# ● Roundtables

**Suggested session format**

Roundtable sessions can take multiple formats. One approach is to organise the room around three or four tables to create small group space for those interested in the same issue. This approach - as the name suggests - involves sitting in a more circular arrangement to enable greater conversation between session participants.

It can aid interaction and dialogue, especially across a range of contributors. This format is designed to enable people to feel more able to participate in conversation, to hear more clearly what others are saying and to gauge the general 'mood' of the room by being able to see people's faces. This type of session works best if a clear topic is agreed upon in advance, even if it is a broad theme.

Roundtables can be organised in two different ways:

- *Expert-led topic choice and discussion*: Here tables are purposely organised with an 'expert' on each table. These experts lead discussion either on a broad question put to the session as a whole, or specific questions related to their field. The questions could be determined by asking for suggestions prior to the conference, e.g. as part of the session call for participation and publicity. This enables people to ask questions they might not otherwise get an opportunity (or have the confidence) to ask. All participants are also encouraged to bring their own additional issues, questions, problems or ideas to discuss with the expert and other participants. This type of session would run well after a more traditionally-organised paper session - giving additional time for participants to have face-to-face time with the speakers.

- *Participant-led topic choice and discussion*: This involves setting up informal discussion roundtables. These are particularly useful to enable people to network and share ideas around conceptual, theoretical or methodological concerns. To do this convenors choose a broad over-arching theme - such as 'participatory research'- and at the beginning of the session brainstorm with the participants as to what topics they wish to discuss. Then divide the room into 'roundtables' of 10 participants each and assign a discussion topic to each table. No formal papers are presented, but a facilitator is needed at each table to encourage discussion, keep time and help the group stick to the topic.

**Preparing the session**

Experts could be invited directly, or could be selected from a complementary papers session (if one is proposed for the conference). Participant-led topics work best if a broad (inspiring and/or controversial) topic or question is posed and questions for discussion are invited. As this second format type does not involve specific papers or speakers then the session could be proposed and advertised before-hand, but the finer content could be determined on the day by brainstorming with the group as a whole.

For both types of session a number of facilitators are required to ensure everyone gets the opportunity to contribute, to keep the session on track. Facilitators who are experienced in running roundtable events should be invited to take part.

**Running the session on the day**

At the beginning of the session it helps to get everyone to introduce themselves very briefly (name, affiliation). This gets people used to talking in front of each other and also allows people to know who else is in the room. For expert-led sessions don't waste time describing the topics to be discussed, label the topic on tables with the experts' name and allow the group to start discussions. If everyone chooses to sit on one table and others are empty then encourage people to spread out and rotate people around after 20 minutes of discussion. Allow time (2-5 minutes per table) for each table to feed back to the group as whole on any interesting issues, debates and ideas that they discussed.