

Maximizing Participation - 10 Tips to Engage Participants

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Have you ever led or facilitated a meeting where the participation was minimal but didn't know what to do about it? People tend to participate in group conversation when they have something to say, they can trust that their input will be taken seriously, they have a safe environment in which to express their ideas and/or opinions, and when they are given opportunities to participate. Here are some quick tips that you can use to help you maximize participation in your meeting or facilitated session.

1. Develop an agenda with participant input (this will increase participant buy-in into the purpose, goals and outcomes of the session).
2. Have participants share in jobs (divvy up the work – one person takes notes, one is a timekeeper, another arranges for food, etc.)
3. Use various facilitation techniques that encourage participation – brainstorming, ice breakers, small group activities, etc.
4. Engage the participants in developing the ground rules for the session that will enhance participation. Ask everyone to vote on them to establish accountability.
5. Separate the generation of ideas from the selection of the ideas and the corresponding action plans.
6. Conduct small group exercises as well as large group exercises. People are often more comfortable to participate in smaller groups, than in a larger group.
7. Acknowledge participants for their effort and the value of their contributions.
8. Provide people time to think (give quiet time for introverts to think by writing ideas down individually first, before conducting group brainstorming – something extraverts love to do).
9. Intervene quickly on any personal attacks that occur.
10. Talk to participants on the side or during a break and invite them to participate. Let them know that their area of expertise and perspective is critical to the success of the group effort. Remember – silence does not mean non-participation. Give people time to think. A participant may be waiting to speak.

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