**One Team Gov Canada Breakout Session Guide**

Methods & Tips for Facilitators

**Our breakout session objectives:**

1. We’re aiming to facilitate:

* **Shared understanding(s)** of the topic to be discussed (aim for *coherence*, not *consensus*);
* **Exploration of implications** **and opportunities** from different perspectives – e.g. experiences, opportunities, barriers, etc; (what’s the current state? What could be?)
* **Identification of practical actions** that might make things better - e.g. ideas, next steps on how to make it happen. What can *each* of us do? What might we do *together*? How to bring it back to the contexts we’re working in?

**Our working assumptions**:

* There are a variety of ways to facilitate discussions, e.g. across a spectrum of very structured to unstructured, enabling divergent and convergent thinking, etc. This guide is meant to do just that. It’s not meant to be prescriptive.
* We want to consider and facilitate for a variety of participant preferences and styles, to the extent possible, e.g. extroverts and introverts.
* Less is more.There’s only so much we can do in a 45-55 minute breakout session. Our efforts will enable connections, creativity, knowledge sharing, and can inform practical action.
* We want to capture and share the learning. Share session notes following the event.

Have fun! First and foremost, we’re trying to enable connections, great discussions and provide everyone the chance to share their perspectives and ideas.

There are two sections below:

1. **First time facilitating? Or maybe it’s been a while?** - this section includes three options for facilitating a breakout session. **[p.2]**
2. **More experienced at facilitating or feeling adventurous?** - bring and apply your skills at the breakout sessions keeping in mind the objectives above. **[p.5]**
3. **First time facilitating? Or maybe it’s been a while?**

Consider trying the following methods...

**Remember**:

* You have an assigned topic for your breakout session, which is the idea someone proposed during the crowdsourcing exercise earlier in the day. - **Mandatory**
* There will be a notetaker to capture the discussion, *particularly those that happen as a collective in plenary*, and to keep time. - **Mandatory**
* Each participant will have a sharpy (extras will be in the room) - **Optional to use**
* There will be stickies (aka post-it notes) on each seat and in the room - **Optional to use**
* There will be flipchart paper in the room - **Optional to use**

**Communicate the Approach**

First, communicate the approach to the room for the 55-minute discussion.

“Today, we’ll take the next 55 minutes to:

* Unpack what the idea means to us so we know what we’re talking about;
* Generate some opportunities and challenges related to the idea; and
* Identify some practical actions that we might be able to take, individually and collectively related to the idea.”

Invite feedback to ensure people are ok with the approach.

Next, **unpack the idea** to generate understanding or coherence on what it means to the participants in the room.

Is the person who proposed it in attendance? Ask the room. If yes, invite that person to share their thoughts on the idea and why they proposed it. If not, that’s ok, move to the next step.

Continue to do **one** of the following three options.

**Credit and thank you**: the following methods have been taken and/or adapted from [Liberating Structures](http://www.liberatingstructures.com/), where you can find [lots of other methods](http://www.liberatingstructures.com/ls/), and [Agile Coffee](http://agilecoffee.com/).

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**OPTION 1: ‘What? So What? Now What?** (as a group)\*

If it’s a manageable number (e.g. 15-20 people), you could facilitate the entire discussion in plenary. Ask the entire group:

* “What does this idea mean to you?” [10 minutes]
* “So what does it matter? Why is it important? [15 minutes]
* “Now what are we going to do about it?” “What are some practical actions that we can take?” [15 minutes]

For those who may be introverted, open up some wall space, where they can share ideas either throughout or at the end.

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**OPTION 2: 1-2-4-All** (adapted)

* See ‘**Communicate the Approach’** above
* Ask participants to **each reflect on the idea in silence**: Ask: “What does this idea mean to you?” and “What are some opportunities and challenges related to it?”

Ask them to use the stickies or their own notepad to put their thoughts down, so they can share them with a partner in the next step. **[5 mins]**

* Then, ask participants to **pair up** in twos and share and discuss what they wrote. Ask them to listen for and identify common things or differences. **[5 mins]**

**As an entire group**:

* Ask for volunteers to share what the idea means to them with the entire room. **[5 mins]**
* Now, ask the participants to **form a group of four** and build off the understanding generated to now focus on ways to move forward.

Ask participants to take note of *opportunities* or *challenges* that would need to be addressed as well as *practical actions* that could be taken to advance the idea.

Ask them to record their **top 3 opportunities, challenges, and actions** to advance the idea. **[10 mins]**

**As an entire group**:

* Ask each group of four to share their top 3 opportunities, challenges and practical actions with the entire room. **[2 mins/per group; or a total for 10 mins]**
* Open the floor for reflection and comments. **[5 mins]**
* Ask: if there’s one practical action that you can do as individual to help realize this idea, what would it be? Write it on a sticky and hand it in (or post it on the wall) before leaving the room. **[5 mins]**

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**OPTION 3 - The Fishbowl**

* Place 6 chairs in a circle in the middle of the room. You, the facilitator, will sit in one of the chairs the entire time.
* Before sitting down, explain to the group the approach [see ‘**Communicate the Approach’** above]

Also explain that this will be done in a Fishbowl format:

* + 5 people will sit in the circle with the facilitator to start things off.
  + The facilitator will ask a question and keep the discussion going in a What, So What, Now What in relation to the idea.
  + At any time, if you want to join the discussion, any person in the room can stand up and tap a person on the shoulder to take their seat.
  + The person whose shoulder is tapped takes a seat in the audience watching the fishbowl. They can enter back into the circle at any time.
* The facilitator guides the discussion by asking questions and/or prompting it along, for example:
  + “What does this idea mean to you?” [15 minutes]
  + “So what? Why does it matter? Why is it important? [15 minutes]
  + “Now what are we going to do about it?” “What are some practical actions that we can take?” Collectively? As individuals? [15 minutes]

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**2. More experienced at facilitating or**

**feeling adventurous?**

Try out the methods below in combination and/or with others!

**Remember**:

* It’s a 55 minute session. The time will go by quickly.
* You have an assigned topic for your breakout session, which is the idea someone proposed during the crowdsourcing exercise earlier in the day. - **Mandatory**
* Each participant will have a sharpy (extras will be in the room) - **Optional to use**
* There will be stickies (aka post-it notes) on each seat and in the room - **Optional to use**
* There will be flipchart paper in the room - **Optional to use**
* There will be a notetaker to capture the discussion, *particularly those that happen as a collective in plenary*, and to keep time. - **Mandatory**

**Communicate the Approach**

First, communicate the approach to the room for the 55-minute discussion.

“Today, we’ll take the next 55 minutes to:

* Unpack what the idea means to us so we know what we’re talking about;
* Generate some opportunities and challenges related to the idea; and
* Identify some practical actions that we might be able to take, individually and collectively related to the idea.”

Invite feedback to ensure people are ok with the approach.

Next, **unpack the idea** to generate understanding or coherence on what it means to the participants in the room.

Is the person who proposed it in attendance? Ask the room. If yes, invite that person to share their thoughts on the idea and why they proposed it. If not, that’s ok, move to the next step.

Feel free to check out the methods suggested in section 1, particularly if you’re short on time, or see below for methods that might inform your facilitation approach. We’re open to experienced facilitators using other methods; however, please do remember the objectives for all sessions shared on page 1 above.

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**1-2-4-All**

**1. Structuring Invitation**

* The proposed idea on the card is the discussion theme.

**2. How Space Is Arranged and Materials Needed**

* Unlimited number of groups
* Space for participants to work face-to-face in pairs and foursomes
* Chairs and tables optional
* Paper for participants to record observations and insights

**3. How Participation Is Distributed**

* Everyone in the group is included (often not the facilitator)
* Everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute

**4. How Groups Are Configured**

* Start alone, then in pairs, then foursomes, and finally as a whole group around the table.

**5. Sequence of Steps and Time Allocation**

* Silent **self-reflection** by individuals on the idea, e.g.: What does this idea mean to you? **3 min**.
* Share your understanding of the idea **in pairs**, building on ideas from self-reflection. What are some of the opportunities and challenges in realizing it? **5 min**.
* **In foursomes**, build off the understanding you discussed in your pairs and generate ideas for actions and next steps towards exploiting opportunities or addressing challenges. **10 min**.
* **As an entire group**,:
  + Ask, “What is one idea that stood out in your conversation?” Each group shares one important idea with all (repeat cycle as needed). **5 min**.
  + Open the floor for reflection and comments. **5 min (15 min)**
  + Ask: if there’s one thing that you can do as individual to help realize this idea, what would it be? Write it on a sticky and hand it in before leaving the room. **(10 min)**

**Conversation Café**

**1. Structuring Invitation**

* Invite all the participants to gather in small groups to listen to one another's thoughts and reflect together on the proposed idea on the card.

**2. How Space Is Arranged and Materials Needed**

* Unlimited number of groups [suggest 4-6 groups for Open First Day]
* Space for participants to work face-to-face in groups
* Chairs and tables optional
* Flipcharts or smart sheets for participants to record observations and insights
* 6 talking objects

**3. How Participation Is Distributed**

* Everyone is included
* Everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute

**4. How Groups Are Configured**

* Mixed, diverse groups of 5–7 participants

**5. Sequence of Steps and Time Allocation**

* State the theme of the conversation, usually in the form of a question
* Build a common understanding of what this means. No one can talk more than 1 min. (5 min.)
* Explain there will be five rounds of conversation at every table, two first rounds using a talking object, the third one as open conversation, a fourth round with the talking object, and a fifth to share takeaways as a group. Give the duration of each round.
* Distribute the talking objects
* First round with the talking object: each person shares what he or she is thinking, feeling, or doing about the idea. 1 min. per person **[6 mins total**]
* Second round with the talking object: each person shares thoughts and feelings after having listened to everybody at the table. 1 min. per person **[6 mins total**]
* **Ask someone in each group to be a note taker**
* Third round: open conversation on opportunities and challenges (option to use talking object). 10 min.
* Fourth round with the talking object: each member shares “takeaways.” Write them down 10 min.
* Fifth and final round: Each team shares its takeaways – take notes.
* [If time] move to open discussion. Facilitators prompt participants.

**What, So What, Now What? W³**

**1. Structuring Invitation**

* Introduce the discussion topic and and explain that we’ll go through an exercise to answer:
  + “WHAT? Does this idea mean to you? What is your understanding of what it means? Then, after all the salient observations have been collected, we’ll ask,
  + “SO WHAT? Why is this idea important for the public service, government and/or other stakeholders and users? What are the opportunities? Are there barriers that need to be addressed? Then, after the sense making is over, we’ll ask,
  + “NOW WHAT? What actions make sense?”

**2. How Space Is Arranged and Materials Needed**

* Unlimited number of groups [suggest 4-6 groups for Open First Day]
* Chairs for people to sit in small groups of 5-7; small tables are optional
* Paper to make lists
* Flip chart or smart sheets may be needed with a large group to collect answers
* Talking object \* (optional)

**3. How Participation Is Distributed**

* Everyone is included
* Everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute at each table
* Small groups are more likely to give voice to everyone if one person facilitates and keeps everybody working on one question at a time

**4. How Groups Are Configured**

* Individuals
* Groups of 5-7
* Whole group
* Groups can be established teams or mixed groups

**5. Sequence of Steps and Time Allocation**

* If needed, describe the sequence of steps. If the group is 10–12 people or smaller, conduct the debrief with the whole group. Otherwise, break the group into small groups.
* [If needed, get a common understanding of the topic. Ask if person who wrote the idea is in the room.]
* First stage: **WHAT?** Individuals work 2 min. alone on **WHAT?** Does this idea mean to you? What is your understanding of what it means? Write concise insights on stickies. Then 8 mins in small group – use smart sheets to capture your understanding of the idea. **10 mins total**.
* Second stage: **SO WHAT?** People work 2 min alone on “Why is this idea important for the public service or government? What are the opportunities? Are there barriers that need to be addressed?” then 8 mins in small group. **10 mins total**. Write concise insights on stickies.
* Third stage: **NOW WHAT?** Participants work 1 min. alone on “Now what? What actions make sense?” Write concise insights on stickies. Then 8 mins in small group – use smart sheets to capture your understanding of the idea. **10 mins total**.
* Actions are shared with the whole group – each group provides a 3-min debrief , discussed, and collected. Additional insights are invited. **15 min total**.

**TRIZ**

**1. Structuring Invitation**

In this three-step process, participants will work individually and in groups to answer the following questions related to the idea:

* 1. “Make a list – one item per stickie - of all you can do to make sure that you achieve the worst result imaginable with respect to this idea.”
* 2. “Go down this list item by item and ask yourselves, ‘Is there anything that government is currently doing that in any way, shape, or form resembles this item?’ Be brutally honest to make a second list – one item per stickie - of all your counterproductive activities/programs/procedures.”
* 3. “Go through the items on your second list and decide what first steps will help you stop what you know creates undesirable results towards the realization of the idea?”

**2. How Space Is Arranged and Materials Needed**

* Unlimited number of small groups of 4 to 7 chairs, with or without small tables
* Paper or smart sheets for participants to record

**3. How Participation Is Distributed**

* Everybody involved in the work is included
* Everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute

**4. How Groups Are Configured**

* Groups with 4 to 7 participants
* Established teams or mixed groups

**5. Sequence of Steps and Time Allocation**

* Introduce the idea that the group will be discussing.
* Facilitate an entire group discussion of what the idea means to the group to generate a general understanding of what the idea entails. **5 mins**
* Ok, now facilitate an entire group discussion on what the worst possible result imaginable with respect to the idea. **5 mins**
* **Now, in teams...**
* Each group make **a first list** of all it can do to make sure that it achieves this most unwanted result. **10 min**:
  + First self-reflection, then as a team. Write your list of things that will achieve the unwanted result.
* Each group makes **a second list** of all that government is currently doing that resembles items on their first list. **10 min**.
  + First self-reflection, then as a team. Write your list of things that government is currently doing that resembles items on their first list.
* Each group then determines for each item on its **second list** what first steps will help it stop this unwanted result, activity, behaviour or practice. **10 min**.
* One person from each group then reports on the first steps that they would take to stop the unwanted result, activity, behaviour or practice.

**Min Specs**

**1. Structuring Invitation**

* In the context of the discussion idea, invite the participants to first generate the entire list of all the do’s and don’ts that they should pay attention to in order to achieve a successful outcome. This is the list of maximum specifications (Max Specs).
* After the list of Max Specs has been developed, ask the participants to reduce it to the absolute minimum needed to achieve their purpose. Invite them to sift through the list one item at a time and eliminate every rule that gets a positive answer to the question, “If we broke or ignored this rule, could we still achieve our purpose?”

**2. How Space Is Arranged and Materials Needed**

* Groups of 4 to 6 around the table
* Paper or smart sheets to record Max and Min Specs

**3. How Participation Is Distributed**

* Everyone involved can participate
* Everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute

**4. How Groups Are Configured**

* Start individually then small groups of 4 to 7
* Whole group for sharing

**5. Sequence of Steps and Time Allocation**

* Facilitate an entire group discussion of what the idea means to the group to generate a general understanding of what the idea entails. Form a purpose statement related to the idea (it might already be phrased as one) **5 mins**
* Form groups of 4-6
* Self-reflection: Each of you individually generate the list of all must-do and must-not-do activities to realize the idea (Max Specs) **3 mins**
* Then share, consolidate and expand in your groups. Make list as complete as possible in a short time. **6 min**.
* Each group tests each spec on its Max Spec list against the purpose statement. If the spec can be violated and the purpose still achieved, the spec is dropped from the list. “If we broke or ignored this rule, could we still achieve our purpose?” **10 min**.
* Do a second round *if needed*. **5-10 mins**.
* Each group shares their refined list. Compare across small groups and consolidate to the shortest list as a whole group. **15 min**.

**Tools for a Lean Coffee**

<http://agilecoffee.com/leancoffee/>

Here’s what you need:

* a pad or two of sticky notes (3″x3″ is fine)
* something to write with (markers work well because they’re visible from farther away)
* a timing device (eg. a smart phone)
* table & chairs
* people
* optional: a camera (to take pictures of actions & idea maps)

As you see, nothing here is expensive or hard to find.

**How it Works**

The steps are simple, straightforward and can be modified depending upon the situation. Here’s the simple version:

1. Setup a Personal Kanban - e.g. To Do, Doing, Done
2. Identify what you want to talk about
3. Vote & discuss

That’s it.

For those who want more of detail, here is comprehensive list of steps:

1. Select a theme - see breakout session topic
2. (optional) Everyone writes their name on a card and keeps it in front of them.
3. Write topics onto notecards/stickies (one topic per card). No limit to the number of topics. (**Pro-tip**: *keep the words per card to a minimum for readability*.)
4. Set up a personal kanban board with three columns: To Do, Doing, Done. (**Pro-tip**: *add a fourth column (“Actions”) to collect action items as they come up*.)
5. Spend a few minutes introducing each topic, sharing a sentence or two describing the idea on each card.
6. Vote. Each participant gets three dot votes (or more – you choose). You may cast all your votes on one topic or spread them across multiple cards.
7. Rank the more popular topics higher in the backlog (the “To Do” column).
8. Now that you have an agenda, move the top item into the middle (“Doing”) column.
9. Set the timer (eg. smartphone) for five minutes — or whatever length the group determines is reasonable. This is the *initial* timebox for discussion.
10. When the time limit is reached, hold a simple roman vote (thumbs up, sideways or thumbs down) to see if there’s interest in continuing the discussion. If so, set the timer for a shorter duration (eg. three minutes) and continue discussing. You can repeat this step as many times as necessary until the group loses interest in the topic.
11. When the topic runs out of gas, move its card to the right (“Done”) column. Bring the next highest card over from “To Do” into “Doing” and repeat the process.
12. (optional) At the end of the session, elicit key takeaways and/or action items from the group. This is usually important if you’re using the meeting to drive decisions or create work. Taking a photo of the board or any artifacts (mind maps, etc.) is also handy.