Eleven Ways to Obtain Participation at a Workshop

Target audience: Teacher trainers, gender trainers

These are some of the suggested ways of obtaining participation during a workshop. It is not necessary to use all of them, but different ways could be tried out in different sessions. You may also adapt them and add other items to this list.

1. Open Sharing

Description: Ask a question and open it up to the entire group without any further structuring.

Benefits: Use open sharing when you are certain that several group members want to participate. Its straightforward quality is appealing. If you are worried that the discussion may be too lengthy, say beforehand, “I’d like four or five participants to share.” The facilitator could further give instruction that participants wanting to share their opinion could raise their hand.

2. Sub-group Discussions

Description: Break participants into sub-groups with freedom to select a chairperson, recorder and presenter to share and record information. This particular method is useful when the number of participants is large. Ideally each group size should be of about 5-7 persons. The facilitators could move around the meeting room for a brief introduction or facilitation for each group. There could also be observers assigned to each group (if there are a sufficient number of observers available) to see if the discussions were on track. After the discussion, the sub-groups should be encouraged to share the group’s views through a selected presenter with the rest.

Benefits: Use sub-groups when you have sufficient time to process questions and issues. This is the best method for obtaining everyone’s participation.

3. Pairs or Partners

Description: Have participants to work on tasks or discuss key questions with a participant seated next to them.

Benefits: Use partners when you want to involve everybody, but do not have enough time for small group discussions. Pairs are a good configuration for developing a supportive relationship and/or working on complex activities that would not lend themselves to group configurations.
4. Calling on the Next Speaker

Description: Ask the participants to raise their hands when they want to share their views and request that the present speaker call on the next speaker. When you are ready to resume your role as a moderator, inform the group that you are changing back to the regular format.

Benefits: Ask participants to call on the next speaker when you are sure there is a lot of interest in the discussion/activity and you wish to promote participant interaction.

5. Passing the Ball/ Stick

Description: Go around the group and obtain short responses to key questions. (e.g., sentences starting as “One thing that makes a gender focal point effective is . . .”) Invite participants to pass the ball/stick when they wish. Ask each participant for a new contribution.

Benefits: The facilitator can encourage everybody to participate.

6. Panels

Description: Invite a small number of participants to present their views to the entire group.

Benefits: Use panels when time permits to gain a focused, serious response to questions. Rotate panelists to increase participation.

7. Fishbowl

Description: Ask a portion of the group to form a discussion circle and have the remaining participants form a listening circle around them. Bring new groups into the inner circle to continue the discussion. Use fishbowls to help the participants select some themes for discussion. As a variation, everyone remains seated and different participants are invited to be the discussants as the others listen.

Benefits: Use fishbowls to help bring focus to large group discussions.

8. Gallery Walk

Description: Form small groups of participants and assign each group a different location in the meeting room. Each group chooses a leader and a recorder. Flipcharts on the theme of gender are posted at various locations in the meeting room. A question or a set of questions is asked at each location. The group is given a specific amount of time to answer the question at the first location. When the facilitator gives the signal, group leaders move their groups clockwise to a different flipchart in the room. The participants add their comments to the comments made by the earlier group. The participants are given the freedom to add content/comment that is different or even disagrees with points already written down. However, no one is allowed to strike out or put an “X” through anything that others have written.
Benefits: This is a brainstorming technique so the views of all participants are welcomed. After all groups have added their inputs at all locations, the facilitator and all participants go around together to discuss the content on all the flipcharts displayed in the room.

9. Anonymous Cards

Description: Hand out cards and request anonymous answers to your questions (e.g., what are the three main changes that should be implemented at your workplace to promote gender equality?). Have the completed cards passed around the group or otherwise posted up on the wall.

Benefits: Use anonymous cards to save time or to provide anonymity for personally threatening self-disclosures. The concise expression necessitated by the use of cards is another advantage of this method.

10. Questionnaires

Description: Design a short questionnaire to be filled out by the participants and compiled on the spot.

Benefits: Use questionnaires to obtain data quickly and in a quantifiable form, from each of the participants. In order to elicit genuine responses the participants could be allowed not to disclose their names. Results from the responses received can be fed back immediately.

11. Games

Description: A quiz could also be used as way of obtaining participation. For this purpose also the participants could be divided into teams and the response could be encouraged from one person from each team after discussing with each team member. As an incentive for the winning team there could be prizes such as a bag of candies could be given away to the winning team. The quiz questions should be based on the time available. Ideally the total number of questions should be between 10-15.

Benefits: Use quiz game formats and the like to elicit participants’ ideas or knowledge. Use games to pick up energy and involvement. Games are also helpful to make dramatic points that participants will seldom forget.