USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

TOPS Promoting excellence in food security programming

FSN Network Food Security and Nutrition Network

coregroup Advancing community health worldwide.

Designing Participatory Meetings and Brownbags

A TOPS Quick Guide to Linking Development Practitioners

The TOPS Program

Version 2, October 2015

Designing Participatory Meetings and Brownbags:

A TOPS Quick Guide to Linking Development Practitioners

The Technical and Operational Performance Support (TOPS) Program is the USAID/Food for Peace-funded learning mechanism that generates, captures, disseminates, and applies the highest quality information, knowledge, and promising practices in development food assistance programming, to ensure that more communities and households benefit from the U.S. Government's investment in fighting global hunger. Through technical capacity building, a small grants program to fund research, documentation and innovation, and an in-person and online community of practice (the Food Security and Nutrition [FSN] Network), The TOPS Program empowers food security implementers and the donor community to make lasting impact for millions of the world's most vulnerable people.

Led by Save the Children, The TOPS Program draws on the expertise of its consortium partners: CORE Group (knowledge management), Food for the Hungry (social and behavioral change), Mercy Corps (agriculture and natural resource management), and TANGO International (monitoring and evaluation). Save the Children brings its experience and expertise in commodity management, gender, and nutrition and food technology, as well as the management of this 7-year (2010–2017) US$30 million award.

Disclaimer:

The Technical and Operational Performance Support (TOPS) Program was made possible by the generous support and contribution of the American people through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents of this guide were created by The TOPS Program and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the U.S. Government.

Recommended Citation:

The Technical and Operational Performance Support (TOPS) Program. 2015. *Designing Participatory Meetings and Brownbags: A TOPS Quick Guide to Linking Development Practitioners* (Version 2). Washington, DC: The TOPS Program.

Contact:

The TOPS Program
c/o Save the Children
2000 L Street, NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20036
info@thetopsprogram.org
www.thetopsprogram.org

Contents

Acknowledgements

Designing Participatory Meetings and Brownbags is part of a series of quick guides produced by the Technical and Operational Performance Support (TOPS) Program to improve knowledge sharing and program learning by development practitioners. This guide represents an effort to package the learning gained by the TOPS Knowledge Management team in the process of planning and supporting the Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) Network's many large-scale knowledge sharing meetings. The quick guide focuses on identifying appropriate formats and approaches for presentations, group discussions and problem solving sessions that will maximize peer-to-peer learning and agenda setting for the future. The quick guide format, it is hoped, will make a number of easily adopted approaches and techniques accessible to a broad swathe of development practitioners.

This quick guide was authored by Lynette Friedman (consultant, FSN Network meeting design and planning) and Joan Whelan (CORE Group/TOPS). The institutional knowledge of the CORE Group, a partner on The TOPS Program consortium, and Karen LeBan, CORE's Executive Director, is strongly reflected in the content in this document. Nancy Dixon (Common Knowledge Associates), Christopher Szecsey (consultant), and Ann Hendrix-Jenkins (Johns Hopkins University Center for Communication Programs/K4Health Project, formerly CORE Group) also provided substantive and important knowledge that fed into this work through their role as facilitators of respective FSN Network knowledge sharing meetings. The authors are grateful for the advice garnered, lessons learned, and practical experience gained by working with the many champions of knowledge sharing and program learning in the FSN Network.

Finally, thanks go out to Rachel Elrom for her work finalizing the guide with top-notch editing and layout support and to Natalie Neumann for her keen eye for graphics.

Introduction

How do you design an interesting and useful peer-to-peer learning event, whether as a standalone brownbag or as a session in a knowledge sharing meeting? You may already know your topic, venue, and intended audience, and you even may have some specific presenters in mind.

This quick guide provides suggestions and ideas for sessions that will be more conducive to learning, adoption, and action than the more traditional expert-led lecture in front of a passive audience.

Underpinning the ideas presented in this guide is the belief that meeting participants have a wealth of useful experiences and ideas. Meetings and brownbags that can unlock the opportunity for sharing, discussion, and debate will produce the best opportunities for learning and a dynamic exchange of information. Regardless of which techniques you select, it is important to engage the audience and build in opportunities for participant input, engagement, thought, and dialogue.

Key steps for more impactful sessions

1. Think through your objectives and your audience's knowledge needs.
2. Choose a format that will engage participants and bring out the knowledge in the room.
3. Build in activities designed for reflection, dialogue, and collaboration.
4. Plan out the flow of the session, including managing time, questions and answers, small groups, and moving forward.

Thinking Through Your Objectives

Before launching into session ideas, it is important to think about the objectives for your session, or what you would like to accomplish. You may be seeking to encourage learning around a promising or emerging practice or around innovations or adaptations for a more established one. Or, you may hope to explore solutions to address an implementation or policy challenge. Alternatively, your chosen topic may bring new evidence or learning to your audience to address a capacity or knowledge gap. The following table discusses these objectives and shares how a dynamic session format can help achieve these goals.

Objective	What a dynamic session format will encourage
Introducing and sharing practices, innovations, and adaptations Sharing, comparing, and discussing field experience around established or emerging practices create an opportunity to understand implementation challenges and opportunities, adaptations, and innovations.	**Peer sharing of experience** The session format should facilitate open dialogue, allow for multiple views and applications to be shared, and allow for questions to be asked and answered.
Addressing common challenges and obstacles When clear answers, established practices, or an evidence base do not exist, a specific group of participants may be able to advance the thinking; devise alternative paths; or develop learning, training or advocacy agendas.	**Group problem solving and solution finding** The session format should open an exchange of ideas through brainstorming, debate, and collaborative work.
Strengthening capacity or addressing knowledge gaps Capacity or knowledge gaps in the target audience can be addressed by rolling out new or relatively unknown practices, guidance, or evidence during direct learning opportunities.	**Applying new learning** The session format should provide opportunities to internalize and contextualize new knowledge to make it real, specific, and actionable.

The specific format of a session can help you and your participants reach the objective you have in mind. Read on to learn more about specific session formats and the kinds of knowledge exchange and participant engagement they may best encourage.

Choosing the Right Format

The following are a number of session formats, but the list is by no means exhaustive. Browse the blogs, guides, and books listed in the **Additional Resources** section for more ideas on how to structure your session, and feel free to be creative and add new ideas. Remember, you can use more than one idea in a session, and you should always leave time in the schedule to include participatory approaches and techniques to stimulate thinking, reflecting, discussing, and engaging.

Case study

A case study demonstrates how an issue plays out in a complex real-life situation. Provide an example or real community context, described in writing, to small groups. The groups can then be tasked with thinking through the appropriate responses to the situation based on the information provided in the session. In order to create an effective case study, it is important to think about the key messages to be communicated and what information will be needed by the small groups to elicit good discussion and learning.

Debates

Speakers present opposing sides of an issue. This format can liven up a discussion topic that lends itself to debating pros and cons, multiple views, or conflicting opinions around an issue. As a variation, groups of participants can be assigned opposing sides of an issue and asked to formulate the key debate points as a group.

Guided discussion

Discussion sessions provide an opportunity for participants to engage in small or large group discussion around specific issues. They are designed to solicit ideas from participants and facilitate a rich exchange of ideas and experiences. Time should be spent determining the knowledge and knowledge gaps of the participants and where real learning or collaborative thinking can help move the issue forward. This way, specific guided questions can help lead participants to discovering an answer together or to sharing aspects of an issue that are new to some.

Panel discussion

Panelists build off each other’s answers to elicit different opinions and deepen the discussion. The discussion can start with an overview presentation and brief comments from each panelist to frame the discussion and provide the audience with an understanding of the experience and viewpoint each panelist brings. The majority of the session time can then be spent in a question and answer (Q&A) format with questions from both the moderator and participants. Discussion is richest when the panel members represent different key constituencies, expertise, or points of view related to the topic and when advanced preparation clarifies each panel member’s role and how he or she relates to the other panel members.

Presentations

Presentations can be effective when the goal is to make guidance, concepts, viewpoints, or specific experience clear. When working with a presenter, be sure to provide clear guidance on the points you would like the presenter to focus on so he or she can minimize the time spent on project overview and maximize the time spent delving deeper into the key lessons learned or implications for others. However, it is important, that presentations and the one-way communication they foster be seen as one part of a larger session that will then seek, through additional activities, to engage directly with participants.

Pyramid schemes

Participants are given a question or problem to think through on their own for a few minutes. They are then asked to join with a neighbor to discuss the topic in twos, then in a subsequent round in groups of four or six, then in groups of eight or twelve. Not only is this effective in requiring engagement and participation by everyone, it also creates a safe zone early on in the smallest groups for tentative and exploratory answers that could serve as the seed for creative but credible responses. Growing the groups larger provides the opportunity for friendly challenging of ideas and cross-fertilizing the best of answers across groups.

Roundtables

Participants form groups around a specific topic area in order to share experiences and discuss ideas. This format provides an informal setting for starting dialogue, sharing and discussion. Depending on the purpose, formal questions could be posed to the group to guide their discussion or the topic could remain open for the group to determine the direction of their conversation. Roundtables are similar to working sessions (described below), but generally are not as formal and may be used to simply start the discussion without the time allotted to work toward completing a joint project.

Three (or four) corners

This method facilitates more intimate small group discussion and two-way dialogue about a number of specific experiences in addition to enabling networking among participants. Three or four different presenters are set up in different corners of the room, and participants are divided into three or four smaller groups, according to the number of presenters. The groups then rotate from one presenter to the next for designated time periods, where they are able to engage with the presenter for more personalized discussion. It is helpful in a session format like this for the groups to come together in plenary to share impressions and learning from their discussions.

Work session

Participants are provided with a significant amount of working time and clear goals to use their expertise to develop a recommended plan of action, solution to a problem, or presentation or proposal around a specific topic. Short presentations or discussions to coalesce around common definitions, existing evidence, or issues might precede a working session. With larger groups, it is often beneficial to start the work with small group tasks that enable everyone to talk and collaborate. The small groups then report out to the large group to spark discussion and build consensus.

Making Room for Reflection and Dialogue

One overriding objective of any session should be to allow your participants the space to reflect, discuss and engage over the issue under discussion. This will allow participants to internalize the information shared, which, evidence has shown, will lead to more effective learning. Doing so also increases the likelihood that important tacit knowledge and experience from the participants will be shared, broadening perspectives and contexts.

The following example techniques can encourage participants' direct engagement, stimulating thinking and dialogue. They can be used in conjunction with any of the session formats described in the previous section.

A moment of silence

All too often we discourage silence, despite the benefits that reflection can bring. In the meeting context, we move quickly from one presentation to another or from presentation to questions and answers or even one topic to another. Yet participants become able to engage in the pauses in between, thinking through what they have just learned, starting to contextualize it and making it real. Building in tangible pauses into the session itself can bring real benefits. Tell participants at the end of a presentation but before Q&A or after explaining the topic of a small group discussion that before moving on you would like them to reflect for a moment, thinking about what they have just learned and applying it to their own context. The key here is to actually measure out a full minute and let the room be silent.

Agree/disagree

This technique is a great way to break the ice at the beginning of a session or any time participants need to be "woken up" and engaged, challenged to think, or encouraged to participate directly. A moderator poses to the group a series of provocative but non-divisive questions phrased in an agree/disagree format. All those who agree with the question can be asked to stand on one side of the room and those who disagree on the other. Explanation for the varying views can be solicited from members of each respective group. It is important that the moderators keep the tone light throughout this activity so that participants feel safe expressing their views.

Talk first, ask questions later

Use this technique immediately following a presentation but before a Q&A sessions to build in essential processing time where participants can reflect, discuss and apply new knowledge to their individual contexts. While broken up into groups of four or five, give participants 15 minutes to talk with each other about what they have just heard. During this time, they can be asked to share their own experiences related to the topic and/or formulate questions for the speaker. This technique enables participants to apply their own experiences and often deepens the level of the questions posed to the speaker.

Note: An important aspect of this technique is to ensure there is enough time after the processing time for Q&A. This involves monitoring the total time spent on presentation. Without enough time for subsequent Q&A, there may be frustration that many important questions formulated during the small group discussion did not get answered.

Wrapping up: Design the way forward

This technique can increase participants' sense of engagement in the issues under discussion, give participants time to reflect on the issue in their own context and facilitate small group discussion on how the issue can be taken forward in a positive manner. It is an opportunity to be heard and to solidify a sense of community. At the end of a session, provide 15 minutes for participants to talk in small groups and answer the question "What are your recommended next steps for advancing this topic and moving the issue forward? What can donors, researchers, your own organizations, networks or even you yourself do?" It may be helpful to provide participants with a few examples of needs or necessary next steps they may identify, such as a strengthened evidence base, a new donor policy, training or tools development, stakeholder consultations, or opportunities for knowledge sharing. Provide index cards for participants to record their responses so that they can be documented, perhaps posted in plenary and considered for future actions.

Managing the Flow

To maximize the benefits of the peer learning potential, it is important to create an environment where participants feel safe expressing themselves, that they are being heard, and that their time is being used well. The meeting space should be physically comfortable, and, if at all possible, participants should be seated at table rounds so they face one another and so contact and dialogue can be integrated seamlessly. No matter if your session is a week-long workshop, day-long meeting or a simple 90 minute brownbag, it is also important to let participants know what to expect during your session.

Time-Keeping Tips

Meeting participants appreciate sessions that start and end on time. When speakers run over, time for a Q&A session and other participatory aspects of the meeting are often sacrificed. These time periods often provide some of the most valuable interaction and knowledge sharing opportunities in a meeting. The following are some tips for keeping sessions running on time.

Work with your speakers in advance.

Clarify the topic focus, time allotted, specific formats and activities, and audience expectations before the day of the presentation. It is often useful to request an advance copy of PowerPoint slides and provide any feedback on the total number of slides and how to focus the presentation so it is of greatest interest to the audience.

Start on time.

Speakers often feel they need to wait until everyone comes into the room to start. However, a speaker beginning his or her presentation brings the laggards into the room and ensures that speakers do not lose valuable time later in the session.

Provide time cues to your speakers.

Use time cards to let speakers know where they stand in session timing. A common practice is to use time cards labeled at 5 minutes, 2 minutes, and 0 minutes remaining (color coded green, yellow, and red, respectively) to indicate the time left in a time slot. However, some speakers may have specific requests that will help them with their time management, for example, for a time check half-way through their time slot.

Provide time cues during the Q&A session.

Similarly, if you are moderating the Q&A time, it is helpful to provide a cue towards the end of the time that lets the audience and the speaker(s) know how many more questions can be accommodated. Saying something like “We can take two more questions” provides a transition to the next item on the agenda. Be sure to factor in the amount of time needed by the speaker to provide an answer.

Don’t share your stress.

Try not to reference to the wider group how the session is running related to timing. It is very common to hear facilitators say something like, “Since we’re running behind, we will...” Modify the agenda or your actions as needed to get the meeting back on schedule, but provide the participants with the illusion that everything is going as planned.

Managing Question and Answer Sessions

Q&A sessions provide an important opportunity for participants and speakers to interact. Participants need time to process what they have just learned in a group (e.g., talk first, ask questions later) or as individuals (e.g., a moment of silence). It is also important that participants feel acknowledged when they do have a question. Scan the room to make sure you are recognizing everyone with their hands up, and try to provide the microphone in order of request. If the same individual(s) repeatedly raise their hands, try to provide time for others to ask questions. Feel free to announce this explicitly, but in a friendly manner. As mentioned in the Time-Keeping Tips section, above, it also is important to give participants warning when the time for Q&A is running out. There are several options for handling questions in a group.

Taking questions from an individual and providing answers on a one-to-one basis

This is the standard style and works well when there is one speaker and the questions are fairly different from each other. The speaker has the opportunity to think fully about the specific question and provide a direct answer.

Taking questions from a table

This modification works well when processing time has been provided. Tables can be asked to pose the question that emerged as a main issue at their table, thus making the question more pertinent to the whole group and less focused on the interest of one individual.

Taking several questions and asking the speaker(s) to address a series of questions

This style works especially well for a panel of speakers or when there is limited time. Several questions can be solicited at a time and the speaker(s) can combine their answers. This style is especially useful for panel discussions to decrease the possibility of all of the questions being directed to only one panelist.

Requesting questions on index cards and having a moderator select and pose the questions

This style is helpful in a large group, especially where there may be concerns about sensitive questions that may be posed to a speaker. If time permits, a moderator can determine the question with the most interest that the speaker should answer. This style erects a barrier between the speaker and the audience and should therefore be used with caution.

Working with Small Groups

Small groups provide a good opportunity for greater participation, deeper discussion, and processing of information or activities.

There are several ways of breaking into small groups for a specific activity.

- Divide the existing tables or groups in the room into different small groups. Assign specific roles or questions to different tables. This is the fastest method and works well for large groups or at the beginning of a workshop when people do not yet know each other well.

- Number off participants for the total number of groups needed. Then provide clear direction on where each group should meet and the task each should take on. The benefit of this approach is that it will mix up participants and ensure greater organizational variety. This method can take too much time, however, if you are working with a large group.

Groups may work differently depending on the purpose of the session and assigned task.

- Groups may be requested to take on the same or different tasks. The same task across groups provides everyone with an opportunity to learn about a specific issue and weigh in on a specific question. Different tasks provide an opportunity for a group to cover more total ground. The method used is closely tied to your learning objectives.

- Reporting out could range from a presentation from each table to a "popcorn" of key ideas that emerged from any group. Be sure to factor in enough time for the desired report out, as this task often takes longer than anticipated.

Participants must understand what is expected of them during small group activities so they feel their time is being used effectively. Post clear instructions for the group activity on a PowerPoint slide, handout or flip chart page, and be clear on expectations, including what each group should do, what they should report out on and how much time they will have. It is also helpful to have groups select members to play various roles, including facilitator, note-taker and reporter. Rotate around the different groups and announce periodic time checks (at least at the halfway mark and a 5-minute warning) to ensure that participants are clear on the instructions and proceed appropriately in the task.

Capturing Input and Ideas

Some of the best information emerges from Q&A and group discussion. There are several methods for capturing this information.

Flip charts

Flip charts are good for capturing key points during a report out or Q&A session. They are helpful to the people in the room as a visual record of the key points and an acknowledgement that their comments were captured. It is helpful to transcribe and edit flip charts soon after the session to ensure that the text will be understandable at a later date.

Index cards or sticky notes

Index cards or sticky notes can be used for a variety of purposes. They are useful for capturing the thoughts and ideas of individuals or small groups. Some people may be more comfortable providing ideas on an index card or sticky notes than sharing them verbally with the whole group. Additionally, individuals can be encouraged to capture their thoughts on the index cards or sticky notes during a presentation or at the end of a session to maximize the time available for discussion and not lose any good ideas. Depending on the questions involved, ideas written on index cards or sticky notes can be sorted to organize ideas or develop an agenda or work plan going forward.

Note-taker

Having someone designated to taking notes and capturing key points is especially useful when you want to be able to move a specific topic area forward in the future. When the discussion is a technical one, having a note-taker who is knowledgeable in the topic area is highly beneficial. An audio recording can be used to augment the written notes.

Additional Resources

The following are a small sample of some of the fantastic blogs, guides, and books discussing how to make knowledge sharing learning focused and dynamic. The main idea is to keep exploring and experimenting.

The FSN Network Resource Library has a full collection of guides, tools, and manuals on knowledge sharing and knowledge management from the World Bank, the Canadian International Development Agency, Overseas Development Institute, International Fund for Agricultural Development, and many more. We invite you to browse (http://www.fsnnetwork.org/resource-library) and welcome your own submissions of the tools, guides, and manuals that have informed your work.

Blogs

- Conversation Matters, by Nancy Dixon of Common Knowledge Associates, www.nancydixonblog.com
- Speaking of Dialogue, by Dr. Jane Vella of Global Learning Partners, www.globallearningpartners.org
- Liberating Structures: Including and Unleashing Everyone, by Keith McCandless and Henri Lipmanowicz, www.liberatingstructures.com

Guides

- *Engaging Everyone with Liberating Structures Handbook*, Group Jazz, 2012, www.groupjazz.com
- *Knowledge Sharing for Change: Designing and facilitating learning processes with a transformational impact,* IngeniousPeoplesKnowledge, 2010, www.i-p-k.co.za

Books

- *Games Trainers Play*, John W. Newstrom and Edward E. Scannell, McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1980
- *Learning to Teach: Training of Trainers for Community Development*, Jane Vella, Oef International, 1989
- *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach: The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults*, Jane Vella, Revised Edition, Jossey-Bass Publishing, 2002
- *Taking Learning to Task: Creative Strategies for Teaching Adults*, Jane Vella, Jossey-Bass, 2002

Appendix: More-Detailed Descriptions of Five Session Formats

Below are more detailed descriptions on carrying out five of the session formats described in the Quick Guide:

1. Panel discussion format
2. Three corners format
3. Guided discussion format
4. Case study format
5. Sample session plan

The guidelines in this appendix can be adapted and shared with presenters to help them understand the format and how to best prepare their materials.

Panel Discussion Format

Purpose

This session format enables participants to hear a few key perspectives on an issue and engage with panelists that may have different opinions and ideas to offer around the topic at hand.

Short Description

Unlike standard presentations, panel discussions provide speakers the opportunity to build off each other's answers, elicit different opinions, and deepen the discussion. This format is especially useful when there are no clear cut answers or evidence to be presented, but when there is a value added to engaging various experts in discussing the intricacies of a specific issue. The discussion can start with an overview presentation and brief comments from each panelist to frame the discussion and provide the audience with an understanding of the experience and viewpoint each panelist brings. The majority of the session time can then be spent in a Q&A format with questions from both the moderator and participants. Discussion is richest when the panel members represent different key constituencies, areas of expertise, or points of view related to the topic and when advanced preparation clarifies each panel member's role and how he or she relates to the other panel members.

Sample Design (90 minutes)

1. **Introduction (10 minutes):** The moderator provides a short presentation to frame the issue to be covered during the panel discussion and briefly describes why these specific panelists have been brought together.

2. **Opening Remarks (15 minutes total):** Invite a brief (no more than 5 minutes per person) introduction and remark on the topic from each panelist. These presentations mainly should serve the purpose of helping the audience understand the perspective each panelist represents and provide enough information to inform future discussions and questions.

3. **Question and Answer (20 minutes):** Panelists are asked questions from a preselected list that the panelist, moderator, and other interested parties can contribute to in advance of the meeting. Questions should evoke discussion and debate from various perspectives. Provide panelists with the questions ahead of time so they can prepare some thoughts and ensure that their opening remarks are not duplicative.

4. **Small Group Discussion (15 minutes):** Participants are asked to talk in small groups about their general reactions so far and to formulate additional questions for the panelists.

5. **Additional Question and Answer (30 minutes):** Panelists answer questions emanating from small group discussion. Participants also are invited to answer.

Variation

The two Q&A sections (steps 3 and 5) could be combined into one longer Q&A session with questions from both the moderator and the audience. This variation provides greater total time in Q&A because the small group discussion is removed, but may lose some depth to questions that might come out of the small group discussion period.

Three Corners Format

Purpose

This session format enables participants and presenters to have more intimate, in-depth conversations and to explore various experiences within a topic area.

Short Description

This format provides an opportunity to facilitate intimate small group discussion and two-way dialogue about a number of specific experiences or tools. Three presenters are set up in different corners of the room. Participants are divided into three small groups and rotate from one presenter to the next for designated time periods. During the small group rotations, participants are able to listen to the presenters and engage in personalized discussion. It is helpful in a session format like this for the groups to come together in plenary to share impressions and learning from their discussions.

Sample Design (90 minutes)

1. **Introduction (10 minutes):** The moderator starts the session in the large group by providing a brief overview to the topic area and the focus of the various presenters. The moderator then explains the flow of the session to participants (i.e., the participants will form three small groups and the speakers will rotate through the various groups, presenting their experience to each group and engaging in discussion). Note: To quickly separate the group into three equal-sized smaller groups, it may be useful to ask participants to count off from one to three, then assign each number group a table or corner.

2. **Table Discussions (60 minutes):** The various presenters each start at different tables in three corners of the room. The time they spend at each table should be divided into presentation and Q&A.

a. **Round One (20 minutes)**
b. **Round Two (20 minutes)**
c. **Round Three (20 minutes)**

One of the benefits of this approach is the interaction that can occur between the speaker and participants during a small group Q&A session. It is therefore useful to minimize the actual presentation time in order to provide ample time for Q&A. With three speakers, there is sufficient time for 10 minutes of presentation and 10 minutes of Q&A. Provide periodic time checks to ensure that the speakers finish their presentations, adequate time is spent on Q&A, and the group has a chance to wrap up their discussion.

Note: It is important to work with the presenters ahead of time and to ensure that they understand that they will not be using PowerPoint slides. They can print off any visuals that would support their presentation or provide a summary sheet of main points, but should focus on informally discussing their experience and ideas with the participants.

3. **Conclusion (20 minutes):** Following the series of small group presentations, it is useful to bring the whole group together for a joint Q&A session. At this point, the speakers can form a panel at the front of the room and respond to any unanswered questions. This process enables participants to ask cross-cutting questions related to all the speakers.

Variation

This same format can be used with four corners with time adjusted accordingly. Adding an additional 20 minutes would enable one additional rotation. Decreasing each rotation time to 15 minutes is possible if the material and discussion can be adequately covered in that time period.

Guided Discussion Format

Purpose

This session format engages participants in addressing common challenges and obstacles where group problem solving and solution finding may be beneficial. This format is especially useful in situations where answers are not yet known and there is a benefit to bringing the experience in the room to bear on the issue at hand.

Short Description

Discussion sessions provide an opportunity for participants to engage in small or large group discussion around specific issues. They are designed to solicit ideas from participants and facilitate a rich exchange of ideas and experiences. Time should be spent determining the knowledge and knowledge gaps of the participants and where real learning or collaborative thinking can help move the issue forward. This way, specific guided questions can help lead participants to discover an answer together or to share aspects of an issue that are new to some.

Sample Design (90 minutes)

1. **Introductions (5 minutes):** In order to set a good stage for discussion and enable participants to recognize the various affiliations and expertise in the room, it would be

helpful to provide a few minutes at the beginning of the session for participants to introduce themselves.

2. **Presentations (no more than 15 minutes total):** You may choose to start with a brief informal presentation to develop a common understanding of the topic area or provoke critical thinking around specific issues. Keep any presentations to a minimum to enable the majority of the time to be spent in discussion and avoid the temptation to use PowerPoint.

3. **Discussion (at least 60 minutes):** The majority of the time should be spent in discussion. Depending on the size of your group and the topic at hand, you could choose to do either one large group discussion or several small group discussions. The key to this format is preparing significant, interesting questions that will stimulate a good dialogue on the topic and enable the group to achieve the session's objective(s).

4. **Summary and Conclusions (10 minutes):** Provide a summary to the whole group of the issue discussed, conclusions reached, and any potential next steps. If you choose to form small groups, be sure to build in some time at the end for the small groups to share their main thoughts and ideas with the larger group. This sharing can be accomplished by asking groups to briefly share their main conclusions or biggest takeaway messages as opposed to requesting lengthy reports from each group.

Case Study Format

Purpose

This session format facilitates group problem solving around common challenges or obstacles.

Short Description

A case study demonstrates how an issue plays out in a complex real-life situation. Provide an example or real community context, described in writing, to small groups. The groups then can be tasked with thinking through the appropriate responses to the situation based on the information provided in the session. In order to create an effective case study, it is important to think about the key messages to be communicated and what information will be needed by the small groups to elicit good discussion and learning.

Sample Design (90 minutes)

1. **Introduction/Warm up (10 minutes):** The moderator welcomes the group to the session and provides a brief overview of the purpose and direction for the session. Participants are asked to introduce themselves. They also can be encouraged to respond to a question pertinent to the case study.

2. **Case Study (60 minutes)**

    a. **Small Group Discussion (30 minutes):** Introduce the case study and provide participants with a few minutes to read the it to themselves. Ask participants to work in table groups to answer a few specific questions on the case study.

Example:
- What are the current problems? What brought them about?
- What could have prevented the problems?
- What could be done now to turn things around?

b. **Report Back (30 minutes):** Request responses from questions sequentially going around the room (i.e., one response per table). Record responses on a flip chart. Note: The moderator should have prepared a list of key issues or points that he or she expects to emerge from the case study. You can encourage a group dialogue by allowing quick participant comments and by probing as needed to bring out key points.

3. **Discussion of personal experiences and opportunities for change (20 minutes):** Encourage participants to bring their own experiences to bear on the discussion.

   Example:
   - Do you recognize some of the challenges in this case study?
   - What other issues often emerge related to the topic at hand?
   - What have you learned in your personal experiences?

4. **Conclusion:** Wrap up discussion and thank participants for coming.

Sample Session Plan

This sample session plan provides a tool to record the objectives of the session, how to engage participants, and how to best use the time allotted. While preparing for the session, list the following items.

Session Title:

Day/Time:

Lead Facilitator and Contact Person:

Learning Objective(s)

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Objective 1
- Objective 2
- Objective 3

Participatory Activity(ies):

- Activity 1
- Activity 2
- Activity 3

For ideas and support in making your session more participatory, contact the event coordinators: [INSERT CONTACT INFORMATION HERE].

Learning Objectives

Use a measurable action word (examples below). Write from the perspective of what the learner will be able to do after your presentation. Create a single action for each objective. Be specific. Each session must have at least one learning objective.

Examples of Measurable Action Words: Explain, Compare, Evaluate, Demonstrate, Differentiate, Identify, Analyze, Describe, Design, Formulate, Name, Define, Discuss, Assess, List

Objective Example: "By the end of this session, participants will be able to design a digital story."

Participatory Activities

Select the participatory activities that you plan to incorporate into the session:

- ☐ **Case Study**: Using a complex real-life situation for groups to think through a scenario
- ☐ **Debate**: Assigning participants to different sides of an issue and asking them to frame key points
- ☐ **Guided Discussion:** Framing key questions for small group or pair discussion
- ☐ **Panel Discussion**: Using panelists to frame the discussion and answer participant questions
- ☐ **Pyramid Schemes**: Scaling up discussion from pairs, to groups of 4, to groups of 8, etc.
- ☐ **Roundtables**: Forming groups around specific topics to share experiences and discuss ideas
- ☐ **Three Corners:** Locating presenters in the corners of the room or tables for simultaneous discussion on 3–4 different topics
- ☐ **Work Session**: Giving participants time to develop a plan of action or solution to a given problem
- ☐ **Other (please describe):** ____

(continued on next page)

Format of Session

Time	Activity & Facilitator	Description	Materials/ Handouts
Example: 10 minutes 9–9:10 am	Icebreaker (Sarah)	Ask participants to find one person in the room that they do not know well and discuss: What is the biggest challenge you face working in a consortium? After 2 minutes, ask them to switch.	None
Example: 30 minutes 9:10–9:40 am	Small Group Discussion (Devan)	Explain the activity and direct participants to the instruction sheets on the tables. Ask each group to select a note-taker and facilitator.	Small group instruction sheet Flip charts Markers
Example: 25 minutes 9:40–10:05 am	Small Group Sharing Out (Devan)	Invite groups to share their responses to the key questions. Limit group sharing to 5 minutes per group.	None

Presentation Tips

- Give an opening statement to acquaint the audience with the nature and purpose of your session.
- Rehearse your presentation beforehand, timing it. Remember that seconds are added to the presentation each time you click to the next PowerPoint slide.
- Stay within your allotted time to ensure that all presenters have equal time on the program and allow the audience the opportunity to ask questions.
- Know what to omit if you start to go over your allotted time. Session moderators will hold you to the allotted time.

PowerPoint Tips

- Describe the content of graphic (i.e., graphs, tables, photograms) slides orally during your presentation.
- Use 40- or 44-point bold font for headings and 24- to 32-point font for bullets.
- Include no more than six lines of text on each slide.