

## Introductions

It's important to reserve time at the start of the meeting for introductions, both so that you can get to know the participants a little and also their expectations of the meeting and what they can bring to it. Rather than just asking for people to state their name, you could ask where they come from and to what extent they've been involved with The Equality Trust or other organisations and what they want to get out of the meeting/workshop. An awareness of what people's expectations are will help you to facilitate more effectively.

## Agenda

It's a good idea to set a draft agenda in advance, clearly laid out, with time limits for each section - realistic for the length of the meeting. However your plans for the workshop may change once you've learnt more about the participants and their expectations - discuss the agenda with the group, ask if anything else needs adding, and write the agenda up on a flip-chart or board. Try to keep to the time allotted for each part of the agenda, so that the meeting doesn't overrun; if necessary, ask someone to keep time.

## Clarifying and summarising points

This will help to move forward discussion and help everyone feel that their opinion has been heard and taken into account. You might want to interject after a series of points, succinctly summarising what has been said so far, thus helping the flow of the workshop. Or after someone has made a "rambling" or unclear contribution, which will need clarifying for the rest of the group. At all times offer clarifications and summaries *tentatively*; ask whether your interpretation is broadly correct, so as not to offend a speaker or to impose your personal opinion onto the group as a whole.

## Involve everyone in discussion

This might involve eliciting contributions from the quieter or shyer members of the group, and/or ensuring that more confident participants don't dominate the discussion.

- **Breaking into smaller groups** can help those who may be less confident to express their opinions. If you do this, make clear (after discussion with the group) what the parameters of each smaller group are, set a time limit, and ask each group to feed back to the wider meeting. *It might help if you consider in advance of the meeting which aspects of the agenda lend themselves to smaller group work.*
- If someone or several people are dominating discussion, you can ensure that other people get their say by intervening, asking "what does everyone else think?". Or if you're aware that for example only people from one area of your region are talking, you might ask "what do people from different parts of the region think?".

## Silence does not equal agreement

Sometimes people may not venture a point either because they agree with what has been said or are indifferent, but often there can be other factors at play. As well as the above techniques, a “go-round” can be effective, where every participant in the workshop/meeting briefly offers their thoughts/opinions (you may want to restrict this to those who have not yet spoken). However some participants may simply not want to speak in the workshop, and this should be respected. Breaking into smaller groups may help in this process.

## “Hand Signals”

You want to employ hand-signals to help move the workshop along effectively. Three suggestions:



Someone wishes to raise a general point



A directly relevant point: i.e. someone has the answer/ pertinent response to a point that has just been made, and wants to express it before the discussion moves onto other issues. Ensure that this gesture isn't abused by those just willing to “jump the queue” to make their general point.



“silent applause”. Rather than everyone saying “I'd just like to say that I agree with Mary” people can indicate their approval by “wavy hands”. This can also ensure that those less willing to speak nevertheless have their view heard.

NB: if using these signals (particularly the latter two), you must introduce them at the start of the meeting.

## Taking minutes and action points

Make sure that someone is responsible for taking notes; you could ask the participants of the workshop if anyone else other than one of the (joint) facilitators would like to do this. As facilitator, pay particular attention to action points, agreed conclusions, or points of consensus / division. This will help the minute-taker to give an accurate reflection of what was discussed. Emphasise “action points” (i.e. something that the group has asked one of the facilitators or any participant to do after the end of the meeting) so that these can be clearly minuted and also display them on the flip-chart.

## “Parking Space”

Also on the flip-chart, keep an area to jot down points that have been raised during the discussion which couldn't be properly addressed without diverging from the agenda. These can then be discussed more fully at the end of the meeting, so that the participants who raised them don't feel their contributions are ignored.

## Finally, stay positive & energetic!

Meetings and workshops can often feed off the attitude and body language of the facilitator(s). If time allows, a short break or period of silence in which to contemplate the particular issue at hand may be appropriate.