

# Kitchen Table Meeting



2 to 3 hours



No more than  
6 people



Average

## RESOURCES REQUIRED

### MATERIALS:

- Computer;
- Suitable location (participant's kitchen, community room, etc.);
- Visual aids (maps, work documents, etc.);
- Coffee, tea, cookies or other food.

### HUMAN RESOURCES:

- A facilitator;
- Someone to take notes.

## SUMMARY

A kitchen table meeting is a way of engaging stakeholders (citizens, elected officials, public and private sector representatives, youth, etc.) who want to be involved in a territorial diagnostic or in developing an action plan. Specifically, this tool can be used to facilitate discussions in a small group setting about a specific issue in a low-key atmosphere such as a participant's kitchen.

### Strengths

- Strong sense of involvement and ownership of the process;
- Small group setting allows each participant to express themselves;
- Affinity between participants stimulates conversations and discussions;
- Flexible schedule so more people can participate.

### Weaknesses

- Lack of control over stakeholders participating in the process;
- Takes a long time to share information among various groups;
- Means that facilitators must be available on multiple days;
- Significant human resources cost (high facilitator-to-participants ratio).

## OBJECTIVES

This mobilization method aims to:

- Promote discussion among stakeholders in a small group setting;
- Create a low-key environment with a flexible structure to encourage discussion among participants;
- Stimulate individual and collective learning.

Information

Consultation

**INVOLVEMENT**

**COLLABORATION**

Empowerment

## WHEN TO USE

Kitchen table meetings are useful to gain a better understanding of the approach (project, plan, etc.) proposed by the stakeholders, while encouraging participation and keeping people involved in what is going on. It can be used as part of a planning process or to carry out a territorial diagnostic.

The model involves holding multiple kitchen table meetings to compile various ideas to work toward the final objective. It is often useful for identifying the various visions for a region, reflecting on common issues, defining actions and strategies, and defining roles and responsibilities for everyone involved. This tool is particularly useful for residents who often cannot attend the more formal meetings that major stakeholders can participate in. It can be used in conjunction with other tools, such as "Visions, Actions and Partnerships" (VAP), used in the planning stages.

Kitchen table meetings increase the sense of involvement participants feel, which will then push them to make more concrete commitments, unlike a more traditional meeting format that has many participants.

## BEFORE THE ACTIVITY

Estimated preparation time: 2-3 hours for each meeting

### 1- Recruiting participants

Holding a kitchen table meeting is first and foremost a co-operative effort. Generally, sector stakeholders provide the names of people to contact. These people then invite other people to form a small discussion group. This results in a number of small discussion groups, since the model involves holding a number of kitchen table meetings to come up with different ideas for reaching the final objective.

The meeting location is determined based on the preference and availability of the people in each small group.

### 2- Logistics

The organizers will adapt as much as possible to the work environment proposed by the participants. They should also set up the meeting location and provide the materials necessary for the activity: coffee, tea, cookies, etc. They are responsible for purchasing the necessary materials beforehand.

## ACTIVITY

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### 1. Explanation

The facilitator explains where kitchen table meetings fit in (project, planning, etc.) and the objectives for the meeting. He or she also talks about the kitchen table meeting model, particularly the idea of holding small meetings with various stakeholders to develop a collective product (plan, diagnostic, etc.), and explains any other activities or tools that will be used during the meeting. (30 minutes)

### 2. Discussions

Participants discuss topics relating to the meeting's objectives. One person is assigned to take notes. Discussions can be guided by questions or themes defined by the organizers before the meeting, or they may follow the process outlined in a complementary tool. If using questions or themes determined beforehand, the discussion may take place point by point by going around the table. Participants may go back and forth on topics being discussed, if needed. (2.5 hours)

## AFTER THE ACTIVITY

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The findings of a kitchen table meeting will vary according to its purpose. The content of the notes taken at each meeting are a valuable source of knowledge about what stakeholders think regarding the issues at hand and about the specific proposals or positions from that small group of participants. A summary of the content should be submitted to the meeting participants for their approval before sharing it with other stakeholders.

A document presenting the summaries from all the kitchen table discussions that took place in a community could be compiled, but participants must be given the opportunity to approve the meeting minutes before the document is released. It could be included in an action plan, a territorial diagnostic, a participants' profile, etc.

## PITFALLS TO AVOID

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- Avoid using slideshows or explanations that are too technical or theoretical;
- Avoid large groups;
- Avoid selecting participants. Stakeholders should be the ones inviting people to the meeting.

## PRACTICAL EXAMPLE

### THE ACTION PLAN TO ADAPT TO CLIMATE CHANGE IN RIVIÈRE-AU-TONNERRE: HOW KITCHEN TABLE MEETINGS WERE USED WITHIN THE CCC-CURA



The kitchen table model was used for the longitudinal project of the Coastal Communities Challenges—Community-University Research Alliance (CCC-CURA) in the Estuary and Gulf of St. Lawrence facing climate change. Specifically, this technique was employed in the Rivière-au-Tonnerre community during a mobilization process to develop a grassroots action plan to adapt to climate change. During these kitchen table meetings, the tool “Visions, Actions and Partnerships” (VAP) was used to develop the action plan. It was used to direct discussions to gradually develop and refine a list of desired actions and commitments made.

After contacting local elected officials and validating their interest in participating in the CCC-CURA project, several local organizations and residents were singled out. The local city councillor also invited several people to participate in these activities. Four kitchen table meetings were held between March 19 and 26, 2013, bringing together a total of 12 participants. Two of the meetings took place in the kitchen of Voyages CoSTE - Coopérative de solidarité en tourisme équitable, one took place at the Club d'âge d'or senior's centre, and the last one took place at Maison du Tonnerre (a youth centre). Discussions were based on the following four points:

- What is your vision for municipal development? What do you want for your children and grandchildren?
- How could weather events be obstacles or opportunities for this development?
- How could you contribute to this development by overcoming obstacles or by taking advantage of opportunities?
- What would you like to see other stakeholders do that would help you achieve your vision?

Next, tables outlining what commitments had been made, based on an open forum carried out previously “Open space”, were reviewed and the following questions were put forward:

- Are there items on the list of desired commitments that we could take on?
- Does anything need to be corrected or added?

By employing this technique, a list of actions to carry out and a list of desired actions were developed and improved, from one meeting to a next, adding the opinions of new stakeholders every time.

Other meetings were carried out in conjunction with the kitchen table meetings, such as meetings with municipal representatives or other partners, including the principal of the local elementary school, the land-use planner for the RCM of Minganie, the North Shore Priority Intervention Zones Committee (ZIP Committee) and the Organisme de Bassins Versants Duplessis. A public meeting was held in the community after the series of kitchen table meetings to present a summary of the results.

PRACTICAL  
EXAMPLE

## CONTINUATION

The draft version of the action plan was written based on the meetings and kitchen table meetings that had been held, supported by general climate and biophysical data available to the public. It is important to note that this plan was designed to evolve and will be updated whenever new knowledge is added or new actions are begun, or when actions have been completed and results have been observed.

The kitchen table meetings held in Rivière-au-Tonnerre provided an opportunity to integrate the opinions, visions and desires of the people who collaborated on this project, as well as the commitments their organizations have made, as part of a territorial planning initiative.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

CCC-CURA, <http://www.defisdescommunautescotieres.org/>

Municipalité de Rivière-au-Tonnerre, Beaulieu, N., and Silva, J. S. (2013). Plan d'action pour l'adaptation aux changements climatiques de Rivière-au-Tonnerre. Version provisoire. Rivière-au-Tonnerre. Available online in French only at <http://www.defisdescommunautescotieres.org/rat>.

ROBVQ, Boîte à outils sur la participation citoyenne. Available online in French only at [https://www.robvq.qc.ca/guides/consultation\\_publique](https://www.robvq.qc.ca/guides/consultation_publique).

Silva, J S, Plante, S, and Beaulieu, N. Développement territorial et gouvernance participative: l'expérience de l'ARUC-DCC à Sainte-Flavie et à Rivière-au-Tonnerre. In D. Morin and J. R. Thuot (eds.), *Cinquante ans depuis le BAEQ*. Quebec City: Université Laval. (approved).

The Coastal Communities Challenges—Community-University Research Alliance (CCC-CURA) comprises a group of partners and researchers concerned with issues pertaining to resilience and governance for coastal and riverside communities in the context of climate change.

The Regroupement des organismes de bassins versants du Québec (ROBVQ) comprises some 40 watershed organizations operating in Quebec. It is a key partner of the Quebec government in the development of watershed management measures.



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