

FACILITATION TOOLS AND STRUCTURE

We can achieve a lot more by working in teams than we can by working alone.

People-power has brought about the big political changes of the past and it is how change will occur in the future. But working in teams is not always easy!

Most of us have been to a frustrating meeting and we know how off-putting it can be. Facilitation tools are essential for hosting well-structured and productive meetings that will help develop healthy teams.

A well-facilitated meeting:

- Enables in-depth discussion
- Encourages participation
- Builds commitment
- Assists planning and coordination

FACILITATION TOOLS

Informal facilitation tools include making eye contact, listening patiently and ensuring your body language is encouraging and attentive. There are also a lot of simple, formal tools that can make a big difference. These include:

Icebreaker – Any activity that is aimed at people getting to know one another. This will help a group work more effectively throughout the meeting.

Round – Each person has a say in turn and no interruptions are allowed. You can give a time constraint e.g. *you can talk for up to a minute*. It can be round a circle or a go-round where people speak when ready, regardless of where they are in the circle, but each person only speaks once. Good for equalising participation and ensuring everyone speaks during the meeting.

Brainstorm – A quick fire creative tool often used at the start of a meeting to gather ideas and encourage freethinking. Anything goes! People can storm ideas onto post-it notes and then share them or call out ideas.

Group Agreement – This can be a prepared list of rules that you ask everyone to agree on at the beginning of a meeting, or you can come up with the list all together. It could include the behaviours that will not be tolerated or it can be a list of principles that the group collectively adhere to.

Paired Listening – A time limited sharing of ideas between two people, often followed by feedback. This is a good tool for ensuring that those people who don't like to speak in a large group can make a contribution.

The Park - A space where you can 'park' ideas that are off topic but worth revisiting. Going off on a tangent can sometimes lead to useful ideas but it will also dilute the focus of a meeting. Using the park allows you to stay focused whilst reassuring participants there point will be revisited.

Small groups - Splitting a meeting into smaller groups which either all do the same work in parallel, or each take on a different task. This can be an effective way of changing the dynamics of a meeting. It is also good for involving a lot people and getting a lot done during a meeting.

Spectrum line – An active tool in which members of a group physically place themselves along an imaginary line, depending on their response to a question or scenario posed by the facilitator. At the extreme end of each line is the more extreme answer. This can be a great way to kick start a discussion and good to get people moving.

Throwing it back to the group – Bouncing questions and decisions back to the group rather than answering them or making them yourself e.g. *“that is a good question... does anyone want to suggest an answer?”*

Evaluation – Evaluation is crucial if you are going to improve the quality of your meetings. At the end of a meeting have a quick go-round asking - *what do you think worked, or not worked, about our meeting tonight?* This will give you a good idea of how it has gone.

Minutes – A written record of the meeting including agreements and action point. Minutes are a vital tool to ensure that ideas are not forgotten and tasks are followed up on.

SUGGESTED STRUCTURE OF A LOCAL GROUP MEETING

Round

Check in: Name, how are you and why have you come to the meeting?

Short presentation/video (if this is a knowledge session)

In pairs or small groups (depending on the size of the group)

What were your thoughts about the talk? What questions or comments do you have? What interested you about the talk?

Round - one minute each (depending on the size of the group)

Comments and Questions

Break

Brainstorm (make sure everyone contributes something)

What action should we take this summer?

Prioritise

What are the top three things people are interested in doing?

Action Points and roles (take notes)

What are the next steps? Who is taking on a task?

Round and Evaluation

Check out: How did you find the meeting?