



**Compass Tool Path:**

Tool / Collaboration Ecosystem / Design Collaborative Interventions

# Designing Co-Creative Events

## What will you learn?

Design practices for the agenda and facilitation of meetings that enhance the quality of dialogue among stakeholder

Examples of how do design co-creative events

## What will it help you with?

To create space for meaningful and effective conversation within your collaboration ecosystem

To enhance the dialogic quality of the conversations despite difference in opinion

## When is this factsheet particularly relevant?

In all Phases of the **Dialogic Change Model**



For an in-depth understanding of making collaboration work, please view our open access publication

Kuenkel, P., Kuehn, E., Stucker, D., Williamson, D.F. (2020)

**Leading Transformative  
Change Collectively**  
A Practitioner Guide to  
Realizing the SDGs



# Design practices for co-creative events



Not all meetings bring a sense of aliveness, do-ability and commitment for change into a group of people. Meetings, workshops, structured dialogue, or large public stakeholder events should follow tested practices that help to make dialogue and collaboration work.

Collaboration ecosystems with multiple and diverse stakeholders are created by building good containers – groups of emotionally engaged and committed people (see **factsheet 2: Building Containers for Change**). This is the space in which good and effective conversations take place. The better the **dialogic quality** of the conversation, the more functional becomes the container for change – the key driver of success. The way people hold each other in respect despite difference in opinion is a key determining factor for the quality of the outcomes of multi-stakeholder collaborations.

Dialogic facilitators understand how to create the conditions for such meaningful conversations. The following practices inform the agenda design and facilitation of meetings and ease the way to high-quality dialogues.

## Design practice #1

### Container

**Giving attention to humanity at the beginning and the end of a conversation**



The beginning and the end of a conversation in meetings, workshops, or bilateral talks are of high importance as they determine the climate in which the conversation takes place and is contained. Particularly the beginning sets the tone in which the conversation is conducted, and even though it is often not made conscious, the tone of the beginning creates an invisible agreement in the group about how to act or not to act, what to say or not to say, if to reveal one's truth or not.

Both the beginning and the end of a conversation can be seen as a gateway, a transition - in the beginning from individuality to collectivity, and in the end the reverse. A consciously created beginning of a conversation allows people to move into the common space in which the conversation shall take place. It helps them to shift from solitude to connectedness. The consciously created end of a conversation helps people to contain the space in which the conversation had been taking place and move back into their individual reality. This is why the beginning and the end of a conversation needs a check-in and a check-out.

## Understanding check-in and check-out

Check-in and check-out are great tools to start and end stakeholder meetings that are meant to become meaningful and outcome-oriented.

Checking-in means that every voice is in the room is heard and every person in the room is seen before the actual content conversations start. This can mean that everybody attending the meeting or workshop has the opportunity to say something about where he or she is in that exact moment, how they are feeling, or anything else that is on her or his mind. It helps participants

- to arrive at full presence,
- to take note of all people in the room as people,
- to leave behind other concerns, and
- to focus on the content of meeting.

In multi-stakeholder collaborations we often deal with people that we might not know very well, or maybe even feel resentments towards. Any kind of consciously created informal atmosphere at the beginning of a meeting or conversation is helping for building connections. Therefore, it is important to create an atmosphere of acknowledgment of people's **humanity**.

This little ritual adds a personal note to every meeting that not only boosts the quality but also the efficiency of the conversational process. Opening up the possibility of a check-in at the beginning of the meeting or conversation may feel awkward when people are not used to it, but as people get to know it, check-ins become more and more useful. Therefore, in less formal environments, it helps before using check-in and check-out for the first time, to introduce the concept to the group and explain its effect on the effectiveness of conversations. In more formal environments the check-in may be a very brief introduction of each participant combined with a one sentence answer to a question a facilitator poses, such as: when would you call this meeting a success at the end of today?

There are many variations of check-in or check-out, so it never gets boring, once people have understood the principles of making **humanity** present. One can use it to tune people into a certain topic, for example by asking them to check-in with what their best experience in cross-sector collaboration was. Another variation is to cut it down to a one-word check-in to get the essence of what people are feeling at that moment. In large groups it helps assisting people who do not know each other well by asking them to check-in in small groups, and then tune back into the plenary. At the end of each meeting, it is important to honor the collective space and also have a check-out of each person individually before the conversation ends.

These two examples from the field illustrate the positive effect of a check-in in highly formal environments.

### Example 8.1: Developing a future charter for SDG implementation



The aim of a stakeholder consultation conference with more than 300 participants convened by the German Government in 2014 aimed to identify core elements of a future strategy to implement the sustainable development goals. The meeting was officially opened by the respective Minister, after which the professional conference facilitator took over. Much to the surprise of

all participants, she did not explain the program and introduced the first keynote speaker, but asked the guests to turn to their neighbour, introduce each other, and chat for three minutes about what their dearest aspiration was to collaborate towards achieving the global goals. Only after this check-in did the official program start. It set the tone for person-to-person connections and constructive workshop sessions in the afternoon.

## Example 8.2.: Working towards a white paper on Land Management in Cambodia



The inter-ministerial technical working group on future land management of the Government of Cambodia met to discuss the joined input for the development of a future-oriented land policy in 2008. In the highly-protocol-oriented environment, the meeting began with distinguished speakers on the podium ranging from deputy directors from the collaborating ministries to the Minister of Land Management. The meeting was guided by a skilled dialogic process facilitator who was known to the speakers and had gained their trust in advance of the meeting. After each of the speakers had expressed their views on challenges and opportunities, the facilitator thanked the speakers, invited them to join participants at round tables (which all but the Minister did), and continued with a check-in related to land policy challenges at the tables. This set the tone for inter-ministerial cooperation and paved the way for understanding that land policy was affecting all stakeholders present.

## Design practice #2

### Intention

Connect people with wholeness and future possibilities



It is common good practice to create clarity of the purpose of a meeting even before the meeting starts. This is usually reflected in the invitation or at least brought to the intention of stakeholders at the beginning of the meeting. The questions that need to be answered by clarifying the intention of a stakeholder meeting are:

- Why are we here?
- What is the difference we are going to make with this meeting?

This means creating a joint understanding of what needs to be achieved on the level of content, the level of relationships, and the level of process, and captures when the time has been spent wisely. Every successful meeting needs to connect people not only with each other, but also with the joint purpose, a larger story and an emotionally compelling goal. This is the basis for constructive communication. This connection can then become the catalysing ingredient for agreements how to lead transformative change together.

### The three levels of meeting objectives

If stakeholders talk about their expectations for a meeting, they naturally refer to the content objectives or tangible outcomes. Only these are usually seen as legitimate achievements. This tends to neglect that it is people with thoughts, feelings, and aspirations who bring **collaboration ecosystems** to life and enable the delivery of transformative change. This is why it is of utmost importance to become aware of all objectives that are relevant for achieving good meeting results.

Hence, when planning meetings, envisaged objectives should be considered on these three levels:

**Relationship objectives** refer to a change occurring in the way stakeholders are connected or interact with each other, e.g.

- People having a better understanding of each other;
- People getting to know and appreciate each other;
- People getting exposed to each other's experiences, etc.



**Process objectives** refer to a change in attitude, as well as clarity and perception regarding the way forward, e.g.

- People having a sense of ownership for outcomes and process;
- People understanding how the initiative is embedded in the larger context;
- People feeling their concerns or positions have been heard;
- People being capacitated and sufficiently knowledgeable about the issue at hand.

**Content objectives** refer to tangible and documented outcomes that create a change in concrete joint action e.g.

- People come to a consensus on a vision or objective, which gets written up;
- People have agreed on an action plan, signed a memorandum of understanding, developed a roadmap together, or agreed on rules for coordinated implementation, etc.

## Design practice #3

### Frame

**Offer a process structure that ensures engagement**

Meetings need agendas as roadmaps so that everybody will feel comfortable where the meeting will be going and when what is going to happen. Such meeting programs create the frame for the collective intention to mature and the collective action to be prepared. They not only show breaks, but also which conversations will take place in the plenary and which in small group discussions. They show something about how the group will work together, which content issues will be discussed when, and at what points results will be consolidated. Knowing and understanding the frame for the conversations creates trust and reliability. It puts stakeholders at ease.

## Design Practice #4

### Dialogue

**Create conversations that harvest collective intelligence and keep engagement**



Depending on the history of how conversations have taken place in an institutional setting, people often do not freely express their points of view. Particularly in settings in which hierarchy is rendered important, people who are not in power positions are afraid to speak up. Differences in opinions are not necessarily asked for. From a dialogic standpoint this means that opposing views that are crucially important in multi-stakeholder collaborations, will intentionally or unintentionally be silenced. This may at times be experienced as speeding up decision making. In stakeholder meetings it erodes trust and subsequent engagement and ownership for implementation. Ignorance towards opposers always pays back negatively.

The issue here is not to necessarily agree with opposers, but hearing their voices, listening carefully to what they have to say and considering what they say might actually provide a valid contribution. But getting a diversity of viewpoints into a conversation does not only relate to opposers, it also relates to people who are not expressing themselves because they are disengaged or do not trust themselves to have anything important to say. There are various



moves dialogic facilitators can use to bring in a diversity of perspectives. For example, asking people who do not speak what they think about a particular issue, inquiring into opposing views, or making transparent differences in perspectives and points of view in a respectful manner. Facilitators need to design meeting agendas so that differences in perspective, various viewpoints, and knowledge can emerge. Only then can they move into consensus building. Any meeting design that deals with content issues needs to ensure such meaningful conversations. Most often, it helps to ask stakeholders to talk about more difficult issues in smaller groups first and then integrate findings or results into the plenary.

## Design practice #5

### Collective action

Practice engagement and foster innovation



Stakeholder meetings are small and temporary laboratories of the collaboration that needs to happen once the meeting objectives have been accomplished. Engagement that connects people around concrete tasks and that leads to collective action requires practice. If people have managed to achieve jointly created results in meetings, this experience influences the way they will work together in the future. It builds trust into the group's capability to actually do change together and it enormously contributes to the satisfaction of stakeholders with the meeting they have spent time in. Hence, in the facilitative design of stakeholder meetings and the time for working together in small groups to reach a certain output are crucially important. Any intermediate result, however, needs to be brought back as a report to the plenary.

## Design practice #6

### Results and reflection

Ensure pathways towards future possibilities and close with humanity





Time pressure in meetings, low quality meeting designs, and over-packed agendas often let stakeholders rush out at the end of a meeting to pursue other tasks. Dialogic facilitators do the utmost best to prevent this as it deteriorates the entire effort of convening stakeholders into meaningful conversations. Stakeholder meetings need a proper ending, of which the check-out is the last step that bridges the flow from the collective endeavour to whatever stakeholders need to move towards individually. The check-out can highlight views about the meeting, but also help each other's understanding that there is a world beyond the meeting that is demanding for each of the participants. However, bringing a meeting back to humanity without having consolidated the results haunts stakeholders sooner or later. It leaves people with the feeling of being unsure what has been achieved and if the time was spent wisely. Moreover, a lack of results consolidation may erode trust: minutes or meetings results distributed a few weeks later may look different from how each stakeholder had perceived results immediately following the meeting. Hence, the design of every stakeholder meetings needs to build into the agenda a summary of meeting results. This means going through the results achieved, the decisions made, or the agreements reached in the plenary at the end of the meeting. This should be followed by an agreement on next steps – a must in every high-quality stakeholder meeting. Only then is it time for a reflective, often short, final check-out.



# Using DESIGN practices to create a program flow



Design practice	Guiding questions	Examples
<b># 1 Container</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What can we do so that people can encounter each other as people and respect one another?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check-in with personal questions or small round tables using guiding question</li> <li>Music and journaling before the beginning</li> <li>Coffee break before starting</li> <li>Getting together in the evening before</li> </ul>
<b>#2 Intention</b>  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why are we here? What can we do to get the purpose of the meeting and the larger issue clear?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being clear about the “Why” of the meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Objectives</li> <li>Expected results</li> <li>Connection to the larger goal</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>#3 Frame</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How will we work together?</li> <li>What is the time frame?</li> <li>What are the responsibilities?</li> </ul>	Agenda points and program flow
<b>#4 Dialogue</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How will we deal with differences and ensure all voices are brought into the conversation?</li> </ul>	The form of plenary and group interactions and how they are designed to ensure meaningful conversations that bring all voices in.
<b>#5 Collective action</b>  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do we work together on specific tasks? How will we move towards results?</li> </ul>	The flow of task-related working groups, plenary discussions, content input, reports, or expert inputs
<b># 6 Results and reflection</b>  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What did we achieve together?</li> <li>How do we create room for reflection?</li> <li>What are the next steps?</li> </ul>	The Integration of results and joint review, agreement on next steps (what, who, by when)



## Example: Towards sustainable sundarbans mangroves in India and Bangladesh



The transboundary Sundarbans mangrove forest, at 10,000 km<sup>2</sup>, is the largest in the world. It is, however, being degraded on multiple fronts including, for example, by large-scale, commercial shrimp farms. In this context, the Global Nature Fund (GNF) and the Naturland Association from Germany partnered with the Nature, Environment, and Wildlife Society (NEWS) in India and the Bangladesh Environment and Development Society (BEDS) to initiate a multi-stakeholder

partnership for restored mangroves and thriving coastal communities. In preparation of a first **engagement** workshop that would set the tone for effective collaboration, a dialogic process facilitator convened a series of preparatory calls with key actors from the collaborating partners. Focus was on how joint vision development would strengthen the formation of the core group of partners as a container across the two countries, while remaining specific and relevant to the situation in each of the countries. It became clear that actors needed to share their understanding of the context as well as how to best create resonance for the initiative, led by the partners, among the stakeholders in the coastal communities. The aims of the meeting were finally agreed as

- Build a common understanding of the challenges in the mangrove ecosystem.
- Create a joint vision for the partnership.
- Strengthen trust and a desire among partners to work toward the vision collectively.
- Build commitment for taking next steps and identify capacity building needs.

The first one and a half-day workshop was held in India with the majority of participants brought in by NEWS, but joined by two representatives from Bangladesh. The second workshop was conducted in Bangladesh with the majority of participants brought in from BEDS, yet joined by two representatives from India. This strengthened the identity of the core group, helped them demonstrate their commitment to the partnership in the eyes of participants, and communicated the transboundary nature of the partnership.



<sup>1</sup> Co-created by participants at "Visioning and Engagement Workshop," 6-7 February 2020 in Khulna, Bangladesh







Round tables were selected with seating deliberately mixing people from different sectors to encourage exchange, learning, and connection. The workshop goals were arrived through a combination of contextual inputs from core group members, facilitation of a guided visioning process<sup>1</sup> as depicted in the picture below, and formation of action-oriented working groups by participants.

## Shared vision for healthy sundarbans mangrove, thriving coastal communities, and robust aquaculture<sup>2</sup>

The working groups, both in India and Bangladesh, focused on: Mangroves, livelihoods and communities, as well as shrimps value chains. The agreed results from the workshop included: key milestones to pursue in 2020, additional stakeholders to involve, stakeholder dialogue events to engage new actors, and possibilities for pilot initiatives. The table below shows the flow of the workshop program in relation to the design practices.

### The workshop flow in relation to the design practices

Design practice	Guiding questions	Examples
<b># 1 Container</b> 	What can we do so that people can encounter each other as people and respect one another?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Welcome by BEDS representative and introduction of core group</li> <li>Participant introductions with the Check-in question: "What is one, key reason why you came to this workshop?"</li> </ul>
<b>#2 Intention</b>  	Why are we here? What can we do to get the purpose of the meeting and the larger issue clear?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Summary of selected pre-workshop survey responses</li> <li>Agreement on workshops objectives:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build a common understanding of the challenges in the mangrove ecosystem</li> <li>Strengthen trust and a desire among partners to work toward the vision collectively</li> <li>Create a joint vision for the partnership</li> <li>Build commitment for taking next steps and identify capacity building needs</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>#3 Frame</b> 	How will we work together?  What is the time frame?  What are the responsibilities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workshop program overview, goals, and workshop agreements</li> </ul>

## #4 Dialogue



How will we deal with differences and ensure all voices are brought into the conversation?

Creating a shared understanding of the context through elaborating different perspectives on sustainability challenges in the mangrove ecosystem, such as

- Coastal Conservation and improving livelihoods through Integrated Mangrove Aquaculture
- Socio-economic and socio-environmental development in the Sundarbans
- Promoting mangrove protection and sustainable aquaculture

## #5 Collective action



How will we move towards results?

### Session1:

Creating a shared 2030 vision for the multi-stakeholder partnership towards a sustainable mangrove ecosystem: Healthy mangroves, thriving coastal communities, and a robust aquaculture value chain in the transboundary Sundarbans

The workshop process: Creative guided visioning, individual, pair, and small group work; consolidation through small group presentations, discussion on specifics and creating an overall image, supported by a volunteer artist; collecting any inputs on draft vision poster

### Session 2:

An Invitation to Engage: Brainstorming next steps together for working toward the vision through

The workshop process:

- Outlines examples of multi-stakeholder dialogue forums that exist and need to be supported to achieve the vision.

Working groups focused on the topics:

- Protecting and restoring the transboundary mangrove ecosystem
- Promoting integrated mangrove aquaculture for sustainable livelihoods and thriving communities
- Promoting collaboration along the aquaculture value chain

## # 6 Results and reflection



What did or can we achieve together?

How do we create room for reflection?

What are the next steps?

- Revisiting strengths and contributions of the partner organizations
- Identifying capacity needs
- Agreeing on communication procedures.

Workshop feedback, closing words, check out circle.



Office Europe  
Kurfürstenstrasse 1  
14467 Potsdam  
Germany  
Phone: +49 331 5816 5960  
germany@collectiveleadership.com

Office South Africa  
11 Abelia Street, Mont Claire  
7785 Cape Town  
South Africa  
Phone: +27 83 772 0958  
southafrica@collectiveleadership.com