

Community Assemblies - a Quick Start guide!

Hand Signals

Assemblies maintain inclusivity and ensure all voices are heard equally by using hand signals to facilitate the discussion.

Point (or 'I would like to speak')



When someone in the group wants to say something, they should point their index finger up and wait for the facilitator to let them have their turn in speaking. It is vital that people do not talk over anyone else and wait for their turn. If someone, who has not yet said anything, puts their finger up to speak, whilst others have spoken a lot, then the facilitator should give that person priority over the 'stack' (the queue or order of speakers based on the order they raised their finger to speak).

Online consideration: If people do not have their video turned on, they can type STACK in the chat or use the raised hand in the participants' panel, or say 'stack' for their name to be stacked.

Wavy Hands (I Agree)



The 'wavy hands' signal of approval is used to show agreement or support for something someone has said. If everybody erupts into a forest of waving hands during a breakout session, for example, the note-taker can see that this is one of the more popular points made and it will become one of the key bullet points fed back to the main meeting room.

Online consideration: If people do not have their video turned on, they can use the 'clapping hands' icon under 'more' in the participants' panel, or write 'AGREE' in the chat.

Clarification



If someone says something that is unclear, people can hold their hand in a 'C' shape as the 'clarification' signal. The facilitator will then pause the discussion giving the person who made the signal the opportunity to ask a question to clear up any confusion.

Online consideration: If people do not have their video turned on, they can write 'Clarification' in the chat, or unmute and say 'Clarification' and their name.

Speak up



If someone is speaking too quietly or they cannot be heard, others can ask them to raise their voice by raising and lowering their hands with palms open and facing up.

Online consideration: If people do not have their video turned on, they can write 'Speak Up' in the chat, or unmute and say 'speak up' or use the 'thumbs up' icon in the participants panel. If using this second option you will need to explain to the whole assembly what the thumbs up icon means so they know to increase their volume if speaking.

Direct Point



If someone has directly relevant information to what is being said, then they can make the 'direct point' hand signal and the facilitator will let them provide that information immediately after the person speaking has finished. The direct point signal is not an excuse to jump the queue just to make a point. It is important that people do not abuse this signal as otherwise it can make all

present lose trust in the process.

Online consideration: If people do not have their video turned on, they can write Direct Point or DP in the chat, or unmute and say 'Direct Point' and their name.

Technical point



If someone has information that is immediately relevant to the running of the meeting, they make a 'technical point' signal by making a 'T' shape with their hands. This is only to be used for concerns external to the discussion that need to be addressed immediately e.g. "We only have ten minutes left" or "I am the note taker and I need the loo so can someone else take over?" The facilitator should stop the discussion to address the technical point.

Online consideration: If people do not have their video turned on, they can write Technical Point or TP in the chat, or unmute and say 'Technical Point' and their name.

Round Up



Facilitators need to ensure that no one speaks for more than necessary (two minutes is a suggested maximum amount of time as it encourages people to be concise). If someone has been speaking for two minutes (or whatever the set amount of time is), the facilitator makes the 'round up' hand signal by repeatedly making a circular motion with their hands (as if they are tracing a ball). This must be done sensitively, but firmly as it ensures that no one person dominates the meeting.

Online consideration: If people do not have their video turned on, they can use the 'time' icon under 'more' in the participants panel.

Speak up



If someone is speaking too quietly or they cannot be heard, others can ask them to raise their voice by raising and lowering their hands with palms open and facing up.

Online consideration: If people do not have their video turned on, they can write 'Speak Up' in the chat, or unmute and say 'speak up' or use the 'thumbs up' icon in the participants panel. If

using this second option you will need to explain to the whole assembly what the thumbs up icon means so they know to increase their volume if speaking.

Temperature check

Jiggle the fingers on the palms of both hands at a level that corresponds with feelings. If hands are pointed upwards and jiggled, this suggests support. If they are held horizontally, this suggests people are ambivalent, and if they are pointed downwards, then this suggests that people do not support something. A temperature check can be used to quickly check the feelings of the group.

Roles

Each assembly needs:

Lead Facilitator (Ideally two with a gender balance)

- They are responsible for the overall running of assembly, timekeeping, and the delivery of all relevant information.
- They facilitate the discussion using hand signals, ensure no one dominates, keep an eye on the time, maintain radical inclusivity and active listening, and adhere to the 'Inclusivity Statement'.

Assembly Notetaker

They are responsible for recording the results of the feedback/integration phase of the assembly and for feeding the assembly results into wherever they are destined to go. They might, for example, need to send them to the local Council to demand action, or feed them into an online organising platform. The destination of what is generated in assembly needs to be clearly defined before the start.

Each breakout group needs:

Facilitator

They facilitate the discussion using hand signals, ensure no one dominates, keep an eye on the time, maintain radical inclusivity and active listening and adhere to the 'Inclusivity Statement'.

Notetaker

They summarise the most popular points, ideally as bullet points, aiming to boil them down to 2-5 key points or ideas from the discussion. They look for wavy hands to record agreement.

Structure

There are three main phases of a community assembly, these are the input phase, the deliberation phase, and the integration/feedback phase.

Input Phase

This phase can be broken down further into the introduction and input, the latter of which can be of varying lengths according to the purpose of the Assembly.

Ideally, the input phase should be around 30 mins in total. However, if a speaker is attending or it is important for those present to learn about a subject, then the input phase may take longer.

Introduction

1. Start on time.
2. Lead facilitators introduce and explain the hand signals, so that they can be used throughout all parts of the assembly.
3. They then introduce the assembly agenda, including where the results of this assembly will go.
4. They then talk through the three pillars (radical inclusivity, active listening and trust) and ask for help from the crowd to remove any barriers to engagement that may be identified, before reading out the Inclusivity Statement:

“We value all voices equally in the assembly, as the aim is to hear the wisdom of the crowd gathered here and not to have the assembly dominated by individual voices or groups. We recognise that confident speakers are not always right and that those who are not confident speakers will often have the most useful ideas or opinions to put into the discussion. This is why we value all voices equally and we ask you to do the same. We do not tolerate any calling out, abuse or shaming and should conflicts arise in this way. We welcome all people but not all behaviours.”

Input

This can be as simple as the lead facilitators framing the question for discussion and explaining why the assembly has been convened.

Or it can involve a longer and more in-depth input section such as a live panel of experts, or a video input.

The Input should be balanced and factual – if research is being done to provide context, consider how you will keep it impartial.

A badly planned input can skew a deliberation and deliver unwise answers.

Testify

Invite people to take the microphone for two minutes maximum and share their feelings about what has brought them to join the assembly or action that day.

In an open public assembly, this section can be drawn out as long as people volunteer to speak.

It opens the space for people to connect emotionally, but be careful to ensure it is not used as a 'soap box' on the issues about to be discussed.

Ideally ask for a woman to speak on the microphone first (It has been shown that this will greatly increase the level of engagement of female participants. The rate of engagement and uptake for males isn't affected in the same way), and allow as much dead air as is necessary for people to build up the courage to come and talk.

Be strict with timing but ensure that the people speaking are supported and made completely safe in their sharing.

Ideally work with two facilitators so that one facilitator 'guards' mic and keeps stack, whilst one sits in front of the speaker with timer and gives 'round up' hand signal as they approach 2 mins.

Deliberation Phase

Main Deliberation

- Before people go into groups a lead facilitator clarifies the discussion topic or question, including making clear how many points are to be fed back from each 'breakout group' (usually 3-5 points depending on the size of the assembly – the larger the assembly, the fewer the points).
- Lead Facilitators then divide the assembly into 'breakout groups', ideally of eight. Facilitators need to try and ensure this is roughly the size of each group and encourage people to sit in groups with people they don't already know.
- Each breakout group has one facilitator and one notetaker as explained above.
- Clarify the duration of the deliberation (discussion in breakout groups) phase, and stick to timings throughout the assembly as many people who are attending have work or family responsibilities that have to be respected.
- A deliberation phase should last around 30 minutes (5 minutes can be allocated to introducing the phase, and groups should have 25 minutes to discuss their ideas).
- Recap the hand signals before putting groups in breakout groups.

Breakout Groups

In the breakout groups, it is good practice for the facilitator to restate the discussion topic or question and for the note taker to write it down. This enables people in the group to refer back to the original point for discussion to make sure the group stays focused and on subject.

It is also good to start by going around the group and stating names, and making space for anyone to highlight any barriers to engagement that they may have that the small group can work together to try to work around.

The breakout groups will have a set amount of time to discuss the topic, as outlined by the lead assembly facilitators beforehand – a good amount of time is 25 mins.

10 minutes before the end of the deliberation phase, the lead facilitators should notify the breakout groups that they have ten minutes left, and should request that the breakout group note takers feed back their summary of the discussion to their groups, so that they can identify which key points they will be feeding back to the main discussion. It is also a good idea for the lead facilitators to remind the breakout groups how many points they will be feeding back.

Integration Phase

Feeding Back

- The lead facilitator calls the breakout group note takers to the front of the assembly (they should ask the name of each note taker before they feedback so that they can thank them at the end).
- The lead facilitator should request that as the note takers feedback their key points, the crowds use wavy hands to signal their support for the points raised.
- Each note taker then feeds back the key points as the main assembly note taker records the points as they are fed back, noting down which ones get the most approval from the entire assembly. It's nice to do this on a whiteboard or a large piece of paper so that the assembly participants can see it.
- The assembly note taker then feeds results of the assembly to wherever they are destined to go (e.g. sending them to the local council to demand action, or posting them on a community online organising platform etc.). This destination is determined prior to the assembly and will have formed part of the framing of the process in the Input phase.

Finishing Up

- The lead facilitators express gratitude for the breakout group facilitators and note-takers, and for everyone who participated.
 - If there is a need to vote on the results of the assembly, you can do a 'Temperature Check'. The lead facilitators read out the different options to be voted on and the members of the assembly cast their 'vote' using 'wavy hands' for the option they like the best. The assembly note taker and lead facilitators watch for the most wavy hands and that gets taken forward.
 - 'Shout Outs' are an invitation for those gathered to call out brief notifications such as upcoming actions or events. These should be short and arranged with the facilitators beforehand if possible. This should take no more than 10 minutes.
 - The lead facilitator summarises the results of the assembly if necessary, and thanks everyone for participating.
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