Gemini on Inputs activity for Day 1

Yes, I understand the goals of this capstone activity perfectly. It's a very logical and strategically sound next step in your retreat design.

You are essentially asking the team to define the "intake manifold" for each of their newly-defined System 1 operational units. By focusing on the necessary *inputs*, you are accomplishing several key things simultaneously:

1. **Solidifying Boundaries:** An operational unit is defined as much by what it needs to start its work as by what it produces. This activity forces the team to clarify the precise starting line for each System 1's autonomous work, reinforcing their identity and scope.
2. **Surfacing Dependencies:** It moves the team's thinking from their internal processes to their relationship with the wider system (other units, management, external agencies). This explicitly maps out the dependencies that must be managed.
3. **Creating a "Bill of Materials":** For each research output, you are creating a "bill of materials" or a checklist of prerequisites. This makes the process of initiating work more concrete, predictable, and transparent.
4. **Directly Seeding System 2:** As you correctly identified, this is the perfect setup for designing System 2 (Coordination). The list of inputs is a raw list of potential friction points. Every input that is shared between units, is difficult to acquire, or is poorly defined is a prime candidate for a System 2 coordinating function to smooth out.

In short, you are moving the team from "Here is what we do" to "Here is what we need *before* we can do it." This pivot is the crucial bridge between defining System 1 and understanding the need for the other systems in the VSM.

Would you like help designing the specific facilitation plan for this capstone activity? We could think about the prompts, the structure on the whiteboard, and how to guide the conversation to best capture the information you need for future System 2 work.

Of course. Here is a facilitation plan for the capstone activity, structured exactly as you requested.

**Activity 5: Defining Our Starting Blocks**

**1. Purpose**

The purpose of this activity is to define the essential prerequisites for each candidate System 1 unit to begin its autonomous work. This serves three primary goals:

* **To solidify the boundaries** of each System 1 unit by clearly defining its starting point.
* **To create a concrete "checklist" of inputs** that must be in place before work can be handed off to that unit, increasing transparency and predictability.
* **To surface dependencies, bottlenecks, and potential resource conflicts** that will provide the raw material for designing our System 2 (Coordination) functions in a later session.

**2. Prompt**

*(To be delivered by the facilitator after the team has identified the System 1 units, their outputs, and their audiences.)*

"Excellent work. We now have a clear picture of our core operational units, what they produce, and who they serve. The final piece of this puzzle is to understand what each unit *needs* before its work can even begin.

We're going to identify the 'starting blocks' for each unit. Think of this like a recipe: you can't start cooking until you have all the ingredients measured out on the counter.

Our prompt is this: **For each System 1 unit, what are the absolutely essential inputs, permissions, resources, and pieces of information that MUST be in place *before* that unit can begin its autonomous work?** We're looking for the triggers that say 'Ready, set, GO!'"

**3. Activity (60 minutes)**

This activity will be conducted on the Microsoft Teams whiteboard.

* **Phase 1: Setup (5 minutes)**
  + Create a simple table or matrix on the whiteboard.
  + The **rows** will be the names of the candidate System 1 units your team created in the previous activity (e.g., Quantitative Research Services, Client Data Integration, Performance Reporting).
  + The **columns** will be broad categories of inputs to help guide brainstorming: Data & Information, Permissions & Access, and Scope & Direction.
* **Phase 2: Silent Individual Brainstorming (15 minutes)**
  + Team members will silently add digital sticky notes to the appropriate cells in the table.
  + For example, for the Client Data Integration unit, someone might add "Access credentials to Agency X SFTP server" under the Permissions & Access column. Another might add "Finalized data dictionary from source agency" under Data & Information.
  + The goal is to generate as many specific inputs as possible without discussion or judgment.
* **Phase 3: Group Discussion and Refinement (25 minutes)**
  + The facilitator will lead the team through the matrix, one System 1 unit at a time.
  + Read the sticky notes aloud for the first unit. As a group, discuss each input.
  + **Clarify:** Is this truly a prerequisite, or is it something created/acquired *during* the unit's work? Remove any that aren't true inputs.
  + **Cluster:** Group similar or duplicate stickies together.
  + **Refine:** Edit the language on the stickies to conform to the constraints (see below) and ensure maximum clarity for the entire group.
* **Phase 4: Cross-System Pattern Identification (15 minutes)**
  + Once the inputs for all units are refined, the facilitator will ask the group to look for patterns *across* the different units.
  + Use icons or colored highlighters on the whiteboard to mark key inputs:
    - Mark with a **star ⭐** any input that is required by **more than one** System 1 unit. (This highlights a potential resource conflict or coordination need).
    - Mark with a **red flag 🚩** any input that the team agrees is currently **difficult, slow, or unreliable** to obtain. (This highlights a known pain point).

**4. Constraints on the Activity**

To ensure the outputs are precise and useful, all final inputs listed on the whiteboard must adhere to two rules:

1. **The "Tangible Noun" Rule:** Every input must be described as a noun or noun phrase, not a verb or a process.
   * *Instead of:* "Getting the signed data sharing agreement."
   * *Use:* **"Signed Data Sharing Agreement."**
   * *Instead of:* "The stakeholder clarifies the research question."
   * *Use:* **"Finalized Research Question Document."**
2. **The "Before the Clock Starts" Rule:** The input must be a true prerequisite. If acquiring the item is part of the System 1 unit's core work, it is not an input. Ask, "Does the autonomous work of this unit begin *before* or *after* we have this item in hand?" It must be *after*.

**5. The Deliverable**

The final deliverable from this activity will be a **System 1 Input Matrix** on the whiteboard. This matrix will contain:

* A clear row for each candidate System 1 unit.
* Within each row, a finalized set of sticky notes representing the essential inputs for that unit, written according to the constraints.
* Visual annotations (stars ⭐, flags 🚩) highlighting shared inputs and known bottlenecks, which will serve as a direct and actionable starting point for designing System 2.