Workshop

A workshop is a facilitated working session in which participants collaborate to explore a specific question, develop ideas, or create solutions. Depending on its purpose, a workshop can be used to share information, analyse problems, or develop concrete actions. Because all participants are actively involved, it is particularly well suited to the collaborative development of results.

Participation Depth	Inform · Participate · Have a say
Project Phase	Onboarding
Goals	Understanding & Gathering Perspectives · Developing Ideas · Exchange & Discourse · Decision-Making
Format	Analogue
Duration	1 - 3 Hours · 1 Day
Target Group	Directly Affected · Interested Public · Hard-to-Reach Groups · Organised Actors
Group Size	Small Group up to 15 · Medium Group up to 30 · Large Group from 30
Characteristics	Creative · Activating

GOAL OF THE METHOD

A workshop brings together the knowledge, experience, and ideas of different participants and supports their collaborative development. Its goal is to produce concrete outcomes, incorporate diverse perspectives, and develop practical solutions or recommendations for action.

PROCEDURE

Preparation

1. Define the Objective and Key Question

At the beginning, the objective of the workshop and the central question are defined. Both should be clearly formulated and easy for all participants to understand. At the same time, it should be determined what outcomes are expected by the end of the workshop.

Possible objectives include:

- Developing ideas for the design of a public space.
- Identifying challenges and needs of a specific target group.
- Developing measures for a mobility or urban development project.
- Collecting and further developing feedback on an existing concept.
- Jointly setting priorities for future projects.

Examples of guiding questions:

- How should this place be used in the future?
- What problems currently exist, and what solutions are possible?
- What are the needs of the different user groups?
- Which measures should be implemented first?
- How can the quality of the public space be improved?

Clearly defining the objective and guiding questions makes the workshop easier to understand and provides valuable guidance, especially for people who have never planned or facilitated a workshop before.

2. Select Participants
The composition of the group depends on the topic. Depending on the research question, participants may include directly affected residents, experts, representatives from public administration, political decision-makers, associations, or other stakeholders. Bringing together different perspectives improves the quality of the results.

3. Plan the Workshop Agenda
Since workshops do not follow a fixed structure, an individual agenda should be developed. It is recommended to prepare a schedule with clearly defined working phases, allowing sufficient time for discussions, group work, and breaks.

An example of a basic schedule could be:

- Welcome and introduction (approx. 10–15 min)
- Introduction to the topic (approx. 20 min)
- Expert input or project presentation (approx. 45–60 min)
- First group work session (idea generation and problem analysis) (approx. 15–20 min)
- Break (approx. 45 min)
- Presentation of group results and joint discussion (approx. 35 min)
- Second group work session (developing and prioritising solutions and measures) (approx. 15–20 min)
- Summary, outlook, and next steps

Note: The schedule can be adapted depending on the workshop objectives. Workshops focusing on idea generation often include longer creative sessions, while workshops aimed at developing concrete measures require more time for discussion, prioritisation, and the collaborative development of practical outcomes.

4. Prepare Facilitation and Materials
A neutral facilitator guides the process and ensures a structured workflow. All required materials—such as moderation cards, pinboards, flipcharts, digital whiteboards, or worksheets—should be prepared in advance.

5. Create Suitable Conditions
A pleasant working environment supports collaboration. Flexible seating arrangements, sufficient space for group work, as well as refreshments and drinks contribute to an open and productive atmosphere.

Execution

1. Welcome and Introduction
At the beginning of the workshop, the facilitator introduces the objectives, agenda, and working methods. Participants are then informed about the planned activities, and common ground rules for collaboration are established.

2. Introduce the Topic
Before the actual working phase begins, it is important to ensure that all participants share a common understanding of the topic. The most relevant background information should therefore be presented in a clear and accessible way. Depending on the subject, this may include a short expert presentation, a project introduction, photographs, maps, plans, models, or examples from comparable projects.

The workshop question should then be presented once again. It should be made clear:

- what task will be addressed,
- what scope for participation exists,
- and what outcomes are expected.

Any open questions should be clarified before group work begins.

To actively involve participants from the start, a short introductory exercise can be useful. Examples include:

- a brief round of introductions connected to the topic ("What do you associate with this place?");
- a card-based question ("Which challenge do you consider most important?");
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a dot-voting exercise to identify initial priorities;

- a joint review of maps, plans, or photographs of the project area;
- a short individual reflection followed by discussions in pairs.

A well-designed introduction creates a shared understanding of the topic, engages participants, and provides a smooth transition into the collaborative working phase.

3. Collaborative Working Phase

Depending on the objective, participants work in plenary, in small groups, or in a combination of both. Various methods—such as brainstorming, card-based activities, prioritisation exercises, or visualisation techniques—can be used to collect and develop ideas.

Possible guiding questions include:

- What are the main challenges?
- Which needs are particularly important?
- Which solutions appear realistic?
- Which measures should be prioritised?

4. Present and Discuss the Results

After each working phase, all participants come back together in plenary. Each group is given sufficient time to present its results. Groups should not only present their ideas but also explain how they developed them and the reasoning behind them.

During the presentations, the facilitator documents the key points in a way that is visible to everyone—for example on flipcharts, pinboards, or a digital whiteboard. Similar ideas can immediately be grouped into thematic clusters.

Afterwards, participants have the opportunity to ask clarifying questions, add comments, or provide brief feedback. The goal is not to discuss every idea in detail, but to identify similarities, differences, and possible synergies. If several groups have developed comparable proposals, these can be merged into common thematic clusters.

5. Prioritise Results and Define the Next Steps

Once all results have been presented, participants jointly decide which ideas or measures should be pursued further. Depending on the workshop objectives, different prioritisation methods can be used, such as dot voting, evaluation based on predefined criteria, or facilitated group discussions.

The following points should be documented transparently:

- Which results have the highest priority.
- Which ideas will be postponed for the time being.
- Which questions remain unresolved.
- Who is responsible for the next steps.
- By when the next steps should be implemented or further developed.

Finally, the facilitator summarises the key outcomes and explains how the results will be used. Participants should clearly understand whether their contributions will feed into a planning process, serve as a basis for decision-making, or be explored further in subsequent participation activities. A clear outlook increases transparency and demonstrates that participants' contributions are taken seriously.

Evaluation

1. Document and Analyse the Results

Immediately after the workshop, all working materials should be collected, including moderation cards, flipcharts, pinboards, photographs, digital whiteboards, and the facilitator's notes.

The results are then systematically analysed to structure the wide range of ideas and identify the most important findings.

The analysis may include the following steps:

- grouping similar ideas into thematic clusters;
- identifying frequently mentioned challenges or needs;
- highlighting differences between working groups;
- identifying priorities and the most frequently proposed measures;
- marking questions that remained unanswered during the workshop;
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deriving concrete recommendations for action.

Depending on the scope of the workshop, methods such as Thematic Mapping, Content Analysis, or Sensemaking can support this analysis.

2. Prepare the Final Documentation
The analysed results are then compiled into a clear and accessible report. This documentation should not only present the final outcomes but also make the process transparent.

A workshop report may include:

- purpose and objectives of the workshop;
- number and composition of participants;
- workshop agenda;
- key discussions;
- developed ideas and proposed measures;
- prioritised results;
- photographs of workshop materials;
- open questions;
- agreed next steps.

The documentation should be shared with all participants as soon as possible.

3. Continue Working with the Results
The workshop outcomes should not only be documented but actively integrated into the subsequent process.

This may include:

- submitting the results to politicians, public administration, or project leaders;
- integrating the proposed measures into an action or implementation plan;
- assessing the feasibility of individual proposals;
- assigning responsibilities for further work;
- planning additional participation activities to further develop selected topics.

Equally important is providing feedback to participants. They should be informed about which proposals will be implemented, which have been postponed, and why certain ideas cannot currently be realised. Transparent communication strengthens trust in the participation process and demonstrates that participants' contributions are valued and taken seriously.

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

WHEN USEFUL?

- developing ideas, solutions, or actions collaboratively
- addressing questions that require different perspectives and areas of expertise
- encouraging exchange between different stakeholder groups
- serving as a working session within a larger participation process
- further developing findings from previous participation activities

WHEN NOT USEFUL?

- the purpose is solely to provide information
- binding decisions have already been made
- involving very large groups without an appropriate working structure
- participants are not willing to actively contribute

TIPS

- A clearly formulated workshop question helps participants work towards a common goal.
- Alternate between different working methods and regularly bring everyone back together to share interim results.
- Ensure that all participants have sufficient opportunities to contribute their perspectives.
- Document ideas and results continuously throughout the workshop so that they remain visible to everyone.
- Neutral facilitation helps structure discussions and ensures that all voices are heard.
- Allow enough time for breaks and informal conversations, as these often support collaboration and creative thinking.

NOT SUITABLE FOR

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Events that are intended solely to provide information.

- Projects with little or no scope for participation or open outcomes.
- Processes involving very large groups without an appropriate working structure.
- Topics that require immediate or binding decisions.
- Situations where participants are unwilling to engage actively in the process.

View online: https://methoden.urbankit.de/en/methods/workshop