



NAWO LIVESTREAM SERIES

Checklist for facilitating effective group discussion

What is an effective group discussion?

An effective group discussion is one in which the group is able to accomplish its purpose or to establish a basis either for ongoing discussion or for further contact and collaboration among its members.

Elements of an effective group discussion:

All members of the group have a chance to speak, expressing their own ideas and feelings freely, and to pursue and finish out their thoughts

All members of the group can hear others' ideas and feelings stated openly

Group members can safely test out ideas that are not yet fully formed

Group members can receive and respond to respectful but honest and constructive feedback

A variety of points of view are put forward and discussed

The discussion is not dominated by any one person

Arguments, while they may be spirited, are based on the content of ideas and opinions, not on personalities

Even in disagreement, there's an understanding that the group is working together to resolve a dispute, solve a problem, create a plan, make a decision, find a precept or set of precepts all can agree on, or come to a conclusion

Possible uses for a group discussion:

Create a new situation – form a coalition, start an initiative, etc.

Explore cooperative or collaborative arrangements among groups or organizations

Discuss and/or analyse an issue

Create a strategic plan – for an initiative, an advocacy campaign, an intervention, etc.

Discuss policy and policy change

Air concerns and differences among individuals or groups

Hold public hearings on proposed laws or regulations, development, etc.

Decide on an action

Provide mutual support

Solve a problem

Resolve a conflict

Plan the work or an event

Why would you lead a group discussion?

- A group discussion gives everyone involved a voice
- A group discussion allows for a variety of ideas to be expressed and discussed
- Group discussion is generally a democratic, egalitarian process
- A group discussion leads to group ownership of whatever conclusions, plans, or action the group decides upon
- An effective group discussion encourages those who might normally be reluctant to speak their minds
- Group discussions can often open communication channels among people who might not communicate in any other way
- In some cases, a group discussion is simply the obvious, or even the only, way to proceed

When might you lead a group discussion?

- At the start of something new
- When an issue can no longer be ignored
- When groups need to be brought together
- When an existing group is considering its next step or seeking to address an issue of importance to it

How do you lead a group discussion?

- Choose the space
- Provide food and drink
- Bring materials to help the discussion along
- Become familiar with the purpose and content of the discussion
- Make sure everyone gets any necessary information, readings, or other material in plenty of time to study it well beforehand

General guidelines:

- Think about leadership style
- Put people at ease
- Help the group develop ground rules
- Generate an agenda or goals for the discussion
- Lead the discussion
 - Set the topic
 - Foster the open process
 - Involve all participants
 - Ask questions or provide information to move the discussion
 - Summarize and/or clarify important points and conclusions
 - Wrap up the session
- Follow up if necessary.

Do's for discussion leaders:

- Model the behavior and attitudes you want group members to employ
- Use encouraging body language and tone of voice, as well as words
- Give positive feedback for joining the discussion
- Be aware of people's reactions and feelings, and try to respond appropriately
- Ask open-ended questions
- Control your own biases
- Encourage disagreement, and help the group use it creatively
- Be a recorder if necessary
- Keep your mouth shut as much as possible

Don'ts for discussion leaders:

___ Don't let one or a small group of individuals dominate the discussion

___ Don't let one point of view override others

___ Don't assume that anyone holds particular opinions or positions because of his culture, background, race, personal style, etc.

___ By the same token, don't assume that someone from a particular culture, race, or background speaks for everyone else from that situation

___ Don't be the font of all wisdom