

Ways to Elicit Workshop Ground Rules

Reference Chapter 6 in
Requirements by Collaboration by Ellen Gottesdiener, Addison-Wesley, 2002.

If you have drafted a list of ground rules before the workshop, you should consider them “working,” or draft, ground rules. Provide time early in your workshop—during the opening—for participants to consider what ground rules they need. Here are some ways to introduce, verify, and adjust ground rules for your requirements workshop.

Before the Workshop

- Ask participants to send you a list of potential ground rules.
- Ask participants to name ground rules during your pre-workshop interviews.
- Work with your planning team to devise a draft list of ground rules.
- Include a list of proposed ground rules in the agenda that is sent to participants before the workshop.
- Post the proposed ground rules on a wall in the workshop room.

During the Workshop

- Review the proposed ground rules during the workshop opening activities. Ask for any modifications to the list.
- Have dyads (groups of two people) or triads (groups of three people) list proposed ground rules as your opener activity. Then share each group’s list in a plenary (whole group) discussion; clarify, combine, and document a final list that everyone agrees to.
- Ask small groups or the whole group (if the group is seven or fewer people), “What could get in the way of achieving our outcomes today?” Facilitate a discussion and then ask, “What ground rules—specific guidelines for our behavior—can we name that will help to remind us about the key points in our discussion?” List each rule on a wall poster.
- Ask dyads or triads to list “anti” ground rules—ones that will result in a miserable, time-wasting session. Share them in a plenary discussion, and then solicit “pro” ground rules. List these on a wall poster.
- Ask participants to recall a time in their lives when they were on a “really great team” (any group situation—work-related or not). Ask them to recall how they behaved as a group. Form dyads or triads to share these experiences. Next, ask dyads to suggest ground rules that can promote that same kind of experience in the workshop. In a plenary discussion, list them and check for agreement on them.
- Several hours into the workshop, pause to check how the ground rules are working. Ask questions to test whether the ground rules are being adhered to and whether they are necessary, valid, and useful. Adjust them as needed.
- Conduct regular check-ins of your ground rules. If the group will be reconvening for multiple workshops, use a check-in ritual to revise and adjust the ground rules.

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After the Workshop

- Facilitate a debriefing discussion on how the group interacted, including questions about the ground rules.
- Ask participants to think, in retrospect, what ground rules they would add, modify, or remove.
- If this is one in a series of workshops, ask participants to name which ground rules they want to use next time.