

Tool – Types of engagement – workshops

Workshops enable people to share ideas in small groups within a larger group setting. They often utilise a variety of facilitation styles, presentation formats and interactive group processes to enable a deep exploration of a subject, such as a policy, plan, project, program or philosophy.

Workshops can be held for a wide range of reasons, such as to:

- provide information
- identify concerns, issues and opportunities
- develop objectives and visions
- develop options
- test ideas and prioritise options
- obtain input into decision-making.

Most workshops do a combination of these things.

Well-designed and well-managed workshops can build trust with participants and ensure their ongoing involvement. They can also help participants to consider views that are different from their own and contribute to a shared understanding of a particular policy or project.

See [Tool - Engagement Techniques](#).

How to run a successful workshop

To run a successful workshop, you will need:

- a skilled host to ensure that all participants have an opportunity to contribute and that the group stays on task and on time
- a means of recording the outcomes of small group discussions, such as a feedback sheet, template or dedicated note-keeper
- a venue that caters for the number of participants and that can accommodate small group discussions through breakout rooms or dispersed tables – these will need to be sufficiently distanced from each other to minimise noise conflict
- a well-structured agenda that includes activities that have a stated purpose
- experienced facilitators to attend each small group discussion and help foster the exchange of ideas
- a mechanism to report back to participants on the workshop outcomes and how these will be used to influence decision-making.

Benefits of hosting a workshop

Workshops can be especially helpful during the engagement process because they enable participants to:

- hear and consider a range of opinions which may lead to better informed contributions and outcomes
- break off into small groups – this allows a deeper level of discussion and gives quieter individuals an opportunity to have their say
- hear the outcomes of small group discussions in real time and understand what has been said.

Potential risks and how to minimise them

When planning a workshop, it is important to consider the follow risks and responses:

Risk #1: Some participants may dominate the discussion and limit the expression of different views.

Response: Your host/facilitators should clearly articulate the ground rules for respectful speaking and listening, manage inappropriate behaviours and ensure that all attendees have the opportunity to participate.

Risk #2: Nominated spokespeople may misrepresent the views of their group when it is time to report back on small group discussion.

Response: Your facilitators can reduce this risk by having a separate sheet for feedback that is completed by and agreed to by the whole group prior to reporting back. Where there has been a strong difference of opinion within the group, it may be more appropriate for the facilitator to report back on behalf of the group, acknowledging the range of views expressed.