

Facilitating Activist Circles

We have developed a specific method of facilitating discussions that will help mobilize audience members to become activists. This is an agenda for a short, but effective meeting that ideally takes place after the audience becomes motivated by a film or lecture.

SAMPLE FIRST MEETING AGENDA

- 1. Gather everyone into a circle of chairs.**
- 2. Hand everyone a sign up/volunteer sheet to fill out.** Collect the sheets at the end of the event, since some information may be added later in the meeting.
- 3. Announce the agenda** and confirm the length of the meeting. Since you will have three rounds for everyone to comment (or pass), the facilitator suggests how long each person should speak at each round. The facilitator can encourage people to “share the air” to ensure the group is not be monopolized by talkers, and that everyone is heard.
- 4. Arrange for a person to take notes.**
- 5. Introductions (Round #1).** In the first round, everyone introduces their name, and, if it’s related to the GMO interest or activism, where they work or what organization(s) they are part of. If they wish, they can add a sentence or two about what their concerns are, how they would like to contribute, or what is most important to them in building a local campaign.
Before this round starts, be sure to tell everyone that they will have the opportunity to suggest resources, introductions, and brainstorming in a later round, so they don’t feel they have to use this round for everything.
It is important for the facilitator to “model” each round. After you give the instructions, you can say, “I’ll model it. My name is ...” It is ESSENTIAL that you model an extremely short check—even shorter than you expect others to use. Otherwise people will talk too long and you will struggle to get through your rounds.
An example of what we’re looking for in this round is the following:
“My name is Alice Day. I am a second grade teacher at Piedmont, and I have two kids in Lincoln High. I’m thinking to introduce a non-GMO lunch program in my school, and in the high school. And I’d like to work with other parents.”

At the end of this round, you will all have an idea of the basic professional backgrounds and main interests in the group.
- 6. Short Brainstorm, Resources and Connections (Round #2).** This is a chance for people to raise ideas for strategy, mention people they know who should be involved, and the resources to tap into (people in key positions, organizations,

vendors, reporters or radio stations, medical people, etc.). All ideas are accepted at this point, but nothing is decided.

Sample remarks include: "I know the news anchor from the local TV station. I could talk to him." "My doctor practices integrative medicine. He is against GMOs and could be a great resource." "We should ask the Natural Products Stores what they are doing, and we should coordinate with their events."

This round creates energy, synergy, and gets people engaged.

7. **Propose a second meeting and frequency of meetings.** First ask how often the group should meet. Note that with an active Google Group, not every active member needs to attend any meetings. But good meetings that are fun inspire continued participation.
Ask, "Propose how many weeks between meetings." Then create a series of hand raising questions to get the result. For example: "In a vote for meetings every month versus every 3 weeks or less, how many want monthly meetings? How many want meetings every 3 weeks or less?" If the latter wins, then rephrase to compare to every 2 weeks or less, etc. Then use a similar method for time of week.
Then figure how many weeks should go by before the next meeting. You need to come up with a date and time that works for most people. Use a list serve to inform those unable to come.
8. **Action Round (Round #3).** Ask everyone to state what they personally want to accomplish by the next meeting, if anything. This may be: finding out about a particular resource, inviting people they know, calling about a festival booth, learning more about GMOs on their own, etc. Don't leave this round out. It creates instant momentum and gives everyone a sense that things are already happening. Whatever people say they will do is recorded by the note taker.
9. **Collect sign-up sheets.** Emphasize legibility for emails and see if they are readable when handed in as people leave.
10. **Thank people for coming and invite them to hang out and socialize.** A group with personal bonds and where people feel appreciated is much more likely to last, once the initial enthusiasm dwindles.