



This one-day facilitation workshop followed the 16th NRN meeting and focused on sharing good practices of facilitation techniques for National Rural Networks (NRNs).

The workshop was designed to support the Network Support Units (NSUs) in achieving the NRN objective of 'increased involvement of stakeholders', in particular colleagues active in facilitating events. This core part of all NSUs' daily work is of particular current importance in involving stakeholders in the design of future national Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Plans and national CAP Networks.

The workshop also reflected the benefits of peer-to-peer learning in improving the facilitation techniques being used during events and related knowledge sharing among NSUs.

Workshop Highlights

After a welcome and introduction to the day, an interactive ice-breaking activity introduced the topic and energised and motivated the participants. Participants were asked to join the group located in the room that corresponded most to their personal facilitation type. In the following discussion they then explored their associated NRN experiences and success stories.

Exchanging experiences



Finnish NSU

[Juha Matti Markkola](#) described the Finnish 'Smart rural areas roadshow' with its current engagement of local actors through 15 provinces explaining their strategic plan. This latest round of workshops will be facilitated by the NSU's own employees unlike previous such NSU outreach activities using paid professionals. Facilitation training sessions, using an expert on facilitation were therefore provided, including to regional Managing Authorities (MAs) and Local Action Groups (LAGs). Findings from this Finnish experience highlighted the benefits of their communicating in concise and simple segments (under 10 minutes at a time).



Event Information

Date: 4 March 2020

Location: Calatayud, Spain

Organisers: ENRD Contact Point

Participants: 46 participants including NSU representatives, facilitation experts, European Commission/DG AGRI and EU networks

Outcomes: Exchanges on how to engage stakeholders more effectively in using various facilitation techniques.

Web page: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-nrn-facilitation-techniques-stakeholder-engagement_en



Irish NSU

In Ireland, NSU staff started a CAP consultation roadshow through six locations earlier in 2020. James Claffey of the Irish NSU explained how this outreach facilitation was internally resourced. This outreach activity will continue through the MA creating a CAP consultation committee. Members of this committee will be farmer organisations, NGOs, LAGs and research bodies etc. These stakeholders will receive regular updates (e.g. every 6 weeks) via a discussion platform. Success factors considered include: retro-planning for deadlines; flexibility to allow local adaptations; and understanding the differences between the forms of involvement, i.e. participation, consultation and engagement.

All participants then shared their successful facilitation experiences from their own countries during a practical exercise. In addition, some of them were asked to act in a facilitation role and then report back reflecting on their personal experience and the learning gained in facilitating these small group discussions.

Inspiration by professionals

A moderated panel discussion involved four professional facilitators in sharing their 'knowhow'. This discussion confirmed useful tips for more effective facilitation and was clustered around [seven key areas](#):

- **Control the room** – There are different roles besides being the facilitator (e.g. moderator, animator, timekeeper). You don't need to be all of them at once. Your audience can help do some of these tasks.
- **Positive atmosphere** – Help participants feel comfortable e.g. through icebreakers, an agreeable room set-up (chairs in a circle), use positioning and working in close proximity to your audience.
- **Presentation techniques** – Optimise visual presentation content e.g. use the '7/7' golden rule i.e. 7 words per slide, 7 slides in total.
- **Sensitivity** – Peoples participation preferences vary, some prefer to be asked to contribute to a discussion, others may be more pro-active. Be sensitive, ask for contributions, and watch body-language, all useful skills for facilitators to deploy systematically.
- **Testing the group response** – Check during the process whether the group is 'on the same path'. Gathering audience reactions can be helpful for guiding facilitation processes and seeking consensus.
- **Listen** – Active listening is necessary for successful facilitation. This can be improved through training and practice. Be aware of audience members' body language and other unspoken communication signals or messages.
- **Monitoring** – To help better monitor and manage the facilitation space and process pay attention to: facilitator's positioning; intervention type and timing; reducing participant distractions and time planning.



Facilitation training

Participants were able to test five different techniques in parallel working groups:



[Jose Moises Martin](#) introduced the '**Network Governance**' technique. This can help improve participants understanding of essential elements for successful networking and can actively involve governance participants in a process.

Facilitation experts Genny Carraro and Clara Ruiz introduced the '**Sociogram**' technique establishing social relationships between groups, institutions or individuals using graphic and spatial representation. A '**Timeline**' technique was also shared involving participants in visualising historical milestones and complex developments in a schematic manner. From this a graphic map of moments and metrics that collectively influence an issue can be prepared.

[Marieke Kok](#) guided participants through the steps of the '**Theory U**' process. This can be suitable for designing bottom-up participation e.g. for creating a SWOT or Local Development Strategy or climate action plan.

David Lamb showed how the '**Buzz groups**' technique can lead to larger groups and diverse opinions being brought together to form ideas and conclusions. The technique included also a role-playing component.

Key messages

- Facilitators should have a strategy, be confident, avoid dominating discussions and prioritise giving everyone a chance to participate.
- Make the audience feel comfortable and ensure they understand how their contributions will be used.
- Honesty and transparency help to gain an audience's confidence and encourage their participation in a consultation process.

