

WHAT'S WORKING WEDNESDAYS
JANUARY 8, 2014- THE CRAWFORD SLIP METHOD
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Originally developed in the 1920s by Dr. C. C. Crawford of the University of Southern California, the Crawford Slip Method is an effective, efficient, inexpensive and flexible tool to gather input from groups of people. Kathleen Goff, of RLPS Architects described the ways that her firm uses this tool with clients, shared the specific steps of the method, and encouraged listeners to think about the many ways they might use this simple tool.

The first step is to think carefully about the goals for the exercise: what information or perspectives are of interest, and from whom are they to be gathered. Then create ten to twelve open-ended, but focused questions. As you will see from the way the method is designed, it will be helpful to think carefully about how you structure and segment the groups of people in order to be able to categorize responses, as you may want to compare and contrast how various groups respond to the questions. RLPS uses this method to get input for facility design and renovation projects.

The next step is issuing invitations to the group session. RLPS issues written invitations and explains a little about the process that will be used. People respond well to the idea of written, anonymous feedback. Convene only one segment of stakeholders at each session.

When the group is convened (can be anywhere from a dozen to a hundred people), plan on an hour or a little more depending on the number of questions and the degree to which you want to have some general discussion at the end. Seat participants at tables to facilitate and give each person a pen and a stack of pieces of paper that are 4 ½ inches by 3" (and 8 ½ x 11 sheet cut into 8 equal pieces). It is best to use paper rather than index cards as the thick index cards are difficult to collate.

Review the rules with participants:

- Write legibly
- Write horizontally on the paper
- Write one idea on each slip of paper; use a separate paper for each idea
- Every idea is valid
- It is okay to be creative
- All responses are anonymous

Then, ask a question and ask participants to write their responses. Gather the responses to that question and put them in a box behind a tab that says "Question 1, and the date and time of the group, along with the name of the stakeholder group – e.g. "residents from assisted living" or "supervisory

staff” or “board members”. Collating responses as you go along will save lots of time later and makes the anonymity clear to participants.

Continue asking questions one at a time and gathering the responses after each question, until all of the questions have been asked. RLPS then opens the floor for some general discussion, though that feedback is not formally included in the process.

Later, the written responses are all recorded in a written report. Responses are categorized – Focus Group A, Question 1 and all responses are listed; Focus Group A Question 2 and all responses are listed, etc. In the written report RLPS lists the top responses to the questions and draws out themes, but includes the exhaustive list of responses as well. It is extremely valuable to provide the report to all those who participated --- this level of transparency and anonymity breeds trust and allows everyone to see the various perspectives.

After describing the process, Kathleen Goff of RLPS responded to questions from participants:

- Do you provide participants copies of the questions in advance? – no, it is best for the responses to be “first thought” responses
- Do you allow people to identify themselves on the papers? – it is discouraged, but sometimes people do
- How do you deal with people who need help writing? – staff members or volunteers can sit with each individual and write down that person’s responses
- Can you provide some examples of the types of questions you use at RLPS for facility projects? – How would you describe your community in one word? What do you like best about your community? What do you like least? What would you like to add to the community? How might that be paid for?
- Could this be used with staff to assess ways in which new procedures could work better? – absolutely, it is a good way to get staff input into all sorts of things as it eliminates the challenges of hierarchy.
- How do participants respond to this approach? – sometimes it takes a question or two for people to get warmed up, but participants really like this method and that is reinforced when they are able to see the reports. It helps folks to see the range of perspectives and everyone can see that their own perspectives have been “heard”.

Kathleen concludes: “By having different stakeholders respond to the same questions, the Crawford Slip Method enables us to identify common themes, ideas, concerns and opportunities. It provides anonymity, an even playing field for all voices to be heard in a timely and cost efficient manner and the ability for all stakeholders to provide input on whatever subject is being discussed. “

If you would like more information, please contact Kathleen Goff, RLPS Architects at kgoff@rlps.com