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Sustainability summit takes creative step forward

by [John Funk/The Plain Dealer](#)

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CLEVELAND -- The more than 700 participants at Sustainable Cleveland 2019 summit took their first creative steps toward synthesizing a concept of Cleveland's green and clean future this morning -- with what looked suspiciously like performance art.

Divided into separate groups sitting at about 90 tables on the floor of Public Hall at the Cleveland Convention Center, the teams leaped from their chairs in fiercely enthusiastic bids for a spot on the stage.

Among the dozen chosen, one group formed an octet to sing about the death of the Muppet Oscar the Grouch in a bucolic and happy Cleveland just a decade away. The singers broke into a refrain from "Celebration" by Kool and the Gang in wild rendition that brought applause.

Another group, using rudimentary art materials provided by summit organizers, jumped onto the stage paddling a huge paper boat, "The Best Time 2019."

"I have never seen such creativity," said summit moderator David Cooperrider, a professor at the Weatherhead School of Business at Case Western Reserve University.

But it was more than a good time. The groups also submitted their ideas in written form of what concrete steps might be taken. And by early afternoon, Cooperrider was distilling the suggestions --- urban gardens, local food production, advanced technologies, advanced energy production and dozens and dozens of others.

"I didn't realize how in-depth this could go, this brainstorming phase," Cooperrider told them. After describing some of the suggestions, he pointed to broad categories his assistants had written on large poster boards around the hall.

At Cooperrider's signal, the hundreds of people are now re-grouping into new teams organized around their interests. "This is design, part one," said Cooperrider.

"The key question," he said, "assuming there are no constraints, [is] how might we advance the idea of local food," for example."

"Encourage wild ideas," he told them as the new teams dragged their chairs into "brainstorming" huddles.

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