

Be creative and adaptive. Different situations require different techniques. With experience will come an understanding of how they affect group dynamics and when is the best time to use them.

Equalizing Participation: Facilitators most often distribute attention during meetings by recognizing each person in the order in which hands are raised. Often, inequities occur because the attention is dominated by an individual or a class of individuals. This can occur because of socialized behavioral problems such as racism, sexism, or internal dynamics such as experience, seniority, fear, shyness, disrespect, ignorance of the process, etc. Inequities can be corrected in many creative ways: For example, if men are speaking more often than women, the facilitator can suggest a pause after each speaker, facilitator can ask if those who haven't spoken yet or who have spoken less if they would like to share. If the group would like to avoid having the facilitator select who speaks next, the group can self-select by asking the last speaker to select the next. Another technique, particularly useful when individuals are dominating conversation, is to give everyone three paperclips (or candies or slips of paper, etc) and for each contribution they make to the conversation, they return one. Once someone is out of paperclips, they may not speak again until everyone is out of clips.

Listing: Those who wish to speak can silently signal the facilitator, and the facilitator will keep a list of who speaks next or may appoint someone else to keep a list or "stack."

Stacking: If many people want to speak, the facilitator asks for all those who want to speak to raise their hands. Have them count off, and then speak in that order.

Silence: If the pace is too fast, if energies and tensions are high, if people are speaking out of turn or interrupting one another, it is appropriate for anyone to suggest a moment of silence to calm and refocus energy.

Fishbowl: The fishbowl is an opportunity for people to "listen in" but not participate in a discussion. This allows participants to discuss otherwise difficult and sometimes uncomfortable issues in a safe and non-confrontational forum. There are two ways in which a fishbowl can be done. One is to have several members representing different points of view meet in an inner circle to discuss the issue, while everyone else forms an outer circle and listens. At the end of a predetermined time, the whole group reconvenes and evaluates the fishbowl discussion. Another method is to divide a group by position or identity (youth and adult, for example), and have each group go into separate rooms and write questions they want to ask the other group. Then one group begins as the center group, answering the questions they were given while the other is silent and listens, and after a set time they switch roles. Again, the whole group should then reconvene and evaluate.

Summarizing: This can be done by the facilitator, the note taker, or anyone else appropriate. This preempts a common problem, in which the discussion becomes circular, and one after another, speakers repeat each other.

Covenant Review: Taking time to review the agreements you have all made to each other may be needed at times, particularly if a conversation has become tense or if you as the facilitator feel like the group is not abiding by the covenant they have set.

Polling (Straw Polls): Useful for clarification of the relative importance of several issues. It is especially use when the facilitator is uncertain about the status of a proposal. Polls are **not** decisions. All too often, straw polls are used when issues are completely clear and a majority wants to intimidate a minority into submission. Clear and simple questions are best, with three or fewer choices. Use with discretion.

Finger polling: A technique to see where the group is at in its movement toward consensus. A question is asked and people hold up their hands with different numbers of fingers to indicate how close they are to resolving concerns.

1 finger – I am ready to support this proposal and have no concerns.

2 fingers – I am ready to support this proposal. I have concerns, but they don't need to be resolved for me to support this proposal.

3 fingers – I will support this proposal, but I have minor concerns that need to be resolved before I can fully support it.

4 fingers – I have major concerns that will need to be addressed before I can support this.

5 fingers – I have a principle objection to this proposal which I believe is one the group should consider, to see if this proposal fits the group purpose.

Whole group: A group idea is not simply the sum of individual ideas, but the result of interaction of ideas during discussion. It is important to know that whole group discussion does not necessarily produce maximum participation or diversity of ideas. Fewer people may get to speak, and the attitude of a group can be dominated by an idea, a mood, or a handful of people.

Small Group: Small groups can vary in size and can be self-selected or selected randomly. Using small groups can allow all participants to share their point of view in a short amount of time. Be sure to have clear time limits and a note taker for each group. When the larger group reconvenes, the note takers report back (and can be asked to not repeat, lowering the amount of report back time). It is a good idea to have these combined ideas listed together for all to see.

Brainstorming: In brainstorming, all group members call out ideas, which are recorded for all to see. Suggestions can be used as catalysts, with ideas building one upon the next, generating very creative possibilities. Avoid evaluating during brainstorming.

Go-rounds: This can allow voices who have not been heard to have time to express their opinions. The facilitator asks a specific question and then each person answers briefly in turn, not criticizing each other's responses, but expressing ideas or opinions directly in response to the question.

Caucusing: Caucuses are either composed of people with similar viewpoints or with similar identities. Caucuses are useful if the issue to be discussed impacts (or could impact) a particular community, or if the group is strongly divided on the issue. Caucuses allow people to discuss issues away from the larger group in a safe space without debate from the other group(s). The group reconvenes after caucusing to discuss the issues brought up in caucuses.

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