

Regular special interest group meetings: putting Communication Support Principles into practice

Go to end of this document for details of each Communication Support Principle

Before the event

1. Identify possible participants



Communication Support Principle 1

2. Agree a budget



Communication Support Principle 5

To make your meetings accessible you may need to include support, extra time and training for participants and staff. Include these resources in your initial budget.

3. Select the venue



Communication Support Principle 2



Communication Support Principle 5

Choose a quiet venue in which participants will feel comfortable.

Consider communication accessibility as well as physical access.

Always try to meet in the same place.

Background noise of any sort can be a major barrier for many people taking an active part in a discussion. For example laying out and clearing of refreshments.

4. Invite the participants



Communication Support Principle 5

Before you invite people, think about whether you are able to meet an individual's communication support needs.

For example can you:

- change the time of meetings?
- shorten the agenda?
- guarantee to send information out in advance?

If you can't the meeting may not be a positive experience for a person who:

- needs extra time to understand what is said or to express themselves
- can only concentrate for short periods.

5. Develop a programme and clear terms of reference



Communication Support Principle 5

Consider a pre-meeting to help people prepare.

Discuss with participants whether they want to attend whole meetings or just relevant sections. This may be helpful for people who have limited energy.

6. Contact details



Communication Support Principle 5

Different people will prefer to be contacted in different ways. For example telephone calls can be quick. But not everyone finds them easy.

7. Appoint a chairperson, convenor or group facilitator



Communication Support Principle 1



Communication Support Principle 2



Communication Support Principle 3



Communication Support Principle 4



Communication Support Principle 5



Communication Support Principle 6

Brief the group facilitator to make sure everyone can communicate to the best of their abilities.

8. Prepare joining instructions



Communication Support Principle 3



Communication Support Principle 5

Everybody finds a clear map helpful. This is particularly important for those with communication support needs.

Some people will find it helpful to have a reminder of the meeting arrangements near the time.

Last minute changes of time or venue can be unsettling. This may put some people off attending.

Joining instructions example can be printed from Resources section of toolkit.

9. Prepare background information



Communication Support Principle 3



Communication Support Principle 5

Follow basic good practice in all printed and electronic information. This will make it easier for everyone. Some people may need the information to be adapted further or presented in alternative formats

Supply information far enough in advance so people can prepare. For some people this will make all the difference between taking part in the discussion and not taking part at all.

Are you planning to include interactive events? When you design them, ask yourself: 'If I had a problem with understanding or expressing myself, could I take part?'

10. Travel arrangements



Communication Support Principle 2

Include travel expenses for the person's supporter of choice if they wish them to attend. Do not assume someone wishes to be accompanied.

During the event

1. Finding the venue



Communication Support Principle 5

Make sure there is clear signage at the venue

2. Reception



Communication Support Principle 1



Communication Support Principle 3



Communication Support Principle 4



Communication Support Principle 5

Brief reception staff to recognise communication support needs.

3. Equipment



Communication Support Principle 5

If equipment is required (e.g. a PA or loop system), make sure someone knows how to use it.

4. Set ground rules



Communication Support Principle 4

Agree how everyone is going to show they want to make a point. For example holding up their hand or showing a coloured card. Different people will be comfortable with different methods. The facilitator should go over the ground rules at the start of each meeting.

Ground rules example can be printed from Resources section of toolkit.

5 Agenda and papers



Communication Support Principle 3



Communication Support Principle 5

Explain abbreviations and any technical terms you use. If these are to be used regularly, put them in a suitable format that people can refer to easily.

If any papers are circulated at the meeting, give people time to take in the information. A summary may be helpful. However it is not possible for everyone to take in information supplied at the last minute. This will affect the way they can take part in discussion.

Agenda template can be printed from Resources section of toolkit.

6. Speakers



Communication Support Principle 3



Communication Support Principle 5

Brief all the speakers to follow good communication practice in their verbal and PowerPoint presentations.

The group facilitator should ask speakers to explain any abbreviations or technical terms they use.

7. Questions and answers



Communication Support Principle 4



Communication Support Principle 5



Communication Support Principle 6

Make sure everyone can take part. Give people enough time to ask questions and respond. If the meeting feels rushed someone with communication support needs may be reluctant to ask a question.

For further information see 'Asking questions: how to make it easier for people to answer' document in Practical advice section of toolkit Resources.

8. Evaluation



Communication Support Principle 3



Communication Support Principle 4

Regularly evaluate how the meetings are going. Ask people how easy it is for them to take part. Find out if anything could be done differently. This may stop people dropping out.

You may want to use other ways of obtaining feedback than a printed form.

For example the Civic Participation Network project used Talking Mats (www.talkingmats.com) as part of their evaluation process. This is just an example. This method will not be suitable for all groups.

9. Ending the meeting



Communication Support Principle 5

Some people will prefer to speak one-to-one. Give participants the opportunity to raise further points before everyone rushes to the next meeting.

After the event

1. Pay expenses



Communication Support Principle 3

Develop an accessible expenses form. Use it all the time. This will be easier for everyone to complete.

2. Minutes



Communication Support Principle 3

Ask participants at the beginning how they would like to receive minutes. For example many people with diverse communication support needs prefer an audio recording.

For written minutes, keep them in a consistent format. This makes it easier for people to understand. They can become familiar with what to look for.

Send the minutes out promptly to help people remember, and to plan for the next meeting. Clearly identify any questions that are to be addressed at the next meeting.

Minutes template can be printed from Resources section of toolkit.

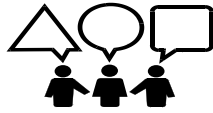
3. Contact between meetings



Communication Support Principle 5

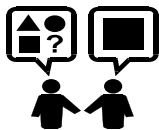
Ask participants at the beginning how they want to be contacted. If you make an arrangement verbally, offer to confirm it in writing. For example not everyone will be able to write details down during a telephone conversation.

6 Communication Support Principles



Principle 1:

Recognise that every community or group may include people with communication support needs



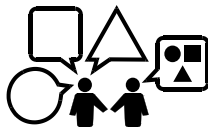
Principle 2:

Find out what support is required



Principle 3:

Match the way you communicate to the ways people understand



Principle 4:

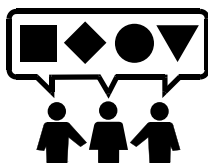
Respond sensitively to all the ways an individual uses to express themselves



Principle 5:

Give people the opportunity to communicate to the best of their abilities

- Adapt the environment
- Adapt the timing
- Adapt the methods of communication
- Adopt a positive communication style
- Adapt the budget



Principle 6:

Keep trying

For detailed practical advice print out Communication Support Principles section from toolkit.