

BUZZ GROUPS

/ Mini-discussions in plenary /

WHAT ARE BUZZ GROUPS?

Buzz Groups are a method for quickly and efficiently gathering feedback on a topic or responding to a specific question during a plenary (a session that includes all participants of an event). Without moving from their seats, participants form mini-clusters of two or three people and engage in free discussion – or ‘buzz’ – for a few minutes on a given question. Buzz Groups provide a welcome change of pace for participants, helping to enliven and energize large group meetings and events.

REQUIREMENTS:

- *Facilitator*
- *Flipchart*
- *8-30 participants for one facilitator (or 50 - 100, see below)*
- *10 - 20 minutes (approx. 5 minutes ‘buzzing’, and 5 - 15 minutes to share feedback in plenary)*



WHEN AND WHY TO USE

Buzz Groups can be applied to obtain participant feedback quickly, or to facilitate engagement with a topic, without breaking away from plenary. Splitting people up into groups and moving them to different locations for short discussions takes time and requires more effort; Buzz Groups make short discussions easy and are particularly useful when time is limited.

Buzz Groups are useful as a follow-up to a presentation (especially if the presentation is particularly complex). They help to shift the session out of lecture mode, and they enable participants to have quick discussions to check on facts, reflect on what was presented, exchange ideas, and link ideas/concepts together. Buzz Groups can also help connect one session to the next, during a multi-session event, by posing leading questions related to the upcoming session.

Buzz Groups can also be used as an icebreaker near the beginning of a workshop. They are a useful way to encourage quiet people to get involved in the discussion and contribute, since they may be more comfortable talking in small groups.



HOW TO APPLY

There are three basic ways to apply Buzz Groups: to obtain feedback, to engage participants with a topic, or to generate questions after a presentation.

To obtain feedback:

1. Instruct participants to form groups of either two or three with their immediate neighbours, without moving from their seats. Prefer groups of two for smaller sessions, and groups of three for larger ones. These are the Buzz Groups. The point is to allow participants to communicate with the person(s) next to them while keeping them seated in plenary.

2. Pose a specific question to obtain feedback. This may be a question you devised previously, or one that has come up during the meeting. Ask each group to discuss it and formulate their ideas, in a maximum of 3 - 5 minutes. Encourage each person to share their views briefly and respond to the comments of others within their group. Ask each group to nominate a presenter to feed back to the plenary.

3. The group discussions proceed. As each group 'buzzes', the room transforms into a lively, energetic space, helping to re-energize the participants while adding to their collective understanding.

4. When the 3 - 5 minutes is up, call a halt to the discussions and ask the presenter of each Buzz Group to share their group's response to the question, in plenary, in one minute or less. If desired, record the feedback on cards or a flipchart sheet.

To engage participants with the topic and relate it to their own experience, or as an icebreaker:

1. Ask participants to form Buzz Groups of 2 - 3 persons with their immediate neighbours.

2. Invite the members of each group to share their reflections on the topic at hand, describe their learning from the event, or briefly summarize their own significant experiences with the topic. Allow 3 - 5 minutes for group discussions.

3. When time is up, you can ask groups to volunteer to share reflections in plenary (one minute per group). Alternatively you may choose not to have any reporting back at all, if your goal was simply to promote engagement with the topic.

To generate questions after a presentation:

1. Ask participants to form Buzz Groups of 2 - 3 persons.

2. Ask each Buzz Group to discuss the just-concluded presentation and come up with one pertinent question for the presenter.

3. Give the groups 3 - 5 minutes to come to consensus on what the question should be.

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4. A representative from each Buzz Group then asks the presenter their group's question in plenary.

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TIPS FOR SUCCESS



▲ Maintain the plenary formation. Buzz Groups are made up of 2-3 people who are seated next to each other. Do not move groups to other locations.

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▲ Once people start talking, they often don't want to stop. The facilitator should be firm and should also give a 1-minute warning before the end of the buzz time.

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▲ Use this method sparingly – not more than twice for a single session, or three times in an all-day session – as this technique can become repetitive or boring when used too often.

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▲ The facilitator should move around the room to provide assistance or clarifications if necessary.

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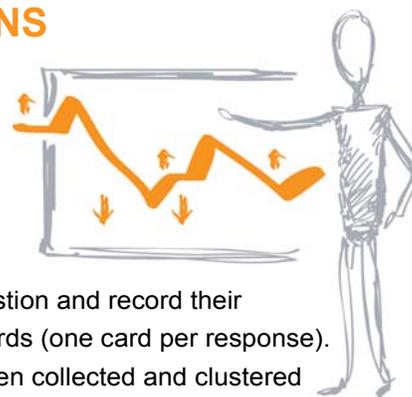
▲ For large groups of 50 - 100 participants, keep a lid on the time required for reporting back to plenary by asking presenters only to share new ideas not already shared by another group. Alternatively, incorporate Buzz Groups as a tool for engagement, so that no report back will be necessary.

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VARIATIONS

▲ Buzz Groups using card collection:

Ask the Buzz Groups to discuss a question and record their responses on cards (one card per response). The cards are then collected and clustered based on similarities. Use a pin board to group the similar cards together. A collage of different idea clusters should emerge. This is especially useful in groups of around 30 participants where feedback is expected.



▲ Buzz Groups to define presentation content - for expert or fact-finding presentations:

Buzz Groups can be used to generate questions to be answered during a presentation by an expert. This allows participants to define the presentation content, thereby increasing relevance and promoting engagement. Sufficient time should be allowed for the expert to prepare the presentation; depending on the expert and the issue, this could be minutes, hours or even a day.



REFERENCES

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