

Group Agreements



for workshops and meetings

Group agreements are a useful tool for getting your event off to the right start and keeping it on track. They help a group to come to an agreement on how it will work together respectfully and effectively. This in turn enables people to interact more co-operatively and maintain respect for each other.

Making these decisions as a group is far more empowering than having a facilitator set out 'rules' for everyone to follow. Also, people are much more likely to respect and implement an agreement that they have had an input into. It will make your job as a facilitator much easier. When problems or conflicts arise you will be able to refer back to this agreement (e.g. "We all agreed at the beginning that it's best if only one person speaks at a time...").

How to create a group agreement

There are lots of ways to create group agreements. When deciding which to use you might consider some of the following: whether the group will be working together in the longer term, how controversial the topic of the meeting or workshop is, how much time you have and what level of trust the group have in you as a facilitator.

For groups that are working together over a longer period of time it may be worth spending a little more time to develop a longer term group agreement. You could use a process such as the one below. Although taking this much time over a group agreement may sometimes feel a little frustrating, you will save that time later on. As a result your event will run a lot more smoothly.



Proposed Group Agreement

1. Make sure everyone is able to contribute
 - more talkative people: show a little restraint
 - quieter people: your contributions are very welcome
2. Only one person speaks at a time
 - put up your hand if you want to speak and wait for your turn.
3. Respect each others' opinions even / especially if you don't agree with them
4. Participate!
5. Confidentiality – some things shouldn't be repeated outside of this meeting.
6. Be conscious of time – help stick to it, or negotiate for more
7. Mobile phones off to minimise disruptions
8. Regular breaks



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www.seedsforchange.org.uk

More detailed group agreements

Allow a **minimum of 30 minutes** to come up with a group agreement.

Once everyone has arrived, **ask a question like:**

- “What things would make this group/workshop work well for you?”
- “What makes this a safe and respectful place for us to work in?” or
- “What would make this group a good space for learning?”

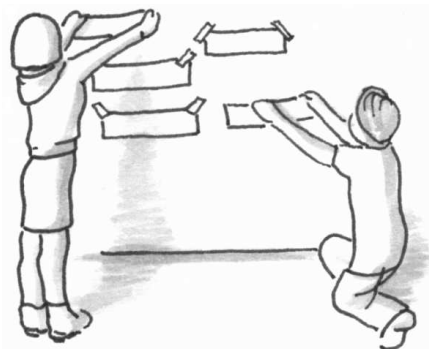
You can **ask people to respond in several ways**, eg:

- People call out points which are written up on flipchart paper for everyone to see.
- People write their comments on pieces of paper and group them together on the wall.
- People talk about the question in pairs or small groups and then feed this back to the whole group.

When you have drawn out people's ideas, **go through the list one by one** and check for clarification. Discuss how this can be turned into practical ways of working.

- Take for example “it's alright to disagree” - how would this work practically? You could add “... by challenging what a person says, not attacking the person themselves.”
- Another example is “Confidentiality”. This is also quite vague and you will need to discuss what people understand by it and what level of confidentiality they expect from the group.

Finally you need to **check for agreement** on all the points from the whole group.



Short group agreements

Other ways of creating group agreements may be more appropriate for shorter meetings or workshops, or for groups that don't tackle emotive or controversial topics. These include:

- proposing a group agreement then seeking additions, amendments and then agreement;
- having an ideastorm around the idea of 'respect' (“what would make me feel respected in this workshop”) and using that as basis for agreement. Other words that might be useful as well as, or instead of, 'respect' are 'safety' and 'co-operation'.

When you've agreed your group agreement, make sure it's on display for all to see – ideally have it written up on a whiteboard, flipchart paper or overhead projector.

Keep the agreement for use in future meetings or workshops with the same group, but check in each time to make sure that everyone is still happy with it. They may, for example, wish to add something to the agreement.

And don't forget that newcomers or latecomers haven't agreed anything, so take the time to explain it to them and ask for their endorsement of the agreement (you can always do this in a break). If they want to amend it, have a discussion with the full group until everyone agrees.

