



Evaluation Summary

On March 12-13, 2019, the Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA convened the seventh biennial Come to the Table Conference, *Called to Action: Uprooting Hunger and Cultivating Justice*. The 2019 conference was the second statewide gathering of the series, and the first two-day conference. Almost 500 people registered for the event, collectively participating in 55 workshops in twelve tracks, and attending keynote addresses by Dr. Monica White and Dr. Eric Holt-Giménez. Participants examined the root causes of hunger and left energized to go back to their communities with knowledge, skills, and connections to challenge the systemic nature of hunger and build a more just food system.

We collected information on the conference through registration forms, workshop evaluations, and an overall end-of-conference survey.

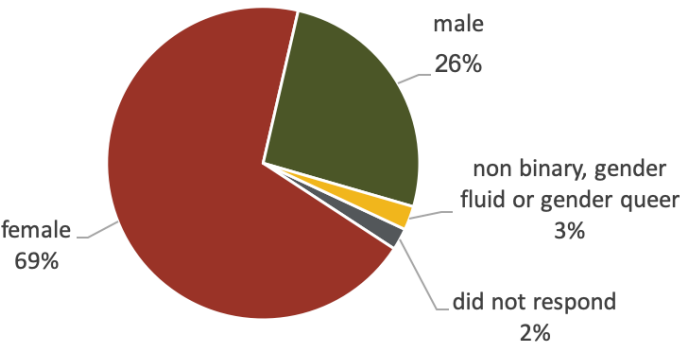
Who Attended the Come to the Table Conference 2019?

- 492 registrations were processed for the event.
- 423 people checked in, although the actual number of attendees was probably higher as some people may have passed by the registration table.
- 139 speakers presented 55 workshops in 12 themed tracks.
- 19 people attended the conference as volunteers.
- 65 people were provided with discounted scholarship tickets.

Of those who registered, 21% had attended CTTT conferences before and 79% were attending for the first time. About half of the repeat attendees (49 of 103) had attended just the 2017 conference. We believe the low return rate is due to the changing geographic location of events.

Demographics

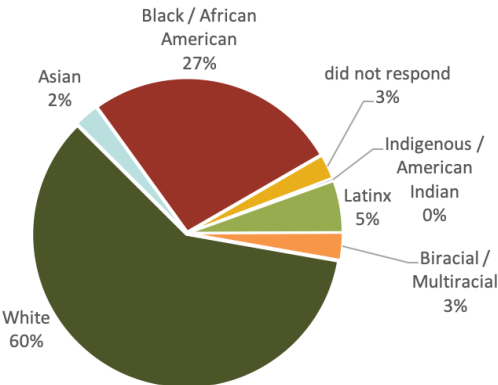
Gender of 2019 Come to the Table Registrants



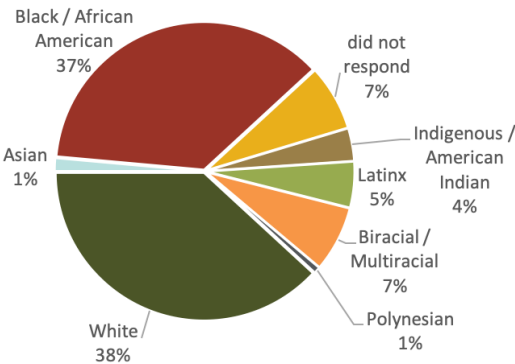
Historically, attendance at Come to the Table has skewed female (66% in 2017 for example), and that trend held fairly steady in 2019. 3% of registrants identified themselves as nonbinary, genderfluid, or genderqueer; as compared to 1% in 2017.

We asked registrants to list their **race / ethnicity** (in a non-validated text box, rather than multiple choice). Coding the responses was an exercise in illustrating that race is a social construct, rather than a biological fact, but it is important to track since race has real impacts on one’s experience and opportunities.

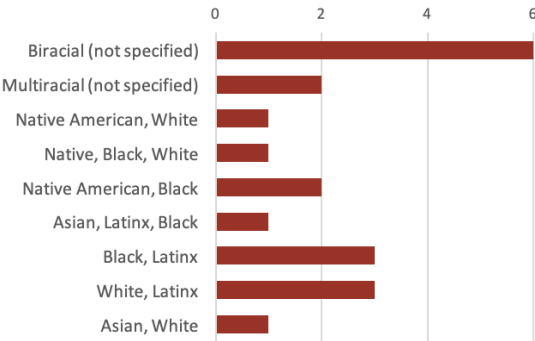
Race / Ethnicity: Attendees
out of 350 responses



Race / Ethnicity: Speakers
out of 139 responses

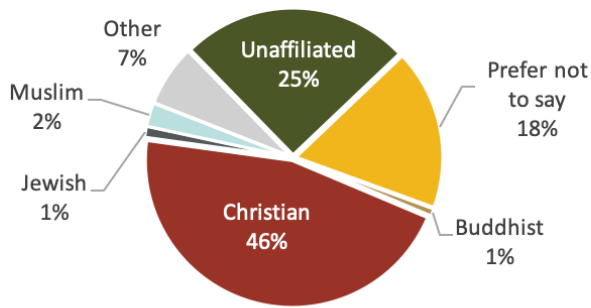


Race / Ethnicity: Multiracial or Biracial Responses
20 total attendee & speaker responses



Our goal in terms of racial and ethnic diversity at the conference was, at a minimum, to mirror the racial and ethnic diversity of North Carolina residents. While this goal was achieved for most racial and ethnic identities, it was not true for either Latinx or Asian residents, and points to areas where we need to build more relationships and seek more input. This data also reflects the conference planning team’s efforts to recruit and feature workshop speakers of color.

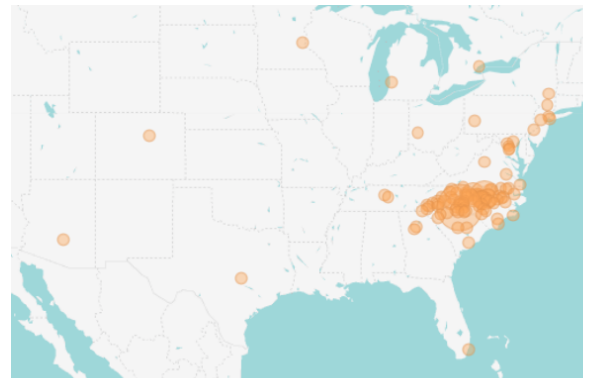
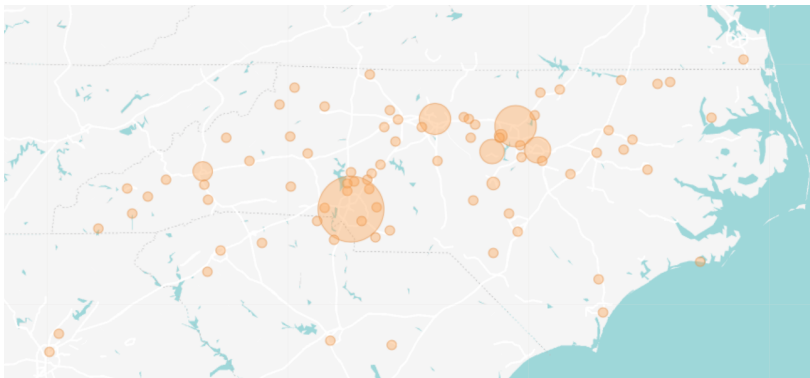
Religious Affiliation of 2019 Registrants



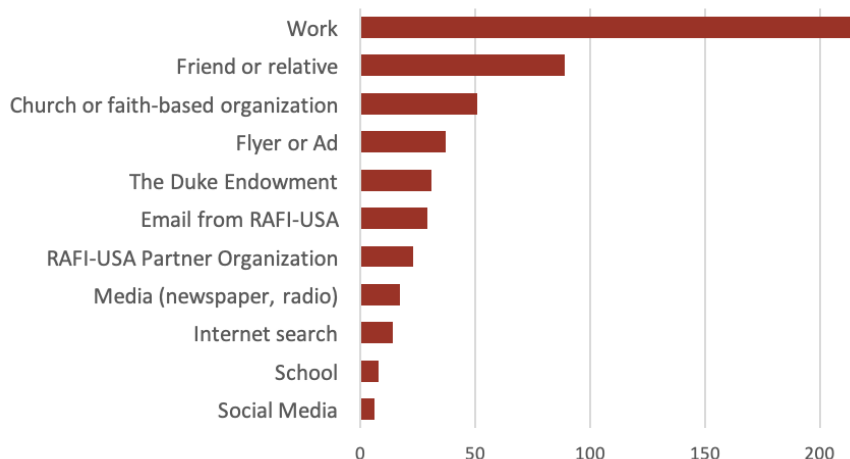
Christianity was by far the most frequently listed **religious affiliation** among registrants. Many **denominations** were listed, the most common being United Methodist (27% of those who listed a denomination), Baptist (24%), Presbyterian (14%), Episcopal (12%), United Church of Christ (6%), and Catholic (6%).

We did not ask registrants to list their **age**, so we do not have reliable data for age of attendees; however anecdotally, given the number of youth speakers we had as well as special registration codes for college groups, we know that at least 33 (or 6.7%) of the attendees were in high school or college, although we believe that in reality that number was probably higher.

Registrants came from across North Carolina (92%), with a few (8%) coming from out of state as well:

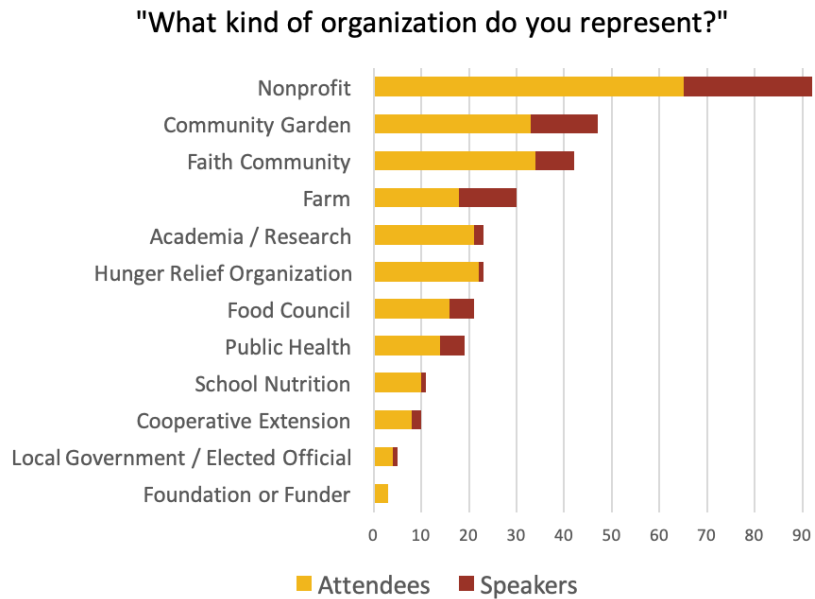


"How did you hear about the Come to the Table Conference?"



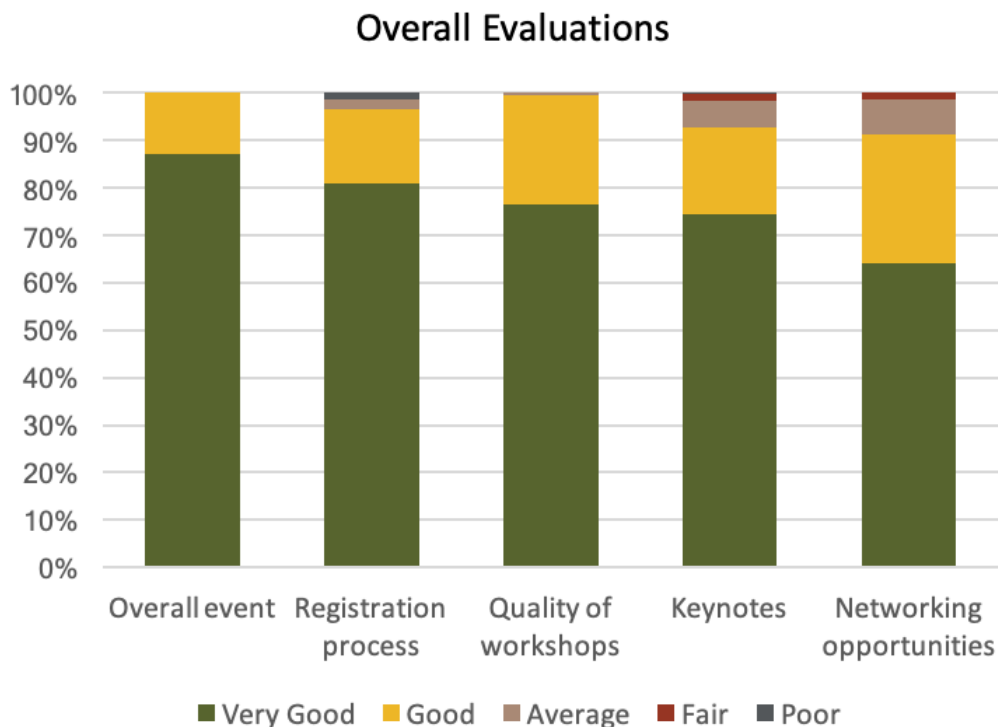
Registrants heard about the Come to the Table Conference from a variety of sources; but it seems clear that the majority heard about it in the context of their professional role, while word of mouth from a friend or relative was also a significant contributor.

On the end-of-conference evaluation, we asked participants which kind of organization they represented, and to select all that applied. One oversight in our evaluation was not including “Farmers Market” as an organization category; however, there were 24 registrants for an extended workshop focusing on farmers markets, so we do know there was some representation.

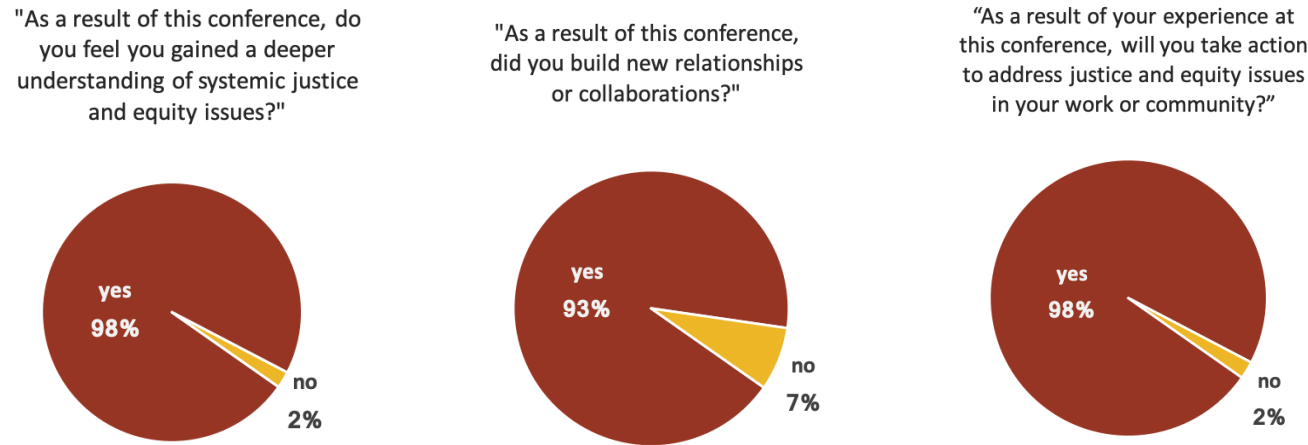


Overall Evaluation

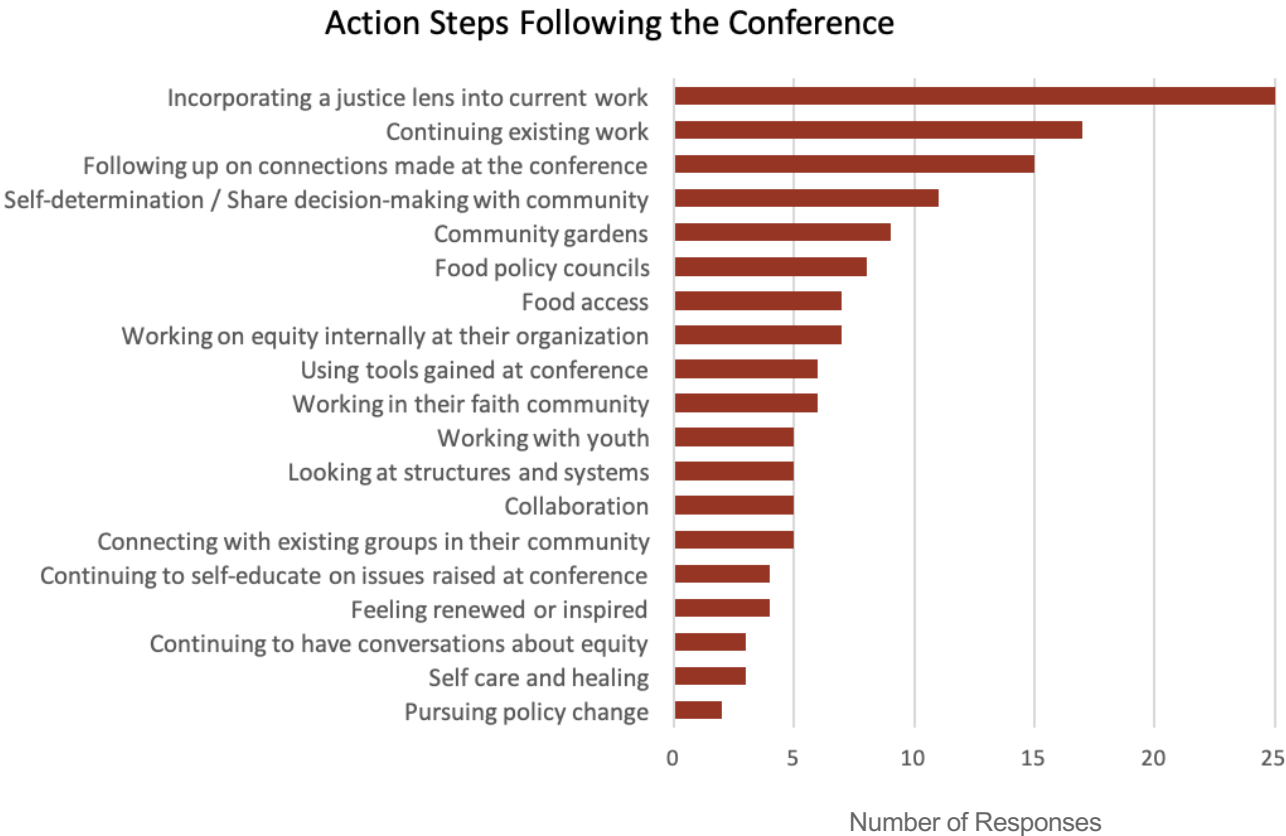
For our end-of-conference overall evaluation, we received 148 survey responses - a 35% response rate, based on the number of people who checked in at the registration table.



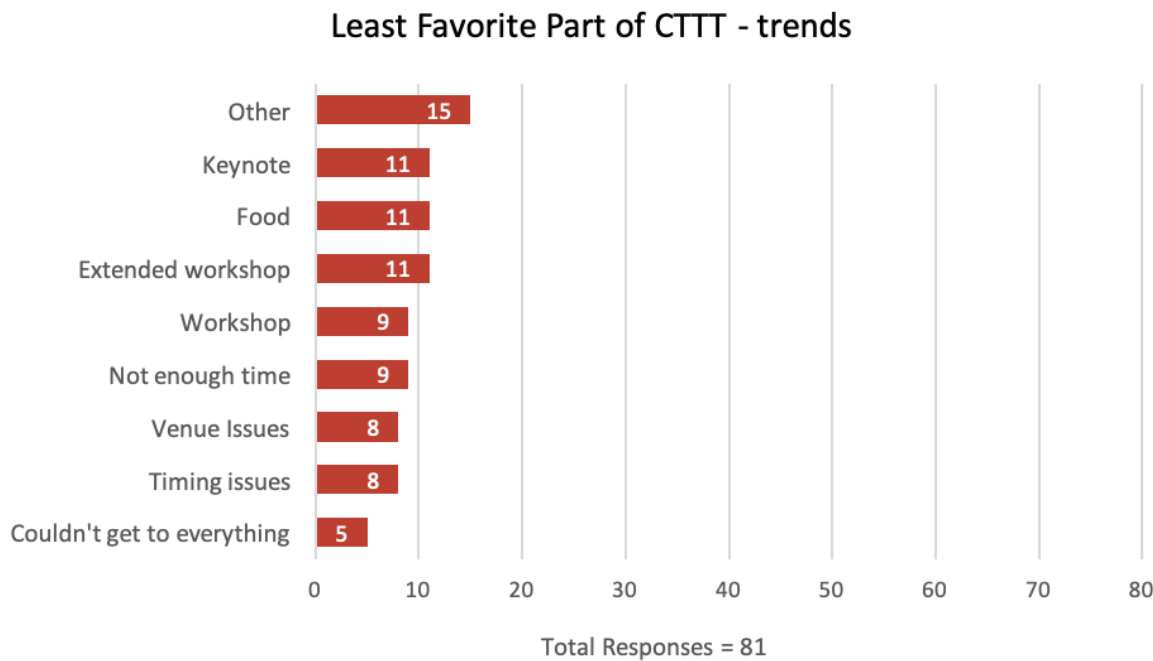
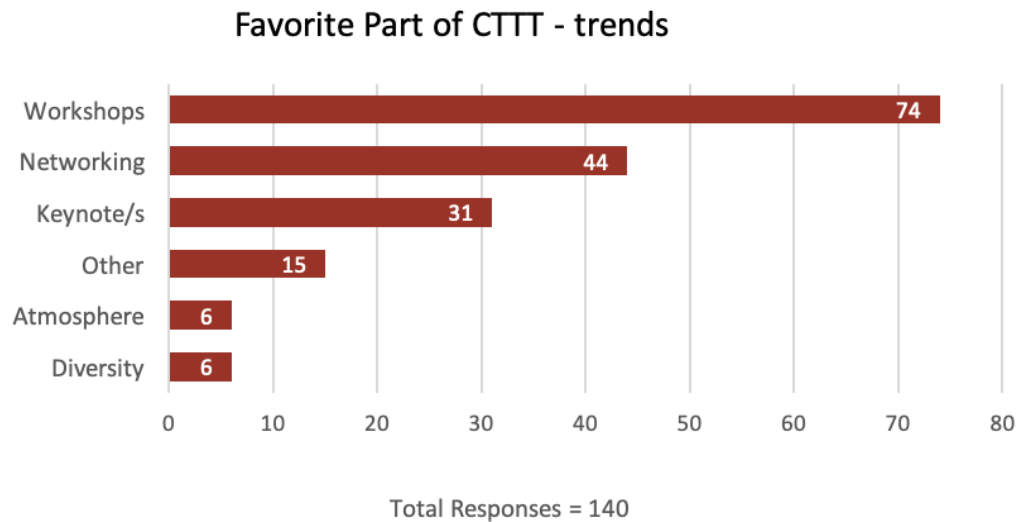
We asked the following questions as a way to measure the impact the conference had on participants:



In an open-ended question, we asked participants **what kind of action they were going to take** based on their experience at the conference. We coded the responses into the following broad themes:



140 people responded to the free-response question, “What was your **favorite part** of the conference?” Broad trends in answers are displayed in the chart below. Within answers mentioning workshops, thirty people mentioned specific workshops they had attended; respondents also seemed to value the variety and diversity of workshop topics offered. Several who wrote about networking mentioned valuing the conversation and stories of others; as well as some who appreciated seeing old friends or colleagues.



Some themes included in respondents’ least favorite parts were lunch on day one, that the extended workshops were too long, and that the regular workshops were too short. Timing issues referred to being sleepy for morning sessions or after lunch or leaving the venue during rush hour; and about half of those who said there was not enough time referred specifically to time for networking.

While a few people had issues specific to the **venue** (A/C, wifi, etc), it should be noted that participants' feedback on their experience at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church was overwhelmingly positive (with 94% of people offering appreciative feedback). "Beautiful" and "spacious" were two words used most often. People also appreciated the welcoming and inclusive atmosphere, the easy parking, the location, and the signage. In the words of one participant,

The venue is absolutely fabulous. I couldn't have imagined a more beautiful space. I could sit in the sanctuary and look at the beautiful window panes for hours.

Workshop Feedback

Fifty-five workshops were offered across 12 themed tracks. Attendees were given evaluations at the end of each session and were asked to rank the degree to which **practical knowledge** was gained, the **quality of the workshop**, and the **quality of presenters**. The five-level rate scale ranged from "Very Good" to "Poor". Responses were resoundingly positive! Approximately 90% of respondents ranked the practical knowledge gained either "Very Good" or "Good". Ninety-five percent of respondents ranked the quality of the workshop "Very Good" or "Good" and 97% of respondents ranked the quality of presenters likewise.

The surveys also solicited additional feedback regarding **valuable information learned**, **what information was missing or not covered**, how well the workshop **connected to the conference theme**, and any other important thoughts. Nearly all workshop characteristics received an above-average ranking.

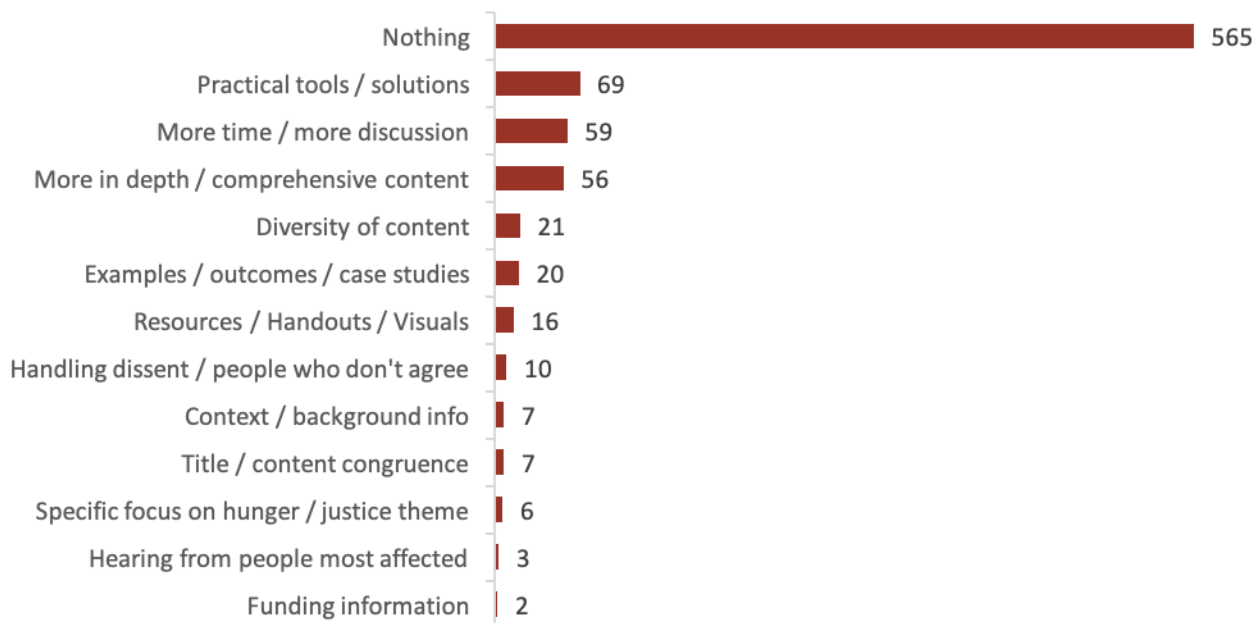
Attendees most frequently named new knowledge gained, practical knowledge/tools, and group discussion as **what they found most valuable** in the workshops.

"What did you find to be the most valuable information in the session?"



The most common responses for **what information was missing or not covered** were largely the same things - more practical tools/solutions, more time for discussion, and more in depth content. This speaks to the importance attendees placed on information they can take to their communities to apply.

"What information was missing or not covered?"



Some notable quotes are listed below from how people answered the question of what they found to be the **most valuable information in the session**:

“Being a Better Ally: Strategies, Challenges, & Common Pitfalls for Community Engagement”

The reminder of what true diversity looks like to help propel community engagement effectively.

“Bread & Wine in the World”

Incredible presenters, information shared & very inspiring.

Theological underpinnings & practical examples.

“Building a Community of Practice Through Dialogue on Racial Equity & Food”

Actions to take back to implement in our organization.

The openness to have conversations and framing thought processes. This was one of my favorite sessions.

“Building Stronger Communities: A Community Organizing and Leadership Training”

Identifying the types of power and how to organize to counter hidden and invisible power.

“Community-based Impact Unlocked: Leveraging Partnership for the Benefit of All”

Seeing people in the class connect, seeing the manifestation of the things learned in real time!

The excellent overview of ABCD - clear, concise, well-organized.

Seeing the connections. Asset management = Relationship management.

“How to Effectively Engage Black Men into the Food System”

The ability to teach a skill to someone who can go on to make a career out of it through mentorship, service and agriculture.

How they work with the young men to start from where they are.

The holistic approach to the program.

How the structure of the program can be duplicated. The info we got was great!

“Engaging Black Youth in Agriculture: The Story of Sankofa Farms”

That a change can always be made no matter what.

They are a group of black men who empower each other and recreate our past and make it relevant within farming.

Having the youth present & able to share their stories.

Tips on mentorship & engaging with the students!

“Farming on the County Line: Food as a Tool for Community Development Across All Lines”

I never realized how important legal knowledge is to food justice.

“From the Prophets to Jesus: Justice as a Bible Imperative”

This was amazing! I loved every minute and did not want it to end. I was worried that this would be long and painful, but actually I did not want it to end. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Examining the intersection of faith / religions and systemic issues.

Biblical substantiation for social justice work, sharing of different individuals in the group.

Going Forward

When asked **what people would like to see more of** at the next conference, the largest number of people mentioned more time for either networking or specifically, facilitated networking. Going forward, the planning team can create time slots for both open and facilitated networking perhaps around specific communities of practice. This mix of open and facilitated networking opportunities would allow for connections to be made that otherwise might not, while instituting structure to boost the likelihood of forging a connection of mutual value.

The second most frequent response was for more engagement of college students and youth attendees and speakers. The copious positive feedback regarding youth participation in the conference as presenters and attendees inspired staff to brainstorm ways to increase the presence of young people at future conferences. These ideas include more stipends to support youth travel, exploring ways our registration process can be designed to better handle the additional coordination required for minor attendees, and creating an Americorps VISTA position.

Many people also responded with specific ideas for additional content areas to address at the next conference, many of them focused on skill-building or how to apply concepts in practice.

Some notable quotes from the survey are:

Youth Track was amazing. So more Youth.

I would like to see more networking opportunities available for college aged students and have more workshops geared toward college students and have more resources for them!

Networking times or specific opportunities, happy hour? Young professionals networking or career opportunities??

Board of business cards in sections for networking

Staff Recommendations

The Come to the Table staff planning team met after the conference to reflect on the event and the planning process. Some recommendations that emerged include:

- Convert one or two of the concurrent workshop sessions to a plenary session instead. This would give us the opportunity to have some core discussions as a common experience among conference participants.
- Have fewer sessions happening concurrently / fewer workshop tracks: this will make it a little easier for attendees to choose which workshops to go to, and easier to make sure that all workshops are adequately covered by room monitors. It will also require finding a venue with larger workshop rooms to fit more attendees.
- Give greater priority in the conference budget to funds for travel stipends, since this is an important aspect of accessibility and the need this year was much greater than our ability to meet it.
- Create more clarity up front about how we decide workshop length so that potential presenters can let us know if their content is more appropriate for a longer session.
- Plan an exciting plenary experience at the end of the conference to encourage attendance through conference closing.