

Tool 1: Introductions

Aim of the tool

To create mutual recognition amongst all the people present, and to establish a sense of group identity.

When to use it?

At the start of an MSP meeting, especially in the early stages of an MSP when stakeholders are not yet familiar with each other.

What is an Introduction?

Introductions are a means to break the ice, create a fruitful atmosphere and making the involved stakeholders familiar with each other and comfortable to interact. In order to achieve the above, introductions should be more than merely exchanging names. Below you will find several tools which can be used to start your meetings well.

Before you decide upon a tool to use, you need to take the following aspects into account:

- Who are the participants? Take into account the differences between cultures, background and gender. Think about potential objections participants might have in certain interactions with each other, based on religious background, for example.
- What is the meeting about? Think carefully about the topic or issue at stake which has brought the participants together. The topic should be addressed or reflected in the introduction.
- Why introductions? Think about the purpose of the introduction and what would you like to achieve with it. Perhaps you'd like to mix the group, so that everyone feels comfortable communicating with the others. Or perhaps you'd like to create a more informal sphere.

Introduction - Step by step

The following sample of tools for introductions can help to develop the best one fitted to the context:

Learning names: If the meeting lasts longer than one day and can be a bit informal, it helps to have everybody speak up at the start – but without the long monologues. A more dynamic method is, for example, to ask participants to throw a ball to each other. Before they throw the ball to another participant they have to shout his or her name. Good for groups up to 25.

Hopes to learn, and Contribute: Invite participants to write on cards what they hope to learn and what they have to contribute. Ask for names to be written on all the cards. This enables you to try to meet individual needs, and to know who can be called on for what.

Proverbs: For this tool you need cards with proverbs on them. [Here](#) you can download a set with over 50 proverbs collected from CDI course participants). The proverbs should link to the culture or background of involved participants, for example African proverbs to use in an African context. The cards with proverbs are spread out on the ground or table so that everyone can read them by walking around the room. Each participant picks out one proverb which appeals to them or which

in their view relates to the topic of the meeting, and explains his or her choice for the chosen proverb. This triggers participants to share more personal experiences and thoughts.

Triggering questions: providing a question which every participant needs to answer after having given his name. A good question can for example be: 'What brought you here?'. Can be risky if the first participants speak long. An alternative for large groups is to divide into small groups of 3-6 people and let these groups discuss the triggering question.

Who are we? Raising hands or standing up: In larger groups, explore the background of the participants by asking participants with a certain characteristic concerning their background to stand up or raise their hand. For example, asking all participants who work at the government to stand up, then all participants who work at an NGO and so on. Options for characteristics include: mother tongue, discipline or profession, travel time to reach the venue, reason for coming to the workshop, etc. Exploring at least 5 of these characteristics gives you a rough idea about who is present.

Presenting each other: Stick some flip-over papers on the walls. In pairs, participants will tell each other their name, where they come from and why the particular topic central to the MSP is important for their work. Additionally, a less relevant question but related to the topic can be asked as well, to lighten the conversation up a bit. If nutrition is the topic for example, you can ask participants after their favourite dish. In pairs, one person asks the questions and draws out the responses on paper, then switch. If everyone is finished, each participant will present his or her partner by use of the drawings to the rest of the group.

Seed mixer: A good way of starting a workshop, immediately establish friendly relationships. It allows groups of up to 30 people to have a talk with everybody in the room, in less than 30 minutes. You need a large pile of beans or seeds, or similar counters, enough for each participant to have as many of them as there are participants (e.g. if there are 25 people, each will need 25 counters). Each participant will also need two paper cups. Put the seeds in one of the cups, and ask participants to greet and introduce themselves to other participants in e.g. 30 seconds or 1 minute. Each then greets and says something to each other participant, exchanging a bean and placing the one received in the empty cup. At the end, everyone should have one bean left.

Name tags: Each participant is given a blank name tag and asked to put his or her first name of nickname on it, plus five words or brief phrases which can be used to start a conversation about oneself. The words should not tell a story themselves, but should serve only as a catalyst for conversation. Participants work in pairs or in a group of 3 to discuss the words on each other's badges. After a few minutes the groups change, so that everyone can meet as many people as possible. An example of a badge could be:

John (Johnny)

Guitar

Mexico

Soccer

Gardening

Learn more

ARC (2001) Facilitators Toolkit. <http://www.unhcr.org/4371d7c92.pdf>

Robert Chambers (2002) Participatory workshops: a sourcebook of 21 sets of ideas & activities.
London: Earthscan.

NB: Tools 'Hope to learn, and contribute', 'Who are we? Raising hands or standing up' and 'Seed mixer' are borrowed from Robert Chambers. 'Name tags' is borrowed from the ARC toolkit.