

5 tips for gender-sensitive online consultations



The outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has drastically impacted peacebuilding approaches and accelerated the shift towards digital consultation.

In many situations, face-to-face has been replaced by online engagement. While this has clearly enabled vital work to continue during the pandemic, it is less clear how this will impact gender and inclusion in peacebuilding consultation.

As consultation moves online, it is critical that all women, girls, men and boys in conflict-affected contexts maintain their opportunity to meaningfully participate in decision-making processes that impact their lives.

This helpsheet aims to support peacebuilding organisations, practitioners and networks to design online consultations in a way that mitigates some key gender and inclusivity challenges that are unique to the online world.



1 Develop an inclusive invitation list



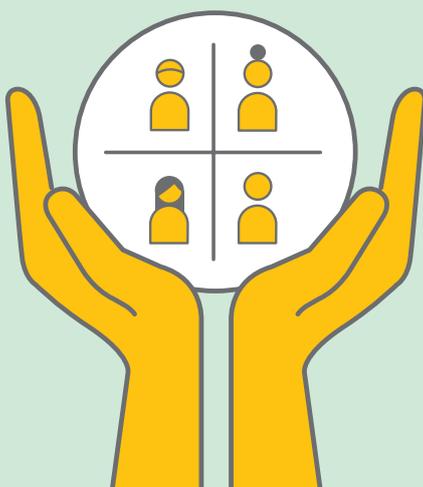
Avoid the online tendency for prioritising 'elite' invitees

- Not everyone who should be 'at the table' has strong technology and connectivity. Ensure engagement goes beyond only the most digitally connected to include community-based organisations.
- Ensure engagement with women and men of diverse socio-economic, dis(ability), racial, geographic, sexual-orientation and gender identity, and caste backgrounds. Intersectionality is key.

Carefully consider the dynamics resulting from the stakeholder 'mix'

- Consider how increasing the numbers and variety of participants can increase power differentials, inhibiting contributions by the less powerful. Adapt the invite list to ensure there is space for equitable contribution.

2 Create safe spaces online



Develop internal capacity to ensure all participants feel safe and comfortable

- Develop a code of conduct to guide participants to ensure their participation is inclusive of others 'in the room'.
- Train facilitation staff in the code of conduct, creating an inclusive online space and online safeguarding techniques, and dealing with online challenging or inappropriate behaviour.

Conduct a safe space needs assessment with participants before events

- Collaboratively identify a safe location, time and date in advance, where necessary. If all attendees cannot participate safely in their 'home' location, provide a safe and private space to talk.
- Gain informed and full participant consent for recording before the consultation event.

Carefully consider how to deal with sensitive topics

- Consider if it is safe for all participants to talk about politically, culturally or personally sensitive issues. If it is not safe to do so, prepare facilitators to steer the conversation away from these issues.

3 Address the 'digital' divide



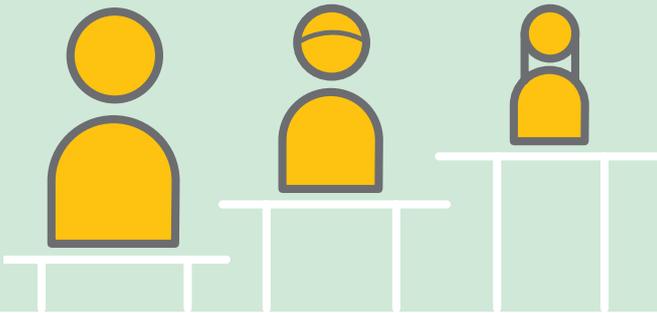
Promote digital infrastructure for those without access

- Consider what infrastructure is required to effectively participate, including: electricity, internet connectivity, phone credit and hardware devices such as phones, tablets or computers.
- Provide and finance this.

Promote digital literacy and confidence among all participants

- Provide digital literacy training for participants, focussing on encouraging uptake in those that have least access to digital technology, including women, those of lower socio-economic backgrounds and older participants.

4 Promote equitable participation and contribution through platform decisions



Choose communication platforms that encourage equitable participation

- Work with where people are at: use platforms already trusted and used by the less empowered and connected participants. Prioritise lower tech options such as conference phone calls if this enables more equitable participation.

Harness and promote the use of in-built features in video conferencing to encourage more equitable communication

- Promote chat functions, as these can be a 'leveller' between those with poor connectivity and those with higher connectivity.
- Promote 'breakout rooms' to open spaces for conversation between smaller numbers of people. This can be less intimidating for those with lower confidence.
- Promote captioning and translation where possible and consider which language will counterbalance existing power imbalances.

5 Budget for staff to ensure gender-sensitive online consultation

- Recognise that building inclusivity, safety and security, and equity in participation into online consultations requires unique planning and activities. Budget sufficient time and financial resources accordingly.



Note: This helpsheet is designed to facilitate gender inclusivity in online consultation in relation to **adults only**. Engaging with children or minors in online consultations requires additional safeguarding measures, which are beyond the scope of the current helpsheet.

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