



Guide for roundtables

How to plan, organize, perform, evaluate and document roundtables

Table of Contents

- 1 What is a roundtable.....2
- 1.1 Rules.....2
- 2 Before the roundtable..... 2
- 2.1 Number of participants..... 2
- 2.2 Set up an agenda..... 3
- 2.3 Arrange date and venue..... 3
- 2.4 Invite participants..... 3
- 2.5 Staff.....4
- 2.6 Promoting & disseminating your meeting..... 4
- 2.7 Material..... 4
- 3 During the roundtable..... 5
- 3.1 Before starting..... 5
- 3.2 Starting the roundtable..... 5
- 3.3 Managing the roundtable..... 5
- 3.4 Evaluation..... 6
- 3.5 Closing..... 6
- 3.6 Quick check list..... 6
- 4 After the Roundtable..... 7
- 5 Example Timetable and Activities..... 7
- 5.1 Welcome (organiser) 10 minutes..... 7
- 5.2 Ground Rules (facilitator) 10 Minutes..... 7
- 5.3 Introductions (participants) 10 minutes..... 7
- 5.4 Activity (facilitator) 60 minutes..... 7
- 5.5 Concluding remarks (facilitator) 10 minutes..... 8
- 6 Resources..... 8
- 7 Annex 1 Example for Evaluation..... 9



1 What is a roundtable

Roundtables, as a technique, arose out of a need for consensus-building to identify problems and seek solutions in the relationship between formal decision makers (such as governments & judiciaries) and other sectors of society (such as environmental groups, community groups & other interest groups) during the 1980's.

A roundtable is NOT a public meeting - it is a focus event to closely explore specific issues identified elsewhere or to identify new issues not addressed before, it can be used to explore solutions, define actions, develop strategies. A roundtable confronts issues rather than people and aims to create a win-win situation rather than a win-lose scenario (Day et al 1998)

The premise on which the idea of roundtables is based is simple – participants, be they business people, local authority employees, environmentalists, members of community-based organisations or members of the public, are seen as being of equal stature. (Day et al 1998)

There is no 'leader' as such but there will be a facilitator to ease the work process and to maintain focus and scribes to record the process, decisions & actions. Nobody is at the head of the table, everyone has an equal voice and can speak mind freely on the subject.

1.1 Rules

- no mobile phones,
- no PC's
- no smoking or toilet breaks
- no external interruptions,
- open, frank and fruitful discussions in a polite manner
- listen to others, no interruption of speeches
- no peer-to-peer discussions while one is talking
- respect of the agreed time schedule and speak time
- consensus oriented meeting (no domination)
- active participation of everyone
- differences in opinions will not be taken personally
- voluntary participation

We recommend to prepare the rules on a separate leaflet and hand them out at registration. Additional to that, prepare them also on a Flipchart and visualize them in the meeting room.

2 Before the roundtable

2.1 Number of participants

Depending on your experience, limit the number of participants Number of participants. For your first roundtable, about 10-12 participants are a good size to handle.



With more experience you can deal with more participants. Depending on the number of participants, split them into smaller groups, e.g. 6-8 are sitting on a table and have not more than 5 tables. A facilitator per table guides participants. Within this format you can alternate different topics per table.

2.2 Set up an agenda

Some strategy and goal setting is necessary before you begin. When setting up the agenda for the meeting be sure that you have clarified “what is your mission”, “what is your strategy”, “how will this roundtable event fit with your strategy” and “what specific goals do you want this roundtable event to achieve”. An agenda should allow time for:

- Group dynamics, i.e. allow people to introduce themselves or the organisations they represent and to establish confidence among them.
- Introduction to the project’s overall goals as well as the specific objectives of this roundtable event.
- The inclusion of interactive, participative and "unstructured" elements that allow people to interact and network.

2.3 Arrange date and venue

It is vital that you plan your meeting well in advance. Allow plenty of time to promote your meeting, giving you time to generate interest and increase attendance numbers. You will need at least 6 weeks to promote your meeting. When deciding on a date and time you will need to take into consideration when the majority of people are free to attend.

Be sure you have reserved a large enough space that can be arranged as a roundtable and have enough chairs. Ensure it is accessible and convenient for everyone you are expecting to attend. Check whether the venue offers catering and refreshments, if not make suitable arrangements.

2.4 Invite participants

- Invite participants 3-4 weeks in advance; include an agenda along with the invitation. Make sure you invite participants from different professional and non-professional backgrounds (i.e. from public sector administrations, from associations, private sector, communities etc).
- Ask for confirmation of participation in the round tables; confirmation could include names or organisations representatives, contact information for updates dissemination. Set up a system to collect confirmations
- Send regular reminders leading up to the round table along with the agenda.
- Pay attention to timetable of locals, decision makers and any key participants that might attract people to your event.

An invitation letter should be sent 3-4 weeks in advance and contain the following elements:

- relevant logos
- Aims of the project/roundtable
- Objectives of the project/round table
- Agenda: topic of roundtable
- time, length and date, location of upcoming round table



- a general description of attendees/invitees/organisations
- time line of round tables
- address of hosting institution
- contact details
- confirmation of follow up

Include some further information, like a leaflet about the project/topic

2.5 Staff

You need a moderator, facilitators and in bigger groups perhaps a person who monitors the process. If you invite international guests to your roundtable, think of the possible need for translation.

If you have only a small group of 10 participants and are experienced in moderation, you can probably perform the table by yourself. For any bigger groups we recommend to use facilitators who support group working, collect and summarize information and help you out in organizational things.

2.6 Promoting & disseminating your meeting

Ensure you have the date, time and venue confirmed before you begin to promote your meeting. Various media can be exploited to promote your discussion/meeting:

- Advertisements or announcements to local press/radio/television or send a press release
- Postcards, leaflets or posters to public spaces
- Posts to blogs/twitters of people that may be interested in the outcomes of your meeting
- Setup a facebook group/page in order to post news, the agenda, etc. of your meeting
- Invite local journalists to discuss about the aim of your meeting

2.7 Material

Handouts and visual materials are useful. Remember though to balance their value with the environmental footprint of unnecessary printed paper.

Based on your agenda you can prepare flip chart recording sheets ahead of the event, noting rules of the meeting, key aims and objectives of meeting, stick to wall as an aide memoire.

Then prepare discussion activities in the same way and stick to wall as you undertake each one. Have spare flip chart paper so that you can include new areas/topics should they arise.

- Have flip chart paper prepared for reviewing the meeting, discussions, decisions, statements and remind all what happens next
- Have a person/s to scribe/record the work, post it to the appropriate flip chart paper on the wall and make sure it is available for all to see.
- At the end of the meeting main points can be drawn together from the visual recordings and a final flip chart prepared that all can sign up to. These notes enable you to write up your report later.
- Make sure you have enough pens, paper and post-it notes of all sizes and colours for the roundtable activities and for recording the responses. Make sure you have sticky tape and other items needed for the planned activities



- Think of preparing re-usable name batches.

3 During the roundtable

3.1 Before starting

Make sure you arrive 30 minutes before the event to check you have everything in order:

- Put up direction signs to enable people to find the room easily
- The necessary resources and equipment are in place and working
- Post it note, pens, paper are available on chairs for people to write down their views
- Arrange the seating in a semi-circle facing the flip charts enabling maximum eye contact / readability
- Any refreshments and catering you ordered are in place
- Be there to greet all participants and distribute agenda and name batches
- Register attendees

Start your roundtable on time, but remember to welcome any late comers.

3.2 Starting the roundtable

- Introduce yourself and your facilitators and go through the purpose and agenda of your meeting, suggesting people's roles within the meeting given their background.
- Explain shortly the rules, explain the working procedure. Have these posted on to flip chart paper and stuck on the wall so all can see
- Clarify, how you want to call each other during the roundtable by using your first name or your surname.
- Inform about the procedure of taking notes and how they will be used further
- Give participants the opportunity to get to know each other and introduce themselves or the organisations they represent and to establish confidence among them.

3.3 Managing the roundtable

It is important that you have a facilitator for your meeting; you need someone cool headed, cheerful, firm and friendly to facilitate the process, someone confident in the art of facilitation and building consensus. This will help your meeting run smoothly and keep on time.

A good facilitator will:

- not allow one person/sector to dominate and will ensure everyone gets a chance to speak
- broach the topic of discussion by having an appropriate structure for asking questions, recording replies, moderating discussions and recording changes in decisions
- will have prepared visually engaging materials and enjoyable activities enabling prompt and effective discussions
- make sure people feel comfortable to ask questions and challenge issues and will adopt a non-judgmental approach to participants' viewpoints



- keep group on-task
- watch for non-verbal behaviours
- remind participants that on the round table they are all equal status and that what is discussed in the round table will remain confidential / non-attributable
- conclude and summarise main points of meetings, discussions and agreed statements / actions, next steps
- check there are no outstanding questions / statements etc
- thank everyone for coming and finish on time

As an option you may record your meeting with a camera; having informed all participants about this and ask them for their consent. This will require a great deal of post-meeting work and its main weakness is that the participants are not there later to moderate their own contributions.

3.4 Evaluation

Explain the evaluation procedure and what you intend to do with that information.

Get feedback and evaluation during the meeting when you can improve the meeting process right away. Evaluating a meeting only at the end is usually too late.

In a round-table approach, quickly have each participant indicate how they think the meeting is going by checking at the end of each activity/discussion. Make sure they are all clear about the process and can see the process/decisions recorded on the wall/flip chart.

Leave 5-10 minutes at the end of the meeting to evaluate the meeting, don't skip this portion of the meeting.

- Which aspects of the roundtable were most useful?
- What other topics are you interested in discussing?
- Rate the overall organisation (venue, facilitation, length, fairness)

In the annex 1 you will find an example for that.

It is up to you, to create your own questionnaire for this, we just recommend to limit the number of questions to be ask.

3.5 Closing

End on time and attempt to end on a positive note.

Give an oral summary, review actions, assignments and explain shortly where to get further information and the notes of the table.

3.6 Quick check list

- Establish the specific focus of the group early on
- Always have an agenda to follow to keep meeting flowing
- Always encourage equally active participation from all group members
- Be sure to discuss topics one at a time, try not to stray off in different directions which is easy to do in this informal format



- Always recap what was covered at the end of the round table

4 After the Roundtable

Produce a report of your meeting and follow up any actions.

Write to participants and thank them for coming and share the report with them.

Continue publicising your meeting and the issues discussed by following up with a press release (remembering not to attribute statements to individuals).

It is important to reflect on what happened:

- Did you achieve what you wanted?
- What was successful?
- And if you plan organising another meeting think about any problems that can be avoided next time.
- you want to change next time?



5 Example Timetable and Activities

5.1 Welcome (organiser) 10 minutes

- Introduce yourself and your role
- Introduce the other personnel and their role in the meeting
- Explain background of project and session
- Establish objectives and expectations for the meeting & explain purpose & goal of meeting

5.2 Ground Rules (facilitator) 10 Minutes

- Maintain confidentiality
- Participate as much as possible
- Ask questions as they come up
- Turn off cell phones / pagers
- Respect others' opinions
- Don't interrupt, let others finish speaking before you begin speaking
- Review any additional rules the group may want to add

5.3 Introductions (participants) 10 minutes

Each participant to briefly introduce themselves with name, background and relationship to the topic.

5.4 Activity (facilitator) 60 minutes

- A) Think about responses to three key questions posted up on wall (8 minutes)
- B) Discussions around the three questions (60 minutes – 20 mins per question)

For example:

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of community led tourism?
 - Think in terms of resources, organisations, people, facilities, existing practice
2. What are the pressing issues facing community led tourism?
 - What are the top goals / priorities that need to be worked on together during the next one or two years?
3. How should we work together to improve or develop matters?
 - How would you like to be involved
 - Which goals are the most important to you?



5.5 Concluding remarks (facilitator) 10 minutes

- Thank all for their contributions and hard work
- Note the next steps – sharing of ideas, ideas formulated, ideas agreed in meeting to be compiled into a report and sent to all participants. All contributions will help formulate solutions / strategy / recommendation which will lead to action and informing policy.
- Any further questions, comments, statements...
- Ask participants for evaluation of the roundtable
- Announce time for networking and further refreshments



6 Resources

1. How to Organize and Promote an Event. <http://www.planetfriendly.net/promote.html>.
2. Organise a public meeting - Information leaflet. The British Diabetic Association. <http://www.diabetes.org.uk/Documents/campaigning/Public%20meetings/Resources%20pack/booklet.doc>.
3. Organize to Win - A Grassroots Activist's Handbook - A Guide to Help People Organize Community Campaigns. Jim Britell. <http://www.britell.com/>.
4. <http://www.sovereignty.org.uk/features/activistinf/publicm.html>
5. <http://managementhelp.org/misc/mtgmgmnt.htm>
6. Day G et al 1998 Where do we go from here? A review of community participation methods, WCVA
7. <http://www.gym.net/eduserve/meetings.pdf>



7 Annex 1 Example for Evaluation

Evaluation Sheet

Roundtable held in Fitou, 31th February 2011






"How can the regional strategy for the development of tourism applied for Fitou by integrating the contributions of local residents, organizations and businesses?"

Which aspects of the roundtable were most useful?

What other topics are you interested in discussing?



Rate the overall organisation:

					
Venue					
Facilitation					
Fairness					
Length					