

Structure of a Community Assembly

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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