Community Assembly Facilitation Guide

How to facilitate and moderate a Community Assembly. This is a summary of facilitating an assembly and a guide for assembly facilitators. It offers a flexible running order of the Community Assembly for the main facilitator to schedule the different elements of the three stages of the process and help breakout group facilitators to see where their support fits into that process.

- Roles
- Hand Signals
- Main Facilitator
- Breakout Group Facilitators
- Dealing with Difficult Interactions

Roles

Each assembly needs:

Main Facilitator (Ideally two with a gender balance)

- Sometimes called Lead Facilitator.
- 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.

Online Roles

Ideally for an online Community Assembly, some of the facilitation team would focus on the technical side. **Technical Facilitator(s)** are responsible for managing breakout rooms, muting people, monitoring chat questions, etc. They may also manage tools, such as Slido, or other digital support platforms. While it isn't essential, this role helps the group facilitator focus on discussion and deliberation.

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 ‘Clarify’ in the chat, or unmute and say ‘Clarify' 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.

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.

Main Facilitator

Input Phase

What do you need to mention as the Main Facilitator in the Input Phase?

- Welcome everyone. Introduce yourself with a sentence or two.
- Tell participants what this event is, i.e. a Community Assembly to “hear your voice on the question of …. ?”
- Ask if anyone has any accessibility needs that can be met now or throughout the assembly process and tell people that if they would rather share these privately, they can speak to any of the volunteers. Ask all the volunteers to raise their hands.
- Housekeeping:
  - Toilets and fire exits
  - hearing loop or other accessibility issues
  - check if objections to photos or video
- Speak about the Agenda of the day including timings; ideally have this visible to participants either via material on the tables, or on flip chart sheet somewhere easily seen. Check if planned breaks might not work for any participants and offer chance to share needs privately
- Introduce the assembly team and in a sentence describe their roles.
- If you do not have enough note-takers, prepare the attendees for stepping forward or using post it notes. Inform tables that they will be asked to find a volunteer to take notes for their break out groups and the group facilitators will support that process, or that people will be limited in terms of the number of sticky note ideas they can offer, so that no voice dominates.
- Go through hand signals
  - Want to speak
  - Temperature check
  - Speak up
  - Round up
- Explain the three pillars:

> **Active Listening**
>
> Active listening is focusing on hearing someone all the way through to when they finish, before responding. It is also about overcoming our urge to start figuring out our response in our own mind whilst someone is still talking.

> Sometimes listening actively leads to shifts in our own focus. Assemblies recognise that no one person or group holds all the answers. It is through the **collective wisdom** of the crowd that we gain powerful intelligence about the issues being discussed. Active listening is also vital to enhance our capacity to empathise.

> **Trust the Process**
>
> Once the system and process for assemblies has been agreed on, it is essential that all participants be invited to trust the process, the facilitators and to trust the various working groups involved. Facilitators and assembly teams enable this trust, through sticking to the agreed process and ensuring that everyone follows the facilitators.

> **Radical inclusivity**
>
> Effective assemblies achieve radical inclusivity, where the emphasis is explicitly put on all being heard and valued equally. Explain that this means no voices dominate, so the **collective wisdom** of the assembly is harnessed. People can participate safely and openly without fear of judgement or ridicule. Radical inclusivity, therefore, also means being aware of potential barriers to engagement and working with those affected to enable their participation. For instance, those not comfortable speaking in groups may wish to make a note on a sticky note / piece of paper / draw their thoughts. Dominant voices will have the same time limits on sharing as those who are quieter. Sometimes the quieter voices have more valuable inputs.

- Read **Inclusivity Statement**:

> “We value all voices equally in the assembly, as our 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. We welcome all people but not all behaviours.”

- Get the participants to agree with this set of guidelines with show of wavy hands

- Tell participants where the results of this assembly will be going, or if there is going to be a follow up event/working group / assembly
- Ask if there are any open questions so far
- Let experts speak and hear testimonials

Deliberation Phase

What do you need to do as the Main Facilitator in Deliberation Phase?

- Set up the groups – 8-10 (max) people in each group
- Repeat the assembly question to every one. Ideally, have it visible on a flip chart or screen for everyone or on paper at each table; point this out
- Make sure every break out group has a facilitator and note taker
- Keep an eye on the time or designate someone to time-keep
- Tell the break out groups ten minutes before when it is time to wrap up and decide on (eg three) key points to feed back to the whole assembly in the integration phase

Integration Phase

What to do as the Main Facilitator in the Integration Phase?

- Ask a presenter from each group to read out their 3 statements / recommendations / asks. The main Note-taker / Facilitator will write on a flip chart visible to everyone
- Check for **clarifications** needed from participants. NB NOT comments. If there is a need to vote on results of the assembly, Lead Facilitator takes a ‘Temperature Check’; they read out the different options to be voted on so the assembly can 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; that point gets taken forward. Each person has three votes
- The lead facilitator summarises the main results of the assembly. They then remind people of next steps again, e.g. results be sent out via email, to whom, any next assembly plans, creation of working groups. If flip chart papers have been used to gather ideas on each table, photograph these and inform participants they will be shared on social channels.
- Express gratitude for the breakout group facilitators and note-takers, and for everyone who participated.
- ‘Shout Outs’ are an open invitation for all gathered to call out brief notifications, such as upcoming actions or events. These should be short and arranged with the facilitators beforehand if possible. Allow no more than 10 minutes.

Breakout Group Facilitators

Breakout Group Facilitators are mainly needed in the deliberation phase of a Community Assembly, with at least one facilitator per group.

If you prefer to watch a training video, this is the XR's Community Assemblies Facilitation training on YouTube.

What do you need to do as a breakout group facilitator during the deliberation phase?

- Introduce yourself briefly. (Say this whichever way works for you, in your own words)

> “I am volunteering today as a facilitator. Our group is a safe place for us all to share our experience, understanding of the topic and to work together. Please keep confidential what people say in our group today; do not name people and ensure people cannot be identified when discussing today with others.
>
> Remember: no one person has all the answers. Please respect other people's right to hold opinions that you disagree with. We are all here to listen to each other and be heard.
>
> So everyone has enough time to speak, we will be limited to [X] minutes. Everyone will speak uninterrupted for [X] minutes at a time until finished. Everyone else will listen."

- Remind people of the Community Assembly question that is being deliberated on.
- Ask for one of the group to volunteer to be the Notetaker.
- Show the hand signals again for:
  - I want to speak
  - Temperature check
  - Speak up
  - Round up
- Egg timers can be used as visual prompts to ease the timekeeping element of facilitation, as they are visible to all. If no egg timers are available, the facilitator can keep time and make the ‘round up’ hand signal when the speaker has had their allowed time, or you can ask someone to volunteer to time-keep.
- Remind people of the Inclusivity Statement and need for respectful, active listening and no interruptions allowed as per the guidelines they agreed to earlier, often called the Three Pillars.

>

> “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. We welcome all people but not all behaviours.”

Run a first round of everyone briefly introducing themselves and saying what they hope to gain from the event

- Invite people to share their access needs and where possible, accommodate these.
- Invite people to voice their opinions, thoughts or questions.
- Make sure everyone has a go at voicing their opinion.
- If questions arise from speeches and speakers are available for ‘speed question’ sessions, invite them to your table.
- When it is time, indicated by the Main Facilitator, guide the group to decide on priority statements (ideally 3 statements per breakout group. This also depends on what the Community Assembly working group decided, so it could be more or less) to share during the imminent and final integration phase of the assembly.
  - Repeat the main topics that have been mentioned.
  - Ask the Notetaker to fill in gaps or topics that you may have forgotten to summarise.
  - Lead a temperature check on which statements should be brought to the main assembly integration phase.
- Find someone to present the group’s statements. This can be you or the Notetaker, but if someone else might want to do it, that should be encouraged.

More (In-Person) Group Facilitation Tips

- Listen more than you speak
- Ensure everyone has the same length of time to speak
- Gently intervene to stop interruptions using name tags of the person interrupting
- Ask questions to invite people to speak if the discussion isn't flowing
- Also allow silence to run if people don’t come in immediately
- Encourage respect, thanking people for their input, so every participant feels safe to share their ideas
- Encourage quieter members of the group to speak; allow people to write their input or draw images (Post it notes are a great tool here)
- Be sensitive to the emotions that may arise
- Hold the space calmly and without judgement for participants to agree to disagree
- Close each activity by summing up the main ideas
- Have fun. A sense of humour makes things work more smoothly
- Ask for one of the group to prompt when X minutes are left to begin facilitating the group to select their top priorities (See the Review and Prep phase below).

Review Of Break-Out Discussion. Prep for the Final (Integration) Phase

When the discussion has reached its time limit, thank everyone for their contributions. Ask the Notetaker to read group comments out again, one by one. Check with the group that the Notetaker has understood each speaker correctly and recorded them accurately. (Notetaker amends as necessary.)

At the allotted time, ask the Notetaker to summarise ideas and any priorities emerging from the discussion. As the Faciliator, don't allow this to become further discussion as the group may then not have time to identify the top 3 ideas.

Also ask group members to indicate the importance of each idea with hand signals (Demonstrate).

The Notetaker will make a mark of their own choosing next to each idea to denote its level of consensus in the group. (e.g. '+' or '✓' to denote one person's agreement; + + / ✓ ✓ = 2 , etc.

Feedback and Whole Assembly Key Points

Your nominated person will read out your key headings and main ideas from your group's discussion to the whole group. The Assembly Notetaker will write these up visibly on flip chart paper.

Other groups may ask your group questions and/or comment. Timing will be framed by the Main Facilitator. Note: comments at this stage can lead to further comments, so be careful to note that further discussion may be needed at a future assembly in order to keep to time.

Each group may feed back in this way, with the whole group clarifying with questions and commenting within the time constraints.

Depending on the process, ideas can be added to large flipchart paper on the walls for everyone in the whole assembly to vote on. Alternatively, the Assembly Notetaker may then read out all of the headings one by one, then may ask the whole group to vote its agreement (Demonstrate hand signals).

Assembly participants may use stickers to note their votes on the flipchart paper. Alternatively, the Assembly Notetaker counts raised hands, adds totals onto the flipchart next to suggestions.

The Main Facilitator then reminds the participants about the eventual usage of the feedback, (e.g. to share with local authority). They may also invite everyone to vote on possible next steps (e.g. use of Polis or follow on assembly along with sharing outputs with the local authority).

Dealing with Difficult Interactions

Sometimes when you are running assemblies, or doing community work in general, you might have difficult interactions with people. Whilst there is no easy way to overcome these, here are some suggestions:

- Refer to the line from the inclusivity statement: We welcome all people, but not all behaviours.
- Move in when people are interjecting, challenging or talking too much, stating that radical inclusivity means we need to have time for everyone and equal sharing/hearing time.
- Thank them for their input and seek the positive intention of their behaviour (what are they seeking to achieve that is positive?)
- Remember, discussions can be won by people who make the most noise. Your job is to ensure all voices are heard.
- Explain the situation & encourage a quick round-up: “I am conscious of time and our agenda - what is the final point you want to make?”
- If someone interrupts, state the importance of ensuring people are listened to without interruption.
- Offer to talk to the person exhibiting difficult behaviour in more detail during a break or afterwards. If you need someone to behave differently it can be an expression of Radical Inclusion to connect with them in a break or afterwards to keep in relationship with them.
- Sometimes with someone who is very unconsciously in need of attention and can’t be satisfied with a short interaction, avoiding eye contact may keep them quiet or let them know they have been talking for too long.
- If necessary, overtly clarify the objectives of the session again and what is needed to achieve those objectives.

Handling Tricky Situations

- You may experience a situation where a person is triggered or emotionally overwhelmed, if the topic relates to a sensitive issue for them.
  - Suggested response: Give them a minute to compose themselves, but if they are struggling, ask if they would like to take time out to catch their breath. If you have trained counsellors as volunteers, suggest they may talk with them in a safe space.
- You may have someone who feels so strongly that they talk for longer than their allotted time and do not acknowledge your ‘round up signal’, or they may go off topic.
  - Suggested response: “Thank you for sharing that (check participant’s name on their name tag). Just to say though, that as a volunteer facilitator, I have to keep the discussions on track to keep us on time. I don’t mean to diminish the value of what

    - you are sharing, but can I bring you back to the question we're discussing together here? If you feel you want to elaborate on your concerns, then let's talk one to one later. OK?"
- You may have a couple of people talking among themselves while someone is taking their turn to speak.
    - Suggested Response: "So everyone can hear everyone's comments, can I ask you to hold your thoughts and share with the group when X has finished speaking? Thanks"
- You may identify other tricky situations that can disrupt the process. Talk these through at your debrief to help everyone learn from your experience.

Trust the People's 'Engaging Communities' module has a document on how to deal with conflict when engaging with strangers, which uses methods from Non-Violent Communication (NVC) - it is worth reading to prepare for community assemblies.