



HOW TO FACILITATE A STANDING DISCUSSION

In order to keep programming and delivery fresh and vital, Professional Conference Organisers are taking conference attendees out of their comfort zones to help bring them together.

The longer conference attendees sit, the less they will retain and the less they will recall. A Standing Discussion session format gets the participants out of their chairs and helps them explore all corners of a particular topic through an expertly-facilitated (standing) discussion where everyone has a voice, and everyone's opinion is valued.

YOU WILL NEED

- > **Ten or more participants** (we've tried it with 100, but with a strong enough facilitator it could work for 500).
- > **A strong session facilitator** who will guide the discussion and promote input from everyone.
- > **A set of questions and a script for the facilitator.** You can allow the facilitator to adapt to the direction the participants take the discussion.
- > **Post-it notes.** **TIP:** Include these in the attendee packs
- > **A supply of pens.**
- > **Prestik** (putty adhesive).
- > **Flipcharts or white boards.**
- > **Three large signs:**
 - YES/AGREE/100%,
 - NO/DISAGREE/0%
 - and ?/UNSURE/50%.
- > **A roving microphone and headset** or microphone for the session facilitator.
- > **Two or three room assistants.**

HOW TO SET UP THE SPACE

TIP: Make sure the space is big enough for your group to move freely. You may also want to provide a table for participants to put their jackets, phones, laptops and bags on so that these don't get in the way. Place the three signs up on the walls or on the flipcharts/white boards in the following positions:

- > LEFT: YES/AGREE/100%
- > RIGHT: NO/DISAGREE/0%
- > CENTRE: ?/UNSURE/50%



SUMMARY

A facilitator asks a set of questions around a topic and participants move to different areas of the room depending on their response. The topic is framed as a statement that requires a yes/no, agree/disagree or true/false response. For example: "Will the sharing economy revolutionise the conference and meetings industry?"

If anyone is unsure or doesn't know, they stay in the centre of the room. Some of the questions asked require an answer along a sliding scale. For these, imagine there is a line along the floor of the room (the far left is 100% agree, the middle is 50% agree, and the far right is 0% agree) for participants to position themselves along in order to indicate their response. Once in position, participants are invited to share why they chose a particular response and are encouraged to ask each other questions.



HOW TO START THE DISCUSSION

1. Introduce the session

Explain what a Standing Discussion is, how the session will work, and what they need to do. Remind participants not to get too comfortable and to be prepared to move around.

2. Set the scene

Give participants some practice with introductory “Yes/No” questions. These should be quite general and planned in a way that if someone were to answer “Yes” to the first question, they’d likely answer “No” to the next question therefore making them move from the left side of the room to the right side.

3. Hear from each side

Ask the participants to write their name on a Post-it note. Then, pose the first statement or question and instruct them to stick their name to the sign on the side of the room that correlates to their answer. This will divide participants into two camps with some unsure people in the middle. To cover the foundation of the discussion, ask the yes and no camps for five points on why they agree or disagree. Bounce between them getting one point from one side, then one point from the other side. Leave out the middle unsure camp at this point in the discussion.

After each side has contributed five points, ask the participants in the middle unsure camp if they’d like to join one of the other camps (they don’t have to move) and allow them to move their name (and bodies) to whichever side has swayed their opinion.

TIP: To help sum up the session at the end or recall it later, have an assistant write down the points.

TIP: Include some “agree” and “disagree” points in your facilitator’s script to get the discussion going if required.

4. Dig deeper

Ask additional binary or sliding scale questions to dig deeper and repeat the process in point three above. Be sure the participants use new Post-it notes for each question.

These “dig deeper” questions can be pre-scripted in order to encourage exploration of the various perspectives and issues, or the facilitator can simply jot down some questions whilst hearing from each side.

5. Conclude with key learnings

Sum up the discussion and remind participants of the initial statement used to open the discussion. The facilitator can invite participants to move a Post-it note with their name on it to another side if their opinion changed during the discussion. If there are participants who move their Post-it notes, the facilitator can ask them why their viewpoint on the opening statement changed.



A STANDING DISCUSSION IN ACTION

Finding ways to facilitate and encourage discussion

The third annual Attractions Africa Conference, presented by African Agenda, brought together more than 100 Attractions industry leaders, from the Table Mountain Aerial Cableway to Gold Reef City and UShaka Marine World. The conference featured international and local speakers who shared trends, benchmarks and best practices.

Attractions Africa is a platform for information sharing and collaboration and the conference architecture needed to facilitate and encourage discussion within the formal agenda. A standing discussion was just the right format.

[Read the case study to find out more](#)

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