

---

## E 7 | TIPPS FOR A DELEGATES' MEETING/SPOKESCOUNCIL

---

The following sets out questions and ideas that can be useful when facilitating spokescouncils that happen right before large actions.

Experience has shown that it can be useful to have a team of several facilitators. Depending on the kind and size of the action and the spokescouncil, this can include:

- the actual facilitators, preferably two people. Their tasks include: collecting points for discussion, keeping a list of speakers, calling people to speak, providing structure to the discussion, making procedural proposals, formulating proposals for consensus, checking for consensus etc.
- the filter: a person who can be approached by anyone who has a question or information from outside the spokescouncil. As the name suggests, this person 'filters' these questions and information and, where appropriate, passes them on to the facilitators.

### First spokescouncil

Usually, the first session of the spokescouncil is held on the night before the action. The team of facilitators should keep the following important points in mind:

- Ensure that everyone has enough space so that they can see and hear what is going on and there are no interruptions from outside. All spokespeople should move close together, e.g., by having those in the very centre sit down, those in the ring around the centre kneeling and those on the outside standing up, forming a circle around everyone.
- The facilitators should ask whether there are journalists/people from the press present. If there are, kindly ask them to leave the spokescouncil. In most cases there will be a group of contact people for the press to go to. The spokescouncil is supposed to be a closed, safe space without the media.
- Does someone need interpreting? If so, who can provide whisper interpretation? Organise corners for interpretation, explain the 'L' hand signal for interpreters (see also: Hand signals in Section E of this handbook).
- The facilitators should welcome everyone, and introduce themselves. The facilitators should briefly explain that they are prepared to facilitate, and why that is the case. Then you should ask whether anyone objects to the team facilitating the spokescouncil.
- Briefly explain what a spokescouncil is and ask whether there are participants who do not have an affinity group (AG). If necessary, you can organise a session for people to find affinity groups after the plenary (see also: Finding affinity groups in Section 4: Other training sessions and workshops). Avoid long explanations of what AGs are during the spokescouncil!
- The facilitators can briefly introduce some remarks about facilitation, speaking and decision making, such as: 'Please raise your hands, we are keeping a speakers list', 'When you speak, do so clearly, loudly and briefly!', 'Use the hand signals!', 'The facilitators will try to find wordings for proposals for consensus' etc.
- Briefly explain hand signals people can use, which could include request to speak, approval, disagreement, direct response to a question, speak louder, I have understood, you don't

need to keep talking, interpretation, proposal on how to proceed, break, interruption due to something important, veto.

- Present the points for discussion and the schedule of the meeting; collect further topics.

The **following topics** often come up at spokescouncils:

- The scope of the action/the action consensus
- The latest information about the action
- Fingers, material for the action, embedded journalists, members of parliament or other ‘celebrities’ accompanying the action
- Behaviour on the way to the blockades and at the site (what to do in case of water cannons, kettling, police dogs, horses, etc.)
- The size of affinity groups and the number and size of fingers
- Practising how to form fingers
- What to take and what not to take to the action
- Information about the legal team, the information hotline, medics, etc.
- Time for questions

### **Second spokescouncil**

A second spokescouncil can be held right before the action. Usually, the second spokescouncil is much shorter than the first. Topics and issues that come up include:

- A brief summary of the information provided during the first council
- New information and topics related to the action
- Answers by the affinity groups to any questions that they were asked to discuss at the first council (such as questions about the action consensus)
- Practising forming the fingers (only necessary if this hasn’t been done before or if there have been major changes to the plan!)
- Provide motivation!!!

### **Further spokescouncils and methods for taking decisions quickly**

It makes sense to call for a spokescouncil during calm situations and when decisions need to be made that affect many of the people involved in the action. At the same time, meetings can also help stabilise situations and prevent people from wandering off, during, for example, blockades that have been continuing for a couple of hours. But even if you seem to have all the time in the world, it is still very important to keep time in check.

The following points can help you to get through a meeting quickly as a facilitator:

- Introduce yourselves and gain acceptance from the people present
- Ask whether everyone is okay: Has someone been injured? Did everyone manage to reach the blockade, etc.?
- Collect news; describe the current situation
- If questions or problems arise, ask the participants: ‘Does anyone have a suggestion?’

- In stressful situations, it is advisable to implement the first proposal that someone makes, assuming no-one has a veto.
- If there is a veto, a new proposal has to be found.
- Try to stick to one proposal at a time when checking for approval. Asking about several proposals at the same time usually causes confusion.
- Avoid questions with two answers such as 'Are you in favour of the first or the second proposal?', 'Do you want to stay here or go somewhere else?', etc.). Instead, ask both questions separately one after the other.

Source: Skills for Action, Action Training Manual, <http://www.skills-for-action.de/en>