Discover Engage Democracy Conference User Guide
1. Introduction
With this little Guide we want to facilitate our Conference and our further Meetings and Cooperations. In Our Meetings we can use different types of organization. The classical would be to have Chairman. But we want it more participatory and more dynamic thats why we can use this hand signs to have a dynamic and efficient discussion.

2. Hand-signs

![Hand-signs Image]

- **Speaking**
  - Want to Talk
  - Direct Response
  - Clarify
  - Point of Order

- **Feeling**
  - Agree
  - Don't Agree
  - Oppose
  - Block
3. Consensus
For finding solutions for discussions or to decide stuff let's use consensus.

The consensus process
(for small and medium sized groups)

The key for a group working towards consensus is for all members of the group express their needs and viewpoints clearly, recognise their common ground and find solutions to any areas of disagreement.

The diagram below shows how a discussion evolves during the consensus process. At the beginning it widens out as people bring different perspectives and ideas to the group. This provides the material needed for a broad ranging discussion (the middle section) which explores all the options and helps people understand each others' concerns. This can be a turbulent and sometimes difficult stage – people might be grappling with lots of competing or contradictory ideas – but it is the most creative part, so don't lose heart!

Finally the group finds common ground and weeds out some of the options, combining all the useful bits into a proposal. The third stage in the diagram shows this convergence of the discussion, culminating in the decision.

Opening out
Share needs, concerns, desires and emotions.
Generate ideas.

Discussion
Explore ideas and pros and cons.
Try to understand each other's needs and concerns.

Synthesis
Find common ground and build proposals by weaving together different ideas.
Proposals need to address fundamental needs and key concerns.
The stages of the consensus process

There are lots of consensus models out there, some groups have developed very detailed procedures, other groups follow a more organic process. The following basic process outlines the stages that are common to most models of consensus. Although your group may not formally go through the process for each and every decision you make it’s a good idea to regularly practice doing it in this way. Being familiar with the process can really help when it comes to difficult or complex decisions.

This model will work well in groups up to about 15-20 people. With groups larger than that extra steps need to be built in to ensure that everyone is able to participate fully. Have a look at the section on Consensus in large groups below to see how this basic model can be adapted to work for groups of hundreds and even thousands of people.

**Step 1: Introduce and clarify the issue(s) to be decided**

Share relevant information. Work out what the key questions are.

**Step 2: Explore the issue and look for ideas**

1. Gather initial thoughts and reactions. What are the issues and concerns?
2. Collect ideas for solving the problem – write them down.
3. Have a broad ranging discussion and debate the ideas:
   - What are the pros and cons?
   - Start to think about solutions to the concerns.
   - Eliminate some ideas, short list others.

**Step 3: Look for emerging proposals**

Is there one idea, or a series of ideas, that brings together the best qualities of the ideas discussed? Look for a solution that everyone might agree on and create a proposal.

**Step 4: Discuss, clarify and amend your proposal**

Ensure that any remaining concerns are heard and that everyone has a chance to
Look for amendments that make the proposal even more acceptable to the group.

**Step 5: Test for agreement**

Do you have agreement? Check for the following:

- **Blocks:** I have a fundamental disagreement with the core of the proposal that cannot be resolved. We need to look for a new
- **Stand asides:** I can’t support this proposal because … but I don’t want to stop the group, so I’ll let the decision happen without
- **Reservations:** I have some reservations but am willing to let the proposal pass.

- **Agreement:** I support the proposal and am willing to help implement it.
- **Consensus:** No blocks, not too many stand asides or reservations?
  Active agreement?
  *Then we have a decision!*

**Step 6: Implement the decision**

Who, when, how? Action point the various tasks, set deadlines etc.
Step 1: Introduce and clarify the issue

This first stage is crucial to get you off to a good start. A good introduction will focus the meeting, ensure that everyone is talking about the same issue and provide everyone with all relevant information needed to make a decision. Spending a bit more time now to get everyone up to speed will save lots of time later.

Explain what the issue is and why it needs to be discussed. This could be done by the facilitator, the person who is raising the issue or by someone who knows a lot about the issue and its background.

Share all relevant information. If possible prepare a summary of the relevant information and circulate in advance so that people have a chance to read up and think about the issue.

Agree the aims of the discussion: What decisions need to be made by when? Who needs to be involved in making the decision? What are the key questions? Can you break complex issues into smaller chunks to tackle one by one? Do all the decisions need to be made today? Does everyone need to be involved or can the issue be delegated to a working group? Could you decide the basics and leave the fine details to be worked out by a couple of people?

Allow plenty of time for questions and clarifications. Don’t assume that everything is crystal clear, just because it’s obvious to you. Equally, if you are confused yourself, now is the time to ask for more information or explanations.

Step 2: Explore the issue and look for ideas

Now it’s time for everyone to really try to understand the issue, to express what they want and need to happen and to come up with lots of ideas for solving the problems.

1. Gather initial thoughts and reactions.
   Start by giving people time to think about the issue and to express any wishes and concerns that it brings up. Make a note of these as they’ll need to be addressed for a solution to be found. Resist the temptation to jump straight in with a proposal – to achieve consensus we first of all need to have a good understanding of everyone’s concerns and limitations. Be honest about your own feelings and listen carefully to what everyone else is saying. At times it can be difficult to say what it is you want and don’t want so if you’re struggling to express things say so rather than staying quiet. Equally, if you don’t quite understand someone else’s position, ask for clarification.

2. Collect ideas for solving the problem.
   Use techniques such as go-rounds, ideastorms or breaking into small groups to generate lots of ideas for solving the problem. Be clear that at this stage they are only ideas, not proposals. When bringing up ideas take into account the concerns you’ve heard. For example, if someone has said that they aren’t able to get to a venue because of the poor transport links to that part of town, don’t suggest another venue in the same area.

3. Have a broad ranging discussion about the ideas.
   Consensus is a creative thinking process that thrives on mixing up lots of different ideas. Make time for a broad ranging discussion, where you can explore ideas and look at the pros and cons and any concerns they bring up. This will often spark new and surprising ideas. Express your reservations about ideas early on so that they can be dealt with. Draw on all the experience, knowledge and wisdom present in your group. Make sure that everyone is heard.
Step 3: Look for emerging proposals

After discussing the issue freely move on to finding agreement on what needs to be done.

This stage is also called synthesis, which means coming up with a proposal by combining elements from several different ideas.

Start with a summary of where you think the group and its different members are at. Outline the emerging common ground as well as the unresolved differences: “It seems like we’ve almost reached agreement on that element, but we need to explore this part further to address everyone’s concerns.” It’s important to not only pick up on clear differences, but also on more subtle agreement or disagreement.

Now start building a proposal from whatever agreement there is. Look for ideas on how the differences can be resolved. Focus on solutions that address the fundamental needs and key concerns that people within the group have. Often people are willing to give way on some things but not on others which affect them more closely. The solution will often be found by combining elements from different proposals.

It can really help to use a flipchart or a whiteboard to write up the areas of agreement and issues to be resolved. This means everyone can see what’s happening and it focusses the discussion.

People often argue over small details and overlook the fact that they agree on the big picture.

Making this obvious to the group can help to provide ways forward.

Even when there is strong disagreement within the group, synthesis can help move the discussion on. Always try and find some common ground, no matter how small: “So we’re all agreed that climate change demands urgent action, even if we disagree on whether the solution lies in developing new technologies, or reducing consumption”. This can reinforce that we’re all on the same side, and remind a group of their overall shared aims – a necessary condition for consensus.

Also synthesising a solution doesn’t necessarily mean uniformity or unanimity. Sometimes a solution is staring us in the face, but our desire to get full agreement becomes an obstacle: “So we’re all agreed we’d like to go ahead with the protest. However some feel strongly that the target of our protest should be government, and others feel it ought to be corporations – is there any reason why we have to choose between the two? Could we not agree that both can happen?”

Step 4: Discuss, clarify and amend your proposal

Check whether people have concerns about the proposal and look for amendments that make the proposal more acceptable to everyone. Do things like go-rounds and straw polls to gauge support for the proposal and to elicit amendments. If it becomes obvious at this stage that some people have strong reservations, see whether you can come up with a different, better option. Remember, consensus is about finding solutions that work for everyone. Be careful not to get carried away because most people like the proposal. Watch out for people who are quiet or looking unhappy and check with them. Give people time to get their head around the proposal and what it means for them. If it’s a complex or emotional issue then build in some time for reflection or a break before moving on to testing for agreement.
**Step 5: Test for agreement**

1. **Clearly state the proposal:** it’s best if people can see it written up, for example on a large piece of paper.

2. **Check for clarifications:** does everyone fully understand what is being proposed? Does everyone understand the same thing?

3. **Ask whether anyone has reservations or objections:** ideally the consensus decision making process should identify and address concerns and reservations at an early stage. However, proposals do not always get wholehearted support from everyone, and less confident group members may find it hard to express their disagreement. It is important therefore to explicitly check if anyone is unhappy with a proposal at this stage.

Within consensus there are several ways of expressing disagreement. The first two, declaring reservations and standing aside, provide a way to express concerns, whilst allowing the group to proceed with the decision. The block stops the proposal.

**Declaring reservations:** I still have problems with the proposal, but I’ll go along with it.

You are willing to let the proposal pass but want to register your concerns. You may even put energy into implementing the idea once your dissent has been acknowledged. If there are significant reservations the group may amend or reword the proposal.

**Standing aside:** I can’t support this proposal because... but I don’t want to stop the group, so I’ll let the decision happen without me and I won’t be part of implementing it.

You might stand aside because you disagree with the proposal: “I’m unhappy enough with this decision not to put any effort into making it a reality, but if the rest of you want to go ahead, I won’t stop you.” In this case the person standing aside is not responsible for the consequences. This should be recorded in the minutes.

Sometimes standing aside can be more pragmatic. You might like the decision but be unable to support it because of time restraints or personal energy levels. “I’m OK with the decision, but I’m not going to be around next week to make it happen.”

The group may be happy to accept the stand aside and go ahead. Or the group might decide to work on a new proposal, especially where there are several stand asides.

**Blocking:** I have a fundamental disagreement with the core of the proposal that cannot be resolved. We need to look for a new proposal.

A block always stops a proposal from being agreed. It expresses a fundamental objection. It means that you cannot live with the proposal. This isn’t an “I don’t really like it” or “I liked the other idea better.” It means “I fundamentally object to this proposal, and here is why...” If the group accepts the proposal either you or others will struggle to stay part of the group. The group can either accept the block and immediately look for another proposal, or look for amendments to overcome the objection.

The block is a powerful tool and should be used with caution. Ideally strong concerns will be heard early enough in the discussion to feed into the synthesised proposal and a block will be unnecessary.

Make sure that everyone understands the different options for expressing disagreement. Often people are confused and block when they would actually be happy to stand aside. Sometimes people are scared of blocking even though they are deeply unhappy and use a milder form of disagreement instead. Ask people what their problems with the proposal are, and whether they have suggestions for how they could be addressed.

4. **Check for active agreement.**

If there are no blocks, check for active agreement from everyone. People often show they agree by waving their hands, but watch out for silence or inaction and check for the reasons.

**Step 6: Implement the decision**

Once you’ve agreed what you want to do, you need to work out who will do what and by when. Share out the tasks among the group and record these action points in the minutes for the meeting.
An example of a consensus process

Step 1: Introduce and clarify issue
“The bit of wasteland that we’ve used as a park for the last ten years is going to be sold by the council – they want to sell it so a supermarket can be built there!”
“But nobody wants another supermarket – we already have three in this town!”

Step 2: Explore the issue and look for ideas
“Let’s go round and see what everyone thinks.”
“I guess it’s time to find somewhere else for the kids to play.”
“I can’t give up that easily – let’s look for ways to raise the money to buy the park!”
“Yes, let’s form an action group, do some fundraising, and what about squatting it?”
“Mmm... not sure that squatting’s for me. I’d be happy to look at raising money though.”
“OK, but I don’t want to rule out taking action if we can’t raise the money.”

[More ideas are talked about...]

Step 3: Look for emerging proposals
“So what are we going to do? Some of you feel that we should build tree houses in the park to stop the developers, but we think we should try and raise money to buy the land.”
“But nobody’s said that they’re actually against squatting the park – just not everyone wants to do it. And squatting might slow the council down so we have time to raise the money. Let’s do both.”

Step 4: Discuss, clarify and amend your proposal
“So let’s just check how everyone feels about that as a proposal. Let’s do a go-round.”
“I like the idea of both squatting and trying to raise the cash to save the park, but people have been talking about separate groups doing those. I feel that we really need to stay as one group.”

[Everyone has their say...]

“OK, so there’s a suggestion that we amend the proposal to make it clear that we stay as one group, even though we’re squatting and raising funds at the same time.”

Step 5: Test for agreement
“Right, we have a proposal that we squat the park to make sure that it doesn’t get trashed, and at the same time we start doing grant applications to raise money to buy the land. We’re going to be clear that we are one group doing both these things. Does anyone disagree with this proposal? Remember, if you think we should consider any reservations you have then please let us know, even if you’re still going to go along with it. And you can stand aside if you don’t want to take part in all or part of the plans. Finally, the block is if you feel this is really wrong for some reason.”
“Yes, I think squatting has good chances of getting results, but I’m not sure we can raise that much cash. I’m not going to stand in the way – so yeah, I’ll stand aside from the grants bit.”
“I don’t believe we can manage the fundraising either, but I’m happy to give it a try.”
“Does anyone else disagree? No? OK, I think we might have consensus. Let’s just check – wave your hands if you agree with the proposal... Rob, just checking, because you didn’t wave your hands – are you happy with the proposal? Ah, I see, yes... I hope your wrist gets better soon. Great, we have consensus, with one stand aside and one reservation!”

Step 6: Implement the decision
“OK, so we’re going to squat the land and we need to start fundraising. We’ll need to decide things like when we’ll start squatting, and what things we’ll need. And for the fundraising we’ll need to identify funds that may be able to help, and come up with other ideas for raising money. And let’s talk to people who couldn’t come tonight and make sure they can get involved.”
4. Facilitating Meetings

Facilitating a meeting - beginning to end

This section gives an overview of the tasks a facilitator may need to undertake in a meeting. Every meeting is different. Not all the points mentioned may be appropriate – use your own judgement and innovation. Whilst it's important that these tasks happen, it doesn't have to be the facilitator that does them all! Draw on volunteers in the group to help with the facilitation. Make sure that the goals of the group and members' expectations of the facilitator are clear to everyone. This allows the appropriate use of tools and suggestions.

1) Preparing the meeting

1. Prepare an effective agenda (see box below).
2. Ensure everyone is informed about time, place and content of the meeting. Send out pre-meeting materials if necessary. Don't just rely on email, unless you know everyone has internet access and uses it regularly.
3. Consider physical arrangements such as temperature, air quality, ability to hear and see. Think about any special needs people might have and how to cater for them. Arrange the seating in an inclusive way – some groups find circles are best because they allow everyone to see each other, while other groups prefer rows so that people can seat themselves according to how committed they feel to the group. In the case of rows, many groups find a V formation useful, like sergeant's stripes with the point away from the front.
4. Gather materials needed for the meeting, e.g. watch, pens, marker pens, flipcharts, written presentations and proposals.
5. Find a co-facilitator who can take over in an emergency, if the main facilitator tires or wants to participate more actively in the discussion.

To find out more have a look at our briefings Organising Successful Meetings and Access Issues.

The meeting agenda

A well structured agenda is vital for a good meeting. The facilitator can help the group draw up agendas that are focussed on the aims of the meeting and are realistic. Remember: if the meeting is only an hour long, there should only be an hour's worth of items on the agenda!

You can either draw up the agenda at the beginning of the meeting, or better still prepare a proposed agenda in advance. It's important that everyone gets a chance to have an input and that the agenda is agreed by everyone.

To create an agenda first agree the aims for the meeting and then collect agenda items from the group, preferably in advance. Estimate the time needed for each item. Think about priorities for this meeting – what could be tackled another time or in separate working groups? Think about effective tools for controversial topics. Deal with difficult items after the group has warmed up but before it is tired. Alternate short and long items. How should the meeting start and end? Plan in breaks, especially for meetings longer than 1½ hours. Plan in an evaluation of the meeting near the end so you can learn for next time.

Write up the proposed agenda where everyone will be able to see it (on a whiteboard or flipchart, for example) or make copies to give to everyone. This will be helpful during the meeting as well as democratising the process of agenda formation.

Ask yourself what you can cut from the agenda, or trim down if anything runs over your proposed time. Have some suggestions up your sleeve.

Sample meeting agenda for the Stop Newton Bypass Campaign

Start 7.00pm

- Introductions (10min)
- Short summary of the campaign (5min)
- Report back from working groups: media, finance, research, stalls (20min)
- Should we meet with the planners? Questions to ask (30min)
- Break (20min)
- Xmas do – when and where (10min)
- Organising more stalls/leafleting (30min)
- Next meetings (5min)
- Any other business (10min)
- Evaluation (10min)

End 9.30pm
2) Getting the meeting off to a good start

A good start is to introduce yourself and explain the role of the facilitator(s).

Have an introductory activity. What you do really depends on the group. It might be a formal icebreaker or a few minutes chat—whatever you do make sure you don’t alienate anyone, especially newcomers to the meeting. If people don’t know each other or there are newcomers to the group, get everyone to introduce themselves—really important for welcoming new people. Encourage people to share more than just their names. You could ask everyone to state in a couple of sentences why they are here, or to share an interesting skill they have (e.g. “I can compose poetry in Mongolian”). Or ask for their favourite colour, food etc. If there are too many people this could be done in smaller groups.

Set the boundaries of the meeting: explain the time frame, subject, aims of meeting, the process for making decisions, the responsibilities of the facilitator and what you aim to do. Agree with the group what behaviour is acceptable/not acceptable in the meeting (e.g. one person speaking at a time, non-sexist and non-racist language, no dominating or threatening behaviour). This may be agreed for a series of meetings, or unique to a particular meeting. It can be useful to have the group agreement, as it’s sometimes called, on display to remind people of what the group agreed on.

Explain the proposed agenda, then ask for comments and make necessary changes. Be careful not to spend half the meeting discussing which item should go where—if necessary be firm. Allocate time for each item and set a realistic finishing time. Keep to this. If using consensus decision making make allowance for extra time to go deeper into the issue if necessary.

Ensure roles such as notetaker, timekeeper and vibes-watcher are covered.

3) During the meeting

Go through the agenda item by item. Keep the group focussed on one item at a time until a decision has been reached, even if that decision is to shelve it for some other time.

Use short items, fun items, announcements and breaks throughout the agenda to provide rest and relief from the more taxing items.

Make sure that decisions on action steps include what, how, who, when and where. Ensure any action points are noted down along with who will do them and any deadline.

If new items come up in the discussion make sure they get noted down to be dealt with later. You could choose to use a parking space (see the glossary at end).

Invite and move forward discussion. Clarify proposals that are put forward. State and restate the position of the meeting as it appears to be emerging until agreement is reached.

Introduce tools such as ideastorming options, forming small groups for discussion, delegating to working groups, and go-rounds, to make the meeting more efficient and participatory.

Regulate the flow of discussion by calling on speakers in an appropriate order. Often this will be as they indicate they want to speak (see hand-signals). Sometimes you may ask more vocal people to hold back from speaking in order to let others have their say.

Help everyone to participate: draw out quiet people, limit over-talking, don’t let anyone dominate the discussion. Use tools such as talking sticks or breaking into small groups to equalise participation and to create a safe atmosphere for expressing opinions and feelings.

Check on the overall feeling of the group throughout the meeting: check energy levels, interest in the subject, whether the aims are being fulfilled, whether the structure is appropriate (large or small groups) and time.

Be positive: use affirmation and appreciation; comment on special contributions of members and accomplishments of the group. Be even-handed and don’t just affirm a few individuals.

In tense or tiring situations try humour, affirmation, games, changing seats, silence, taking a break etc. Some groups might rebel at the suggestion of “wasting time” on a game, but will welcome a stretch break or informal hilarity.

Challenge put-downs and discriminatory remarks.
4) Ending the meeting
Make sure a time and place for the next meeting has been agreed and that people leave their contact details if they want to be updated or receive minutes for the meeting. Do this before people start leaving.
Sum up, remind people of what they're committed to doing before the next meeting, and provide some satisfying closure to the meeting.
Check that someone has taken responsibility for writing up and circulating the minutes or notes in the next few days.

Facilitating Consensus
The key to helping a group towards consensus is to help all members of the group express their needs and viewpoints clearly, map out common ground and find solutions to any areas of disagreement. Active listening, summarising and synthesis are three skills that help the facilitator with this.

1) Active listening
Active listening is a key facilitation skill – without it a facilitator simply can’t do his or her job. When we actively listen we suspend our own thought processes and give the speaker our full attention. We make a deliberate effort to understand another person’s position and their underlying needs. We simply listen, and we don’t just listen with our ears. We also use our body language, eye contact and where appropriate verbal cues – short questions or comments – to help the speaker formulate their thoughts and let them know that they are being listened to.

Active listening helps facilitators in several ways. It helps us to understand how the speaker feels about a subject or situation and the underlying emotions, concerns, and tensions. It allows us to focus on the core issues of a speaker’s message. It enables us to hear what the speaker is actually saying to us, and not what we want to hear. It also shows the speaker that we are interested in what they have to say.

2) Summarising
Listening on its own is a great tool for diagnosing problems and hearing underlying issues. There’s a second stage to active listening that can help a group move forwards – succinctly summarising what’s been said. Summarising reassures speakers they are being heard, and it can also help to focus meetings.
Examples include: summarising after a period of discussion to clarify where you think the meeting has got to; or summarising after a particularly rambling speaker to ensure that everyone understood the essence of the point that they made.
Some people find it helpful to take notes or write up key issues on a flipchart as the discussion happens. This makes a succinct and accurate summary much easier.

Summarising effectively
- Wait until the speaker has finished.
- Offer the summary tentatively and allow people to correct you if you get it wrong. Use phrases such as: “you seem to feel that...”, “what I hear you saying is.... is that right?” But we need to be careful how we phrase it. If we say something like: “so you feel that...” and the speaker doesn't agree 100% then we may risk offending our speaker by misrepresenting them.
- Summarise succinctly – try to boil things down into one or two short sentences.
- Rephrase rather than parrot – this shows we’ve understood the key issues and feelings that were expressed.
  “What I hear you saying is that you feel we need to restrict noise after 10pm because you need a good night’s sleep to be able to function in the meeting tomorrow".
3) Synthesis

When working to reach consensus we bring together different ideas and try to find a proposal that is agreeable to everyone. We call this process synthesis: it maps out the common ground, finds connections between seemingly competing ideas and weaves them together to form proposals.

Synthesis is based on active listening, which allows us to hear the emerging common ground as well as unresolved differences.

Start with a summary of where you think the group and its different members are at: “it seems like we’ve almost reached agreement on that element of the proposal, but that we need to explore this part further to address everyone’s concerns.” It’s important to not only pick up on clear differences, but also on more subtle agreement or disagreement.

Start with whatever agreement there is and build the proposal from that. Look for ideas on how the differences can be resolved. Focus on solutions that address the fundamental needs and key concerns that people within the group have. Often people are willing to give way on some things yet not on others which affect them more closely. The solution will often be found by combining elements from different proposals.

As with summarising it can really help to use a flipchart to write up the areas of agreement and issues to be resolved. This means everyone can see what’s happening and focus the discussion.

People often argue over small details and overlook the fact that they agree on the big picture. Making this obvious to the group can help to provide ways forward.

Even when there is strong disagreement within the group, synthesis can help move the discussion on. Always try and find some common ground, no matter how small: “so we’re all agreed that climate change demands urgent action, even if we disagree on whether the solution lies in developing new technologies, or reducing consumption”. This can reinforce that we’re all on the same side, and remind a group of their overall shared aims – a necessary condition for consensus.

Also synthesising a solution doesn’t necessarily mean uniformity or unanimity. Sometimes a solution is staring us in the face, but our desire to get full agreement becomes an obstacle: “so we’re all agreed we’d like to go ahead with the protest. However some feel strongly that the target of our protest should be government, and others feel it ought to be corporations – is there any reason why we have to choose between the two? Could we not agree that both can happen?”
**Glossary of Tools**

**Excitement sharing:** people share something good or exciting that has happened to them recently or since the last meeting. Good at start of meetings as it creates a lot of positive energy and puts people more in touch with each other's lives.

**Group Agreement:** the group agrees at the beginning of the meeting what behaviour will help make the meeting a safe, respectful place for everyone. May include things like: switch off phones; no smoking; one person speaking at a time; no put-downs; respect etc.

**Go-rounds:** everyone takes a turn to speak without interruption or comment from other people. Go-rounds help to gather opinions, feelings and ideas as well as slowing down the discussion and improving listening. Make sure that everyone gets a chance to speak.

**Hand signals** can make meetings run more smoothly and help the facilitator see emerging agreements. Three simple signals should suffice:

- **Raise a hand** when you wish to contribute to the discussion with a general point.

**Raise both hands** if your point is a direct response to the current discussion. This allows you to jump to the head of the queue, so use it wisely and discourage overuse!

**'Silent applause'** – when you hear an opinion that you agree with, wave a hand with your fingers pointing upwards. This saves a lot of time as people don't need to chip in to say “I'd just like to add that I agree with...”

**Idea storming** gathers a large number of ideas quickly. Start by stating the issue. Ask people to say whatever comes into their heads as fast as possible – without censoring or discussion. This encourages creativity and frees energy. Write down all ideas for later discussion.

**Paired listening** creates a space where everyone is heard, so participants can explore and formulate their own thoughts and feelings on an issue without interruption. In pairs, one person is the listener, the other speaks about her thoughts and feelings on the issue. The listener gives full attention to their partner without interrupting. After a set time swap roles within the pairs.

**Parking space:** when something comes up that's not relevant to the discussion at hand “park” it in the parking space (a large sheet of paper on the wall) and deal with it at an appropriate time later. This allows you to stay focused but reassures participants they will be heard.

**Small groups** create safer spaces for people to contribute to the meeting. They can also make meetings more efficient – any topics are discussed more effectively in a smaller task group, and different groups can discuss different topics simultaneously. Explain clearly what you want groups to do. Write up the task where people can see it. If you want feedback at the end, ensure each group appoints a notetaker to report back.

**Talking stick:** people may speak only when they hold the talking stick. This makes people conscious of when they interrupt others.

**Throw back to the group** – many facilitators feel they have to deal with all the problems that arise in meetings. Where possible, let the group do the work. If someone asks a question, you don't have to answer it so throw it back to the group. Get them to make the major decisions about things like time, and priorities for the meeting.