

CHECKLIST FOR EFFECTIVE MULTI-STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOPS

Once your first relations are established among a diverse group of stakeholders and you perceive a certain appetite for the project, you can start bringing stakeholders together. Start light and informally, because you know them by now but they do not know each other yet. This needs some time and attention first before you can start working on concrete projects and building coalitions.

You can put serious content on the agenda, but the form in which you discuss it may be more open and exploring. Keep it a bit positive, perhaps starting with topics where you expect to find consensus rather than starting with the sensitivities and dilemmas. First build the positive culture of collectivity, of being in it together. There may still be some ice rocks under the table and some stakeholders may have some history with each other, that is why you need to give this some time to breathe.

During your events, stakeholders do not only get to know each other but also each other's perspective on the area and the project. You may have spotted several overlaps between their perspectives, but now they can start spotting them themselves as well, which is crucial if you want them to get into action mode. You may need a few of these events first, always making sure that there is enough time after the "official" program for the stakeholders to catch up informally with a drink and a bite. This is where you grow the culture of collaboration, the fertile ground for any future coalitions.

Now there may be some very clear shared topics and priorities emerging from these first events. Maybe stakeholders bring them up themselves, maybe you need to nudge them a bit first because you have already spent a lot more time analysing the area and all the different stakeholder input. You can bring in some of your findings and hypotheses to feed the conversation and of course test the response. You can also bring in external experts or inspirational examples here.

Don't worry about big coalitions yet, even though you and also other stakeholders may feel the ambition to do so. This will only increase the threshold and make discussions unnecessarily heavy. First focus on one project, testing the collaboration in a light and one-off way with a coalition of the willing. You celebrate your results together, perhaps show them to the outside world through your communication channels and press releases and evaluate the project, process and collaboration. Then move on to the next project and step up your game.

Keep your sessions open and shared. Make sure the urban transformation process feels like a collective effort from the start. It needs to be clear to everyone that they depend on each other and the whole thing only succeeds if everyone takes ownership and plays their part. This also means everybody needs to be heard and acknowledged as a real partner, of course.

Traditionally stakeholders may be used to the municipality having a more centralised power position and consequently having a vision ready with rules and guidelines. Be careful here. By accepting the responsibility for plans and guidelines too fast, you also kind of accept the ownership and responsibility for realising it. The other stakeholders may remain in a non-committal position. It really needs to be a collective journey from the start.

Present documents that are clearly not definitive. For you it may be clear that it is only a rough first study, but to stakeholders it may look like you have already decided what to do. Rather use statements, reference images and collages to convey an atmosphere and ambition. This is the first prototype of your ideas to open the conversation and test responses. You also use it to detect the priorities and sensitivities in the area that you can learn from and incorporate as much as possible in later versions of the documents you share. By explicitly inviting stakeholders to respond and adjust your start document, you also invite them to make it their own. Slowly it becomes a shared document and process that you now facilitate through regular sessions and actions.