

## Fifteen ideas for a successful workshop

1. If people will be staying overnight before the meeting, arrange an informal buffet-style meal to be available throughout the evening. Encourage people to stop by and meet fellow attendees.
2. If you plan breakout sessions, bring leaders-facilitators together to review the process and share ideas for making it work well. Be sure they know how results will be shared with the larger group (e.g., two or three highlights from each breakout session).
3. Open with a strong, high-interest session led by a presenter or facilitator who can excite and energize the group. The opening sets the scene, establishes expectations, and can go a long way toward building a successful result.
4. Also early on in the workshop, ensure that everyone fully understands the workshop's purpose and process, and how and what participants are expected to contribute.
5. Establish regular process checks: "Let's take a moment to get some feedback. Anyone want to comment on our progress, any ways in which we need to adjust the process, or other observations to help keep us on track?"
6. Adjust the schedule as necessary. For example, break early if the discussion on one issue has wrapped up and the next agenda item is likely to be challenging or lengthy. With boxed lunches, you can combine the break with small-group discussions.
7. The larger the group, the longer the breaks need to be. Just getting people out of a large meeting room can take 5 minutes or more. Breaks will need to be at least 20 minutes in this case. You will likely need one or more people acting as "break police" to encourage people to finish their phone calls and other conversations and move back into the room.
8. Start and finish every session on time. If you don't, you'll find it even more challenging to stay on schedule—and you'll also encourage latecomers after breaks.
9. Encourage people to take the breaks they need, even while discussion continues. It's practical, flexible, and comfortable; and it limits a rush for the doors (and bathrooms) at official breaks.

10. Maintain flexibility—manage time with care, but recognize that issues, ideas, and other needs may suggest that you adapt the schedule as you go.<sup>1</sup>
11. Near the end of the workshop, lead a discussion about how to summarize the results so that attendees can brief their teams with consistency when they get back to the workplace.
12. Note every issue and question—especially the unresolved ones. These will need attention following the session. They also provide a great start for developing an FAQ guide. You may want to assign someone as full-time note-taker.<sup>2</sup>
13. During breaks (or overnight), check in informally with several participants and group leaders. Ask them how they think the meeting is going, what they like, and what they'd change. Be ready to adjust accordingly.
14. Consider conducting an evaluation of the workshop before it ends. For a small session, facilitate a “plus-delta” discussion.<sup>3</sup> For a larger session, consider brief (10-minute) breakout sessions to assess and report on the meeting.
15. Keep the process alive. Soon after the workshop, distribute notes. Invite further input and comment and be clear about next steps. Build on the engagement you've created.

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1. For example, more time may be needed to address a specific issue of concern, thus forcing you to take time out of another session. It is generally better to adjust the schedule, and let people know why, than to overrun and risk upsetting people who lose time from their own sessions.

2. The task isn't to keep detailed minutes of all the discussions, but to record key items to be resolved, answered, or applied.

3. Plus-delta (meaning “positive”-“change”) is a good approach for an informal assessment. Ask two questions of the group: What went well and what did you like? What could we do better or differently next time? Responses to the first question open up discussion and encourage constructive responses to the second question.