

# Core facilitation tools

This is an overview of tools you'll come back to time and time again.

## Group agreement

**5 minutes - 1 hour to set up; any number of people**

It can be useful to start your meeting or workshop by negotiating a group agreement. The aim of the group agreement is to create a safe and respectful space in which people can work together productively.

Essentially a group agreement is a set of statements that set the tone for how people will behave within the meeting or workshop. It might include: “try to understand where everyone is coming from, even when you disagree”; “allow everyone opportunity to speak”; “confidentiality”; “mobile phones switched off, or on silent”. The key thing about a group agreement is given away by its name – it only works as an effective facilitation tool if it's agreed by the group. Agreements can be proposed to the group, but not imposed.

For more information and various ways to apply this tool, take a look at our guide *Group Agreements for Workshops and Meetings*.

Active agreement is a useful addition to any group agreement. Essentially it's an agreement that the group will actively signal their opinion on any given issue. This allows you to ask the group questions knowing you'll get a definite



answer. So for example, you might feel that group energy is low and ask the group if they need a break or are happy to carry on with the next activity or agenda item. If they simply stare at their feet what do you do? Active agreement avoids this. Silent applause (see *Hand-signals* below) can be a useful way of showing active agreement.

## Hand-signals

Hand-signals are a technique that can make workshops and meetings run more smoothly and help the facilitator see emerging agreements and common ground. The basic concept is that people use different gestures or shapes with their hands, to communicate some basic ideas in a non-verbal way (e.g. "I want to speak", "I agree", "I don't understand" etc.)

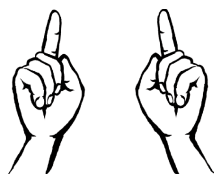
It is important to explain any hand-signals you are using clearly. This makes it less intimidating for someone who's turned up new, and doesn't understand what's going on! It also prevents misunderstandings if people are using the same signal to mean different things.

We prefer to stick to as few hand-signals as possible to limit confusion. Be aware that some hand-signals can be disempowering. For example, some groups use gestures to mean 'I disagree' or 'You've been speaking too long'. Situations vary, but in general, it is more helpful to communicate these messages in words.

We find a few simple signals usually suffice:

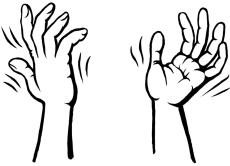


**Raise a forefinger** when you wish to contribute to the discussion with a general point.



**Raise both forefingers** if your point is a direct response to a point that's just been made or a question that's just been asked. This allows you to jump to the head of the queue, in front of all those

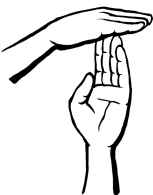
people raising just one finger. For example, if the group is discussing which train to catch, it could be helpful to jump the queue to tell people that the trains are on strike, and you will need to catch the bus. NB: This option can easily be over-used if people don't fully understand how it is different from raising a single hand.



**Silent applause** – when you hear an opinion that you agree with, wave a hand with your fingers pointing upwards (this saves a lot of time as people don't need to chip in to say “I'd just like to add that I agree with...”).



**Language** - Make an L shape with your thumb and forefinger to request translation, or to ask someone to use simpler language. This can be especially helpful in any multi-lingual group. Some groups use 'C' for 'clarification' in a similar way.



**Technical point** - Make a T shape using both hands. We've seen this used in a variety of ways by different groups, so always check you have a shared understanding. One use of 'technical point' is to interrupt the discussion with urgent factual information not related to the meeting (e.g. 'Lunch is ready', 'Can someone help me set up the tea urn for the break.'). Another is to jump the queue with a facilitation suggestion, e.g. 'Can we break into small groups for this conversation?'

Take a look at our guide to *Hand Signals* for more examples.