Reflecting on Your Community Assembly

You've had your first community assembly, well done! You're beginning an extraordinary journey with others in your community, finding ways to ensure all voices are heard and using the wisdom of the crowd to make decisions collectively.

With any luck you will have identified your next step(s), even if this is just to hold another assembly soon! Before you focus on the next steps, however, it is useful to put aside time for personal reflection and for a group debrief to reflect on how things went: What did you learn? What went well? What could be improved for next time?

Engaging in such reflective processes will allow you to gauge the needs and the feelings of your communities and brainstorm solutions to challenges going forward.

Personal Reflection

It is often useful to reflect as an individual before coming together to debrief with others. Creating time for personal reflection will help you unpick your experiences and perceptions, so that you can share these with the group. Sometimes, if we go straight into a group debrief, we don't have time to get to the bottom of our own feelings and views.

A good framework for this individual reflection is to consider:

- Who?
- When?
- Where?
- What?
- Why?

These questions, though simple, can help you consider all aspects of your assembly and organise what you have learnt or can learn from. They don't need to be answered in any particular order, but for ease of reference we will go through them in the order listed:

Who?

This question is about who participated. Firstly, think about who contributed at the assembly: Was there anyone who felt left out or who seemed unable to actively join in? It's important to understand those who were present, to identify who is the most enthusiastic, and who may need extra support.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Were there any voices that were heard more than others?
  1. If so, why was this the case?
  2. What impact did this have on the assembly dynamics?
  3. If necessary, what can be done to prevent this recurring in the future?
- Were there any people who seemed left out or unable to actively join in?
  1. If so, why was this the case?
  2. What impact did this have on the assembly dynamics?
  3. If necessary, what can be done to help them engage more in the future?

Secondly, focus on who came to your assembly. Was there anyone or were there any groups missing?

This is also an important consideration in terms of diversity. We are trying to reach everyone, build strong and resilient communities that serve the needs of everyone, especially those who are most vulnerable and marginalised under the current system. If these minorities are missing from assemblies, then that's a problem.

Consider who you intended to reach, who you might like to reach in future and how you could go about this more effectively. From these ideas you can analyse your channels, think if anything might need to be changed.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Who was at your assembly?
  1. What groups do they belong to?
  2. Did you intend to reach out to them?
  3. How did you reach out to them / how did they hear about the assembly?
- Who was absent from your assembly?
  1. What groups do they belong to?
  2. Did you intend to reach out to them? If so, what went wrong?
  3. How can you reach out to them to invite them along in the future?

When?

This question refers to the timing of your assembly, both in a practical sense – the time of day it was, the day of the week, any time-sensitive responses required – and in terms of where you and your group are in your journey.

Firstly, focus on the practical sense of when and think the impact that the timing had on attendance. If, for instance, the assembly was held late one evening, it might have excluded parents of young children. Equally, if it was held during the day, if it was held during the day on a weekday, it may have been inaccessible to people who are working.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- When was your assembly held?
  1. What impact would this day/timing have had on attendees?
  2. Who would this day/timing have catered for? Who would it have excluded?
  3. Does anything need to be taken into consideration when decided on the days/timings for future events?

Secondly, it is worth considering if there is anything time sensitive. Did you establish any next steps in the assembly which are urgent and need careful attention?

If relevant, ask yourself:

- What next steps were identified?
  1. When do they need to be done by?
  2. What will happen if they are not done?
  3. Who is accountable for completing these next steps?

Finally, think about your group and where you are in your journey. It is useful to think about the group relationships and foundations. For example, did everyone in the group have the necessary level of trust with one another? Is there anything that needs to be accomplished first?

It is vital that you spend time building strong connections before you think about mobilising to make change. This is not to say it's a linear, one-follows-the-other requirement but that they are intrinsically linked and demand equal attention. A team that trusts each other will work together more effectively, and will be able to overcome any challenges that appear in a constructive and collaborative way.

Where?

This question can address both the location of your assembly and can help you identify where the most work is needed.

Firstly, consider the location of your assembly and think about accessibility and suitability of the location.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Where was your assembly held?
  1. Was the space accessible to everyone? If no, who was held back from accessing the space and why?
  2. If it was a physical location, what provision did the location have (i.e. working toilets, running water, working heating)? Was this enough?
  3. If it was online, what barriers to engagement did people face?
  4. What could have made the space better?

Secondly, consider where the work and energy might come from to help the community assembly process get to where it needs to or to where it can.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Where is work most needed?
    1. Where is the energy for the project coming from? What impact does this have?
    2. Where could energy come from? How might this help?
    3. Were there any exciting resources or skills being offered?
    4. Are there any people who can support the assembly process to help it get where it needs to be?

What?

This question is simply about what happened. Hopefully you have kept notes, or maybe even have a recording of your assembly. If you have the notes, re-read them, if you have a video, watch it. Replay the event and really ruminate on how it went.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- How was the event?
    1. What went well?
    2. What would you change or include in the future?
    3. Were there any problems?
    4. What was the atmosphere like?
    5. If you had to sum up the event in one sentence, what would that sentence be?

Why?

This question seeks to measure your success by thinking about why you decided to have the community assembly in the first place.

Perhaps you had a specific goal in mind that you wanted an outcome for, or maybe your intention was simply for every member of your community who attended to leave feeling heard and understood. Consider what your goal was, establish if it has been met and then you can consider what steps may have contributed to your relative success or failure.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Why did you decide to have a community assembly?
    1. What was your goal?
    2. Did you achieve your goal? If so, how? If no, why not?
    3. Do you need to do anything else to help secure your community assembly's success?

Group Reflection and Debrief

Once you've had time to think on your own, turn to your group to get other people's perspectives on the assembly and debrief together. Be sure to share your personal reflections with the group

and to listen to everyone else's feedback. The principle of a community assembly is that every participant has a chance to make their voice heard, every voice is valued and that people make decisions together, so make every effort to ensure that even the reflection and debrief process embodies this.

You can ask a lot of the same questions, using the who, where, when, what, why structure. Below are some extra questions and ideas you might also want to explore.

1. **Goals:**
   - What were your goals for the assembly?
   - Were they achieved?
2. **Logistics:**
   - Were there any problems encountered along the way?
3. **Problem solving:**
   - How would you/did you go about solving these problems?
4. **Funding:**
   - Are there monetary considerations that need to be addressed?
5. **Risk management:**
   - Were there any setbacks beyond your control? (i.e. sickness, internal conflicts)
   - What impact did they have?
   - Are there any steps that could be taken to mitigate these in future?
6. **Training:**
   - Do you feel those facilitating had adequate training for their positions?
   - Were participants sufficiently prepared for the process of deliberative democracy?
7. **Expectations:**
   - Was everything made clear from the outset?
   - Or did people end up disappointed?
   - What might be needed to establish more clarity?
8. **Information channels**
   - Was all necessary information readily available?
9. **Successes**
   - Celebrate your triumphs! What went well?
   - What can you congratulate yourself and each other for?
10. **Best practice**
    - How can you replicate these successes in the future?
    - What are your standards for behaviour and interactions?
11. **Registration**
    - How effective was your registration process?
12. **Tech**
    - Are there any technical considerations?
    - Who is best placed to deal with these?
13. **Idea generation**
    - Have a brainstorm, what would everyone like to see at future assemblies?
14. **Inclusion**
    - Did everyone feel sufficiently included?
    - Who would you like to see at future assemblies?

15. **Branding**
    - Does everyone feel represented?
    - Or is the message and culture antithetical to the beliefs of some involved?
16. **Communication channels**
    - Were you able to reach everyone in a timely manner?
17. **Deliverables**
    - A deliverable is something that is produced as a result of a project. So, in terms of your community assembly this could be a report, a document, a survey or any other 'building block' of your overall plan for your community.
        - Do you have any deliverables that you need to create?
        - Are there any deliverables you would like to aim towards?
18. **Content coordination**
    - Was the process of planning and sharing the content convenient and effective?
19. **Setup**
    - Was the assembly itself well organised?
    - Was everything available that you needed?
    - Did everyone involved in setup and planning have adequate support?
20. **Time management**
    - Did you have enough time? If no, why not?
21. **Infrastructure** *Any other considerations – what you needed but didn't have. You may wish to discuss accessibility concerns, for disabled people, young children or older people who may be less comfortable using technology.
    - Was everyone able to access the space?
    - What can be done in the future to boost accessibility?
22. **Agenda**
    - Was everyone made aware of the intentions of the assembly in advance?
    - Was the agenda clear and accessible?
    - Were there any scheduling issues?
23. **Interactions**
    - How far did you succeed in creating a space to foster useful and beneficial connections?
24. **Critical thinking**
    - What did you learn?
    - How could you better further the group's knowledge and ensure well-informed decisions are being taken?
25. **Workshops**
    - Did you make use of any talks and training in the run up to your assembly?
    - Are there any you missed which could have been useful?
26. **Engagement**
    - How was everyone engaging with the questions/content?
    - What could be done to encourage more meaningful discussions?
27. **Individual experiences**
    - Are there any disparities in people's experiences of the assembly?
    - It's useful to reflect on different demographics here.
28. **Emotional engagement**
    - Did people feel emotionally engaged?

- Did the messaging resonate?
- What narratives were identified during sharing?

29. **Continuing education**
    - Are there useful development opportunities, roles and responsibilities for those interested?

30. **Social media**
    - Did you post about the assembly on social media?
    - What could be done to encourage more online engagement?

31. **Recreational offerings**
    - Is there a need for more fun, connection activities to facilitate more successful assemblies in future?

32. **Messaging and Communication**
    - What channels are being used to maintain contact with everyone involved?

33. **Event layout**
    - How was your meeting space set up?

34. **ROI**
    - Return on investment – did the amount of time and effort you invested into getting this assembly together translate into a favourable result?
    - Is the workload being shared fairly?

35. **Attendee interactions**
    - How did everyone get on together?
    - Were there any conflicts?

This is by no means an exhaustive list and you can decide in your own group how extensive your reflection is. The important thing is that you do think back on what has been accomplished and establish a culture of ongoing introspection and reflection, and you proactively engage with your findings to improve future community assemblies.