

Rhizome guide to

Facilitating Phone Conferences

Phone conferences pose some unusual problems for both participants and facilitators. Communication is always harder when we take facial expressions and body language away. Suddenly we struggle to see who wants to speak next. It's harder to notice that some people aren't contributing and so on. All of this can lead to an increase in interruptions, frustration and wasted time. So here's a few tips to get you through your phone conferences more effectively:

 Suggest that when contributing for the first few times, people introduce themselves so that everyone can start to identify voices with names. The facilitator can aid this process by using names throughout - "Thanks for that, Sam".

 Create a clear and understood *group agreement* in order to create a safe and respectful environment for the call. Examples of what you might agree include in your agreement include:

- Drawing attention to the obvious: for example, that it's easier to interrupt because we can't see the body language cues, so we need to be especially sensitive on the phone.
- Pauses between contributions are welcome. They're much better than interruptions.
- Suggesting that: "If you've contributed to an item already, hold back before contributing a second or third time to allow other people to have their say".

 Use *go-rounds* to ensure everyone has an opportunity to speak in turn:

The go-round: □ Set the tone and the length of contribution that you're looking for □ State a clear issue or ask a clear question at the start to ensure it stays focused □ Challenge interruptions



Use plenty of questions to involve everyone:

"Is there anyone that we've not heard from yet who'd like to speak on this agenda item?"

"Jo, we've not heard from you yet - is there anything you'd like to add?"

"Is there any more on this before we move on?"

"Do people need more time to think about this before we start the discussion?"



Be clear about which conversations that everyone needs to have and which conversations can take place in smaller groups outside of the phone conference. As soon as you feel that the majority are spectators at a smaller group meeting, challenge the speakers and see if those active in that discussion are willing to complete it another time.



Summarise at the end of each agenda item. Recap action points and check everyone shares the same understanding of what's been agreed.



You could end with a go-round in which everyone recaps their own action points to ensure that their understanding is the same as yours.

rhizome

rhizome.coop

rhizome@rhizome.coop

0845 458 4776



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