



Coffee Connections: Rebuilding Connections Among Coworkers in the Library

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Your “Coffee Connections”

Who are included in your participant pool and how will they opt in?

Who can initiate a conversation, and how often? Is there a window period?

How will participants sign up? How will you match participants?

Collect a list of questions that are safe, fun, & comfortable for all in your community:

Feedback questions for participants: what do you want to learn about their experience?

“Coffee Connections” Project Description

Approved by the UConn Library Strategic Framework Implementation Team, this pilot project was an attempt to facilitate coworkers’ connections through short, one-on-one, meaningful interactions. Although originally intended to take place through a mix of in-person and virtual interactions, due to the pandemic, the project took place entirely through online 2-person meetings. After requesting a “connection” (usually a specific person or randomly assigned), staff members were sent a description of the activity and asked to schedule their meet-up. Conversation partners used a set of teambuilding questions (either from a list of suggestions or a commercial pack of “question cards”) to discover new things about one another. The hope that these interactions would both strengthen existing ties and establish new ones between colleagues, building trust based on emotional bonds established through interpersonal engagement.

Nuts and Bolts

- Staff dedicated to project: 2
- Timeframe: First half of 2021 (almost the entirety of the UConn Library staff was working remotely during this period)
- Participation: We had a total of 38 connections. 18 unique staff members-initiated connections with 30 total coworkers. 45 individuals took part in the pilot.
- The essentials you need: a list of questions (home-grown or obtained), a means to connect known colleagues or randomly assign colleagues, several emails confirming participation and asking for feedback, a feedback mechanism (brief survey, rating system, etc.)

Something Discovered Along the Way

- Some staff preferred to be randomly matched to another staff member, so that was introduced as an option (about 8 “random connections” were facilitated)

Outcomes & Future Plans/Ideas

- Staff who offered feedback found the Connections a positive experience. 19 participants offered us feedback through a simple form. Every respondent indicated they would take part in such an experience again and had positive feelings (we used 😊, 😍, & 😄 emoji “ratings”).
- It was sufficiently successful that Library HR would like to incorporate something like it into onboarding new employees
- There is interest in continuing the Connections (both virtually and perhaps also in person) with existing employees, although this brings up questions of staffing (e.g. Who will manage it going forward? Can it rotate among staff?) & logistics (lists of possible destinations, perhaps vouchers for coffee/beverages at campus locations – also, how do we make sure it reaches a broad spectrum of staff rather than cycling through the same people who are interested? How to we prevent repeat match-ups – or would that be a good thing?)
- It makes sense to expand participation beyond the branches of the main library to the UConn Health and UConn Law libraries
- Other academic libraries have offered similar programs with similar aims – there’s an informal community out there, which could lead to interesting partnerships