

Awareness to Action Planning Workshop: Evaluation Report

On February 21-23, 2018, 38 professionals representing diverse expertise in the arts, the sciences, and a variety of sustainability-related fields participated in a two and a half day Awareness to Action (A2A) Planning Workshop held simultaneously in Boulder, CO and Princeton, NJ. Funded by the National Science Foundation, the planning workshop aimed to convene a group with a wide range of knowledge and experience, in preparation for two subsequent convenings focused on promoting and disseminating strategies and best practices for transdisciplinary science-arts-sustainability collaboration. All participants were invited to complete an online survey immediately after the workshop to comment on their experience. In all, 26 surveys were completed within two weeks, including 14 respondents from the Princeton location and 12 from Boulder. This report reflects data from 24 respondents—excluding data from the two project developers who planned the workshop as well as participated, in Boulder.

Describing their professions and areas of expertise, all 24 identified at least one area of expertise and four respondents listed six or more areas. Most common were Arts, Environment, Sustainability, and Social Science. Shown below, Health and Business were among the least represented disciplines.

Exhibit 1. Respondents' Identified Areas of Expertise

	N	% out of 87 responses
Arts	12	14%
Environment	12	14%
Social Science	12	14%
Sustainability	11	13%
Natural Science	8	9%
Social Justice	8	9%
Organizing	5	6%
Policy work	5	6%
Business	3	3%
Health	2	2%
Other: Design, Education, Science Education, Environmental Humanities, Group processes, Indigenous knowledge of the Arctic, Political Ecology	7	8%

N=24

While very few respondents identified *Sustainability* first as their primary area of expertise, most identified Sustainability and/or a related area (e.g., Environment, Social justice, Organizing) as secondary areas. All of those who selected Natural Science as an area of expertise defined themselves as educators and selected Social Science and/or Sustainability as well. Most of those who selected Arts as their primary area of expertise, also selected Sustainability, Environment, Organizing, and Policy work.

A2A Planning Workshop Expectations

Before the workshop, planning committee members engaged in discussion with the project team about the workshop concept. All committed participants completed a survey in which they shared their concerns, perceived barriers, and potential solutions to art, science, and sustainability collaborations, described their own expertise and interests, and provided resources they produced themselves and/or particularly valued. Those resources were shared with the full group in an online archive before the planning workshop and in the Briefing Materials that included the Workshop Agenda and participant bios. Based on these early interactions, in their own words, one third of the respondents explained they expected group discussions at the workshop, along with project based collaborations and working groups. A few respondents noted their expectation for participants with a wide range of perspectives to come together with a goal to develop “*frameworks for successful collaboration.*”

Close to two in 10 took the opportunity to suggest additional preparation that would have improved their experience, including:

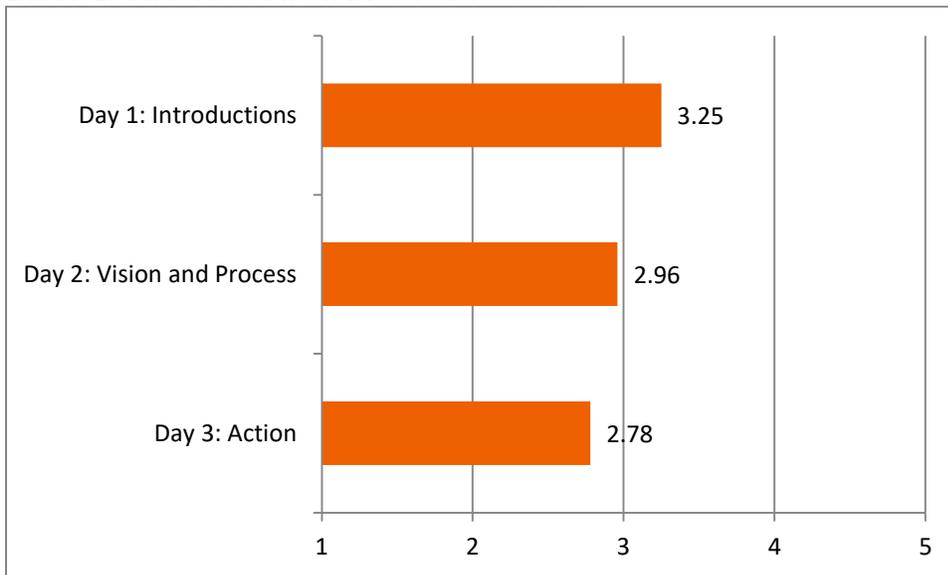
- Webinars facilitated before the meeting to get “*everyone on the same page*” and increase efficiency of time spent during the workshop
- Breakout group questions distributed before the workshop along with the other materials
- Increased clarity about the expected workshop outcomes

On average, respondents felt their input was valued by the project team; average rating was 4.25 on a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Completely). To a slightly lesser extent, they also perceived their input was integrated into workshop components (average rating: 3.83), and their overall workshop expectations were met (average rating: 3.46). Examination of ratings between locations revealed participants in Boulder perceived their overall expectations were met more than did those in Princeton (average ratings were 4.10 and 3.00, respectively).

Workshop Components: Relevance and Value

Each workshop day started with a LiveStream session intended to bring all participants together by video to connect and prepare for the day. Additional LiveStream sessions were facilitated throughout both days for reflection, discussion across all participants, and to introduce new topics for small group discussions. In terms of value added to the overall workshop, the *Introductions* on Day 1 were rated most favorably, followed by *Vision and Process* sessions on Day 2 and the *Final Action* session on Day 3. (See Exhibit 2.)

Exhibit 2. Value Added from LiveStream Sessions

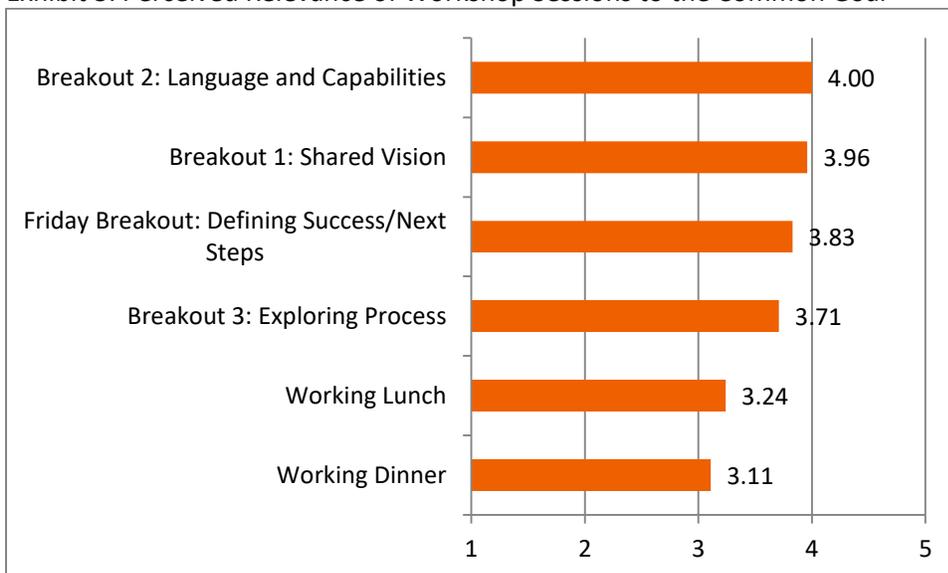


N=24

Scale: 1 (Not at all valuable) to 5 (Extremely valuable)

Relative to the common workshop goal, *to establish an operational strategy for knowledge sharing across our different disciplines, networks, and associations*, respondents rated each workshop component as relevant, with average ratings above the midpoint of the scale from 1 (Not at all relevant) to 5 (Extremely relevant). Shown below, the first two Breakout sessions on Day 1 were rated slightly higher than was the third Breakout session. After some technical issues with the livestream on Day 2, participants in each location regrouped and the slightly revised plan for Friday was well-received overall. There were no differences in ratings by respondents across the two locations.

Exhibit 3. Perceived Relevance of Workshop Sessions to the Common Goal



N=19-23; respondents who did not participate in a workshop session did not rate that session

Scale: 1 (Not at all relevant) to 5 (Extremely relevant)

In their own words, 14 respondents elaborated on their ratings of the workshop components. Most (6 out of 14) addressed the technical issues, with several citing “distractions” caused by the technology and a perception that this led to a disconnect, with “two very different conversations” among the participants in the two locations. A few others praised the “innovative way to collaborate... an important step toward reducing air travel among people working on climate change” and acknowledged that the “glitches” were part of the process that will likely improve with time.

A few respondents suggested ways to improve upon the format while still using the livestream sessions. For example: in response to some limitations of the technology, “I think if bullets for each report out were on slides that we could see rather than seeing just the room with people (who you really can't see facial expressions at all) it would have made the report outs and actually the introductory framing session more understandable by those at the remote location.” Further, “perhaps the Live stream could just be at critical points -- at the intro, end of day 1, and at closing.” A couple respondents suggested it would have been helpful to include additional in-person introductions in the small groups in each location, beyond the livestream session and bios that were provided in the briefing materials.

Workshop Goals and Objectives Met

Using the retrospective post then pre method, respondents commented on their agreement with several statements that represented the foundation of the concept for the A2A planning workshop. After participating, on average, respondents agreed about the value of these underlying principles slightly more strongly than they did before the workshop. Even as they reflected back to before the workshop, agreement was strong with most concepts, which is not surprising among this group of professionals who elected to participate in the work. Shown in Exhibit 4, statements rated the highest after the workshop also showed the least change from before to after participation. In other words, participants sustained the values they held going into the workshop. They agreed most strongly about the value of *establishing and making efforts to sustain interdisciplinary collaborations access networks*.

Exhibit 4. Value of A2A Underlying Concepts Before and After Participation



N=23

Scale: 1 (Strongly disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Neutral), 4 (Agree), 5 (Strongly agree)

After participating in the workshop, respondents agreed they were *eager to collaborate with others outside their own disciplinary expertise*, were *comfortable* doing so, and *have been thinking about ways to sustain such collaborations* beyond the days of the planning workshop. See Exhibit 5. In their own words, respondents described their appreciation for the new connections they made, both in terms of colleagues and content. For example, *“Hearing varying perspectives helped me make connections I had not considered before”* and *“I really appreciated learning about the forms and processes of other disciplines and how those parallel and diverge from [my own].”*

Exhibit 5. Respondents’ Attitudes after the Workshop



N=23

Scale: 1 (Strongly disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Neutral), 4 (Agree), 5 (Strongly agree)

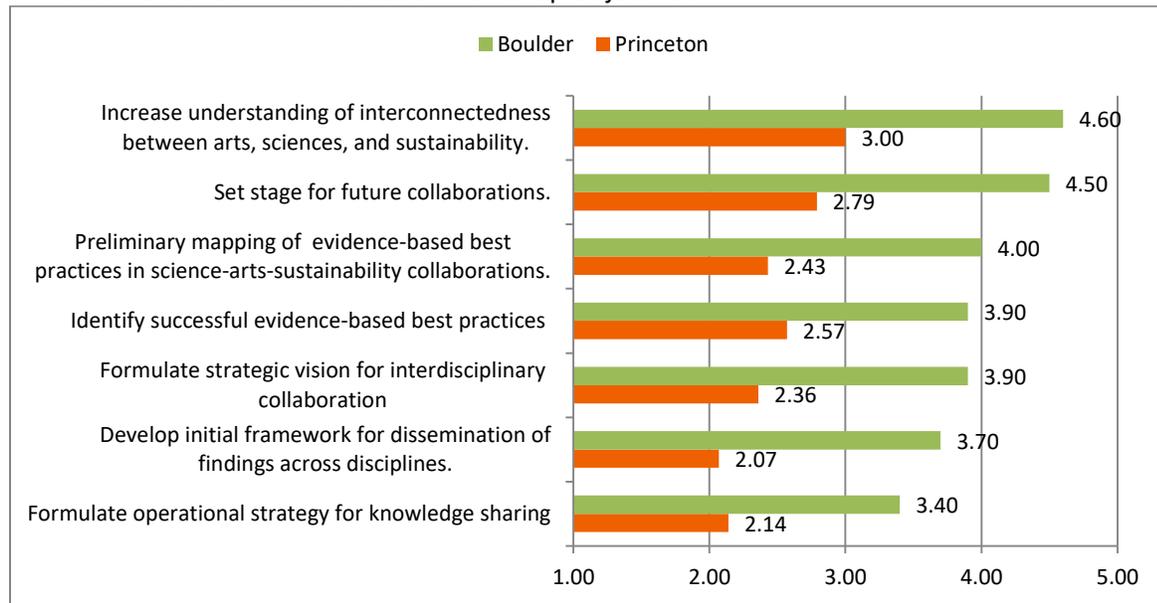
While a handful of respondents noted their thinking about this work has not changed, a few participants described an enhanced understanding and confidence around forming and working to sustain interdisciplinary collaborations. Explained by one respondent, *“One big takeaway was a clearer understanding of the need for sustained relationships within these collaborations.”* The workshop motivated respondents to continue along this path as they were *“more inclined to seek out collaboration with those outside my disciplinary expertise.”*

Perceived Workshop Effectiveness

Respondents generally felt the A2A Planning Workshop set the groundwork to achieve its objectives (i.e., for developing, measuring, sustaining, and disseminating findings about collaboration across different disciplines, networks, and associations) effectively, with room for improvement that can be built in to future convenings. See Exhibit 6. Described by one respondent, *“The intent is significant and deserving of future attempts that would benefit greatly from lessons learned from this workshop.”* Areas they perceived as particularly effective included increasing participants’ understanding of the interconnectedness between the arts, sciences, and sustainability and setting the stage for future

collaborations. Relative to the other areas, respondents indicated slightly lower effectiveness in areas related to formulating an operational strategy for sharing knowledge across disciplines. Highlighted by one participant, *“I would have liked to spend more time on action steps and strategies.”* Shown in the exhibit below, these items were all rated significantly higher by participants in Boulder than by those in Princeton, which may reflect differences in the facilitation, or focus, discussion groups at each location.

Exhibit 6. Perceived Effectiveness of Workshop Objectives



N=24; Boulder=10, Princeton=14

Scale: 1 (Not at all effective) to 5 (Extremely effective)

In their final remarks, respondents expressed appreciation for the opportunity to work with this interdisciplinary group to discuss and strategize around such an important topic. Several took the opportunity simply to thank the facilitators for the opportunity and for including them in *“a very interesting experience.”*

Next Steps

On the final day of the workshop, facilitators asked participants to reflect on the experience and develop ideas for next steps that should be taken for this work to continue as well as to indicate ways in which they would be willing and able to be involved. Participants emailed these notes to the facilitators individually. Responses reflected an energy and enthusiasm about the work, with several participants listing more than one idea for next steps to take toward the development and maintenance of transdisciplinary science-arts-sustainability collaboration. Project developers noted that, even among those participants known to be very busy in their daily professional lives, several offered their time and assistance to continue these efforts. This strong post-workshop commitment suggests that participants' initial buy-in to the idea was sustained and enhanced over the course of the three days.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The relatively new experience of collaborating in-person with others from different disciplinary fields, who shared common interests and goals around the value of science, arts, and sustainability efforts led to new perspectives, new partnerships, and an interest in remaining connected in these new networks. Based on survey data and conversations with the project developers, the evaluation concludes that the A2A Planning Workshop effectively laid the groundwork for ongoing collaboration that will positively affect future working groups, convenings, and larger conferences.

Two unique features of the A2A Planning Workshop, 1) facilitating the workshop in two locations simultaneously and connecting via livestream technology, and 2) bringing together professionals from a wide range of disciplinary expertise, resulted in both challenges and opportunities for future work. Building on comments and suggestions from planning workshop participants, the evaluation makes the following recommendations for future convenings:

- Clarify in introductory materials the objectives of the convening and the purpose of the format used. For example, the A2A Planning Workshop was meant to begin a process that would inform the design of larger scale convenings. The goal was not necessarily to come to a final answer and strategic plan, rather, it was to begin preliminary thinking and mapping of strategies, discussing and pulling together existing evidence of best practices to date. The preliminary nature of the work may have been clearer to some participants than to others. A clear outline of expectations and outcomes for future convenings will help to guide participants. A strong understanding of intended outcomes will likely lead to increased satisfaction with the overall experience.
- Use the increased knowledge and lessons learned about potential technical issues to prepare participants for the experience. For example, highlight specific challenges and benefits of using livestream technology and explain the rationale for its use.
- Further, consider the best uses of this technology. If facilitating more than one location, decide on the most useful number and timing of livestream sessions. Consider creating presentations, either electronic or on whiteboards, that include bulleted key points to share and discuss across groups, rather than relying solely on verbal sharing.
- Use debriefing meetings over the course of the convening to make mid-course corrections as needed and create time for discourse around potential preferences among different groups. For example, if a group in one or the other location wishes to shift the focus of a breakout session, the project team can make a joint decision about how best to proceed in each location. If needed, consider making real-time modifications to ongoing small group work and discussions that will ensure each group's voices and ideas continue to be honored.

Overall, as a planning workshop intended to set the stage for ongoing work, the A2A Planning Workshop successfully convened a group of people with a broad range of experience and expertise. Participants held a strong common interest in transdisciplinary collaboration and they were energized to continue with this work. They appreciated the new connections made through the workshop and expressed enthusiasm for their own contributions to the prospective next steps.