

How to Design a Workshop

Designing workshops is a creative activity, which means that different trainers have their own ways of doing it. Here is one way, which works for me.

- 1. Learn about the group.** I ask the leaders/sponsors about the group, its history, problems, conflicts, expectations, hopes, experience with workshops. I often ask a contact person “Who else should I interview? Anyone with a different or unusual perspective?” I do this work by telephone or face-to-face or in a committee meeting (or all of the above). I may have a questionnaire that participants fill out, to get broader data.
- 2. Formulate goals.** I want goals that are realistic, that respond to the needs/wants of the sponsors of the workshop and/or the participants, and that motivate me. I don’t want more goals than I can remember, because my goals control many of my judgement calls as I facilitate the workshop. I want goals that are clear, so I can use them to evaluate the workshop mid-term and on completion.
- 3. Brainstorm activities/tools.** Goal-setting often requires making hard choices, so I’m ready for some fun. Brainstorming lightens me up. Sometimes I start by brainstorming “my favorite activities and exercises.” These are mostly experiential, but I do include relevant mini-lectures/videos/etc.
- 4. Sort the list.** I sort for which activities lend themselves especially to the substance of the workshop and its goals. Also for the kind of group I’m working with. Sometimes I make another phone call at this point, to fine-tune my diagnosis of the group. I also sort for differently able: are there too many activities depending on hearing for this group, or seeing, or running around?
- 5. Develop sequence and select.** As I develop a sequence I select the activities likely to move the group forward in its learning process. Which activities are building blocks that prepare for the next step? I let my expectation of energy flow influence the sequence: when to place cognitive work? Are there high energy activities after meals? Emotional dynamics -- do the activities allow for the highs and lows?
- 6. Check for *variety* of formats.** Does the design move the group into pairs, threes, fours, etc? Does whole group time come when most needed (for example, at the end of the day)? Is there some individual time for the introvert?
- 7. Check for learning styles/channels.** Is there a mix of auditory, visual, and kinesthetic? Is there sufficient safety-building time before people are asked to risk? What does the whole design indicate I need to say during Agenda Review to anticipate individual needs?

by George Lakey