



Navigate Group Dynamics

When people convene for a shared experience, they bring different kinds of authority, experiences and backgrounds to the table. It's the facilitator's responsibility to cultivate an atmosphere where each voice can make a meaningful contribution. In order to do that, you need to know who holds sway and who might risk being marginalized. Recognizing these dynamics ahead of your gathering is crucial for fostering an inclusive environment.

CONSIDER THESE TYPES OF QUESTIONS

1. **What are the different identities, backgrounds and experiences represented in the room?**

Tip: Design an opening session that invites people to share who they are with authenticity. Give people a chance to share a personal story in a small group, or use ice breaker questions like these that prompt people to share more personally:

- When did you last feel inspired?
- When was the last time you changed your mind about something important?
- What is a topic or challenge that you've been dedicating a lot of energy towards lately?

2. **Who are the alphas, the loudest voices likely to dominate?**

Tip: Start the session with a ground rule like "step up, step back" to challenge people to exercise self-awareness about how they use their power in the group. Use conversation methods like discussion "rounds" to invite all participants to offer reactions one at a time so that you're not giving disproportionate airtime to the most vocal people in the room.

3. **Who are the silent observers, most likely to take it all in but stay quiet?**

Tip: Invite participants to talk in pairs or smaller configurations to encourage introverts to contribute. Check in with quieter participants to gauge how they're feeling: ask them how they prefer to participate.

4. **Who are the skeptics, most likely to challenge or dismiss?**

Tip: Draw in skeptics by celebrating the value of skepticism for healthy debate. Ask questions that intentionally invite dissenting points of view. Make disagreement safe and welcome, while also emphasizing the importance of being solutions-oriented. Model how to make strong proposals to resolve tensions in real time.

5. **Who are the elders, the most trusted voices in the room who can influence and inspire?**

Tip: Audit your agenda and designate times when elders or those with the most experience can lead: you might ask them to lead small-group conversations or find places where they can co-facilitate with you.