

Facilitation: 10 useful ideas

- Rounds: each person gets a chance to speak or to answer a question. Frame the question carefully to get the best results.
- Small groups: break up into small groups to discuss different issues or just to hear people's ideas in more detail.
- Pairs: an opportunity for people to listen to one another in some depth and with more safety than a larger group usually allows. Especially useful if people need to talk about how they are *feeling*.
- Breaks. Stretch and yawn breaks, getting your thoughts in order breaks, breaking the mood breaks. Even short silences can be useful.
- Energy watcher: someone whose task in the meeting is to watch the energy and mood level and decide when a break, game, or other activity would make a difference.
- Time limits: on single agenda items or whole meetings. They focus the mind and counteract the idea that 'we will be here forever!'
- Co-facilitation: organise two people to facilitate half the meeting each or simply to provide resources and support for the one who is facilitating, who can then ask questions if s/he gets stuck—especially good for apprentice facilitators. People need to learn how to do their job well, not just be thrown in at 'the deep end'.
- Explicit agreements: it is very useful to be explicit about what we expect of one another, whether that is to speak without interruption, to be treated with respect, or to arrive on time.
- Listening partnerships: ask someone to listen to you talk through your plans and concerns before the meeting, and then to listen to you about what you did well and what you would like to have done better afterwards. Ask them to agree not to give you advice and to give you only constructive feedback, and even then only if you ask for it. Most of us are criticising ourselves enough already, we don't need help!
- Records: a clear agenda worked out before the meeting and brief notes of key decisions and the people who agreed to carry them out will prevent needless repetition and forgetfulness preventing the task at hand from getting done. A contact list of those involved will help people make contact with one another between meetings too.