemented rapidly during a refreshment break, within a longer meeting or conference.

Intensive approach

- An intensive Equity Café approach requires two-three hours to complete.

Resources- what do you need to use the tool?

- A 'host' to keep track of time and guide the final discussion. **Face-to-face implementation:**
 - A room with enough space to set up café style tables for the number of participants you are expecting.
 - Poster papers, sticky notes, and pens.
 - Refreshments.



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Virtual implementation:

- Virtual meeting platform with breakout room facility.
- Online whiteboard app - [Miro](#) is easy for most participants to access and use (please note that you will need to create a free account).
 - As an alternative, you could use one of the popular virtual meeting apps (Zoom or Teams for example) and utilise the chat or screensharing functions.

How to use the tool?

Preparation

Determine the equity question(s) and/or issue(s) that will be discussed in the dialogues. See Suggested Questions... section for examples.

Face-to-face implementation / Facilitator Guide

1. Set up a café style space, with tables surrounded by enough chairs for the number of participants you expect, for example:
 1. For a group of 12 participants, four tables, each with three chairs.
 2. For a group of 20, five tables, each with four chairs.
2. Cover each table with a large sheet of paper (the 'tablecloth') and place a pad of large sticky notes ('serviettes') on each.
3. Label each tablecloth with a question or topic that will be the focus of discussion at that table. You may:
 1. Use the same question or topic for all or multiple tables.
 2. Use a series of different but related questions or topics for each table.
4. Ask participants to take a seat at one of the tables.
5. Remind participants that listening to others is as important as speaking. Things to listen out for include:
 1. Insights and creative ideas
 2. Themes and patterns
 3. What is not being spoken about



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6. Ask one person per table to volunteer to be the table host. Ask the remaining participants to move to a new table for each new round of dialogue. Explain to the table hosts that their role includes:
 1. Welcoming new participants to the table at the beginning of each new dialogue round.
 2. Starting each new dialogue round with a summary of the key insights and ideas that have been raised in the previous round(s).
7. Give participants 20 minutes to discuss the question or topic with the other people sitting at their table.
 1. Encourage them to doodle and make notes on the 'tablecloth'.
 2. Ask participants to write any key insights or ideas on the 'serviettes'.
8. Ask all participants who are not table hosts to move to new tables for another round of discussion.
9. Repeat steps 7 and 8 until all moving participants have visited all the café tables, or until the available time is exhausted. Equity Café dialogues work best if there are at least three, 20-minute rounds of dialogue.
10. At the end of the dialogue rounds, collect all sticky notes and re-distribute the same number of notes to each table host.
11. Ask roving participants to go back to their first table.
12. Ask participants to cluster the ideas and insights on the sticky notes at their table by:
 1. reading through all the ideas
 2. developing categories for clustering, which represent themes or patterns in the ideas.
13. Move to each table and ask one or more participants to briefly share the ideas or clusters that they found most important and the reasons why.
14. Optional step i: Photograph the artefacts, including the tablecloths, serviettes and clustering schemes.
15. Optional step ii: Use the ideas to generate:
 1. An equity action plan for the partnership.
 2. An equity statement for the partnerships.



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Virtual implementation - Facilitator Guide

1. Set up a virtual meeting space with enough breakout rooms to enable participants to split into groups of three to five participants. If possible, set up breakout rooms up so that participants can choose their own room. For example:
 1. For a group of 12 participants, three breakout rooms, each with four participants.
 2. For a group of 20, five breakout rooms, each with four participants.
2. Set up a virtual whiteboard for each breakout room, that allows for individual ideas to be recorded "sticky-note" style (for example [Miro](#)).
3. Copy and paste the whiteboard URL into the chat function of each breakout room, so that all participants can access and add to the whiteboard.
4. Assign each breakout room a focus question. You can paste the question into the chat for that breakout room or use it as the title for the virtual whiteboard. You may:
 1. Use the same question or topic for all or multiple breakout rooms.
 2. Use a series of different but related questions or topics for each breakout room.
5. Ask participants to choose a breakout room and provide them with instructions six to eight (below).
6. Remind participants that listening to others is as important as speaking. Things to listen out for include:
 1. Insights and creative ideas
 2. Themes and patterns
 3. What is not being spoken about
7. Ask one person to volunteer to be the host for each breakout room and stay in that breakout room throughout. Explain to the breakout room hosts that their role includes:
 1. Welcoming new participants to the table at the beginning of each new dialogue round.
 2. Starting each new dialogue round with a summary of the key insights and ideas that have been raised in the previous round(s).
8. Ask the remaining participants to move to a new breakout room for each new round of dialogue. If they find the breakout room they wish to join is full (has more than the specified number of participants), they should choose another room.



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9. Give participants 20 minutes to discuss the question or topic with the other people in their breakout room.
 1. Encourage them to make notes by typing comments into the chat.
 2. Ask participants to record any key insights or ideas, by adding a sticky-note to the virtual whiteboard.
10. After 20 minutes, ask all participants who are not breakout room hosts to move to a new breakout room for another round of discussion.
11. Repeat steps eight to - ten, until all moving participants have visited all the café tables, or until the available time is exhausted. Equity Café dialogues work best if there are at least three, 20-minute rounds of dialogue.
12. At the end of all the dialogue rounds, ask participants to take a short break. During the break:
 1. Set up a new whiteboard for each breakout room (you could do this in advance of the dialogue).
 2. Transfer all ideas recorded on sticky notes to the whiteboard(s).
 3. Mix up the sticky notes and then allocate the same number of sticky notes to each breakout room. Note that you may need to create new notes manually, as some online whiteboard apps do not include functionality to copy and paste between whiteboards.
 4. Paste the link for each new whiteboard into the chat of one of the breakout rooms.
13. After the break, ask all participants to go back to their first breakout room.
14. Ask participants to cluster the ideas and insights on their list, using the virtual whiteboard. They should look to:
 1. Read through all the ideas.
 2. Develop categories for clustering, which represent themes or patterns in the ideas.
15. Save the whiteboards.
16. Move the participants back to the main sessions.
17. Ask one or more participants to briefly share the ideas or clusters that they found most important and the reasons why. They could share the screen showing their group's whiteboard as they speak.



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18. (Optional step) Use the ideas to generate:

1. An equity action plan for the partnership.
2. An equity statement for the partnerships.

Suggested questions and topics to explore using this tool

1. What is equity?
2. What would equity 'look like' in this partnership when assessed against the ten critical areas for developing equitable international research partnerships (Faure et al, 2020). These areas are:
 1. Capacity building
 2. Authorship
 3. Data (sample) ownership
 4. Research agreement
 5. Local health priorities
 6. Trust
 7. Acknowledging inequalities
 8. Recognition of stakeholders
 9. Communication
 10. Funding
3. How will we know if our research partnership is equitable?
4. What can/should I do to address equity in this research partnership?
5. What can/should other people do to address equity in this research partnership?
6. What can I not do to address equity in this research partnership?

Extra tips for face-to-face Equity Café dialogues

- Hang the tablecloths produced during the dialogues on the walls. This way participants can continue to view and think about the ideas that have been covered so far.
- Play background music and provide refreshments to create an informal, café-like atmosphere.



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Expected outputs and outcomes

Outputs

- Artefacts from the café dialogues, which could be analysed using qualitative techniques to produce an equity statement, or inform the content of a written Research Partnership Agreement [[see Tool 14 in Section 4](#)]. Artefacts include:
 - Tablecloths
 - Serviettes
 - Clustering themes
 - Online whiteboards (virtual option)

Outcomes

- Increased mutual understanding of what equity means to different members of the partnership.
- Enhanced interpersonal relationships among partnership members, that provide a foundation for working together confidently and openly throughout.

References and further reading

- This tool is adapted from: World Café Community Foundation, 2015. Café to Go- A quick reference guide for hosting a World Café. Available from: <https://theworldcafe.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Cafe-To-Go-Revised.pdf>
- When planning an Equity Café, read [Café to Go](#), the World Café Hosting Guide, for further tips and hints on how to host a café.
- For ideas about how equity in research partnerships might be defined, see Faure, Marlyn C, Nchangwi S Munung, Ntobeko AB Ntusi, Bridget Pratt, and Jantina de Vries. 2021. "[Mapping experiences and perspectives of equity in international health collaborations: a scoping review](#)." *International journal for equity in health* 20 (1): 1-13.



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Completed example Equity Café

The completed example details perspectives of 20 researchers about equity in their next research partnership. The researchers joined three conversations about different equity questions, at three different café tables. Using the online meeting platform Zoom, the participants discussed three questions. Using the online whiteboard platform Jamboard they recorded their answers:

What equity will mean? [\[View in full screen\]](#)





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What things will influence equity that members of my research partnership will not have control over? [\[View in full screen\]](#)

In my next research partnership what things will influence equity that members of my research partnership will not have control over?



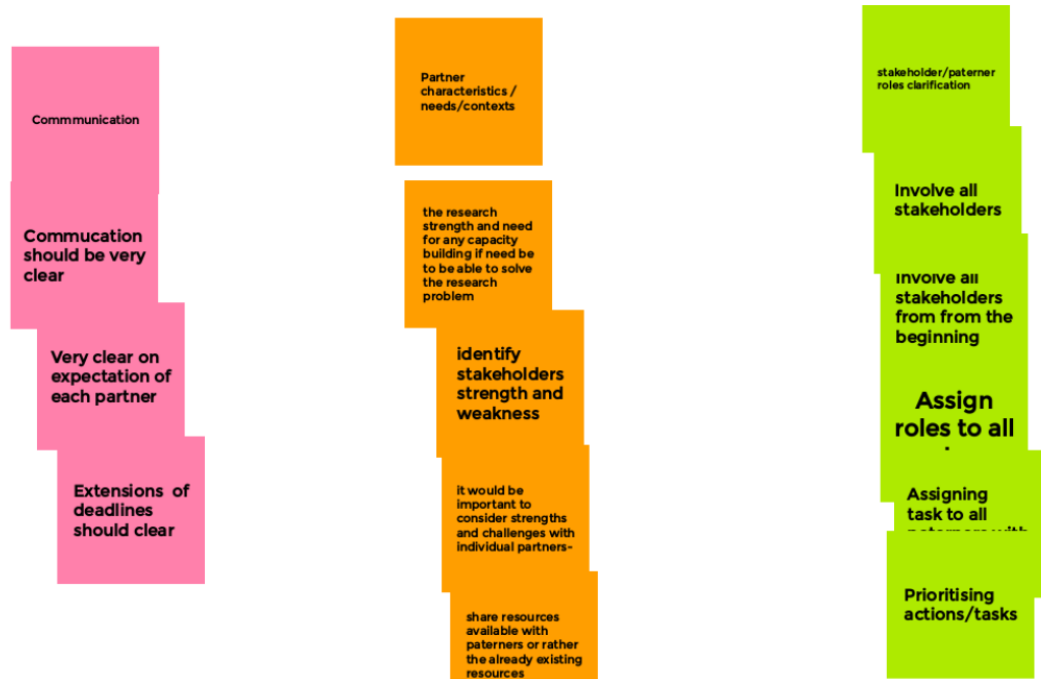


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What are the most important actions to take or avoid taking to make progress towards equity? [\[View in full screen\]](#)

In my next research partnership what will be the most important actions to take or avoid taking to make progress towards equity?



The recorded responses highlight the diverse possible meanings of equity in research partnerships, and that equity may mean different things to different people. The responses identify numerous actions that the participants thought it would be important to take, to optimise the chances that their next research partnership would be equitable, including actions that members of the partnership can take, such as communicating effectively, identifying expectations, strengths and weaknesses and allocating roles and responsibilities. However, the participants also identified numerous actions are beyond the control of all or some researchers, who rely on funding bodies to enable actions, and have to take risks because they do not know what they are getting into, when they form a research partnership.