

Tips and Tools for Facilitating Community Engagement Sessions

This protocol is intended for use with your community engagement session. The first page includes information about the role of the facilitator and some tips for facilitating. The remaining pages provide a sample protocol and notetaking sheet that can be tailored to your community engagement session.

Role of the facilitator

As the facilitator, your primary responsibility is to create a welcoming and positive environment that encourages open and thoughtful discussion. Your aim is to invite a diversity of perspectives and even disagreement or debate, since these can enrich the conversation and yield valuable insights. While consensus may naturally occur on some topics, ensure that every participant feels represented and heard by encouraging all to share their views. Guide the conversation, use probing questions (see Text Box 1), keep the group focused, and move the discussion forward, minimizing your own input as much as possible.

Facilitation tips

To create a welcoming and positive environment, be friendly and approachable, smile and make eye contact with participants, use a pleasant tone and relaxed body language, use humor appropriately, and be patient. When asking questions, allow 10-15 seconds for responses. Silent pauses create space for thoughtful answers. If there is no response, try rephrasing or clarifying.

To promote open and thoughtful participation, set ground rules at the outset, invite everyone to contribute, use pauses and probing questions, encourage participants to build on each other's ideas, link ideas when appropriate, and avoid judging comments.

Text Box 1. Probing questions

Probing questions are essential tools for deepening dialogue and clarifying perspectives. Examples include:

- "Could you say more about ____?"
- "I want to make sure I understand. Are you saying ____?"
- "Can you elaborate on that?"
- "You mentioned _____. Can you expand?"
- "Does anyone else have an example to share?"



Sample Protocol and Notetaker

Session information

Date and time: _____

Facilitator(s): _____

Notetaker(s): _____

Group participants

Name	Organization, role	[Other salient characteristics]

Introduction (5 minutes)

Hello, and thank you all for joining us today. We would like to take some time to learn more about _____].

We are particularly interested in [_____].

Insights from this community engagement session will be used to _____].

The community engagement session will last approximately [____] minutes.

We will begin by reviewing meeting norms and participating in an engagement activity, after which we will dive into our community engagement session questions. If you have questions at any time, please do not hesitate to ask.

Meeting norms

For our community engagement session to run smoothly, we ask that you:

- Place all electronics in vibrate mode and refrain from texting.
- Respectfully participate, listen, and contribute to the conversation.
- Share what is important to you but stay focused on the topic.
- (If setting is virtual) Turn your camera on, if you feel comfortable.
- (If setting is virtual) Come off mute when you want to contribute.

One member of the research team will serve as the facilitator and timekeeper, while another member of the research team will serve as the notetaker. You may leave or discontinue the community engagement session at any time.

Engagement activity (icebreaker)

Before we begin, let's spend a few moments getting to know one another.

[Insert an engagement prompt here requiring a brief response, depending on the size of the group. This can be as simple as asking people for their name and where they are joining the session from. This can also include a question that can be related to the topic of discussion or off topic. One example is "If you were a kitchen tool, what would you be and why?"]

- For small groups (≤6): Invite round-robin sharing.
- For larger groups (7+): Collect responses in the chat or notetaking document.

Questions

Section 1 topic: [_____] ([__] minutes)	
Facilitator instructions. <i>[Insert facilitator instructions here.]</i>	
Question	Notes
Q1:	
Q2:	
Q3:	

Closing (____ minutes)

Thank you for your input. Before we close, is there anything else you would like us to know?

Thank you again for your valuable input. As a reminder, our next step is to analyze this data and use it, as possible, to [_____].

Finalizing data collection

- Add any additional comments within 24 hours after the meeting.
- (For virtual settings) Paste the chat log at the end of the notetaking document.
- Review and synthesize key takeaways as a group.

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