AGA KHAN FOUNDATION

Virtual Facilitation Techniques for Work Teams and Communities of Practice

A guide for designing and running dynamic and engaging remote sessions and meetings

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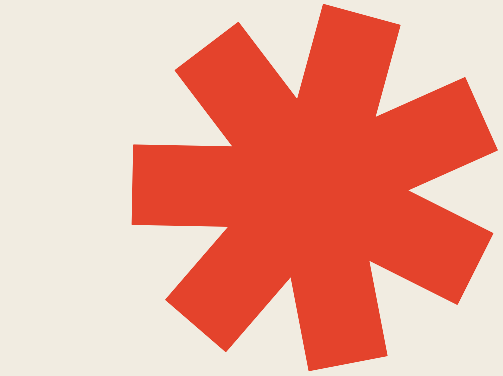
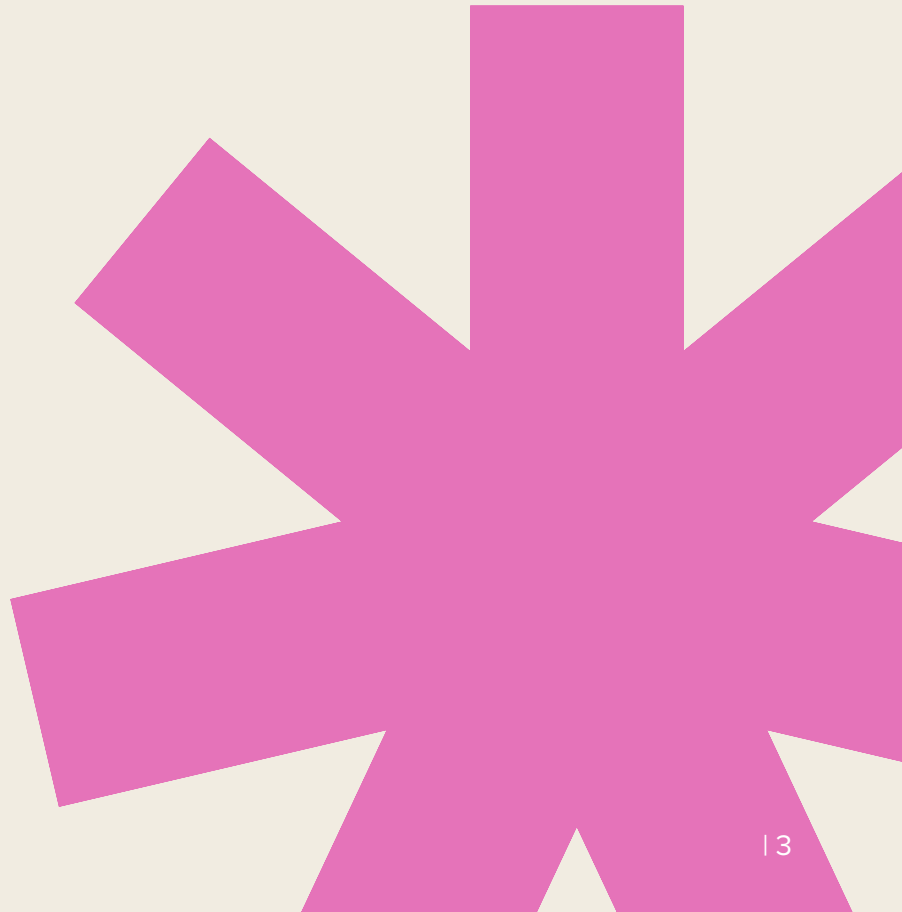
Tips for virtual facilitation





Prepare.

Technology.

Test all technology tools and features you plan to use ahead of time. Make sure they match your expectations and that you know how to use them. Then, check them again the day before your session.

Visuals.

In your session, use visuals such as photos, charts, and graphs instead of PowerPoint slides. Prepare them ahead of time. Use a branded PowerPoint template if you feel you can't do without slides.

Instructions.

Prepare clear instructions for each activity in your session. Make sure participants understand what you expect them to do.

Talking points.

Prepare and rehearse anything you want to present, including activity instructions. Check your timing. Be concise and avoid lecturing. Focus on the essentials.

Co-facilitate.

Make sure there are at least two people co-facilitating the session.

One person should be managing the participants and the flow of the session.

The other person should provide technical support and manage the technology during the session.

Build trust and co-ownership.

Turn cameras on.

Make sure participants can see you and each other. Switch on your camera. Encourage participants to be on video too.

Be encouraging.

Provide quick, positive, and encouraging feedback. Ensure everyone knows this is a safe space to share.

Be transparent.

If you are recording the session, make sure everyone in the session is aware of this. Be clear on who will have access to the recording and any materials produced during the session.

Build engagement.

Provide reflection questions, readings, agenda, etc. ahead of time. Maximise exchange and interaction during the session.

Share responsibility.

Assign/ask for volunteers to document, take notes, and lead different activities during the session. Follow up with the group after the session.

Simulate in-person sessions.

Include informal moments.

In-person events allow participants to chat informally at different points (before the start, during breaks, after the session...). Create moments for informal chatter to help the group laugh, bond, and get to know each other.

Include breaks.

If your session is longer than 60 minutes, make sure to include a 15-minute break for people to re-energise, stand up, stretch, have a snack, and clear their minds.

Get feedback.

At the end of the session, have participants fill out a short 1-minute survey to rate different activities. Ask what they enjoyed and didn't enjoy, what they found useful and what they didn't.

Developing an agenda

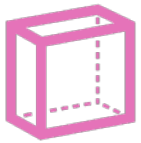
Tips.

Active engagement.

Avoid presentations and lectures that leave participants passive. Focus on activities that actively engage participants.

Time management.

Less is more. Don't try to pack too much into a session.
Be realistic with time.



Variety.

Include a few different types of activities and facilitation techniques.

Peer learning.

Encourage peer learning. Solicit knowledge, experiences, viewpoints, questions, and doubts from participants.

Relevance.

Ensure the content of the session is relevant and relatable to the participants' daily work and lives.

Breaking the ice

Imaginary ball toss

Purpose: For participants to introduce themselves.

Group size: Any

Duration: Varies depending on group size, but rapid.

Advance preparation:
(1) List of participant names.
(2) Choice of category, such as favourite food, hobby, geographic location, etc.

Instructions:

- Demonstrate holding an imaginary ball. While holding the ball, say your name and one other fact about yourself related to the category you chose (for example, your hobby).
- Continue tossing the imaginary ball until everyone has caught it and had the chance to say their name and the fact about themselves related to the same category.
- Track participants as they share to ensure everyone has had a turn.

Bingo 8

Purpose: For participants to introduce themselves.

Group size: 5 to 10

Duration: 5 minutes

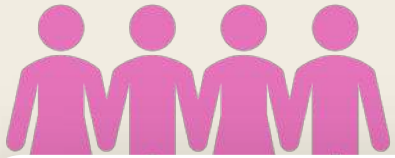
Advance preparation: (1) Design a 5x5 bingo board in an online collaboration space (such as Jamboard or Miro) where each box has a different fact (for example: “Enjoys cycling”, “Speaks more than 3 languages”, “Has a pet cat”, etc.). The bingo board should have as many boxes as there are participants.

Note: The bingo board can be completed as a whole group for <10 participants and in breakout rooms for >10 participants.

Instructions:

- Ask participants to go to the online collaboration space and use "sticky notes" to indicate which board squares can be associated with their name. Each participant should place a "note" with their name on the square. There can be several post-its per square and some that stay empty.
- Show participants how they can add their name to a square.
- Start the game and conclude once all squares are filled or there is no more activity.
- Summarise a few interesting points learned about colleagues.

Line up



Purpose: For participants to introduce themselves.

Group size: 5 to 20

Duration: 5 to 20 minutes

Advance preparation: (1) Collect headshots/photos of each participant. (2) Put the collected photos in an online collaboration space (such as Jamboard).

Instructions:

- Ask participants to work in the online collaboration space to arrange the participants' photos in a line in alphabetical (A-Z) order of first names.
- Once arranged, start with the first person and ask that they share their name and their role and continue until everyone has shared.
- Then, ask participants to arrange the photos by length of time employed by their organisation (least to longest).
- Once arranged, start with the first person and ask that they share when they started, continue until everyone has shared.

Getting to know each other

I feel like a...

Purpose: To generate creativity while creating a safe space to share emotions.

Group size: Any

Duration: 10-30 minutes

Advance preparation:
(1) Set up an online collaboration space (such as Jamboard). (2) Identify an image that represents you within their organisation.

(Note: This activity can also be used as a "check in" to as questions like "how are you feeling today", "what animal best represents your state currently," etc.)

Instructions:

- Share the online collaboration space link and demonstrate how to use the space.
- Ask participants to identify an image that represents them within their organisation.
- Once everyone has posted an image, ask participants to share, one by one, why they selected their image.

Desert island

Purpose: For participants to introduce themselves.

Group size: 15 to 50

Duration: 20 minutes or more

Advance preparation: (1) Create a shared document (such as a GoogleDoc). (2) In the shared document, write a list of random items that have "washed up" on a desert island. Think creatively.

Instructions:

- Set the scene by telling participants that they have been shipwrecked on a desert island along with a few colleagues. Together the colleagues must review a list of items that could wash up on the beach. Their task is to select three items they would wish to keep as a group and to explain why.
- Divide participants into breakout groups of 4-5 people.
- Share the shared document with each group.
- After 6 minutes, recall groups to the plenary and ask that each group share their 3 items and why they selected them.

Coffee break

Purpose: For participants to have a relaxed space and a break in the middle of a longer event.

Group size: Any

Duration: 10 to 15 minutes

Advance preparation: (1) Prior to the event, share the agenda where the "Coffee break" is clearly designated. (2) Ensure participants understand that they can come and go during the coffee break – just like in an in-person event.

Instructions:

- Leading into the break, let participants know that the remote meeting will stay open.
- Encourage participants to grab a drink or a snack and to move around. Mention they are invited to chat with each other informally as they come back so that they can get to know each other.

Sharing expertise and experience

Expert panel

Purpose: To share thought provoking information and expertise.

Group size: Any but works well with large groups

Duration: 30 minutes to 1 hour

Advance preparation: (1) Select panelists who complement one another. (2) Ask panelists to prepare talking points and visuals. Encourage them to show photos and graphics, discourage them from preparing slides with text. (3) Review talking points, timelines, and any visuals being used. (4) Prepare "starter" questions if a Q&A session will follow the panel.

Instructions:

- Introduce the panelists.
- Raise a general question for each panelist to speak to.
- Close the panel discussion by opening a plenary Q&A.
- Thank the panelists.

Pecha Kucha presentations

Purpose: To share thought-provoking information and expertise.

Group size: Any but works well with large groups

Duration: 30 minutes to 1 hour

Advance preparation: (1) Create a Pecha Kucha standard deck (20 slides with images, delivered at 20 seconds per slide) and instructions page. (2) Review all presentations to ensure they meet the requirements.

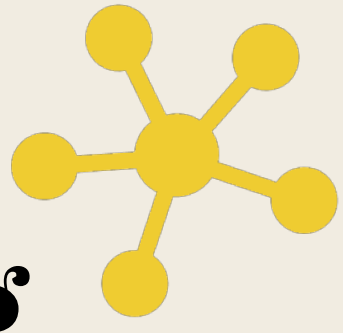
Note: You can integrate a coffee break midway through the session.

Instructions:

- Remind the presenters of the rules of Pecha Kucha – that they will each have 20 seconds for each of their 20 slides, so a total of 6 minutes 40 seconds to present.
- Ask presenters to give their presentations. The slides will automatically advance as the presenter speaks.
- Following the completion of the Pecha Kucha presentations or during the midway break. Encourage participants to have an informal Q&A session between presenters and participants.

Generating ideas

Rapid sharing



Purpose: To rapidly generate ideas related to a common question.

Group size: Any (but works well with groups smaller than 15)

Duration: 5 to 20 minutes

Advance preparation: (1) Identify a question such as "How might we..."or "What is one...". (2) Prepare a slide with that question written in large font. (3) Prepare a timer (on your phone or to share on screen).

Instructions:

- Pose the question to the whole group. Show the slide displaying the question.
- Give participants 1 minute to individually rapidly consider possible answers.
- Explain that each participant will have 1 minute to share one answer to the question. Let participants know you will set a timer.
- Set a timer per participant to keep the sharing moving.
- Take notes as participants share.

Notecard brainstorm

Purpose: To rapidly generate ideas related to a common question.

Group size: Any

Duration: 10 to 30 minutes

Advance preparation: (1) Identify a question such as "How might we..."or "What is one..." or simply identify a topic with subcategories. (2) Set up an online collaboration space (such as Jamboard) with one question per slide.

Instructions:

- Pose a question to the participants.
- Explain that participants will work independently for a set time adding virtual notecards that answer the question.
- Participants should use one notecard per idea and place it in the appropriate category (if more than one question or theme is introduced).
- Demonstrate how to use the online collaboration space.
- Review notecards in plenary and shift notecards around to demonstrate repeated ideas. You can review ideas aloud or ask for one or more participants to share.

Mind map

Purpose: To build on a central idea, or to introduce the central idea.

Group size: Less than 20

Duration: 30 minutes or more

Advance preparation: (1) Choose a central idea. (2) Start a mind map in a collaboration space (such as Mural or Miro).

Instructions:

- Collectively, identify and add connector ideas. These are other significant concepts related to the central idea.
- Choose one connector idea at a time and begin building onto it, adding branches and limb ideas as needed.
- Continue until the central idea has been exhaustively thought through.

Keep, Start, Stop, Ask

Purpose: To generate and organise ideas into categories to support planning.

Group size: More than 10, less than 30

Duration: 30 minutes or more

Advance preparation: (1) Create a Keep, Start, Stop, Ask board in an online collaboration space (such as Jamboard).

Instructions:

- Share the link to the online collaboration space and ask participants to take a few moments to reflect on the things the community of practice should Keep, Start or Stop doing. Ask participants to also reflect on the things the community of practice should Ask or inquire further about.
- After approximately 1 minute, ask participants to type their ideas on "cards" (one idea per card) and share these in the appropriate category.
- Once participants have completed sharing cards, review each category and ask if there is clarity or questions that need to be explored per section. Also seek to understand if there is consensus on the cards in each of the four categories.

Prioritising

Notecard sorting and ranking

Purpose: To rapidly sort and rank ideas.

Group size: Any

Duration: 10 to 30 minutes

Advance preparation: (1) Set up an online collaboration space (such as Jamboard) with a variety of ideas. (2) If you used Notecard brainstorm to generate ideas, build off of the existing collaboration space or duplicate the space.

Instructions:

- Indicate that through a silent collaborative exercise group priorities will be identified.
- Ask participants to move ideas into the order that they feel is best (for example: most to least, highest to least). Explain that participants may have different priorities and thus cards may continue moving.
- Stop the activity once participants stop manipulating the order of the cards.
- Review the order aloud.

Pyramid organising

Purpose: To rapidly sort and rank ideas.

Group size: Less than 20

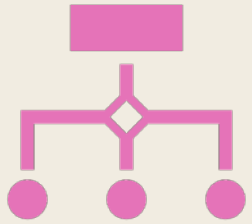
Duration: 30 minutes or more

Advance preparation: (1) Create a pyramid with appropriate labels in an online collaboration space (such as Miro). (2) Organise tasks into individual "cards" that can be manipulated on the pyramid. If you used the Notecard brainstorm, reuse those notecards.

Instructions:

- Indicate that through a silent collaborative exercise group priorities will be identified.
- Ask participants to move ideas into the order that they feel is best (for example: most to least, highest to least). Explain that participants may have different priorities and thus cards may continue moving.
- Stop the activity once participants stop manipulating the order of the cards.
- Review the order aloud.

Polling



Purpose: To rapidly solicit input for establishing priorities.

Group size: More than 20

Duration: A few minutes

Advance preparation: (1) Create a survey or poll in Microsoft Teams (or use a tool like Mentimeter).

Instructions:

- Introduce the poll and share the link or the live poll.
- Ask participants to complete the poll.
- Share the results.

Tick mark

Purpose: To rapidly solicit input into establishing priorities.

Group size: 10 to 35

Duration: A few minutes

Advance preparation: (1) Organise tasks or ideas into individual "cards". If you used the Notecard brainstorm, reuse those notecards. (2) Based on the number of participants, decide on how many tick marks each participant can use. The more participants, the more ticks that can be allocated but aim for between 3 to 5.

Instructions:

- Demonstrate how to make a tick mark on a card.
- Ask participants to review all cards and to select the top cards they wish to prioritise. Participants can allocate their tick marks as they wish.
- Count the ticks and report out.

Energising the group

GIF challenge

Purpose: To generate creativity and/or have some fun.

Group size: Any

Duration: 5 minutes

Advance preparation: (1) Set up an online collaboration space (such as Jamboard) and post a phrase at the top linked to the type of GIF participants should share. For example: "I feel like this" or " A great Community of Practice looks like this", etc. (2) Option: Set up a poll using Mentimeter for participants to vote on their favourite GIF.

Instructions:

- Share the link to the online collaboration space and the phrase.
- Ask participants to search online for a GIF that matches their answer to the phrase.
- Invite participants to share their GIF in the online collaboration space.
- Invite participants to comment or vote on their favourite GIF.

Find something...

Purpose: To have a fun break and re-energise by moving around.

Group size: Any

Duration: 5 minutes

Advance preparation: (1) Create a list of 3-4 types of things participants should find and share (for example: something red, something sticky, something on your desk).

Instructions:

- Ask participants to turn on their cameras.
- Ask participants to find the first item and then to hold it up to share.
- Summarise some of the items you see (for example, "I see two red scarves, and one red apple").
- Continue for one to three more rounds.

Weird pitches

Purpose: To make space for creativity

Group size: Any

Duration: 30 minutes

Advance preparation: (1) Set up a slide deck with images of up to 10 unexpected objects (such as a pencil sharpener, a sippy cup, a hot air balloon, etc.). (2) Prepare a timer you can share on the screen (or set the timer on your phone).

Instructions:

- Explain that you will ask for volunteers (one per image) who will give a convincing and unusual "pitch" for the images shared with the objective to convince the other participants to "buy" the item. Encourage participants to be creative and witty, but to stick to 30 seconds.
- Demonstrate with the first image by giving a whimsical pitch in 30 seconds or less.
- Ask for volunteers.
- Share the first image and start the timer for the pitch.
- Continue until all images and pitches have been shared.
- Thank the volunteers.

Wrapping up

Fist to five

5

Purpose: To rapidly assess comprehension or satisfaction.

Group size: 5 to 15

Duration: 2 minutes

Advance preparation: (1) Draft question(s) (for example: "Using a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most and 1 being the least, how likely are you to use the skills we worked on today in your next session?")

Instructions:

- Using your hand, demonstrate how to use fingers to show level of agreement, comprehension, or satisfaction.
- Ask a question and ask participants to answer showing one or more fingers.
- Take a screenshot of the participants' answers if needed.
- Continue for as many questions as need answering.

Emoji evaluation

Purpose: To rapidly assess satisfaction with the day's session.

Group size: Any

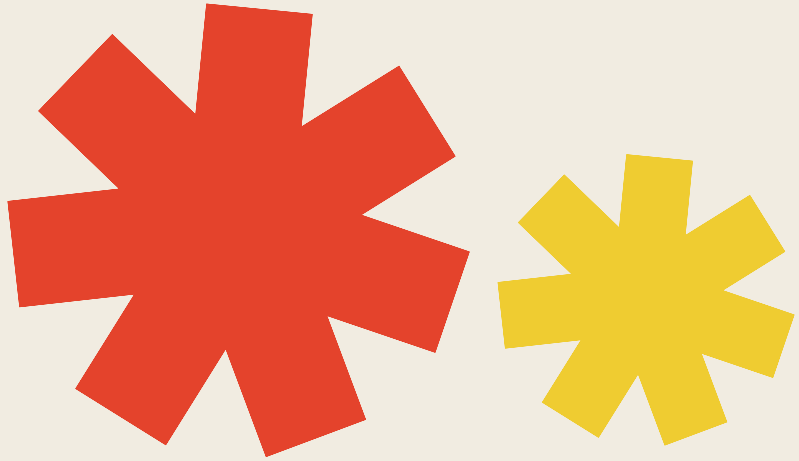
Duration: 5 minutes

Advance preparation: (1) Draft question(s) (for example, "How satisfied are you with today's session on XYZ?")

Instructions:

- Explain that participants can choose an emoji that best answers the questions raised.
- Demonstrate by asking a question and showing an emoji in the chat box or on screen. (Note that the chat box is helpful if you want to review in more detail after the event.)
- Ask a question and ask participants to respond by sharing an emoji.
- Continue until you go through all your questions.

Appreciation cards



Purpose: To demonstrate appreciation of colleagues. This activity can be used at the end of a multi-day event or to close out a year/project.

Group size: Any (but works well with groups larger than 15)

Duration: 5 to 20 minutes

Advance preparation: (1) Set up an online space to collect appreciation notes, such as a GoogleDoc or Jamboard, or simply ask participants to submit appreciation notes to the facilitator via email.

Instructions:

- Introduce activity purpose at the beginning of the event.
- Ask participants to share their appreciation and other kind words with colleagues through their notes.
- Package each participant's notes and send them to the respective recipients.

Traffic light feedback

Purpose: To rapidly assess satisfaction or comprehension with the day's session(s).

Group size: Any

Duration: 5 minutes

Advance preparation: (1) Draft question(s) and graphics in an online collaboration space (for example, put an image of a traffic light in Jamboard). If you have several questions, then make sure to have one question per slide with its own traffic light image.

Instructions:

- Explain that each participant should answer each question using red ticks to indicate "negative", yellow ticks to indicate "neutral", and green ticks to indicate "positive".
- Count the responses and report out.

Technologies

Suggested technologies

Jamboard

Kahoot

Mentimeter

Microsoft Teams

Miro

Socrative

Facilitator final checklist

Agenda:

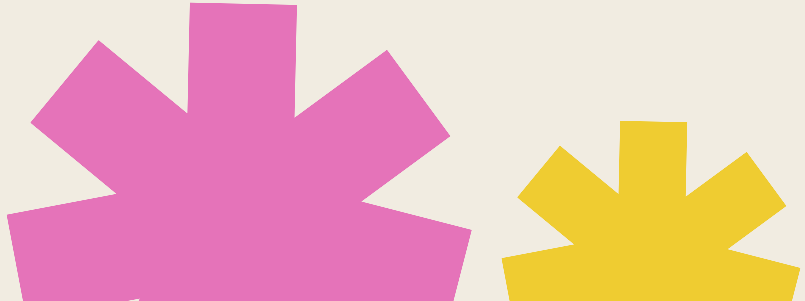
- Does my agenda mainly have presentations and lectures or engaging, interactive activities?
- What concrete problems am I helping participants solve?
- Have I planned a few different activities for the session?
- Is there enough opportunity for all participants to contribute and share?
- Am I trying to pack too much into one session?

Technology:

- Have I selected the right technologies for my purpose?
- Have I installed all the needed software?
- Have I tested the software and all the features I want to use?
- Have I made sure my software is up-to-date and working properly?

Communication:

- Have I sent an invitation to participants well ahead of time?
- Do all participants have the link for the session?
- Have I clearly communicated any preparatory work participants need to do for the session?
- Have I tested the instructions I plan to give with a colleague before the session to make sure they are clear?



Useful references

Creative Activities for Work Teams and Communities of Practice

Facilitating Adult Learning
A blended learning course by AKF

Pact Facilitator Guide