

A successful participative meeting

This plan works for between twelve and about fifty people:

- ⇒ **Identify whom you want to invite and give them a good reason for coming.**
 - ⇒ **Choose an accessible, comfortable venue.**
 - ⇒ **Have food and drinks freely available.**
 - ⇒ **Be clear about start and finish times, and stick to them.**
-
- ▶ Explain the purpose of the meeting as simply as possible, for example ‘our group is concerned about the lack of safe play facilities for young children in the neighbourhood. We wanted to check out what you think and also get your ideas for what to do about it.’
 - ▶ Get people to introduce themselves. Many people find it difficult to speak up in a large group, so ask everyone to first introduce themselves to a person next to them. Then ask them to introduce themselves to the larger group.
 - ▶ Break people up into small groups to discuss their experience of the issue, whether there is a problem and what they think are the causes. At this stage it may be best to keep people with similar interests together.
 - ▶ Bring people back together to share what they have found. You can ask for a formal report back if that is appropriate. A less formal option is to ask people to share what they have discussed; this needs a skilled facilitator to make sure everyone participates, and a good note-taker, but it is usually more creative and energising.
 - ▶ Divide into groups again. The task is: taking account of what we have learned, how do we want things to change? What sort of place do we want for the future? A key here, is to think about what we would like the situation to look like in five years time. It is vitally important to do this before planning what you will do. This stage can release unexpected passion, commitment and vision that will last through the long haul of doing the work.
 - ▶ Bring people back together to share the vision. If there is enough common agreement, put together a series of points as a summary. (If there is serious disagreement, acknowledge it. You may have to reconsider your organisational plans and will need time to do this).
 - ▶ If there is time, you could get the groups to work on the outline for a strategy, which are the stepping stones along the way to achieving the vision.
 - ▶ Thank people for coming; tell them what will be happening immediately to the work they have been doing. Ask for their assistance in taking the work forward.
 - ▶ Send them a report of the meeting within two weeks, with a letter saying what is happening. Keep a list of their contact details.