

Guidelines for Open Space Technology

Open Space is an interactive process that enables self-organizing groups to explore complex information and knowledge with diverse groups of people. In the context of the SOTA conference, attendees will have an opportunity to participate in open space sessions following the mini-university sessions, which include the following topics:

- HPN related topics
- USAID administrative topics
- USAID programmatic topics

Participants will be asked to identify a topic area that they want to explore from one of these areas previously discussed during the mini-university. A volunteer will offer to facilitate a session for their similarly-interested colleagues. A room will be provided for interested participants to go to discuss their interests. Each session will have a facilitator who is self-selected from the general audience. The facilitator is a discussion leader who is responsible to keep the topics focused and to encourage participation, forward thinking, and future actions. Mini-university facilitators are invited to each Open Space session to contribute data and knowledge, but are asked to take the role of participant, not facilitator.

Facilitator guidelines for Open Space:

This is a participant-run event. As a facilitator, it is considered a mark of success to be uninvolved and even absent. You do not want to model a hierarchical process. In fact, if the sessions are pre-planned well, the facilitator will only [set the staging and facilitate a discussion of the basic principles](#), allowing the motivation of the audience to take hold and create the sessions. After that, the Open Space facilitator should make him/herself scarce, and not interfere in the natural process of the event.

To begin, set up a planning matrix, with multiple sheets of flip chart paper pinned to a long wall at the back of the room where the plenary meeting takes place – as in the following illustration.

Thursday, June ____ Time 11:00 – 12:30	Room # TBD Topic _____ Facilitator ____ <u>Participants</u> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. Etc.	Room # ABD	Rm. # ABD	Rm. # ABD
Friday, June ____	Rooms Same info.			
Saturday, June ____				

Initial Set up Session

Logistics

Chairs in a Circle

Set up, if at all possible, the chairs for the participants. The chairs should be in concentric circles, so that everyone can see and hear each other and there is a central space for the volunteer facilitators to enter into where they can address the entire audience.

Time and Room Matrix is set up against wall. There should be room for a crowd to gather at the wall to sign up for the spaces. Therefore the wall selected should be away from chairs and other furniture.

Sheet of Note Paper for all participants. In order to remember the topics, the facilitator, and record the room numbers and times, the participants need paper to take notes.

Handouts are prepared for each session facilitator. See attachment

Technology

Several computers will be set up so that at the end of the session the note-taker within each group can type the notes into the computer. The compiled notes can be handed back to participants at the end of each day. In this way, the participants can learn what occurred in, and who attended, the sessions they could not attend.

Initial Facilitation

The facilitator is responsible for setting the tone, explaining the guidelines and the logistics, and then getting 'out of the way' of the group. This should take no more than 20 minutes.

Tone – Quiet and attentive. Ring a bell to bring the room to attention.

Open by setting the tone along the lines of - "Open Space Technology" is particularly powerful when nobody knows the answer and the ongoing participation of a number of people is required to deal with the questions. Therefore, this session is about questions and questioning. For this to work, you must focus on a real business issue that is of passionate concern to all who will be involved.

Explain the following (Posted on the walls)

The Four Principles

Behavior at Open Space gatherings is guided by four principles and one law.

1. Whoever attends are the right people.
2. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have.
3. Whenever it starts it's the right time.

4. When it's over, it's over.

Clearly, these principles lend themselves to self-empowerment and to being open to new views and ideas. These principles say, essentially, that one must trust the process.

One Law - The Law of Two Feet

Take yourself to be where you need to be. This one law says that if, during the course of the gathering, any person finds him or herself in a situation where they are neither learning nor contributing, they must use their two feet and go to some more productive (meeting) place.

This law is critical, in that it must be acceptable to decide on where the most effective use of one's time and expertise is to be contributed.

Now, for the Topics:

Based on the prior mini-university session, meditate (take some quiet time) to consider what you want to explore or discuss with others. Take 3 minutes to come up with a topic suggestion. When you are moved, stand up and move to the front of the room. State the topic and give a two minute description of what you want to accomplish and why you are moved to facilitate this. Do not stand up if you are not ready to carry this forward. After you announce your topic, go back to the Time/Room matrix and enter your name and the topic area in a room.

Co-facilitation, or the merging of two closely-aligned topic ideas, requires some group management and flexibility. Often someone else has thought of a topic that is similar to the one suggested and wants to co-facilitate, or just asks that his/her topic be included. If someone wants to co-facilitate, this is fine. Of course, this has to be agreed to by the original facilitator.

- Ask each participant to write down the topic(s) along with the facilitator(s).

Finally, when all topics have been exhausted and the joint topics determined, tell everyone to go to the wall and write their names in the boxes allocated for the session they will attend. In addition, ask that each facilitator appoint a note-taker at the start of the session.

The Note – Taker is a full participant but in addition will take notes that will be given out later.

Session Notes

TOPIC AREA _____

FACILITATOR _____

ATTENDEES _____

NOTE-TAKER _____

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/ISSUES:

MAJOR POINTS/CONTRIBUTIONS

ACTION ITEMS

