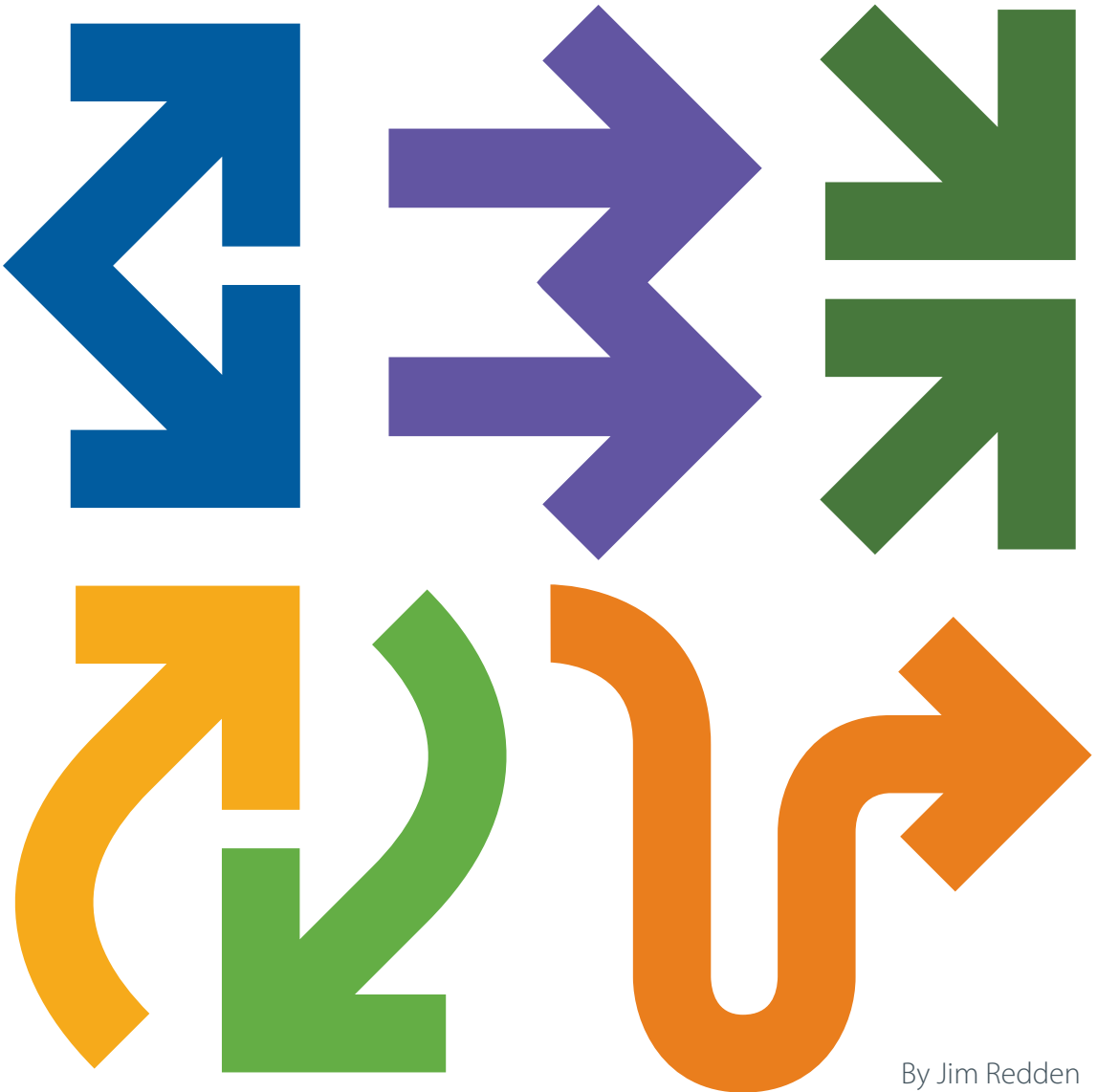


# Facilitating at the Front End of Innovation

A Guide for Planning and Executing Innovation Workshops



By Jim Redden



Facilitating is the art of bringing  
the best out of other people.

Facilitating at the Front End of Innovation  
A Guide for Planning and Executing Innovation Workshops

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We've all been there. Your organization faces a difficult challenge. Traditional solutions just aren't getting the job done. You need a new approach, but are not sure where to begin. You have found yourself face to face with the *Front End of Innovation*.

The problem you are up against is complicated. Solving it will require more than one person. In fact, many different people have information that will be integral to creating a successful solution. Should you chase the hot new technology? Should you have a brainstorming session? How do you sort through all of the half-baked ideas that were thrown out at the last staff meeting? Fortunately, this guide is here to help.

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# What Is the Front End of Innovation?

The front end of innovation (FEI) is the beginning of the innovation process. It is characterized by uncertainty and ambiguity. It often involves non-linear exploration and lots of iteration. Journeying through the front end of innovation requires a learner’s mindset—one that is open to the fact that experimentation and failure are necessary, for the answers are unknown.

The two fundamental questions that recur at the front end of innovation are **“what might we pursue?”** and **“what should we pursue?”** These questions—these cycles of divergence and convergence—are not simply asked once. They are asked dozens, maybe hundreds, of times along the path through the front end of innovation. They must first be asked in the context of innovation strategy. “What strategic innovation areas might we pursue?” And, “what strategic innovation areas should we pursue?” Once strategic areas for innovation are established, the fundamental questions must be asked again. “What opportunities in this space might we pursue?” and “what opportunities in this space should we pursue?”

To be successful, these cycles of divergence (“what might we pursue?”) and convergence (“what should we pursue?”) **must continually be infused with learning.** An organization must inject insights from megatrends, emerging technologies, customers, and business strategy into the FEI process. This learning is the necessary precursor to asking “what might we pursue?” As Senior Innovation Advisor Tom Culver says, “you must earn your right to ideate.”

The front end of innovation stands in contrast to later stages in the innovation process that are characterized by disciplined product development, stage gate processes, and linear thinking. As such, traditional measures of business success such as financial return on investment (ROI) do not apply. Rather than seeking a monetary return on dollars spent at the front end of innovation, companies should look at the amount of organizational learning that occurs to evaluate the effectiveness of FEI spending. In short, **managing the front end of innovation requires asking “what are you learning?” not “what are you earning?”**

## Why Does the Front End of Innovation Need Facilitation?

Because the front end of innovation is a messy, ambiguous, and uncertain place. Navigating the front end of innovation requires deliberate planning and disciplined exploration. Successfully charting a course through this ambiguity is hard for organizations and hard for individuals. Organizations are giant machines built around executing a known value proposition. Organizational processes that support disciplined execution are often fundamentally at odds with the exploration required by the front end of innovation. Similarly, many individual would-be innovators have been successful in their day-to-day roles by applying analytical problem solving skills. For them, the ambiguity and uncertainty of the front end of innovation is often uncomfortable and therefore avoided.

**Creating the conditions for successful front-end innovation requires intentional planning and careful facilitation to overcome organizational and individual barriers.** As you will see throughout this book, innovating in groups is a difficult yet powerful task.

There are many tools and tactics that you will encounter as you journey through the front end of innovation—from megatrend analysis to technology landscaping to concept prototyping. Some occur in groups. Others must be done individually. **This book is a “how to” guide for one of the fundamental tools in your FEI toolkit: the FEI workshop.** Though the road to a successful workshop seems daunting at the start, we have collected best practices and resources to help you plan and execute an effective and engaging innovation workshop. However, the first question to ask yourself is “do I really need to have an innovation workshop?”

## When Do I Need a Front End of Innovation Workshop?

An FEI workshop is appropriate when both of the following are true. First, **the organization is seeking input** from a group of people on the two fundamental FEI questions: “what might we pursue?” or “what should we pursue?” In instances where an organization simply wants to communicate with a group of people, a meeting, training session, or conference can be an effective format. However, a meeting, conference, or training session should not be confused with an innovation workshop.

Second, **the organization seeks to enable discovery, insight, and learning** between workshop participants that will improve the quality of the input they generate. Otherwise, the decision maker could simply elicit responses via email as a way to gather input from the group on what might or should be pursued.

If you are faced with the formidable challenge of bringing together a group of people to collectively generate insights and answer one or both of the fundamental FEI questions, this book is here to help.

## How to Use This Book

This book is not a comprehensive guide to the front end of innovation. Remember, organizations must “earn their right to ideate” by first doing the prerequisite learning to identify technology and business trends, understand consumers, and set strategy. For help with any of these activities, refer to the resources in the appendix. Once you have “earned your right,” this book can be used in a variety of ways as you plan your innovation workshop:

### **Comprehensive Planning Support**

*“I am just starting to think about my innovation workshop” or “I am new to facilitating innovation”*

Great news! This book will guide you through the planning process step by step. We recommend that you first skim the book cover to cover to get an idea of the entire planning process. Then, as you go through each planning step, read each section more thoroughly and use the planning templates and checklists.

### **A-la-Carte Support**

*“I always get stuck in this part of the process”*

The sections of this book can be taken a-la-carte as well. Having trouble building the agenda? Turn to page 39. Want some day-of facilitation tips? Page 47 has you covered. Need a pre-event checklist? For templates or checklists, email [innovationadvisors@rti.org](mailto:innovationadvisors@rti.org).

## **Terminology Used Throughout the Book**

**The Front End of Innovation** is the “fuzzy,” ambiguous, non-linear, and iterative process of organizational learning that seeks to answer the fundamental FEI questions “what might we pursue?” and “what should we pursue?”

**An Innovation Workshop** is a gathering of people to collectively provide input on the two fundamental FEI questions

**A Facilitator** is a person responsible for planning, executing, and following up from the Innovation Workshop. (This is you!)

**The Client** is the person (or people) who asked you to plan and run the innovation workshop. (Sometimes, you get to be both client and facilitator if you are the one trying to innovate!)

**Participants** are the people you will invite to the innovation workshop who will help you answer the two fundamental FEI questions.



## This Book Contains:

- A planning timeline  
(for a 1 hour event, a 1/2 day – 1 day event, and >1 day or complex event.)
- Planning worksheets  
(downloadable)
- Planning checklists  
(downloadable)
- Case studies
- Pro tips
- Common pitfalls

# The Many Faces of Innovation Facilitation

Taking groups through the FEI process is a difficult task. Sometimes, it will feel like herding cats. Other times, it may feel like pushing a wet noodle. The reality is that each workshop or event will likely require a slightly different approach. Some groups are all over the place and must be encouraged to focus. Other groups will struggle to get out of their narrow mindset and will need help diverging. Over time, you will likely find other analogies that fit your experience, but here are just a few of the many roles the facilitator is asked to play:



## **The Sherpa**

A facilitator-Sherpa often acts as a guide for groups trying to ascend Innovation Mountain. As Sherpa, you know that there are many paths, but your experience helps you plan an appropriate route and point out pitfalls along the way.



## **The Shepherd**

As facilitator-shepherd, you know the “fertile fields” or activities or questions that are likely to lead to productive discussion or spur innovative thinking.



## **The Cowboy/Cowgirl**

Sometimes facilitator-cowboys/cowgirls must deal with unruly or strong-headed participants. These “wild bulls” must be managed while not losing sight of the rest of the group.



## **The Conductor**

Each participant brings a unique skill set and perspective to your innovation event. Your job as facilitator-conductor is to coordinate the “playing” of diverse viewpoints and skillsets to produce the beautiful sounds of innovation.



## **The Midwife**

As facilitator-midwife, you help birth latent ideas that are growing within participants. The process of idea generation and creative divergence is sometime uncomfortable, and participants often need encouragement to share ideas with the world rather than keep them inside.



## Warning: Many People *Hate* Innovation Workshops

Unfortunately, many people have had bad experiences with brainstorming or other FEI events. In *Designing for Growth*, author Jean Liedtka outlines four reasons that people hate the front end of innovation:

- Problems are poorly framed
- The usual suspects say the usual things
- Brainstorms turn into critiques
- Events make more work and the organization is just going to kill ideas anyway

This book will help you rectify many of these criticisms and put on a spectacular workshop. However, facilitator's must be aware that participants bring biases from bad FEI experiences. The best way to combat these criticisms is to put on a stellar event. Fortunately, this book will help you do just that.

# An Overview of the

## Section 1 Planning Your Event

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### Understanding Needs

The planning kickoff meeting helps the facilitator learn as much as possible about the client's needs, objectives, and context for the workshop.



### Aligning Objectives

Establishing workshop objectives is the most important part of the planning process. The workshop objectives impact every subsequent planning step.



### People Place and Time

A facilitator must understand participants' perspectives and be aware of constraints related to workshop location and time.

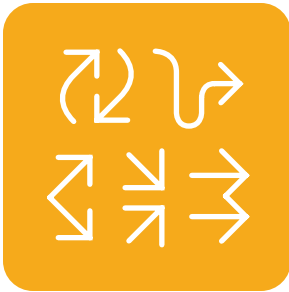
## Section 2 Facilitating The Event

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While the facilitator is the star of the planning process, the participants are the stars of the workshop. A good facilitator brings out the best in participants.

# Facilitation Process

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## Selecting Activities

With objectives and logistics in mind, the facilitator assembles combinations of activities that allow participants to Immerse, Share, Diverge, Converge, and Plan.



## Building the Agenda

The planning process culminates in the creation of the agenda—that deceptively simple workshop blueprint that outlines workshop activities and timing,



## Creating the Facilitator's Guide

The facilitator's words matter. A good facilitator thinks through how the words they use will impact the participants, activities, and workshop outcomes.

## Section 3 Following Up

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Often, perceptions about the workshop's success hinge on what happens next. Thus, the end of the workshop is not the end. Follow up well to solidify event success.

## Section 1

# PLAN

Planning is the most important part of the entire workshop process and it takes time—way more time than you think.

# Planning Your Event

When someone asks you to facilitate an innovation workshop, there is a lot more you need to know before you agree. Planning a great workshop takes time and a significant level of involvement from the person asking you to help (aka, the client). To agree to facilitate an event, you should first determine if the client has **the right intention, the right team, and the right time.**

## The Right Intention

Recall from the introduction that innovation workshops seek input from participants on at least one of the following two fundamental questions: “what might we pursue?” and “what should we pursue?” Ask the potential client why they want to have an innovation workshop. If their explanation doesn’t seem to fit in either of these two buckets, perhaps an innovation workshop is not what they truly need.

*Innovation workshops seek input from participants.*

## The Right Team

You will not be able to plan a successful innovation workshop on your own. Your client must commit to being a key partner in the planning process. To plan a successful event, your client must be able to provide

- the strategic and business context for the workshop,
- the workshop objectives, and
- insight about the participants.

Sometimes, the right team is just two people: you and the client. Other times, the planning team is larger. Managing multiple stakeholders on the client’s side adds to the complexity and time required for the planning process.

### PRO TIP

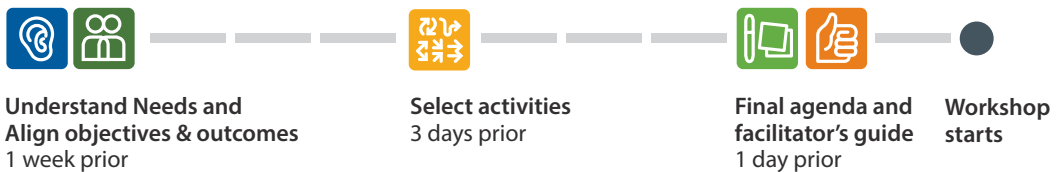
When working with large planning teams, encourage one decision maker and point person on the client side. Managing “decision by committee” will prolong the planning phase.

## The Right Time

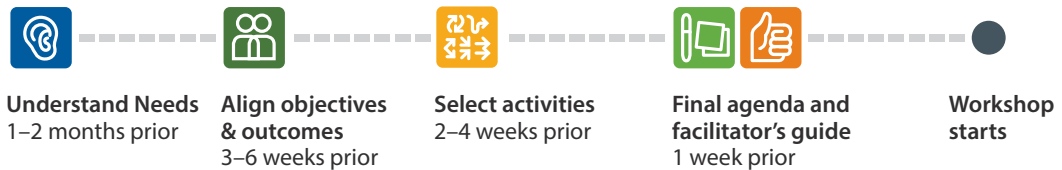
The exact number of hours it will take to plan an event varies based on the length of the event, complexity of the objectives, and specific activities that are planned. However, as a facilitator, you should start planning well in advance of the workshop. As a starting point, consider using the following timeline as a guide:

\*Note: This timeline does not imply that the facilitator is working on the event full-time. Instead, the suggested timeline allows enough time for meetings with the client, iteration around objectives, and testing of various activities prior to the workshop.

### 1 Hour Workshop: 1 week planning time



### 1/2 to 1 Day Workshop: 1–2 months planning time



### >1 Day (or complex) Workshop 4–6 months planning time





 **CAUTION**

If someone comes to you and asks for your help planning an innovation workshop on a highly compressed timeline, say no. As the facilitator, your job is to push back on those who do not understand the time and effort required to plan and execute a successful workshop.

 **CAUTION**

Often, people mistake innovation event planning for workshop logistics planning. Logistics are critical, but the true value you bring to the client is in your understanding of how to plan an event that accomplishes a set of innovation objectives aligned with innovation strategy.

 **PRO TIP**

Often, your planning timeline will be influenced by when the invites to participants must be sent. To know who should be invited, you must first be aligned around objectives. Adjust your timeline as necessary, but always align around objectives before moving forward.

Once you have established that your client has the right intentions, the right team, and the right time, you can agree to plan the innovation workshop.

# Step 1 Understanding Needs



The planning process begins with a kickoff meeting between the event planner and the client. The purpose of this meeting is for the workshop planner to learn as much as possible about the client's needs and objectives.

# Workshop Kickoff Worksheet

It is important that the participants who attend the kickoff can speak to the strategic and business context for the workshop, the workshop objectives, necessary participants, and the desired outcomes for the event. The **Planning Kickoff Worksheet** provides a template for the topics that you should discuss in the kickoff meeting and lists some suggested questions for each section. In this worksheet, the size of the box correlates with the amount of time you should spend on each topic during the kickoff.

## Using The Worksheet

- 1 Background:** During the kickoff, it is important to understand the history of the project and how the client arrived at their current situation.
- 2 Objectives:** Once you understand the context, ask lots of questions about the client's objectives for the workshop. Ask about business objectives, participant objectives, and personal objectives.
- 3 Participants:** Learn as much as you can in this first meeting about the mindset of your participants and potential problematic personalities.
- 4 Outcomes:** Find out from the client what they intend to do with the output from the workshop.
- 5 Event Space:** The intended space may impact workshop design.
- 6 Timing:** Inquire about time constraints or expectations.

Innovation Workshop Planning Tools: The Planning Kickoff Worksheet	
Client:	Date:
Facilitator:	
<b>Background</b> <i>Can you tell me about the context for this project?</i> <i>Why do you want to have a workshop?</i> <i>Have you done these types of workshops before?</i> <i>What went well and what didn't go well?</i> <i>How does this project fit in your innovation/business strategy?</i>	<b>Objectives</b> <i>Tell me about your goals for the workshop.</i> <i>What are you hoping to accomplish by the end of the workshop?</i> <i>What do you hope participants take away from the event?</i> <i>What do you hope happens after the workshop?</i>
<b>Participants</b> <i>Can you tell me about the people who will be at the workshop?</i> <i>How many? What are their backgrounds/functions?</i> <i>Have they participated in these events before?</i> <i>How are they likely to feel about the workshop?</i> <i>Are there any difficult personalities or conflicts to know about?</i>	<b>Outcomes</b> <i>What type of data are you hoping to generate during the event?</i> <i>What will be done with the things produced during the event?</i> <i>What comes after the workshop?</i>
<b>Event Space</b> <i>Where will the event be held?</i> <i>What options are there for rooms set up?</i> <i>AV/Whiteboard availability? Wall space?</i>	<b>Timing</b> <i>How long are you envisioning for the workshop?</i> <i>Is that timing firm or flexible?</i>

The Planning Kickoff Worksheet can be requested via email: [innovationadvisors@rti.org](mailto:innovationadvisors@rti.org).

# Questions to Ask During Your Meeting

## 1 Background:

- Can you tell me about the context for this project?
- Why do you want to have a workshop?
- Have you done these types of workshops before?
- What went well and what didn't go well?
- Can you tell me more about how this project fits in your innovation/business strategy?

## 2 Objectives:

- Tell me about your goals for the workshop.
- What are you hoping to accomplish by the end of the workshop?
- What do you hope participants take away from the event?
- What do you hope happens after the workshop?
- What do we need to learn from the participants?
- What do we need to tell the participants?
- What do we need participants to learn from each other?

## 3 Participants:

- Can you tell me about the people who will be at the workshop?
- How many people are you anticipating?
- What are their backgrounds and functions?
- Have they participated in these events before?
- What will NOT fly with this group?
- Are there any difficult personalities or conflicts to know about?

#### 4 Outcomes:

- What type of data are you hoping to generate during the event?
- What will be done with the things produced during the event?
- What comes after the workshop?

#### 5 Event Space:

- Where will the event be held?
- What options are there for room set up?
- AV/Whiteboard availability? Wall space?
- Can we go see the space?

#### 6 Timing:

- How long are you envisioning for the workshop?
- Is that timing firm or flexible?

#### Other Questions to Consider:

- What are you most worried about with this event?
- What would make this workshop exceed expectations by 10x?

#### PRO TIP

Do not discuss the details of the agenda or try to plan specific workshop activities during the kickoff. The focus of the kickoff is project context and objectives. Steer clear of “what we will do?” and focus instead on “what do you need?”

## Step 2 Aligning Objectives



The process of coming to an understanding and agreement about the objectives of your workshop is one of the most difficult, yet most important, steps in the planning process. The objectives become your compass.

## Defining Objectives

During the kickoff meeting, your planning team broadly discussed the needs, objectives and desired outcomes from the event. The next step is to translate those broad needs and objectives into a **clear, comprehensive, and mutually agreed upon** set of objectives for your workshop.

*“But I know what the client wants, why do we need to write out specific objectives?”*

The success of innovation workshops often comes down to how well the objectives were understood by both the facilitator and the client. Experience planning workshops (and making many mistakes along the way) has helped us understand the criticality of the aligning around objectives. This step in the planning process can feel somewhat contractual, but trust us, having a well-defined and agreed-upon set of event objectives can prevent lots of headaches later in the planning process.

*The success of innovation workshops often comes down to how well the objectives were understood by both the facilitator and the client.*

### Case Study: Coalition for Global Competitiveness

In 2016, the RTI Innovation Advisors were asked to facilitate a series of meetings for the Coalition of Global Competitiveness. At the

time, the Coalition was made up of about 30–40 members from diverse sectors and backgrounds who met quarterly to improve the global competitiveness of the state of North Carolina. After the planning kickoff meeting for an upcoming workshop, it became clear that the number of objectives proposed by the client far exceeded the allotted meeting time. The facilitator, recognizing the problem, used the design brief as a tool in prioritizing the objectives. In the initial design brief, the facilitator listed 10 objectives and instructed the client to highlight the three most important and cross out the three least important objectives. This forced prioritization helped the facilitator narrow the scope and design a successful workshop.



# The Design Brief: The Most Powerful Tool in Your Planning Toolbox

We wish that we could give you a perfect formula for creating event objectives. Unfortunately, there is no magic wand for creating alignment around objectives. However, using the **Workshop Design Brief** will give you a way to communicate with your client and ensure that the activities that you plan will meet the client's objectives.

**Innovation Workshop Design Brief**

This worksheet serves as a template for aligning with the client around the objectives of the event.

**Step 1:** Take the information from the kickoff planning worksheet and translate it into a preliminary set of objectives for the event and fill in the left hand side of the design brief.

**Step 2:** Send to the design brief to the client and ask them to review the objectives and answer the following questions: Are these objectives accurate? Is the list complete? If we achieve these and ONLY these, will we have been successful? Are we missing something?

**Step 3:** Iterate with the client until you have an agreed upon list of objectives for the event.

We would like...	so we will ...
1	2

## 1 Column 1: We Would Like

The left hand column serves as the repository of workshop objectives. The “we” in this case refers to the client.

## 2 Column 2: So We Will

In your first iteration with the client, leave this column blank. During the agenda building step, this column can be used to ensure that you are meeting all of the event objectives. Including this blank column during initial iteration also signals to the client that you will be explicitly planning activities to ensure that these objectives are met.



# Using The Brief

**Step 1:** Take the information from the [Kickoff Planning Worksheet](#) and translate it into a preliminary set of objectives for the event and fill in the left side of the [Workshop Design Brief](#).

**Step 2:** Send the design brief to the client and ask them to review the objectives and answer the following questions:

Are these objectives accurate? Is the list complete? If we achieve these and ONLY these, will we have been successful? Are we missing something?

**Step 3:** Iterate with the client until you have an agreed-upon list of objectives for the event.

## Tips for Writing Event Objectives:

**Use the goldilocks rule** when sizing objectives—not too broad, not too specific, just right. Broad, vague objectives like “build a culture of innovation” can be difficult to achieve. Similarly, objectives that are too narrow and tactical like “have a 30-min keynote” do not address the “why” of the objective.

**Consider writing objectives that prioritize**, such as “we want participants to diverge and generate many ideas more than we need them to converge and decide what one idea is best.”

**Look for clues about implicit objectives** in your notes from the planning kickoff. Implicit objectives are ulterior motives your client or planning team has, but might be reluctant to admit up front. Examples include things like “demonstrate to our stakeholders that we are an innovative organization.” Or “counter the CFO’s belief that these events are a waste of time.” Often those implicit objectives become very important to the perceived success of the event.

### CAUTION

As the planning process progresses, your client may try to add objectives without understanding workshop implications. In these instances, the design brief becomes an invaluable tool for reminding the client what everyone agreed to at the outset.

## **Step 3** People, Place, and Time



With objectives finalized, it is time to revisit the people, place, and time. These three factors become much more important as you move from establishing objectives to planning activities.

## People: Know Your Audience

The process of innovating is never easy. Different people struggle with different parts of the process. For some, thinking outside the box is very challenging. For others, wild and crazy ideas are a way of life. Knowing as much as you can about the participants prior to the event will help you avoid problems before they arise.

### Questions to Ask About Participants

- *How many people do you want in attendance?*
- *What are their backgrounds and roles in the organization?*
- *Why are the participants coming?*
- *What do they expect to get out of the event?*
- *What is their current perception of the problem you are trying to solve?*
- *What is likely to make them uncomfortable or frustrated?*

### Case Studies: Information About the Participants that Shaped the Event Design



When designing the Education Innovation Lab for BEST NC, participants came from both sides of the political aisle. Because of political and interpersonal tensions, the language used by the facilitator was very important. In addition, it was important that both sides be given equal time to express their ideas. The client's knowledge of these issues was essential in planning a successful event.



When asking "people questions" for an internal innovation workshop at RTI International, we learned that many of the participants felt that brainstorming and innovation was a waste of time. Knowing that many participants were skeptical, we designed an event that made a strong and compelling case at the start for the value that the workshop would bring.



When designing an innovation workshop for a small group of university presidents, we asked the client what was likely to make participants uncomfortable. The client responded, "Whatever you do, don't make them stand up and act out charades or other such nonsense. That type of activity will not go over well." With this critical insight, we tailored the activities and language of the workshop appropriately.

## Place: The Space Matters

Our best advice for thinking about the space for your event is to **go see the space**. There is no substitute for standing in a room, imagining layouts, examining walls, and inspecting supplies. When you have room choices, the space you select should be dictated by the types of activities that you plan. Sometimes, your space is selected for you or options are limited. In those instances, the physical space may constrain or inform the activities you select.

### Questions to Ask About the Event Space

*How is the room currently arranged?  
Can we change it?*

*What type of furniture is available?*

*What are the AV capabilities of the room?*

*How many whiteboards are in the room and where are they located?*

*Can we stick things to walls?*

*Is there Wi-Fi?*

### Case Study: Facilitator Failure Files



Last August, I agreed to facilitate a 1-hour brainstorming session for six people in a business unit within RTI. After talking through objectives and preparing for the event, I arrived at the meeting with post-its and sharpies in hand. To my (and my client's) frustration, the room we had booked had nothing but cloth walls—terrible for sticking post-its. What's more, the room didn't have any tables and only had armchair style seating for four. After 30 minutes of struggling to make the space work, we decided to reschedule. The client and participants were frustrated and the brainstorm session suffered. Whenever possible, go see the space.

## Time: There's Never Enough Time

When you first start planning and facilitating events, you will likely feel like you are battling the clock. Things that you think should only take 10 minutes often take 20.

Activity debriefs run long because of great discussion. People take too long to come back from break. The list goes on and on. When asking questions about timing during the planning phase, try to determine which of the following situations most closely matches your client.

### **Situation 1: "We have a fixed amount of time and it is X hours"**

Planning tip: In fixed-time situations, you have to be very careful how many objectives you attempt to tackle. Often, the client will want to get more done than is reasonable in the allotted time, and you, as planner, must actively fight to narrow the scope. If the scope cannot be narrowed, you may want to propose multiple sessions to accomplish needed objectives. In Situation 1, activity selection (which is covered in the next section) is strongly influenced by the time available.

### **Situation 2: "We are flexible, how long does the event need to be?"**

Planning tip: In flexible-time situations, understanding the objectives is very important. Postpone committing to a set amount of time until after you think through the activities you want to propose to meet the objectives. For example, sorting and prioritizing ideas may be the objective, but the amount of time needed changes if you expect to generate 50 ideas versus 500 ideas. In Situation 2, the activity selection dictates the amount of time needed for the event.

In the end, our best advice for those starting out planning workshops is to run the event timing and objectives by a seasoned facilitator. Experience is the best teacher when it comes to how much is too much to tackle. Over time, you will learn more about how to manage objectives and event timing, but even seasoned veterans still sometimes try to take on too much in a single workshop. When in doubt, err on the side of more time rather than less time.



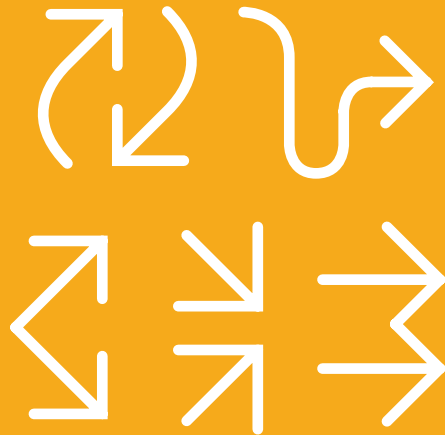
*STOP*

**Before you move on, do you have the following:**

- A comprehensive set of event objectives agreed upon by you and the client?
- An understanding of who the participants are and what attitude, background, and experience they are bringing to the event?
- An understanding of the place and time allotted (if fixed) for the event?

If not, go back to the client and work through these things before you try to go any further. Otherwise, you run the risk of designing activities that are misaligned with the event objectives or that do not work for the participants, space, or time constraints.

## Step 4 Selecting Activities



Selecting activities is like mixing cocktails: the ingredients are the same, but it's the combinations that create either magic or disaster.



## The Facilitator-Sherpa Versus the Facilitator-Salesman

There are two fundamental approaches to selecting activities, as illustrated by the Sherpa and the salesman. The salesman comes to the client with a set of pre-packaged activities that accomplished a pre-defined set of objectives. Where the salesman starts with his solution, the Sherpa, by contrast, starts with the client's objectives. The Sherpa crafts a unique workshop by selecting activities that will accomplish the client's unique objectives. As a result, no two events look alike.

This book is designed to support facilitator-Sherpas—those who are asked to design an event specific to a client's unique context and needs. This book is not a "how to" guide for specific activities. Resources that provide detailed descriptions of specific activities can be found in the Appendix. However, this book does provide a framework for understanding the type of activity to select and provides guidance for those trying to Sherpa the front end of innovation.

*The salesman starts with his solution. The Sherpa starts with the client's objectives.*

# The Five Types of FEI Activities



## Immerse

Immersion activities are designed to transfer information from outside of the room in. Immersion activities generally have one of two objectives. Either the participants need to be brought up to speed on a certain topic to ensure that everyone is on the same page, or the participants need to be stimulated with some type of new information that will serve as the starting point for a later discussion or activity.

**Example Immersion Activities:** Gallery data walk, video stimulus, guest speaker, personal testimonials, human-centered design observations

### PRO TIP

Consider creating an opportunity for your participants to engage with stimulus material, rather than just passively absorb it. Participant engagement will lead to greater retention and understanding of the material.

### CAUTION

Choose or create stimulus carefully! Make sure external presenters focus on the question at hand and jibe with the tone of your event. A mismatch can bore your participants or worse, confuse or derail the activities that follow.



# Share

Sharing activities are designed to transfer information between participants. Sharing activities are great (1) when important pieces of information are spread out across teams or held by different individuals and (2) as follow-up to an individual or group work activity. Sharing activities allow for participants to know what others think or have done.

## Example Sharing Activities:

Introductions, round-the-room, 1-minute pitch, whole group discussion, round-robin critique, table discussion, gallery walk, affinity clustering

### PRO TIP

Don't shortchange the sharing. Often, the most productive conversation occurs during sharing activities. Planning enough time for sharing in your events will ensure that this deeper, often productive, conversation is given time to occur.

### PRO TIP

Model the share out. The best way to prevent long-winded sharing when you just want a short comment is to have a trusted participant go first and model the share-out response.

### CAUTION

Do the math! With sharing activities, timing is often a big consideration. If each of the 20 participant takes 2 minutes to “tell about a time when,” your 15-minute introductions just took 40 minutes! Calculate total time for sharing activities.



## Diverge

Divergent activities are designed to generate a diverse (and often creative) set of options, ideas, or solutions. The objective of divergent activities is to go wide and generate quantity rather than quality.

### **Example Divergent Activities:**

how-might-we brainstorming, creative matrix, alternative worlds

### **PRO TIP**

For many groups, divergent activities are difficult. Generating new ideas requires both vulnerability and tolerance of bad ideas. See page 47 for tips on setting guardrails and protecting vulnerability.



## Converge

Convergent activities take the many possibilities and try to prioritize or select a subset of those possibilities for deeper exploration.

### **Example Convergent Activities:**

affinity clustering, dot voting, bulls-eye diagramming, force ranking, pick 5 pick 3

### **CAUTION**

Language matters—the way you describe the evaluation criteria for voting, prioritizing, or down-selecting is extremely critical. Discussed and agreed upon the evaluation criteria ahead of time with the client. For example, converging by asking “which is your favorite,” “which best aligns with strategy,” or “which will have the greatest impact” will yield completely different results—even if you start with the same set of ideas.



# Plan

Planning activities address the question of “what next?” Without some sense of what happens after the workshop, participants may leave feeling like the workshop didn’t have any lasting impact. Planning activities may also answer the questions “how are we going to evaluate these prioritized options?” or “who is responsible for X moving forward?”

**Example Planning Activities:**

action plan, circle of commitment, role and responsibility (RACI) chart, leadership decides

 **PRO TIP**

Every workshop should include a planning activity and direct communication from the client to the participants about what will happen after the event. Nothing erodes confidence in the front end of innovation faster than generating great ideas with no follow-up.

# Moving from Objectives to Agenda

Before selecting *specific* activities (e.g., creative matrix, round-robin discussion), it is usually helpful to map out the types of activities (e.g., immerse, share, plan) that you want to use. But how do you know which types to choose? Fortunately, your meeting objectives often offer clues. Certain keywords in your objectives will often point you to certain types of activities. The following table shows common keywords that we have found align well with the different activity types.

## Common Objective Keyword Clues



### Immerse

- stimulate
- bring up to speed
- inform/tell
- understand



### Share

- share
- communicate
- discuss
- debate
- understand
- report out



### Diverge

- Think outside the box
- ideate
- generate new perspectives
- fresh ideas
- new approach
- create



### Converge

- prioritize
- decide
- agree
- select
- downselect
- pick
- converge
- gauge
- importance



### Plan

- next steps
- carry forward
- planning
- ownership
- contribute
- moving forward

## So, I Have My Framework, Where Do I Find Specific Activities?

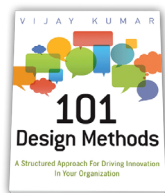
This book is not a comprehensive resource for selecting activities. There are many other established and wonderful resources for that. Below are some of our favorites.



### **LUMA**

The LUMA system contains 36 great activities for FEI workshops. Their framework categorizes activities as either looking, understanding, or making methods. The LUMA system is currently our favorite system for FEI activities. We highly recommend their resources.

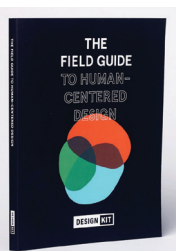
[www.luma-institute.com](http://www.luma-institute.com)



### **101 Design Methods**

This book contains 101 activities that you can use in your workshops. By far, the most comprehensive of the resources we use, the 101 Design Methods book is great for inspiration. The book separates the methods into six categories that span full spectrum of the innovation process.

<http://www.101designmethods.com>



### **Ideo Field Guide for Human Centered Design**

This book contains 57 design methods separated into three categories: inspiration, ideation, and implementation. We highly recommend this resource for teams trying to learn about and embody the human-centered design mindset.

<https://www.ideo.com/post/design-kit>

# Creating Combinations: The Art of Planning.

Every innovation event, even 1-hour events, will have a combination of activities. Because you are a Sherpa and not a salesman, there is no way to prescribe the exact combination of events that your client will need. However, in our years of facilitating events, we have recognized a few best practices and pitfalls which will be helpful as you plan. In addition, we have listed some common combinations that we have found work well.

## Like Peanut Butter and Jelly—Some Combinations Just Work



### **Diverge → Converge**

After generating lots of options, it naturally becomes clear to participants that not all options can be pursued. There are just too many. This combination works well because after diverging, participants crave some sort of prioritization or convergence.



### **Converge → Plan**

This combination helps move participants from ideas to action. The participants have made their voices heard through the convergent activity. For participant's input to be valued, something must be done with it. A planning activity adds clarity and a sense of "my input had impact and is not just talk."



### **Immerse → Diverge**

This combination works well when the immersion activity provides participants with new understanding or new perspective about the problem to be solved. Learning something new increases our ability to generate options that are new and different—often a key goal of divergent activities.



### **Diverge → Share → Diverge**

This combination speaks to the importance of building off of others ideas. If participants have a mindset of "yes, and" rather than "yes, but" during sharing, ideas build off other ideas and sharing facilitates further divergence.

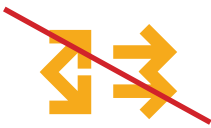


### **\*Immerse → Converge**

This combination has a caveat. It only works well when participants are being immersed in a pre-existing set of options. This combination is necessary when you split a diverge/converge combo across multiple meetings or are taking the results of divergent activities to a set of decision makers (e.g., business leaders).



## Like Oil and Water—Some Combinations Just Don't Mesh



### **Diverge → Plan**

This combination is frustrating for participants because there are likely too many ideas to carry forward. Planning next steps for too many ideas will leave participants feeling overwhelmed.



### **Plan → Diverge**

This combination presents activities out of sequence. Planning activities ask “what are we going to do?” and divergent activities ask “what might we pursue?” In this order, diverging after planning will feel like regressing or going backwards.



### **\* Immerse → Converge**

This combination does not work if the immersion step is presenting participants with new information rather than options. For example, imagine an event where participants are shown the results of customer surveys and the next question is “which course of action is best?” Participants will feel uncomfortable and lost because you are asking them to select options without any time or space to generate options.

### **⚠ CAUTION**

#### **Known Activity Planning Mistakes:**

- Too many objectives, not enough time.
- Ending after diverging.
- Assuming the participants are immersed already.
- Mixing generating problems with generating solutions.
- Poor balance of individual work and group work.

# Tried and Tested Combinations

Remember, you are a facilitator-Sherpa. We debated whether to include sample combinations for fear that planners would pull them off the shelf and try to use them without looking closely at the workshop objectives. However, we have included them because the explanation of WHY they work is important and will hopefully help you as you plan.

## Half-Day Innovation Workshop



This sequence works well because one activity naturally leads in to the next. The event begins by immersing participants in a problem, a new set of data, or alternate perspective. From there, a specific and strategic topic or statement is chosen as the basis for diverging. Sharing serves the dual purpose of inspiring new options as participants learn from each other and familiarizing all participants with the options that have been created so that participants can effectively begin to converge. Once the many options have been prioritized or the top options are selected, a plan of what to do next continues option development after the event and leaves participants feeling like their contributions were worthwhile.

**⚠ CAUTION**

Be very intentional about how you ask questions. Complex problems often have multiple root causes and the specific questions that you ask at the start of the divergent section will strongly influence the options created, and thus, the outcome of your event.

## The Classic Double Diamond



In this sequence, the first diverge and converge combination asks “what is the problem to be solved?” The second diverge and converge sequence takes the problems that the group has selected and asks “how might we solve them?”

**⚠ CAUTION**

Be clear about whether or not you are *identifying problems* to be solved or *creating solutions* to a specific problem. Failure to distinguish diverging and converging to *identify problems* from diverging and converging to *create solutions* will leave participants confused.

## Case Studies:

### Exploring New Applications for Existing Technology

**Need:** A small business in Vermont was looking for new applications for their core technology and hired the RTI Innovation Advisors to help. To quickly generate and prioritize options to explore in depth through the project, IA proposed a one-hour innovation workshop.

**Participants:** 3 members from the client organization, 4 innovation advisors from diverse backgrounds.



**Activities:** **Immerse**  
client describes capabilities and core technology.

**Diverge**  
How might we statement aimed at identifying new applications.

**Converge**  
sorting of new applications into categories and voting on new applications of interest.

**Plan**  
exploring top application spaces became the focus of the 8 week project.

### Generating Opportunities to Fuel Business Growth

**Need:** A business unit within RTI was looking for new ideas that aligned with business strategy and could fuel future growth. To generate ideas, the team wanted to have a one-hour brainstorming session over lunch. Because the objectives exceeded the time constraint, two separate sessions were needed—one to generate options (part 1) and one to converge and plan (part 2)

**Participants:** 8 members from the business unit



**Activities Part 1:** **Immerse**  
review of business unit strategy

**Diverge**  
generate strategy-aligned how-might-we statements

**Share**  
read and post statements to the wall

**Diverge**  
brainstorm solutions to posted statements

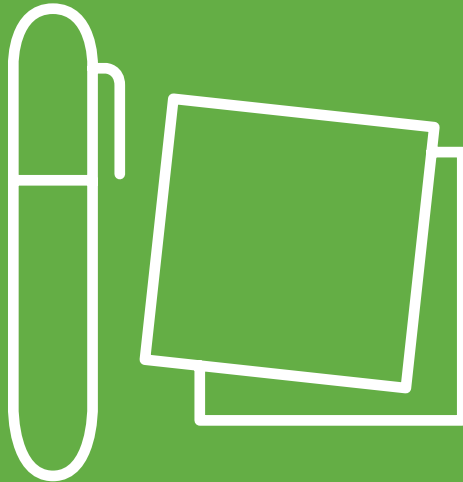


**Activities Part 2:** **Immerse**  
pre-read and verbal review of ideas

**Converge**  
leadership team (decision makers) decide which ideas to pursue

**Plan**  
teams assigned to carry ideas forward.

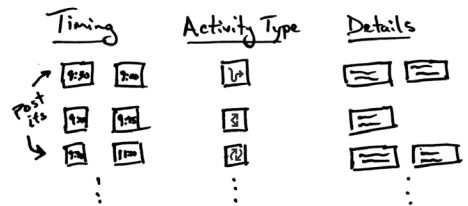
## Step 6 Building the Agenda



Ah, the agenda. That beautiful document where the magic of objectives, activities, and timing come together on a single, deceptively simple outline of the event.

# Drafting the Agenda

To the uninformed, an agenda is a simple document that requires a matter of minutes to outline. But to us, this beautiful document represents the culmination of many hours of discussion, iteration, and labor.



Our best advice for drafting the agenda is to start with pen and paper or sticky notes. Sketching out approximate timing and what occurs during each section is an iterative process—one that can be frustrating to do digitally.

## Top 4 Tips for Drafting the Agenda

- 1) Use a medium that is easy to revise, change, and update. The draft will bleed with red ink.
- 2) Start by planning large blocks of time and naming the key objectives for each segment. Think about the large thematic movements in your symphony before timing out the individual notes.
- 3) If you have no idea how long an activity will take, go practice it! Try it yourself. Try it with your coworker. Try it with your mom. Just try it! There is no better way to understand timing.
- 4) Build flex time into your agenda. For a half-day event, build in at least 30 minutes of flex. For a full day, one hour of flex time is not uncommon. If the flex time goes unused, no one usually minds if the workshop ends a bit early.

### PRO TIP

For idea generation activities, you can expect about one idea per participant per minute.

### PRO TIP

If you are using LUMA resources, they provide estimated activity timing for each of their methods.

## Estimating Activity Timing: The Art of Agenda Setting

A key part of drafting the agenda will be estimating how long each activity will take. The time required depends heavily on the activity you select. Our best advice for determining activity timing is to practice the activity before your event with a stopwatch in hand. Don't forget to account for the time to explain, demo, and debrief the event. Forgetting to account for these elements will cause you to drastically underestimate the time necessary for each activity. When in doubt, practice!

# Managing Energy: Breaks, Food, and Movement

A key part of creating a winning agenda is to consciously manage participant's energy level throughout the event. Too many high-energy activities in a row will leave your participants exhausted while too much "sit and listen" will put participants to sleep. A good event has a cadence that manages the energy level in the room from start to finish. Here are three tools for managing energy:

**Breaks:** Try to schedule one 10- to 15-minute break every 60–90 minutes. Wait much longer than 90 minutes, and participants will start to get restless.

**Food:** Feeding participants is a key part of managing energy! "Hanger" is a real thing, but too much food can also have negative effects. For an all-day event, we recommend the following feeding schedule:

- Pre-event light breakfast—don't forget the coffee!
- Mid-morning snacks—go for something healthy (plus more coffee!)
- Lunch—don't forget to ask about dietary restrictions
- Mid-afternoon snack—sweet and salty can't go wrong (plus more coffee!)

**Movement:** Activities that involve movement should be used strategically and in moderation. If you have participants running around the room all day, you will wear them out. But, if you let them sit still after lunch, the food coma will set in. Combat the post-lunch lull by strategically incorporating activities with movement in them. A good check for movement is to ask: how long are participants sitting in the same spot? If the answer for any part of your agenda is more than 60 minutes, find a way to add movement.

# Sanity Check: The Return of the Design Brief!

Once you have a full first-draft agenda, it is time to return to the **Workshop Design Brief**. You will recall that when we aligned around objectives with our client, we left the right-hand column on the design brief blank. Now that we have a tentative draft of the agenda, we can go back and ask the key question:

*Does this agenda accomplish all the stated objectives for the event?*

If so, you should now be able to fill in the right-hand side of the table and point to places in the agenda where specific objectives are met. It is now time to send your draft agenda along with the updated design brief to your client for review.

**Innovation Workshop Design Brief**

This worksheet serves as a template for aligning with the client around the objectives of the event.

**Step 1:** Take the information from the tasklist planning worksheet and translate it into a preliminary set of objectives for the event and fill in the left hand side of the design brief.

**Step 2:** Send to the design brief to the client and ask them to review the objectives and answer the following questions: *Are these objectives accurate? Is the list complete? If we achieve these and ONLY these, will we have been successful? Are we missing something?*

**Step 3:** Iterate with the client until you have an agreed upon list of objectives for the event.

We would like...	so we will ...

Note: You and your client will discuss and work with the detailed agenda. The detailed agenda includes smaller time blocks and details about what will occur in each segment. We never share this detailed agenda with participants. Instead, we share a simplified agenda that uses larger time blocks and does not go into details of specific activities. Always create a simplified agenda for workshop participants.

## Detailed agenda: for you and the client

<p>8:30-9:30 – Coffee/Breakfast/Networking</p> <p>9:30-10:00 – <b>OPENING</b></p> <p>10:00-10:15 – Welcome, Water</p> <p>10:15-10:30 – Executive Session: <b>Session 1 (15 min)</b></p> <p>10:30-9:30 – Keynote, Margaret + <b>Q&amp;A (100 min)</b></p> <p>9:30-10:30 – <b>The role of the principal now and in the future</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Speaker 1 (15 min)</b> – “The role of the principal in the future”</li> <li>• <b>Speaker 2 (15 min)</b> – “The role of the principal in the future”</li> <li>• <b>Speaker 3 (15 min)</b> – “The role of the principal in the future”</li> <li>• <b>Q&amp;A for speakers (15 min)</b></li> </ul> <p>10:40-11:00 – <b>Keynote, business perspective on school leadership.</b> Draw parallels between CEO/business and leader with Principal/Superintendent. Why does leadership matter in business? What best practices/lessons learned could the education community adopt from business? What leadership practices are being applied in education <b>(15 min)</b></p> <p>11:00-12:00 – <b>Leadership Innovation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Speaker 1 (15 min)</b> – “The role of the principal in the future”</li> <li>• <b>Speaker 2 (15 min)</b> – “The role of the principal in the future”</li> <li>• <b>Speaker 3 (15 min)</b> – “The role of the principal in the future”</li> <li>• <b>Q&amp;A for speakers (15 min)</b></li> </ul> <p>12:00-1:00 – Lunch</p> <p>1:00-1:15 – <b>Panel discussion of a Principal Panel.</b> Alternatively – “debate” “what is the role should be the top priority” or “what is the top priority and what practices should be the top priority”</p>	<p><b>Headline, James</b> 10:00-10:15</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 10:15-10:30</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 10:30-10:45</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 10:45-11:00</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 11:00-11:15</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 11:15-11:30</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 11:30-11:45</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 11:45-12:00</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 12:00-12:15</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 12:15-12:30</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 12:30-12:45</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 12:45-1:00</p>
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## Simplified agenda: for workshop participants

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Agenda</b></p> <p>11:00 <b>AIDUN</b> Introductions: name, university, “what hope led...” P question (Adrienne) What to expect: objectives and quarterly (Adrienne/Jim) Context: STEDS origins, change, and progress (Dawn/James)</p> <p>12:00 <b>DINE</b> Lunch</p> <p>1:00 <b>HAMMERS</b> Dinner: give successes (and pitfalls?) of KTTO from the US experience (Dawn/Jim) Firsthand account: successes and challenges of KTTO (Tara)</p> <p>2:00 <b>DISCUSS (Adrienne/Jim)</b> Successes and challenges to date from participating universities (we can use up one or two to be selected)</p> <p>3:30 <b>STRETCH</b> 15-minute break</p> <p>2:45 <b>WORK (Adrienne/Jim)</b> Surface observations: positives, negatives, and opportunities Priorities Assess: experience/impact vs. efficacy of high-priority items</p> <p>4:30 <b>REFLECT</b> Reflections, next steps (Dawn/James) Around the room (participants)</p> <p>5:00 <b>AUDITORIUM</b></p>	<p><b>Headline, James</b> 11:00-11:15</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 11:15-11:30</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 11:30-11:45</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 11:45-12:00</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 12:00-12:15</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 12:15-12:30</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 12:30-12:45</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 12:45-1:00</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 1:00-1:15</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 1:15-1:30</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 1:30-1:45</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 1:45-2:00</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 2:00-2:15</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 2:15-2:30</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 2:30-2:45</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 2:45-3:00</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 3:00-3:15</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 3:15-3:30</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 3:30-3:45</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 3:45-4:00</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 4:00-4:15</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 4:15-4:30</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 4:30-4:45</p> <p><b>Headline, James</b> 4:45-5:00</p>
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## Step 7 The Facilitator's Guide



Words matter. Especially when you are trying to lead people through the messy front end of innovation. As such, it is often helpful to think through the words you will say to guide people through your innovation workshop.



# What Is a Facilitator's Guide?

A facilitator's guide is a document that captures the words you want to say and the points you want to make throughout the course of the event. This document not only captures what you want to say but, more importantly, how you want to say it. Remember, as facilitator, words matter. Saying "What can we do to solve this problem?" produces different results than "What can we do to understand this problem?" The facilitator's guide is your chance to think through how the words you will speak in front of the room will impact your event.

For some, their facilitator's guide looks like a script. For others, it looks more like an outline. No matter the format or level of detail, the facilitator's guide is an important part of your preparation for the event.

## **There is no wrong format.**

### **Choose a format that works for you:**

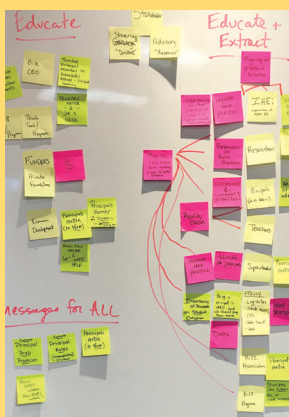
*"I like to write out the entire script for events that I facilitate. I never end up reading the script from the stage, but going word by word helps me to think through exactly how I will give instructions and gives me confidence on the stage."—Adrienne*

*"I like to use the notes section of power point to create speaking points for each of my instructional slides. Since I create slides with few words, the notes section helps me make sure I hit all of the speaking points on each slide"—Kristina*

*"For events longer than 1 hour, it is often really hard for me to keep track of all of the things I need to remember to say at the beginning of events. Having a facilitator's guide is like a checklist of key messages and ensures I don't forget critical instructions." —Maggie*

### **Pre Event Checklist:**

For a full pre-event checklist, email: [innovationadvisors@rti.org](mailto:innovationadvisors@rti.org).



## **Case Study: Words Matter**

As I was drafting my facilitator's guide for the Excellence Innovation Lab, I ran through a few exercise instructions with the client. My intent was to gauge how clear the instructions were and to identify common points of confusion. "Welcome to the BEST NC Innovation Lab" I began. As soon as the words left my mouth, the client looked mortified. "what's wrong?" I asked. "Do NOT say the BEST NC Innovation Lab. It is the EXCELLENCE Innovation Lab HOSTED by BEST NC."

As facilitator, your words matter. Make sure there are not any "language land mines" that you could unknowingly walk across. Creating a facilitator's guide will help.

## Section 2

# FACILITATE

Facilitating is the art  
of bringing the best  
out of other people.

# Facilitating Your Event

The big day has arrived! Hours of planning and preparation have led you to this moment. It is now time to shift your mindset from planning to execution. You have done everything you can to prepare, but no event will ever go exactly as you have planned. While we cannot prepare you for every possible situation, adopting the facilitator's mindset will help you adapt as the event unfolds.

## The Facilitator's Mindset

**Enable Others**—You are not the hero. The participants are the stars of the workshop. Do not confuse being in front of the room with being the star of the event.

**Know Your North**—Your event objectives are your compass. Facilitator's must make dozens of on-the-fly decisions during the event. A good facilitator uses the event objectives as a tool to make those decisions.

**Feel the Pulse**—A good facilitator always has a finger on the pulse of the room. Are participants excited? Frustrated? Tired? Confused? Be attentive to how participants are feeling and respond accordingly.

**Embody the Attitude**—Participants will mirror the attitude and energy of the facilitator. Deliver instructions with calm confidence. Be energetic where energy is needed. Be vulnerable to enable vulnerability in the room.

**Wield the Pen**—As the facilitator, it is your job to capture the comments made during your event. Live note taking in front of the room lets participants know they are being heard.

**Embrace Tension**—A good facilitator does not shy away from heated discussions or disagreements. Innovating is not all kumbaya and rainbows. Ensure respect is maintained, but do not be afraid to explore areas of tension or disagreement.

### PRO TIP

Always assume the whiteboard markers will not work and bring your own.

# Innovation Requires Vulnerability

The front end of innovation is a very uncertain space. It is full of failure and full of risk. For FEI events to be successful, participants must be comfortable with taking creative risks. Let's face it—sharing half-baked or wild ideas is uncomfortable for most of us. Judgement from peers kills vulnerability. As the facilitator, you must passionately defend vulnerability during divergent phases of your event. Of course, there is a time and place (often in the converge phase) to comment on or evaluate ideas. But, do not let participants insert judgement into periods of divergence.

## Guardrails: A Key Tool in Protecting Vulnerability.

Every event that we run begins with establishing guardrails. Guardrails help create a safe space for participants to engage in the messy work of innovating. Each event we put on uses slightly different guardrails depending on the objectives and the audience. For example, is your audience overly conservative? Use the guardrail "Be Ambitious."

### Sample Guardrails:

**Be Ambitious**—use this guardrail to encourage big ideas and combat participants' natural inclination to say "that will never work."

**Defer Judgement**—there is a time to judge ideas, but it is not during idea generation. Passionately enforce this guardrail as it is essential to creative vulnerability.

**No Stripes**—use this guardrail to remind teams that during this event there is no hierarchy—we are all equal. (Stripes allude to military uniforms).

**One Speaker at a Time**—because side conversations prevent listening.

**Trust the Process**—participants see the tree, but the facilitator built the forest. This guardrail communicates the intentionality of the event design.

\*Note: For a more extensive list of guardrails, email:

[innovationadvisors@rti.org](mailto:innovationadvisors@rti.org).

### PRO TIP

No matter which set of guardrails you choose, always include the Defer Judgement guardrail. One of the most common barriers to successful ideation is participants that attempt to evaluate ideas too soon.

## Teaching vs. Facilitating

Facilitating the Front End of Innovation is much different than teaching. While the format often looks similar, with an instructor or facilitator at the front of the room leading activities, there is one crucial difference. The teacher knows the end point and is trying to drive participants to a particular understanding or skill. The facilitator knows the starting point and is indifferent to the specific outcome. A good facilitator obsesses over the questions, but makes no claim on the right answers. Always remember, as the facilitator, you know the questions, but the participants provide the answers.

*A good facilitator obsesses over the questions, but makes no claim on the right answers.*

# From Kickoff to Close: Our Best Advice for the Day of the Event

## As the event kicks off:

**Arrive early!** Make sure you arrive early enough to adjust room layout and test the AV system.

**Define the objectives**—tell participants what you are setting out to accomplish.

**Set the Guardrails**—establish the rules of engagement for the day. Guardrails are essential.

**Go over the agenda**—participants like to know what is coming (especially breaks).

## As the event rolls on:

**Keep track of time**—appropriately managing time is one of the most difficult parts of facilitating. Do not be a slave to the clock, but remember—you built an agenda for a reason.

**Manage the energy**—Fidelity to the schedule is less important than responding to the needs of the room. It's ok to move the break up, or dictate a “stand and stretch” if energy is lagging.

**Prevent too many tangents**—it is the facilitator's job to recognize when conversations are going too far off course. Bring focus back to the conversation by restating the question at hand.

**Provide clear instructions**—Deliver simple, single task instructions to participants and model those instructions where appropriate. Consider posting the instructions on a ppt slide for visual learners.

## The Power of the Parking Lot:

Every facilitator has been there. A participant begins to hijack the conversation and take it in a direction that distracts from the objectives at hand. In these situations, the concept of a “conversation parking lot” is a great tool. The parking lot is a public physical space (like a white board) where the facilitator writes topics that need to be tabled for later. The “parking lot” is a powerful way to say to a participant “your topic is important and we will talk about it later, but for now let's focus in this direction.”

## As the event wraps up:

**Reflect upon the day's accomplishments**—remind participants of just how much great work was accomplished. This is a great time to publicly review the event objectives.

**Clarify next steps**—Be clear about what happens next and who is responsible.

**Take pictures!**—at this point, the walls are likely covered with sticky notes and other participant creations. Take high resolution pictures of everything (in case sticky notes fall off or get lost in clean up).

### PRO TIP

Consider giving the leaders in the client organization the task of taking notes on inspiring moments through the course of the event. Reflecting on accomplishments is powerful when it comes from the client's leadership.

## Facilitator Spotlight: Sometimes You Need the YMCA

During a workshop in the Philippines, facilitator Jamie Pero Parker sensed that the energy in the room was much too low. Looking for a way to reinvigorate the workshop, Jamie expertly injected movement to raise energy levels. She cued up a YouTube rendition of the YMCA, asked participants to stand, and then modeled the energy and enthusiasm she was seeking to inspire by singing and dancing in front of the room. Soon, the whole room was singing and dancing along and ready for the next activity.



## Dealing with Difficult Participants

Problematic participants are inevitable if you facilitate events long enough. While each situation is unique, here are a few types of participants we have regularly encountered and some tips for handling them:

**Loquacious Larry**—Walk over and stand next to Larry, hold your hand out for the mic back, or search for an opening and summarize his point and move on. As you call on him explicitly ask him to be very brief

**Recluse Ralph**—prep Ralph by saying “this next question I am calling on you.” Explicitly ask, “Ralph, based on your role in sales, what do you think about X” Don’t put Ralph in a group with Larry or he will never speak up.

**Side-Bar Steve** –Build Steve up while stopping the side bar—“I know that you are having awesome and powerful conversation, but if you side bar the rest of the group doesn’t benefit any insights you would like to share with the group?” Alternatively, walk over and stand next to Steve. Sometimes your presence and proximity will be enough to stop the side bar.

**Activity Skeptic Sally**—Remind Sally to Trust the Process (guardrail). Explain you have been very intentional with the design of the event and each activity.

**“That idea will never work” Will**—Remind Will that we are Deferring Judgement (guardrail) and that he will have a chance to evaluate ideas later. For now, there are no bad ideas.

**Perfectionist Paul**—Model imperfect sketches. Put forward bad ideas. Help Paul see that perfection is not the goal of the workshop.

**Jerk Jim**—Some people are just not worth the trouble of having at your event. Try not to invite participants who are blatant jerks, who do not want to be there, or who will intentionally try to derail your event. During the planning process, the client can identify “Jerk Jim’s” and help keep them off the invite list.



## What to Do if Your Event Goes Off the Rails:

Let's face it. No matter how well we plan, sometimes an event goes wildly wrong. For situations outside of your control (like the power in the building goes out, or the AV system quits working) do your best to roll with the punches. Your participants will understand and at the same time they will look to you for leadership. Together you and the client can be decision makers in uncertain times. The most common way that an event starts to go haywire is that you start to run behind. As facilitator, keeping time is not only within your control but also one of your key duties.

### Tips for getting back on track:

**Objectives are your compass**—First and foremost, remember that your objectives are your north star. Cut time in a way that does not compromise your objectives.

**Strive to end on time**—Events that run long leave a bad impression on participants.

**Use the flex time first**—Remember, you built flex time into the agenda. Use it!

**Do not cut the break!**—Your next instinct will be to use break time to “catch up.” Don't do it. Breaks are necessary for maintaining energy levels.

**Sketch out a revised agenda**—During a break or while participants are completing an activity, huddle with the client or your facilitation team and sketch out a revised agenda that will get you back on track.

*“Flexing the agenda is about adjusting time, not cutting activities and not changing objectives. As facilitator, you are the lighthouse if the event turns to storm.”*

—Adrienne Brown, expert facilitator

## Section 3

# FOLLOWUP

Remember, a key part of a successful event is clarity around what happens next.

# Following Up

One of the reasons that many participants hate FEI workshops is that they think nothing impactful comes out of such events. The event itself can only go so far in combating this negative perception. The way that you follow up with participants after the event (and what happens next within the organization) will have a lasting impact on how the event is perceived in the future. As such, it is important to be both strategic and timely with your follow up from the event. Know your audience and tailor your report to the length and style that works best. The worst kind of follow up is to do nothing at all.

## **The Follow Up Report**

The specific format you choose for following up will depend on the content and audience. Choose a format that is appropriate for your event.

# Mind Maps

are great for capturing all of the ideas generated during the event in a structured and organized format. The mind map can serve as the “master database” of all of the participant generated content, but it is not a good format for communicating key outcomes.

# PowerPoint

is great for creating a synthesized summary of the event, complete with pictures from the day or sample work products.

# A Written Report

is a versatile follow-up format. Sometimes a key objective of the event is to generate data that will be used in a comprehensive report on a topic. Other times, one page written summaries with key takeaways are more appropriate.

## What Comes After an FEI Workshop?

Many FEI events produce a list of prioritized ideas or concepts at various stages of maturity. Left to their own devices, many participants would run off and start building their new products or services. After all, everyone at the event voted for it! How could it be wrong!? However, seasoned innovators know that there is much more to be learned before product development begins.

The output of most FEI events are nothing more than a product or service hypothesis. This hypothesis must be further developed and tested with customers prior to new product development. There are many great resources that exist to help further develop and test ideas.

**The DFV Framework**—Successful innovation occurs when a new product is desired by users (D), is technologically feasible (F) and has a viable business model (V). The DFV framework asks key questions in each category as technological innovations are developed

**Business Model Canvas**—Created by Alex Osterwalder, the Business Model Canvas is a great tool for drafting and testing various business models for new products or services.

**Value Proposition Canvas**—The first step in maturing an idea that is the output of an FEI workshop is to understand the idea's value proposition. This canvas is a great way to understand specific customer needs and ways in which your new product or service addresses those needs.

**Lean Startup**—Eric Reis' best-selling book describes the fundamental build-measure-learn cycle of hypothesis testing. While many of the above tools help with hypothesis generation, Lean Startup provides an essential framework for hypothesis testing.

**Google Design Sprint**—The Google design sprint is a great follow up to an FEI event that produced a prioritized list of problems to be addressed. The Google Sprint takes a small team (5-7) through an intensive week long process that culminates in live customer testing of real prototypes.

## A Final Note About Surveys

As a facilitator, you should always strive to make each event better than the last. While client satisfaction is the most important barometer of event success, you should always seek to learn from your participants through a follow up survey. While each survey must be tailored to your specific event, here are three questions that every survey should include.

Note: a digital and editable version of the survey is available by sending an email to [innovationadvisors@rti.org](mailto:innovationadvisors@rti.org).

How well did we meet each of the following event objectives?

1 = did not meet objective, 5 = fully met the objective  
(list each objective with a sliding scale score from 1-5)

Please rate the effectiveness of the event facilitator:

1 = not effective, 5 = highly effective

What suggestions do you have for how the event could have been improved?

If you had to describe the event to a friend, what would you say?

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### **Need help planning or facilitating your FEI workshop?**

RTI's Innovation Advisors would love to help!  
Reach out to us at [innovationadvisors@rti.org](mailto:innovationadvisors@rti.org).

## List of Links and Additional Resources

**Available via email: [innovationadvisors@rti.org](mailto:innovationadvisors@rti.org)**

- Event Planning Timeline
- Planning Kickoff Worksheet
- Workshop Design Brief
- Agenda Planning Template
- Pre-event Checklist
- Facilitator Supply List
- Post-event Survey

### Resources for Selecting Activities

#### **LUMA Institute**

<http://luma-institute.com>

#### **101 Design Methods**

<http://101designmethods.com>

#### **Google Sprint**

<http://www.gv.com/sprint/>

#### **Ideo Field Kit for HCD**

<https://www.ideo.com/post/design-kit>

#### **Value Proposition Canvas**

<https://strategyzer.com/canvas/value-proposition-canvas>

#### **Business Model Canvas**

<https://strategyzer.com/canvas/business-model-canvas>

#### **DFV Framework**

<https://www.ideo.com/pages/design-thinking>

### Other Great Resources

**ThinkJar Collective:** Exploring how to problem-solve better and help people, organizations and systems enhance their creative capacity. <http://thinkjarcollective.com>

#### **The Braveheart Facilitator's Creed:**

<http://thinkjarcollective.com/articles/braveheart-facilitator-creed/>



