

Facilitation Tools

for

Meetings and Workshops



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This is a compilation of tools and techniques that we have found useful for participatory meetings and workshops. We've categorised the tools, but many of them can also be useful in other contexts. Don't be bound by our categories! We have more detailed information on some tools available on our website, and you might also find it helpful to read our briefings on *Facilitating Workshops* and *Facilitating Meetings*.

Here's a few general guidelines for using these tools:

- ✓ Every group is different: some tools may not be appropriate in a specific group or situation. Don't force a tool on a group or an individual but let people decide for themselves to what extent they want to participate.
- ✓ Be flexible: don't let your choice of tool dictate what happens, but fit and adapt the tools to the needs of the group. Be creative and invent your own tools.
- ✓ Use visual aids such as whiteboards. Use them to write down instructions, questions to consider and to record responses from the participants.
- ✓ Be aware that people might not be happy to share everything that was said in a pair or a small group with all the people in the room.
- ✓ Do explain the purpose of a tool before asking the group to use it. That way people feel in control of what they are doing, allowing them to participate more fully.

Core facilitation tools

These are the basic tools you'll come back to time and time again:

Group agreement

5 minutes - 1 hour to set up; any number of people

It can be useful to start your meeting or workshop by negotiating a group agreement. The aim of the group agreement is to create a safe and respectful space in which people can work together productively.

Essentially a group agreement is a set of statements that set the tone for how people will behave within the meeting or workshop. It might include: "respect everyone's opinions"; "allow everyone an equal opportunity to speak" (this could be more specific – "no interrupting" for example); "confidentiality"; "mobile phones switched off, or onto silent mode". The key thing about a group agreement is given away by its name – it only works as an effective facilitation tool if it's agreed by the group. Agreements can be proposed to the group, but not imposed.

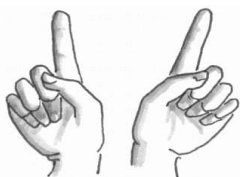
For more information and various ways to apply this tool, take a look at our briefing *Group Agreements for Workshops and Meetings*.

Active agreement is a useful addition to any group agreement. Essentially it's an agreement that the group will actively signal their opinion on any given issue. This allows you to ask the group questions knowing you'll get a definite answer. So for example, you might feel that group energy is low and ask the group if they need a break or are happy to carry on with the next activity or agenda item. If they simply stare at their feet what do you do? Active agreement avoids this. Silent applause (see *Handsignals* below) can be a useful way of showing active agreement.



Handsignals are a simple technique that can make workshops and meetings run more smoothly and help the facilitator see emerging agreements and common ground. We find three simple signals usually suffice:

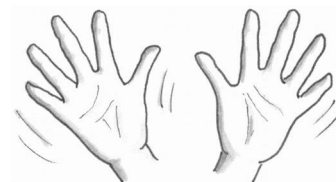
Raise a forefinger when you wish to contribute to the discussion with a general point.



Raise both forefingers if your point is a direct response to a point that's just been made or a question that's just been asked. This allows you to jump to the head of the queue, in front of all those people raising just one finger. Use wisely and discourage overuse!



Silent applause – when you hear an opinion that you agree with, wave a hand with your fingers pointing upwards (this saves a lot of time as people don't need to chip in to say "I'd just like to add that I agree with..."). You can signal disagreement with a downward wave of the fingers.



Sometimes with big, diverse or difficult groups more hand signals can be useful. Take a look at our briefing *Hand Signals* for different examples of usage and clear explanations of what they can do.

Go-round

1 – 3 minutes per person; 3 – 30 people

Everyone takes a turn to speak on a subject without interruption or comment from other people. Go-rounds are useful for equalising participation and giving everyone some clear space to express their opinion. Allowing people to 'pass' means that no-one feels put on the spot. To keep it focused clearly state what the purpose of the go-round is and write the question on a flipchart where everyone can see it. You can set time limits as necessary. For a more in depth explanation of this tool take a look at our briefing *Tools for Group Work* on our website.



Ideastorms

10 – 30 minutes; 5 – 15 people

A tool for sparking creative thinking and helping to quickly gather a large number of ideas. Begin by stating the issue to be ideastormed. Ask people to call out all their ideas as fast as possible – without censoring them. Crazy ideas are welcome – they can help people to be inspired by each other.

Have one or two notetakers to write all ideas down where everyone can see them. Make sure there is no discussion or comment on others' ideas. Structured thinking and organising can come afterwards. For a more in depth explanation of this tool take a look at our briefing *Tools for Group Work*.



A variation ...

A roving ideastorm is a useful variation of the ideastorm that increases the level of participation and gets the group physically moving. It also allows you to think of ideas around several different, but related, issues at once. In a roving ideastorm small groups each start at a different 'station' (a tabletop or wall space with a sheet of flipchart paper on it) and have a short ideastorm on that station's topic. You call time and they then move round the other stations ideastorming as they go. A short, well enforced time limit will keep the small groups moving from station to station and make this a dynamic experience.

So, for example, in a meeting skills workshop you might want to get some ideas on tools to deal with problem behaviour encountered in meetings. One station might be labelled 'dominant people', the next a 'shy and quiet people', a third 'speakers who take time to get to the point' and so on.

A roving ideastorm allows the group to share their knowledge and creativity with no 'top down' input from you and no need for a feedback session at the end of the exercise.



A few hints and tips...

- ✓ As people move around they will arrive at a station that another group has just vacated. They'll therefore need to be able to read the ideas of the previous small groups, so make sure groups summarise their ideas intelligibly, and write them clearly.
- ✓ The new group just adds extra ideas other groups didn't think of. This means that they have less work to do as they progress, because most of the ideas will already have been thought of. You can reflect this in the time limits you set. You might give them six minutes at the first station, five at the second, four at the third, three at the fourth etc.
- ✓ Finish by sending the groups back around the stations, so they can read what other groups added to the lists.

Small groups

Time dependent on task; 3 – 15 people per group

There are many reasons why you may want to split into smaller groups. Large groups can sometimes become dominated by a few people or ideas, stifling creativity and the contributions of others. By contrast, smaller groups allow time for everyone to speak and to feel involved and can be a lot less intimidating. This can increase the energy in the room because more people are more actively involved. It can also make it possible to discuss emotionally charged issues that would be difficult in a large group. The final advantage is efficiency – many topics can be discussed more effectively in a smaller group – for example the details of a newsletter's layout. Similarly, you can cover several different topics at once – with each group taking on one topic or task.

Think about the sort of group you need – a random split (e.g. numbering off or by hair colour etc.) or groups of people with particular experience or skills or with energy for the topic? Explain clearly what you want groups to do. Write specific questions or topics on flipchart paper or a blackboard beforehand. If you are going to have feedback at the end, you need to say clearly what they need to feedback and ask them to ensure someone from each group is ready to give the feedback. Sometimes it is important to hear a full account of each group's discussion, often it is not necessary. Encourage the people giving feedback to be concise, think about setting time limits, or asking groups to feedback key points.

For more information on this tool take a look at our briefing *Tools for Group Work*.



Paired listening

5 – 15 minutes; 2 people per group

This tool creates a space where everyone is heard, enabling participants to explore and formulate their own thoughts or feelings on an issue without interruption. It can help in uncovering and resolving conflict as well as allowing people to gather and consolidate their thoughts before a group discussion. Listening in pairs is also a good way of developing skills in active listening.

Split into pairs, one person is the listener, the other the speaker. The speaker talks about their thoughts or feelings on the issue that you've chosen. Encourage the thinker to speak first thoughts – that is to speak as thoughts enter the mind without analysing or holding back. This may seem difficult at first –

think of it as holding an internal monologue, but out loud. The role of the listener is to give full attention to the thinker without interrupting, questioning or commenting. The listener can provide an attentive and supportive atmosphere through eye contact, body language, encouraging noises, smiles and nods. If the thinker gets stuck the listener may ask neutral questions such as “How does that make you feel? Why do you think that?” After a set time (one - four minutes is usually plenty) thinker and listener swap roles.

This exercise can be followed by a go-round in the full group, with every participant summarising the thoughts of their partner.



Roleplays and simulations

10 minutes – 3 hours; 5 – 100 people

Both roleplays and simulations are an opportunity to enact a scenario, practice skills around that scenario, and explore emotional reactions to it. The difference is simple. If people are taking on a specific role within the scenario it's a roleplay. If they are exploring a scenario as themselves it's a simulation. In some situations some participants will be themselves whilst others take on roles and interact with them. Simulations are good for practising new skills, or existing skills in new situations. Roleplays help to understand people's reactions, and can give insights into the thoughts and feelings of "opponents".

For either, select a situation to be played out. Ask yourself what you want to examine and why. A simple situation is best. Explain the situation carefully, including the groups represented (e.g. police and protesters) and the physical layout. If you need people to take on roles ask them to volunteer– never force people to play a role they're uncomfortable with. Give them a few minutes to get into their roles. Ask everyone who is not playing to be active observers.

The facilitator stops the simulation or roleplay when enough issues have been uncovered, the

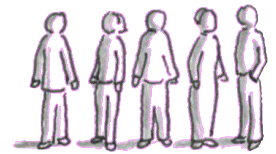
A variation...

Hassle lines are a form of quick roleplay. They are great for getting people to explore their emotional responses to a situation, to look at body language or to prepare for a particular situation such as aggression from the public or the police during a protest or action. As with any role play, make it clear that anyone who isn't comfortable participating is welcome to act as an observer.

Participants form two lines, each facing a partner. The two lines are given roles and a brief scenario and then step towards each other and play their roles. The left line, for example, may take on the role of protesters, the other side of unsympathetic passers-by, making a provocative comment such as "Get a job".



After a short time (30 seconds to two minutes) the facilitator stops the roleplay and asks a few people for their comments, e.g. how it worked and how it made them feel. Roles can then be swapped and scenarios varied. For a more in depth explanation of this tool take a look at our briefing *Tools for Group Work*.



exercise comes to a natural end or people want to stop. The play should also be stopped if a participant shows great tension or gets too involved. Have a short break, de–role (see below) and then evaluate the exercise.

Evaluation gives participants and observers the chance to assimilate and analyse what has happened and how well they put their skills into effect. Start by asking the players how they felt in their roles. Ask observers for their impressions and then allow discussion. What have people learnt and how will they apply their insights in real life? Discourage comments that tell participants what they should have done. Compliment people for having the courage to participate regardless of how the scenario turned out. These tools are there for learning. Use encouraging language such as "Another option that you might try is...", "Perhaps this would work...", "I learned ... from your tactic and would like to try...". If new insights come up the group might want to try them out in a new exercise rather than talk about what might happen. For more on using roleplay, see our briefing on *Facilitating Workshops*.

After any roleplay it's important to provide participants with the chance to de-role, that is to come out of their role and leave any strong emotions behind. You will need to judge the level of de-roleing required, depending on the intensity of the roleplay. A simple shake, or a few deep breaths may be all that you need. Other options include taking a break, a physical game, or a visualisation that takes people's attention elsewhere (to a pleasant memory, for example).

Plus-minus-interesting

5 – 20 minutes; 3 – 20 people

This is a process that allows the expression of opposing views without generating too much conflict. This tool can be used in the whole group, in small groups or individually. Write the topic across the top of a large sheet of paper. Draw a plus sign, a minus sign and an “I” (which stands for Interesting). Start with the plus and ask people to list anything that they feel to be positive about the topic. Write these without comment around the plus sign. When everyone has had their say move on to the minus sign and list everything that people feel to be more negative. Around the “I” sign list everything that people find interesting, ideas that could be explored further etc. Then move back to the plus sign and start a second round. The first round finds out what’s happening with the group. The second round builds upon it. One particular issue can come up in every section as what seems positive to one person could well be negative to the next.



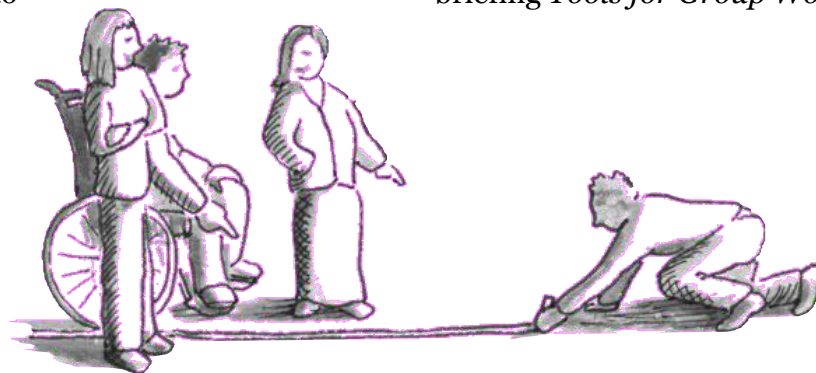
Spectrum lines

20 minutes to 1 hour; 5 – 100 people

These can help to explore the different views on an issue within the group. It is a dynamic way of discussing philosophical rather than practical topics in large groups.

Start by creating an imaginary or real line through the room (chalk or masking tape on the floor are good for indoor spaces). One end stands for “I agree completely”, the other end for “I disagree completely”. Outline the issue under debate and formulate it into a statement to agree or disagree with. Ask people to position themselves along the line according to their views. They may try out several spots before making a final choice. Ask them to have a short conversation with the person next to them, explaining why they are where they are. Then invite participants to

share their viewpoints and feelings with the group. Repeat this exercise with other statements that explore the issue under discussion and see whether and how people’s viewpoints change. You could also use a curved line so that people can see each other. This exercise taps into both our intuitive and rational sides and needs to be done quietly and thoughtfully. A spectrum line may require strong facilitation to stop the group from slipping into general discussion. For more ideas and variations on spectrum lines have a look at our briefing *Tools for Group Work*.



Tools for introductions and endings

Meetings and workshops can suffer if participants feel they haven't had time to build a rapport with the rest of the group, or if they end too abruptly – some people like 'closure'. These tools are best used at the beginning or end of a meeting or workshop, but might be

appropriate elsewhere.

Personal introductions

30 seconds – 1 minute per person; 3 – 20 people

Each person gives their name, where they are from and one other fact about themselves. This third fact could be freely chosen by each individual or the facilitator could suggest a

theme (e.g. what kind of food they like, why they are at the meeting, something good that happened in the last week).



Pair Introductions

10 – 20 minutes; 10 – 30 people

Ask people to pair up with people they don't know or know less well. One person interviews the other for three minutes, then roles are swapped.

Questions can include the reasons why the person is there and what they are hoping to learn or achieve during the event. When the whole group re-forms the pairs introduce each other, giving as much detail as they can remember. The facilitator could also suggest specific themes to be included in the interview.



Name games

5 – 15 minutes; 10 – 30 people

There are countless games that help people remember everyone else's name. Here's one of our favourites:

The group stands in a circle facing each other. Everyone needs to think of a verb (action word) that begins with the same letter as their name. Have an initial go-round where everyone says what their name is (e.g. Jumping James). When everyone has said what they're called, start off by throwing a (real or imaginary) ball to someone while saying their name and acting out the verb (so you throw a



ball to Jumping James, and jump while you say his name). James then throws the ball to the next person, while saying and acting out their name (Laughing Lindsay)... Of course you can run the same game without the verb. In large groups you can add to the challenge and keep everyone on their toes by using several balls at the same time.



People map

5 – 10 minutes; 5 – 40 people

Create a human map to show where people consider their home. Indicate North, East, South & West, and allow participants to position themselves to create a map. Ask people furthest away where they are from. Continue with each cluster of people. People can also reposition themselves. You could vary this by asking where people would like to live or go on holiday etc.



Excitement sharing

30 seconds – 2 minutes per person; 3 – 20 people

People share something exciting that has happened to them recently. Examples are: "I've harvested the first peas of the year", "My friend

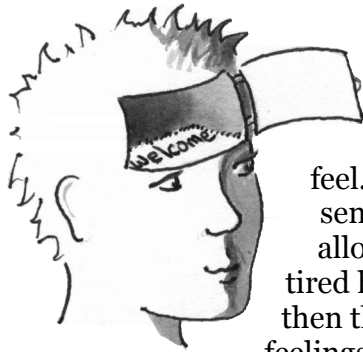
from New Zealand came to visit," "I've got a new job". This creates a lot of positive energy for the meeting and puts people more in



touch with

each other's lives. You can use this instead of introductions when people already know each other. Make sure people keep it brief.

Discourage comments or questions. Don't confuse excitement sharing with announcements.



Feeling sharing

up to 1 minute per person; 3 – 30 people

Ask people to listen inwards and to consider how they feel. Then have a round with people describing in a couple of words or sentences how they feel, for example curious, nervous, tired, excited. This allows the facilitator and the group to tune into each other. If people are tired have an energiser and open the windows. You can use this at the start and then the end of a workshop to see if the workshop has had an effect on people's feelings.



Getting present

up to 5 minutes per person; 3 – 15 people

Sit in a circle so that everyone can see and hear each other. Ask each person in turn to share concerns, distractions and events that are on their mind. For example: "I'm giving a presentation this afternoon and I feel nervous." "My daughter had a baby last night. It's my first grandchild." Ask everyone to give their full

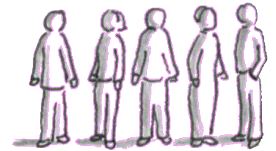
attention to the speaker. As facilitator you can help people if they appear stuck. Interventions could include: "Is there any action you want to take?" "Is there anything else you want to say about that?" This tool is suitable for groups that work together closely and where there is a high level of trust.



Personal object game

1 – 2 minutes per person; 5 – 20 people

Sit in a circle around a large sheet of paper. Ask everyone to take a personal item out of their pocket or bag – something that has some personal significance to them – place it on the paper and draw round it with a marker pen. Once they have drawn round it they can put it away again. Then take turns to pick one of the outlines. The person whose outline it is explains what the item is and why it's significant to them.



Workshop gifts

10 – 15 minutes; 5 – 20 people

A contemplative and fun game we've used at the end of workshops. Everyone is given a card with a 'gift' written on it. Everyone then takes turns to explain what they will do with their gift. Example gifts are: an apple tree whose fruit has

the power to grant a wish to whoever eats it, an empty train that can travel anywhere in the world, and a cloak that turns the wearer invisible.



Writing a letter to yourself

5 – 20 minutes; any number of people

This might seem like a strange idea, but it's a lovely way for everyone to take the time to think about what they have learnt through a workshop, and what changes they might make, or steps they might take, in their lives or work because of it. Give everyone some paper, an envelope and a pen and ask

them to write a letter to themselves that outlines the main things they have learnt at the workshop, and the changes they would like to bring about. Get them to put their letter in an envelope and address it to themselves. Next collect in the letters. Explain that they won't be opened but that they will be posted out in a couple of weeks or months. We all know that we often have great intentions of making change but simply never get around to it. However having these intentions, written in our own fair hands, land on our doormats 6 weeks later could be just the reminder we need.

People bingo

10 – 20 minutes; 5 – 40 people

A flexible and gentle icebreaker. Write down a list of questions you would like each person in the group to find answers to from other people in the group. The question can be specific to the session e.g. “What qualities do you have that makes you a good trainer?” or generic “How are you feeling today?” It is useful for everyone to have questions on sheet of paper to carry around and fill in answers as they get them. Each person

should only ask one question to one person then find somebody else to introduce themselves to and ask another question. When they have found answers to all their questions they shout bingo and have finished. Ten questions gets people well mixed and a lot of information shared.



Tools for building trust

These exercises help build trust in a group by sharing personal details, feelings and challenges with each other.

Alternative CV

15 – 25 minutes; 5 – 40 people

Hand out coloured sheets of paper and coloured pens. Ask people to draw a pattern of their choice on their piece of paper. When everyone has finished ask people to fill the pattern with words or phrases describing what they like about themselves, skills they have and skills they would like to have. Ask people to write their name on this. Pass around the finished patterns for everyone to look at or hang them up on the wall. This exercise helps people to appreciate themselves and others for who they are, laying a good foundation for working together.



Skilled hand exercise

15 – 25 minutes; 4 – 100 people

Hand out paper and pens. Ask everyone to draw around their hands and to write something they do well into each of the fingers. Split into pairs. Pairs take turns discussing things they do well and how they acquired those skills. This exercise

not only helps people find out more about each other, but also develops people's confidence.



Picture yourself

20 – 40 minutes; 6 – 20 people

Hand out coloured paper and coloured pens. Ask people to draw or paint a picture that expresses who they are. When everyone has finished ask people to pair up and explain their pictures to their partners. The partners then introduce each other to the group using the picture.



A journey of discovery

15 – 30 minutes; any number of people, depending on space

Go outside into a garden or woodland. Form into pairs. One person closes their eyes, the other guides that person by the hand and takes them to discover natural objects with all their senses apart from sight. Swap roles after a set time. Participants need to be very careful not to abuse

the trust placed in them by their partners – it's very pleasant to touch and smell a flower, but not a thistle! This can be quite a lot of fun especially after or in the middle of a long, tiring session, and is excellent for building trust.



Trust circle

10 – 15 minutes; 10 – 20 people per group

Ask the group to form a tight circle facing inwards. One person stands in the centre. They allow themselves to relax, and fall backwards, safe in the knowledge that their team-mates will catch them and then 'bounce' them gently round the circle. The tighter the circle, the less risk of accidents! Allow everyone that wants to have a turn. This can be a lovely, relaxing and enjoyable game that brings groups together, but it obviously carries some risk, and requires everyone to be reasonably able-bodied.



Trust ladder

10 – 20 minutes; 10 – 30 people

Form two parallel lines facing each other, standing close together in all directions. One person volunteers to go first and stands at one end of the parallel lines and fall forward, crowd surfing style. The group lifts them and passes

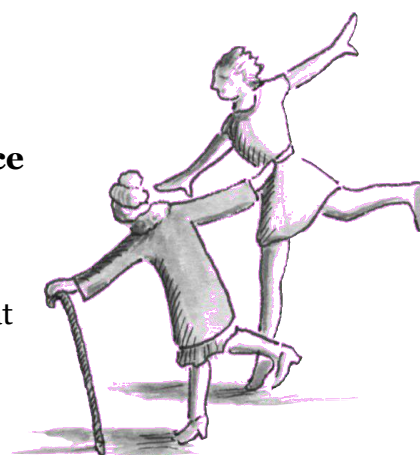
them down their double line, gently depositing them at the end. They then take their place in the ladder and the next volunteer has a go.



Mirroring

5 – 15 minutes; any number of people, depending on space

Split into pairs standing opposite each other. One person makes movements, the other tries to mirror them as well as they can. Swap roles. When both have played both roles, they can try to coordinate movements with each other, so that both become player and mirror at the same time. This works best with slow movements and needs a lot of concentration. Try not to talk while playing.



Tools for encouraging participation and discussion

Many of these techniques will help make discussion a safer space for quieter voices. They can also be used to formally explore group dynamics. Other tools already mentioned, such as group agreements and go-rounds are also excellent participation tools.

Parking space

1 – 2 minutes to set up; any number of people

This makes sure all ideas get recorded and participants don't feel like they've been ignored. Whenever anything comes up that's not relevant to the discussion at hand 'park' it in the parking space (a large sheet of paper on the wall). In other words write it up on the paper and deal with it later. This allows you to stay focussed but reassures participants they will be heard. Of course, if you want to avoid people feeling ignored, make sure you do deal with parked items! Consider having a space reserved on the workshop or meeting agenda to deal with parked items.

Keeping a speakers list

any number of people

A tool that's used in conjunction with handsignals (see *Core facilitation tools* above). It simply involves asking people to raise a finger when they wish to speak, and noting them down

in order. They are then invited to speak in that order. The group will soon become impatient with people that ignore this protocol and just barge in and interrupt.

Talking sticks

any number of people

You can use a stick or a conch shell or almost any other distinctive object. Place the talking stick in the centre of the group. Speakers take it from the centre, say their piece and return it to the middle. Only the person holding the talking stick is permitted to speak (you can set a time limit if necessary). This tool allows people to consider and take their time in voicing their views as they don't have to be afraid that someone else might jump in. It also makes people conscious of when they interrupt others and helps them to break the habit.



Matchstick discussion

any number of people

This can be used to place limits on dominant or over-eager speakers. It also encourages shy speakers to contribute. Each person is given the same number of matches (one to five matches depending on time available.) Every time someone speaks s/he gives up a match. When

someone has used all their matches they may not speak again until everyone else's matches are gone too. Decide beforehand whether people may give their matches to other members of the group.

Tools for tackling difficult issues

Here are some tools that are useful when dealing with difficult issues in the group. The following tools generally benefit from strong facilitation, so do lay down clear rules and don't let discussions get out of hand. Don't feel afraid to stop the process if necessary. If things do get heavy then bear in mind that conflict resolution requires both skill and experience, and shouldn't be done unprepared. It's much better to stop the meeting and seek help from experienced facilitators, such as those at **Activist Mediation Network** – www.activistmediation.org.uk

Controlled dialogue

30 minutes – 1 hour; 3 people per group

This tool is helpful when two people find it difficult to listen to each other and understand each other's concerns. Form a group of three, one observer and two speakers/listeners. There are three phases to this form of dialogue – after a set amount of time or points, the group can go on to the next phase:



1. The listener repeats word for word what the speaker has said. Only then are they allowed to answer.
2. The listener summarises what the speaker has said and then answers.
3. When answering the listener addresses all issues and concerns of the speaker.

The observer makes sure participants stick to the format and helps out if necessary. Particularly in the first and second phase the speaker should concentrate on essential points as listening requires a lot of concentration. You can also use this exercise to practise listening and responding skills in the group.

Sharing withholds

15 – 40 minutes; 5 – 30 people



Withholds are thoughts that we keep to ourselves. They usually have to do with judgements about ourselves, others, or what is happening in the group. For this tool to work there needs to be a climate of generous listening, which may take some time to achieve. It may be helpful if the group commits to putting aside enough time to relax together and do this exercise.



Set up an unstructured round asking people to make statements beginning with: “If I could change one thing in the group it would be...”, “What upsets me about this group is ...”. Do not allow anyone to respond to the withholds or start a discussion. Make sure that everyone has a say – it is highly

unlikely that someone is completely happy with a group. At the end of the round, see if any themes have emerged and if anyone wants their issue discussed.

Feelings meeting

30 minutes – 2 hours; 3 – 30 people

Similar to sharing withholds. A meeting which is solely concerned with feelings. Many groups hold regular feelings meetings to catch any problems early. Participants do not have to deal with decisions and actions. Such meetings allow the group to involve and support members as whole people and to resolve concerns, problems and conflicts before they become too serious. It helps to use tools such as talking sticks or go-rounds to encourage active listening. Encourage people to use “I...” statements instead of

speaking for other people too.

Begin by asking people about where they are at in their lives outside the group. This will give a context for everyone's reactions when you

come on to issues within the group. Listen for what is not being said. Some people and groups find it hard to admit to negative feelings and tiptoe around conflicts. Create a safe enough space so that people feel able to open up.



Reverse role plays

30 minutes – 1 hour; 6 – 30 people



A tool to allow people to understand both sides of a conflict. They can help people entrenched in one position to think more flexibly. They are useful for examining a critical incident that occurs repeatedly or is expected to occur and for developing a definition of acceptable behaviour (e.g. conflicts over power, sexism, ageism etc.).

Set up a situation involving two sides. At an important point in the role play, have everyone freeze. Ask people to take the opposite role and take up the conversation where it left off. The facilitator may have to help people remember what the last lines of the dialogue were. It can help if the facilitator physically moves people to their new positions and says “You are now X, and you are now Y”. Give people a moment to mentally shift to their new identities and resume the role play. Follow the role play with an evaluation.

Quick and easy prioritisation tools

There are several quick and easy methods to gauge group opinion, so that you can rapidly drop unpopular ideas....

Show of hands

2 – 5 minutes; any number of people

Obvious but effective. Run through your list or agenda and get a preliminary show of hands on how important each item is to the group. Those options that have less support are good candidates for being quickly scrapped. Remember to check with the people that made a

suggestion before scrapping it – it’s best to avoid upsetting them for the rest of the meeting. It’s also possible that an idea that’s not popular at first glance can become the favourite on closer examination.

Fist To five

5 – 10 minutes; any number of people

A more complex version of the show of hands. Group members stick up:

- ✓ **Five fingers** for strong support and a willingness to lead the proposal forward.
- ✓ **Four fingers** for strong support, and a willingness to work on it.
- ✓ **Three fingers** for minimal support, but a willingness to work for it.
- ✓ **Two fingers** for neutrality.
- ✓ **One finger** for no support.
- ✓ **Fist** for no support and active opposition.

Thumbs spectrum

3 – 5 minutes; any number of people

Another simple visual tool. Ask everyone to stand and imagine a vertical axis with support for an idea at the top and no support at the bottom. Get them to stick out their thumb and raise it along the imaginary axis for support (the higher the

thumb the more support) or lower it for opposition (the lower the thumb the more opposition). If all the thumbs are up, you know the group likes the idea. If all of them are on the floor, it’s not going to work!

Stickers and dots

5 – 10 minutes; up to 50 people

You can achieve the same effect by giving everyone a number of stickers or dots (1–6 usually works).

Write up a list of the ideas. Ask people to stick their stickers or make their dots by the item(s) that they consider to be most important for the group to deal with. If you give multiple dots or stickers, people have the choice of ‘spending’ them all on one item that they feel is really important/urgent, or spreading them across a number of options.

More detailed prioritisation and planning tools

Ranking

10 – 20 minutes; 5 – 20 people

This is a great technique for using in small groups. Write each option on a card or post-it note and give each group a full set of cards/notes. Set a time limit and ask the groups to rank the options, or reduce the options to, say, three. Having a facilitator in each small group will help. It’s also helpful to set out clear criteria at the start – for example:

“You’ve got 15 minutes. We’re looking for options that need to be done most urgently, are most important, and yet realistic within our budget. Also we’ve only got a week to make it happen, so please think about what we can realistically achieve in the time available.”



2, 4, 8 consensus

1 – 3 hours; 8 – 40 people

This exercise will take time, but will help a group reach a decision that everyone can live with! Probably not one you’d use every meeting, but useful for the really important discussions. It’s usually best to impose tight time limits at every stage of this discussion or it can take ages!

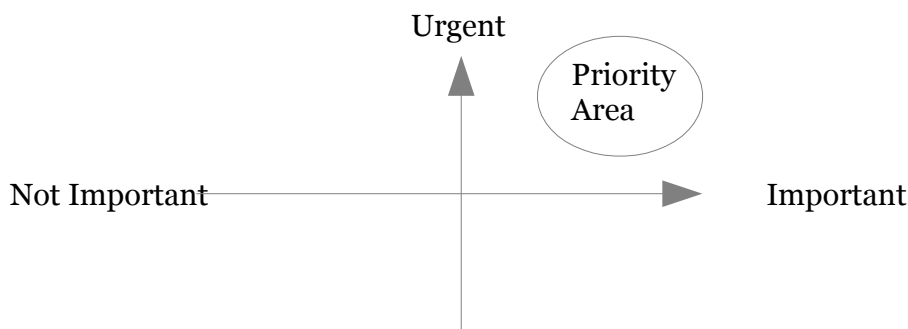
1. Start in Pairs. Each pair discusses the list of options and is asked to agree their top three priorities.
2. Each pair then comes together with another to form a group of four. The two pairs compare their lists of top three priorities and agree on a joint top three.
3. Each group of four comes together with another to form a group of eight. Again, each group takes its two lists of priorities and reduces it to an agreed top three.
4. Repeat until the whole group has come back together. Hopefully three clear priorities have emerged. In the worst case scenario the group has six top priorities and may need to reduce it still further through facilitated discussion or another prioritisation tool.



Urgent/Important grid

10 – 20 minutes; 3 – 50 people

A classic time-management tool that can be applied to group prioritisation! You can use this tool on paper, or as a ‘Spectrum Line’. The group ranks ideas according to their urgency and importance:

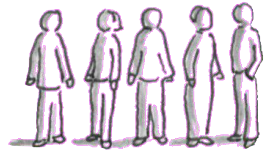


Six thinking hats

30 minutes – 1 hour; 5 – 20 people per group

This tool encourages a group to look at a situation from a new angle. Each 'hat' represents a different way of looking at something. There are a number of ways to do this exercise. For example, individuals within the group can wear different hats whilst the group discuss an issue. Another alternative is that everyone in the group can try on one of the 'thinking hats' for a while, then everyone can put on another one. As

facilitator you may want to think about the order in which the group wear the different 'thinking hats'. Below is one possible order for a creative problem solving process. The roles the 'hats' bring give you a chance to thoroughly examine every option and to prioritise or choose the best one(s).



- ✓ **White hat:** White hatted people concentrate on the facts – what information and knowledge do you know about the situation? What can you learn about the situation from this information? What info is missing? Can you plug the gap? If not can you take it into account when discussing the situation? What can you learn from past trends?
- ✓ **Green hat:** Green hat people think creatively in a no-criticism, freeform thinking kind of way.
- ✓ **Red hat:** Red hats are the emotional input of the discussion. They allow themselves to be intuitive and act as much on hunches as fact. They are sensitive to the emotional responses of others in the group.
- ✓ **Black hat:** Black hats live under a black cloud! They should think pessimistically. Look for the flaws in the plan, find the obstacles!
- ✓ **Yellow hat:** Yellow hats bask in sunlight – they should think positively looking for the value in every possibility. What benefits does it bring?
- ✓ **Blue hat:** The blue hat is worn by the facilitator(s). They concentrate on process, calling on the other hats to add in their thinking as and when it's appropriate and making sure that each option is scrutinised from all perspectives. They are neutral, helping the group achieve it's task without trying to shape the decision.



This tool actively seeks out the optimistic analysis, the pessimistic analysis etc., so every idea is thoroughly tested and when the decision is made, it's made on the basis of a creative and thorough process.

Pros & cons

15 – 30 minutes; 3 – 20 people per group

Got several ideas and can't decide which one to go for? Simply list the benefits and drawbacks of each idea and compare the results. This can be

done as a full group, or by asking pairs, or small groups to work on the pros and cons of one option and report back to the group.



Plus-minus-implications

15 – 30 minutes; 3 – 20 people per group

A variation of the simple 'pros & cons' technique. It will help you decide between a number of options by examining them one by one.

Create a simple table with three columns titled Plus, Minus, and Implications. In the Plus column write down the positive consequences of the option. In the Minus column write any negative consequences of the action, and in the Implications column write down other possible implications whether good or bad



If this doesn't make the top priorities or decision clear for you, you can extend the process by putting a score against each plus point, minus point or implications point depending on how strongly you feel about that point. Then add up the columns and see what the result is. If the Plus column scores highest the option is good. If the Minus column scores well, don't go with this option and so on.

Diamond ranking

10 – 20 minutes; 5 – 20 people



A variation of the general card sorting tool. The group takes its 9 top ideas and sort them into a diamond shape (see below)

1: most support	1	
2–3: next best ideas	2	3
4–6: other possibilities	4	5 6
7–8: little support	7	8
9: weakest idea	9	

Tools for waking up, warming up and winding down

When people stop concentrating or become irritable in a meeting, this could simply be because they've been sitting and listening for too long. A stretch or a game can re-energise people. Games can change the atmosphere in other ways – from lifting the spirits in the group to creating a quieter, more contemplative mood. Be sensitive to the group and individual members – the idea is to relax people, not to make them feel embarrassed or isolated. Don't coerce people into playing games. If people don't feel like playing, they could get themselves a cup of tea or go to the toilet. Also remember mobility issues. Sometimes a simple break or a stretch works just as well.



Facilitating prioritisation tools - a word of warning

It's easy to deviate from your process and get bogged down in endless discussion. What starts as an attempt to briefly list the pros and cons of each option can easily be diverted into a full scale hour long discussion on just the first option. Be wary of this, and stick to your chosen process. Only if the process itself is clearly not working should you abandon it and go for another!

Prioritisation, by definition, involves choosing some ideas over others. This means that throughout your prioritisation exercise you'll be discarding ideas. There are 2 possible pitfalls that you can easily avoid:

- ✓ The first is throwing away an idea too early, deciding later that you were too hasty, but not having written it down anywhere. So always note down ideas and keep hold of the notes until the decision is finally made. If new ideas arise, put them in the parking space
- ✓ Secondly, people are usually more attached to the ideas that they thought of, so if you're facilitating, be wary of throwing ideas away too lightly and offending people. It can help to remind the group regularly that you're looking for ideas that are best for the group as a whole. You can also ask permission to discard ideas, and thank people for being willing to put aside their personal preferences.

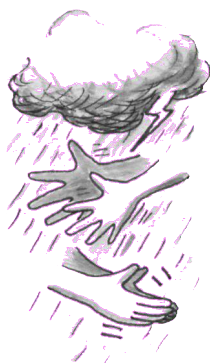
Rain making

5 minutes; 1–100 people

This is a lovely co-operative game that always brings a group together and lights up people's faces! Ask everyone to gather around you in a tight semi-circle, several people deep. Divide the

semi-circle into three groups. Explain that you're all going to create a rainstorm by making four simple sounds in a round. The sounds are as follows...

- ✓ Drizzle – gently rub your palms together to produce a whispering sound.
- ✓ Light rain – move your hands up and down in opposite directions, with the palms brushing against each other, as if you are brushing sand off the palms.
- ✓ Heavy rain – clap your hands together.
- ✓ Hail – cup your palms and clap them against your thighs.



Start off group one on making drizzle. Once that's under way turn and signal to group two to start with drizzle, then group three. Turn back to group 1 and get them to start light rain whilst the other maintain their drizzle, then turn to group two and do the same, then group three. Keep the round alive until all segments are making hail. Then work backwards so that group one stop hailing and make heavy rain, then two, then three, until you work back through light rain to drizzle and then silence!

Green trousers game

10 minutes; 5 – 20 people

Form a circle and take one seat away. One person stands in the middle and calls out something like "Everyone with green trousers". Everyone with green trousers then jumps up and runs to a seat vacated by someone else. The person left without a seat remains in the middle to call out something else.



Knot game

10 minutes; 10 – 20 people

Stand in a circle, close your eyes. Walk towards the centre of the circle with outstretched hands. Find another hand for each of yours. Then open your eyes. Unravel the knot without opening hands.

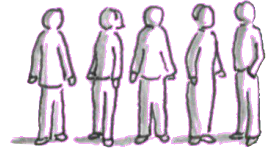
Involves getting physically close to others, stretching, laughing and problem solving. Make two simultaneous groups if there is a large number of people.



Animal sounds

5 minutes; 10 – 50 people

Participants are blindfolded and assigned an animal. The challenge is to use animal noises in order to meet up with other animals of same species. Aim to have at least three animals of each species. Releases energy. Loud, fun, chaotic, then gradually order and unity.



Wizards, pixies, giants

10 minutes; 10 – 100 people

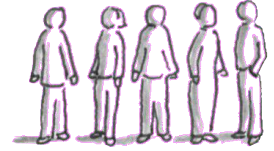
A very physical team version of 'Rock, Paper, Scissors!'. Sort the group into two teams and explain that each team has to choose one of three options – Wizards, Pixies, or Giants. Demonstrate the action for each choice. Wizards step forward and use their arms to 'zap' their opponents (and of course say "Zap!" as they do so). Pixies bend down low and scurry around in circles quickly whilst chattering to themselves in high-pitched gibberish.

Here's how to score:

- Wizards 'zap' all known Pixies and they fall asleep.
- Pixies scurry round giants legs distracting them.
- Giants overpower wizards by stomping around them.

Play enough rounds for a clear winner to emerge, or until laughing begins to hurt. One variation sees the winning team chase the losers. Any losers that are touched before they get to the safety of their starting point join the winning team. The game is won when one team captures all of the other.

Giants step forward and raise themselves to their full height (arms stretched above their heads, hands clawed) and they roar. Obviously. Now get the teams to huddle together and give them a minute or two to agree their choice. Then they stand facing each other across the room, and on your count of "One...Two..." they take two steps forward. On the count of "Three..." they do their thing, be it wizardly, pixie like or gigantic.

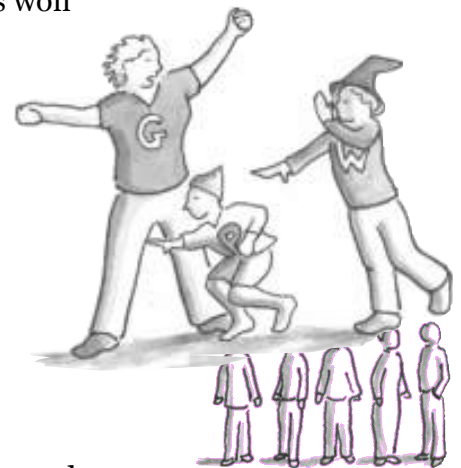


Count to ten

10 minutes; 5 – 20 people

An excellent game for focusing people and getting them to work together. It creates laughter and energy without being physical. Because it's not a physical game it's more suitable for less mobile groups. With everyone sitting or standing in a circle, explain that they have to count upwards – set a target (usually 10) if you like. There are a few complications though. Only one person can say any one number. If at any stage two or more people speak simultaneously the group have to go back to 1 and start again. Nor can the same person say more than one number in succession. It's

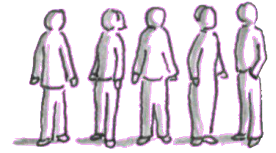
possible that some clever so and so will attempt to co-ordinate the group with hand gestures or nods, or even by speaking so that they count around the circle. Discourage this. The point is to enjoy the challenge, not necessarily get to 10. If the group succeeds too easily, try the whole thing again with a twist. Either get them to count to 20, or ask them to shut their eyes, or turn their backs, or lie down, or any other cunning mechanism that prevents them from seeing each other!



Body part twister

5 minutes; 5 – 20 people

Great for getting people working together and energised, it is physical and needs people to be comfortable leaning on each other. Call out different body parts, these are the only parts of the body the whole group can have touching the floor. Encourage people to work together to find a solution and balance on each other if they need to. For example, to a group of nine people you could call out four bums, two feet, one head, two hands, four knees. Call out the next set of instructions as soon as everyone is in position. Think before you call out combinations or you could call out something that is physically or numerically impossible!



Eye-catching

5 minutes; 10 – 20 people

Ask the group to stand or sit in a circle. People look at ground, then on "Heads up" look into someone else's eyes at some point around the circle. If two people are looking at each other, they must swap places with each other. If anyone

moves and no one is looking at them or they sit in the seat of someone who hasn't been looking at them, they are out.



Who am I?

15 minutes; 5 – 10 people

Ask everyone to think of someone they admire who they could answer questions about, they should be known to most of the group. Keep it a secret. The group asks one person at a time questions about the person they admire until they guess it. The group gets three goes to guess the identity, if they don't get it in three attempts that person wins.



Tools for evaluating meetings and workshops

Evaluation allows us to learn from our experiences. It should be a regular part of our workshops as it give us the chance for honest feedback on the process and content of the event, allowing us to improve in the future. Everyone who participated in an event should be encouraged to take part in its evaluation. Bear in mind that there will be differences of opinion and that it is not necessary for the group to come to agreement on the matter. It is important to point out what was successful as well as what could have gone better. Begin with positive evaluations wherever possible. The structure of the evaluation should be planned carefully – how will you draw out what type of information? Keep evaluations of the process and of the content of the events separate.

Below are some possibilities:

- Have a round where everyone sums up their feelings or ask everyone to write down comments on a large piece of paper.
- Ask everyone to call out two or three high and low points of the workshop.
- Draw up an evaluation questionnaire and distribute it amongst the participants for filling in.
- Ask “What are you taking away from this session?” This rapid review can help people notice what they have learned.
- At the beginning, ask people to write their hopes and fears for the workshop or meeting on post-it notes and stick them on the wall. At the end ask them to take down any hopes that have been fulfilled and fears that have been dealt with or proved unfounded.
- List the expectations that were gathered at the beginning of the meeting. To what extent were they satisfied or changed as the event progressed? Do the same with goals.
- Use a graph on a large piece of paper representing the entire workshop. Each participant, using a different coloured pen, crayon or chalk, draws a line from one end to the other, drawing it above or below a central line depending on how much s/he has enjoyed/gained from the session.

