Round Table

A Round Table is a participation method in which representatives of different stakeholder groups come together to discuss a shared issue or conflict. The aim is to make different perspectives visible, foster mutual understanding, and collaboratively develop sustainable solutions or agreements.

Participation Depth	Participate, Have a say
Project Phase	Onboarding
Goals	Understanding & Gathering Perspectives
Format	Analogue
Duration	1 Day - 1 Week
Target Group	Directly Affected, Interested Public, Organised Actors
Group Size	Small Group up to 15, Medium Group up to 30
Characteristics	Structured, Activating

GOAL OF THE METHOD

The goal of a Round Table is to bring together different interests, perspectives, and needs in order to facilitate constructive dialogue. Through direct discussion, participants develop a better understanding of conflicts, work collaboratively towards solutions, and seek agreements that are supported by as many stakeholders as possible.

PROCEDURE

Preparation

1. Define the topic and objectives

Begin by considering:

- Which issue or conflict should be addressed?
- What should be achieved by the end of the process?
- Which questions need to be answered?

Important:

The objectives should be realistic and clearly understandable for all participants.

Examples include:

- developing a shared understanding
- making conflicts visible
- formulating recommendations

- agreeing on the next steps

2. Identify relevant stakeholder groups
Consider:

- Who is affected?
- Which interests should be represented?
- Which perspectives are often missing?

Invite all relevant stakeholder groups whenever possible.

Examples include:

- community initiatives
- local associations
- representatives of the public administration
- policymakers
- businesses
- planning professionals
- directly affected residents

Important:

Each stakeholder group should ideally be represented by only a small number of participants to keep the discussion manageable.

3. Conduct preliminary conversations
For particularly sensitive or conflict-related topics, individual conversations before the Round Table can be very helpful.

These conversations can explore:

- participants' expectations
- concerns or reservations
- existing conflicts

This helps build trust and identify potential tensions before the meeting begins.

4. Organise the facilitation
The facilitation team should:

- remain neutral
- avoid favouring any stakeholder group
- have experience facilitating group discussions
- be able to manage conflicts constructively
- ensure balanced participation

5. Prepare the venue
The venue should be:

- quiet
- easily accessible
- large enough to support open discussion

A round table or circle of chairs encourages:

- equal participation
- open communication
- direct eye contact

Execution

1. Welcome and introduction
At the beginning of the meeting, the facilitation team explains:

- the objectives of the Round Table
- the agenda
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the role of the participants

- the discussion guidelines
- the schedule

Ground rules may include:

- communicate respectfully
- remain focused on the issues
- allow others to finish speaking
- respect differing opinions

2. Participant introductions
Participants briefly introduce themselves.

Helpful information includes:

- name
- organisation or role
- connection to the topic

This creates transparency and helps participants become familiar with one another.

3. Identify perspectives and interests
At the beginning of the discussion, participants share:

- their perspectives
- key concerns
- existing conflicts
- expectations and priorities

Helpful questions include:

- "What is most important to you?"
- "Where do you see the main conflicts?"
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"What solution would you like to achieve?"

Important:

All perspectives should receive equal consideration.

4. Joint discussion
The discussion may take place:

- in plenary
- in smaller working groups

Depending on the topic, participants may:

- analyse conflicts
- compare different interests
- develop solutions
- formulate shared objectives

The facilitation team helps by:

- reopening stalled discussions
- highlighting common ground
- keeping the discussion focused on solutions

5. Document the results
Throughout the meeting, record:

- key statements
- proposals
- points of conflict
- agreements

Documentation may be displayed using:

- flipcharts
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pinboards

- shared digital documents

Important:

The documentation should remain visible and understandable for all participants throughout the process.

6. Closing and next steps
At the end of the meeting, discuss:

- Which outcomes have been achieved?
- Which questions remain unresolved?
- What are the next steps?
- Will additional Round Table meetings be organised?

The facilitation team concludes the session by summarising the key outcomes.

Evaluation

1. Document the outcomes
Prepare a clear summary of:

- the discussions
- agreements
- unresolved questions
- agreed next steps

The meeting record should be shared with all participants as soon as possible.

2. Communicate the results
Depending on the topic, the outcomes may be:

- communicated publicly
- published as a press release
- incorporated into political or administrative decision-making processes

Important:

All participants should understand how the results will be used after the meeting.

3. Organise follow-up meetings
If the process will continue:

- schedule future meetings at an early stage
- assign responsibilities
- prepare unresolved issues for further discussion

This helps maintain commitment and continuity throughout the process.

Source: https://mobilitaetsplanung-hessen.de/methodenkoffer-partizipative-planung/

WHEN USEFUL?

- addressing conflicts or competing interests
- different stakeholder groups need to develop solutions together
- dealing with complex issues that require a high level of coordination
- building trust and encouraging dialogue
- long-term collaboration is needed
- several groups are directly affected by the issue

WHEN NOT USEFUL?

- key decisions have already been made
- one or more stakeholder groups are unwilling to engage in dialogue
- the event is purely informational and does not require discussion

TIPS

- Neutral facilitation is essential for a successful Round Table.
- Ensure that no single stakeholder group dominates the discussion.
- Agree on clear and understandable discussion rules at the beginning.
- Allow sufficient time for dialogue and conflict resolution.
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For controversial topics, preliminary conversations with participants can significantly improve the quality of the discussion.

NOT SUITABLE FOR

- purely informational events
- very large groups
- topics without genuine scope for action
- highly escalated conflicts where participants are unwilling to engage in dialogue

View online: https://methoden.urbankit.de/en/methods/runder-tisch