

Your First Circle Meeting

Facilitation Guide for Community Work Teams

"In a circle, everyone is equal, everyone can see each other, and everyone has a voice."

— Traditional Indigenous Teaching

Welcome, facilitator! This guide will help you lead your team's first official meeting with confidence. Remember: you're not here to control the discussion, but to help everyone participate and ensure you accomplish your goals together.

Before the Meeting: Preparation (15 minutes)

Materials You'll Need:

- ☐ Copies of your draft Charter for everyone
- ☐ Pens/pencils for each person
- ☐ Large paper or whiteboard (optional, but helpful)
- ☐ This facilitation guide
- ☐ Snacks or drinks (community building matters!)

Set Up Your Space:

- **Arrange chairs in a circle** - no head table, everyone equal
- **Have good lighting and comfortable temperature**
- **Put phones on silent** and ask others to do the same
- **Prepare any opening reading or grounding exercise**

Time Planning:

- **Total meeting time: 90-120 minutes**
 - **Don't rush** - building trust and consensus takes time
 - **Plan for a 10-minute break** halfway through
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Meeting Structure Overview

Phase	Time	Purpose
Opening & Check-in	15 min	Ground the group, set tone
Charter Review	30 min	Finalize team identity and values
Break	10 min	Refresh and connect
Community Needs Discussion	25 min	Identify potential projects
First Project Selection	20 min	Choose what to start with
Roles & Next Steps	15 min	Organize immediate actions
Closing	5 min	Appreciate and commit

Step 1: Opening & Check-in (15 minutes)

Start with Grounding (5 minutes)

Choose one approach that feels right for your group:

Option A - Simple Breathing: *"Let's take three deep breaths together to arrive in this space and with each other."*

Option B - Gratitude Round: *"Let's go around the circle. Share your name and one thing you're grateful for today."*

Option C - Reading the Preamble: *Read aloud: "Many hands make light work, many hearts make strong communities. We're here because we believe work can heal rather than harm, connect rather than isolate, and serve life rather than exploit it."*

Check-in Round (10 minutes)

"Now let's do a quick check-in. Share your name, why you're excited about forming this Community Work Team, and how you're feeling right now. We'll go around the circle - about one minute each."

Facilitator Tips:

- Model vulnerability by going first
 - Keep time gently but don't be rigid
 - Thank each person after they share
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Step 2: Reviewing the Charter (30 minutes)

Introduce the Process (2 minutes)

"We've all had a chance to look at our draft Charter. Now we'll go through it section by section and make sure it truly reflects who we are and what we want to accomplish together. Speak up if anything doesn't feel right - this is our document."

Work Through Each Section (25 minutes)

Team Name & Mission (8 minutes):

- Read the current draft aloud
- Ask: *"Does this capture what we want to be known for?"*
- Discuss modifications until you have consensus

Values & Principles (8 minutes):

- Go through the listed values
- Ask: *"Are we missing anything important? Is there anything here that doesn't fit?"*
- Add or modify as needed

Work Focus Areas (9 minutes):

- Review checked contribution areas
- Ask: *"Do these reflect our actual interests and skills? Should we add or remove any?"*
- Make sure everyone feels their interests are represented

Confirm Final Charter (3 minutes)

"Before we move on, let's do a final check. Is everyone comfortable with this Charter as it stands? Remember, we can always revise it later as we learn and grow."

Use the "Thumbs Test":

- Thumbs up = "I support this fully"
 - Thumbs sideways = "I can live with this"
 - Thumbs down = "I need us to discuss this more"
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Break Time! (10 minutes)

"Let's take a 10-minute break. Stretch, grab some water, chat informally. We'll reconvene to talk about our first project."

Step 3: Identifying Community Needs (25 minutes)

Brainstorming Round (15 minutes)

"Now let's think about our community. What needs do you see that aren't being met? What would make our neighborhood a better place? Don't worry about whether we can solve it yet - just name what you notice."

Process:

1. **Give everyone 3 minutes** to write down their ideas privately first
2. **Go around the circle** and have each person share 1-2 ideas
3. **Write all ideas on large paper** (or ask someone to take notes)
4. **No discussion yet** - just collect all the ideas

Example Prompts if People Get Stuck:

- "What do you wish existed in our neighborhood?"
- "Who in our community could use more support?"
- "What environmental issues do you notice locally?"
- "What would make you more excited to live here?"

Discussion and Clustering (10 minutes)

"Now let's look at all these ideas. Do you see any themes? Are there ideas that connect to each other?"

- **Group similar ideas together**
- **Identify which ones match your team's focus areas**

- **Note which ones feel most urgent or exciting**
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Step 4: Choosing Your First Project (20 minutes)

Establish Criteria (5 minutes)

"For our very first project, we want something that will build our confidence and show our community who we are. Let's think about what would make a good starting project."

Good First Project Characteristics:

- ☐ **Small enough** to complete in 2-4 weeks
- ☐ **Concrete and visible** - people can see the results
- ☐ **Uses skills** we already have in the group
- ☐ **Serves a real need** we identified
- ☐ **Builds relationships** with our broader community
- ☐ **Aligns with our values** and contribution areas

Project Selection Process (15 minutes)

Round 1 - Initial Ideas (7 minutes):

- Look at your community needs list
- Each person suggests 1-2 specific projects that meet the criteria
- Write all suggestions down

Round 2 - Discussion (5 minutes):

- Talk through the practical aspects of each idea
- Ask: "What would this actually involve?" "Who would we need to work with?"

Round 3 - Decision (3 minutes):

- Use the thumbs test for each viable option
 - Choose the one with the most enthusiasm and least concerns
 - If tied, pick the simplest one to build momentum
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Step 5: Defining Roles & Next Steps (15 minutes)

Project Organization (10 minutes)

"Great! Now let's figure out how we'll actually make this happen."

Key Questions to Answer:

1. **Who will coordinate this project?** (rotation encouraged)
2. **What specific tasks need to happen?**
3. **Who wants to take on which tasks?**
4. **What resources or permissions do we need?**

5. When will we complete this by?

Create a Simple Plan:

- **Task 1:** **Who:** **By When:**
- **Task 2:** **Who:** **By When:**
- **Task 3:** **Who:** **By When:**

Next Meeting Planning (5 minutes)

Schedule your next gathering:

- **Date & Time:**
- **Location:**
- **Purpose:** Check progress, support each other, plan next steps

Between now and then:

- Everyone works on their agreed tasks
 - Share updates in whatever group chat/communication method works for you
 - Ask for help if you run into obstacles
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Step 6: Closing Circle (5 minutes)

Appreciation Round (3 minutes)

"Let's close by appreciating what we've accomplished together and sharing one word about how you're feeling as we end."

Go around the circle:

- **"I appreciate..."** (something about the group or the process)
- **"I'm feeling..."** (one word - excited, hopeful, nervous, grateful, etc.)

Commitment Moment (2 minutes)

"Before we leave, let's each make a simple commitment to our team and our first project."

Example: *"I commit to researching locations for our community garden and reporting back by our next meeting."*

Facilitator Tips for Success

During Discussions:

- **Ask open-ended questions:** "What do others think?" "How does that land with everyone?"
- **Reflect what you hear:** "It sounds like you're saying..." "I'm hearing that..."
- **Encourage quiet voices:** "Sarah, we haven't heard from you yet - what's your sense of this?"

- **Manage dominant voices gently:** "Thanks, John. Let's hear from a few other people."

When Things Get Stuck:

- **Take a break:** Sometimes people just need a moment
- **Change the process:** "Let's try writing our thoughts first, then sharing"
- **Acknowledge the difficulty:** "This is hard work we're doing together"
- **Remind people of the big picture:** "Remember why we're here..."

Keep Energy Positive:

- **Celebrate small agreements:** "Great, we're aligned on that!"
 - **Thank people for participating:** "I appreciate your honesty about that concern"
 - **Stay curious, not judgmental:** "That's interesting - tell us more"
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What If Something Goes Wrong?

If Someone Dominates:

"I want to make sure everyone has a chance to contribute. Let's hear from folks who haven't spoken yet."

If There's Conflict:

"It sounds like we have different perspectives here. Let's make sure we understand each other first before trying to decide."

If Energy Gets Low:

"Let's take a 5-minute stretch break" or "I'm noticing some tiredness - should we wrap up for today and continue this next time?"

If You Feel Lost:

"Let me pause for a moment and check - how is this process feeling for everyone? Are we on the right track?"

After the Meeting

Follow Up Within 48 Hours:

- ☐ Send meeting notes to all participants
- ☐ Share contact information if people want it
- ☐ Send calendar invite for next meeting
- ☐ Check in personally with anyone who seemed uncertain

Document Everything:

- ☐ Finalized Charter
 - ☐ First project plan
 - ☐ Task assignments and deadlines
 - ☐ Next meeting details
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Remember: You're not expected to be perfect. You're learning together how to work together. The most important things are that everyone feels heard, everyone knows what happens next, and everyone leaves feeling good about being part of the team.

You've got this! Your willingness to facilitate shows your commitment to your community. Trust the process, trust your team, and trust yourself.

Good luck with your first Circle Meeting - you're about to start something beautiful!