Agenda Conference

An Agenda Conference is a participatory method designed for larger groups to collaboratively identify problems, define shared goals, and develop concrete ideas for the future. The method combines open discussions with clearly structured working sessions and is particularly suitable as the starting point for long-term participation processes. Its aim is to bring together different perspectives and initiate joint projects or actions.

Participation Depth	Participate, Have a say
Project Phase	Concept Development
Goals	Developing Ideas
Format	Analogue
Duration	1 - 3 Hours
Target Group	Directly Affected, Interested Public, Hard-to-Reach Groups, Organised Actors
Group Size	Medium Group up to 30, Large Group from 30
Characteristics	Structured, Creative

GOAL OF THE METHOD

The goal of an Agenda Conference is to bring together diverse perspectives, develop a shared vision for the future, and jointly identify practical projects and actions. The method creates a structured framework for collaboration and lays the foundation for long-term participation and implementation.

PROCEDURE

Preparation

1. Define the objectives and framework
Begin by clearly defining:

- Why is the Agenda Conference being organised?
- Which topics will be addressed?
- What outcomes are expected?
- What opportunities for action exist?
- Which decisions can realistically be implemented afterwards?

Also clarify:

- Who needs to be involved?
- Which groups have often been underrepresented?

- Which conflicts or tensions may arise?
- What roles will policymakers and the public administration play?

Important:

Communicate openly:

- which topics are open for discussion
- where limitations exist
- how the results will be used afterwards

2. Select participants and stakeholder groups
Aim to include a broad range of perspectives.

Possible participants include:

- directly affected residents
- interested members of the public
- organised stakeholder groups
- policymakers
- representatives of the public administration
- community organisations
- subject-matter experts

Pay particular attention to:

- representing different interests
- including various age groups
- actively inviting underrepresented groups
- creating a diverse participant group

3. Prepare background information
Before the conference, compile relevant information, such as:

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existing analyses

- plans and concepts
- ongoing projects
- previous participation results
- relevant data and facts

Whenever possible, provide these materials to participants several weeks before the event.

4. Prepare the venue and materials
Provide:

- a large room for plenary sessions
- several breakout rooms or working areas
- pinboards
- flipcharts
- moderation cards
- presentation equipment
- documentation materials

It is also helpful to provide:

- free refreshments
- clear signage

5. Organise the facilitation
An Agenda Conference should be professionally facilitated.

Depending on the number of participants, several facilitators may be required.

Prepare in advance:

- the agenda and schedule
- facilitation roles
- methods for small-group work

- documentation procedures
- strategies for managing conflicts or dominant participants

Execution

1. Introduction and shared overview

At the beginning of the conference:

- explain the objectives
- introduce the agenda
- agree on guidelines for collaboration

Then present the current situation, including:

- existing projects
- current challenges
- recent developments
- opportunities
- existing problems

Important:

Ensure that all participants begin with a common understanding of the topic.

2. Assess the current situation

Participants then discuss questions such as:

- What is working well?
- What is missing?
- Which problems are most important?
- Which developments are concerning?
- Where do opportunities exist?

This may take place:

- in plenary sessions

- in small groups
- at thematic discussion tables
- using pinboards for documentation

Important:

Different perspectives should be made visible.

3. Develop shared visions and goals
The focus then shifts towards the future.

Participants explore questions such as:

- Where do we want to go?
- What should the future look like?
- Which goals are most important?
- Which issues require urgent attention?

This often results in:

- future visions
- guiding principles
- shared objectives

4. Develop actions and projects
Participants then work on developing concrete:

- projects
- actions
- implementation steps
- collaborations
- responsibilities

Helpful questions include:

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What should happen?

- Who could contribute?
- Which resources are needed?
- What should be the first steps?

Project groups or working groups often emerge during this phase.

5. Closing session and outlook
At the end of the conference:

- summarise the results
- present the next steps
- agree on future collaboration
- clarify responsibilities

Important:

Clearly explain:

- how the results will be documented
- who will continue the work
- when participants can expect updates

Evaluation

1. Document the results
Prepare structured documentation of:

- goals
- guiding principles
- identified challenges
- project ideas
- proposed actions
- responsibilities

The documentation should be made available to all participants.

2. Prioritise the outcomes
After the conference, review:

- which topics were considered most important
- which actions appear realistic
- where additional coordination is required
- which participants wish to remain involved

3. Organise the follow-up process
Continued collaboration is essential.

Possible follow-up activities include:

- working groups
- project teams
- regular meetings
- additional participation activities

Without clear follow-up, valuable outcomes often lose their impact.

Source: https://partizipation.at/partizipation-anwenden/methoden/

WHEN USEFUL?

- launching larger participation processes
- involving a wide range of stakeholder groups
- developing shared goals and future visions
- jointly planning projects and concrete actions
- establishing long-term collaboration
- bringing together citizens, policymakers, and public administration

WHEN NOT USEFUL?

- dealing with acute or highly escalated conflicts
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rapid decisions are required

- there are insufficient resources for preparation and facilitation
- there is no commitment to following up on the results

TIPS

- Allow sufficient time for preparation.
- Use experienced, professional facilitators.
- Communicate the objectives and limitations transparently.
- Make different perspectives clearly visible.
- Involve policymakers and the public administration from an early stage.
- Use a variety of participatory formats throughout the conference.
- Document the results clearly and accessibly.
- Create concrete opportunities for participants to continue working together.

NOT SUITABLE FOR

- situations where there is no commitment to follow-up
- processes where the results cannot realistically be implemented
- situations requiring rapid decision-making
- highly escalated conflicts
- projects with insufficient preparation time

View online: https://methoden.urbankit.de/en/methods/agenda-konferenz