

HANDBOOK

# How to conduct democratic workshops

A summary of ICLD suggestions



**The exercises and methods for process management and facilitation of workshops and for creating the best group dynamics and inclusion, have been developed by many and over a long time. ICLD would like to especially mention Plunge and INDEA who provided us with competence development on these topics.**



## Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>HOW TO CONDUCT DEMOCRATIC WORKSHOPS</b>   | <b>4</b>  |
| General tips on how to increase understanding, learning and engagement in a workshop | 5         |
| Workshop preparation checklist   | 6         |
| During the workshop  | 7         |
| Opening  | 7         |
| Main content   | 7         |
| Ending   | 7         |
| <b>ICLD RECOMMENDED EXERCISES</b>  | <b>8</b>  |
| Opening exercises  | 8         |
| Simple check-in exercise   | 8         |
| Send a postcard  | 8         |
| Introduce your friend  | 8         |
| Set the ground rules for the meeting   | 8         |
| Simple method to create a climate for inclusive discussion                           | 8         |
| Draw portraits of each other   | 8         |
| Photo Language   | 9         |
| “Everyone who”   | 9         |
| <b>MAIN CONTENT EXERCISES</b>  | <b>10</b> |
| The ‘opposite’ method (30 mins +)  | 10        |
| Get to the point   | 10        |
| Anyone else?   | 10        |
| Reflecting teams   | 10        |
| Circuit Training   | 11        |
| The empty chair  | 12        |
| Three-way conversation   | 12        |
| ‘Answer the question’  | 14        |
| The cafe method  | 15        |
| Appreciative Inquiry   | 16        |
| One step Forward   | 17        |
| Time Walk  | 18        |
| <b>TRY DEMOCRACY FITNESS</b>   | <b>20</b> |
| Example: Deep listening  | 22        |
| Example: Courage   | 27        |



## How to conduct democratic workshops

ICLD strives to organise all its workshops, trainings, conferences and other activities in the most democratic way possible. For the ICLD, this means organising these events so that they are as inclusive and transparent as possible, as well as ensuring active participation and that the organiser remains accountable to participants. This handbook can also help guide your own local government's internal training, workshops and meetings to strengthen its internal democratic functioning.



# General tips on how to increase understanding, learning and engagement in a workshop

## 1 Involve the right people

Involve those who are most affected by the content of the discussions. This will make them engaged in the topic.

## 2 Design before, during and after

Think about how you can prepare participants for the work they are going to. Describe the purpose and any planned activities in advance. Produce a schedule for the meeting. A structure is good as it enables you to be flexible. Think about how you will support the participants in their work moving forwards. It is a good idea to develop, for example, the 'next step', together during your meeting.

## 3 Joint introductory platform

Before you start to look at the main issues, give the participants time to discuss the goals and content of the work, work together to allocate the roles for the participants, and decide on a joint approach to the work.

## 4 Start and finish in the day-to-day lives of the participants

Start and finish the work in the day-to-day lives of the participants. Let them describe their own situation and support them to reflect on the responsibility they have to carry out this work.

## 5 Identify issues in the group at an early stage and allow everyone the time to process them together

You need to know what is relevant and meaningful for the group to talk about if you are going to support

understanding, learning and engagement in the group. It is a good idea to identify any issues that the group has in relation to the theme that is going to be discussed (it is a good idea to use 'how' and 'what' questions). Give the group time to process them during the meeting using participation methodology.

## 6 Be aware of, and describe, your own experience

Be aware of how you experience your situation and the discussions with the group. This is important information as it shows how this kind of contact works. Describe your experience to the group. This will help the group work to decide together how they are going to move forwards in their work.

## 7 Be prepared to look deeper into your own perspective — and the perspective of other people.

One way that culture is created is through discussions. An inquisitive approach to discussions is: "What do I really think about this issue"; and "What do you think about this issue?" This encourages us to look deeper into these perspectives and helps us learn.

## 8 Appreciation, reinforcement

We create our world by describing it with words. Help participants identify and affirm the group's current strengths and success factors, and use them as the basis for positive choices in the future.

## 9 Allow for other voices

It is a good idea to bring 'other voices' into the room. These perspectives stimulate a deeper understanding; they sometimes change our understanding and help us learn. These voices could be people who are not at the meeting. For example, what would unit X say about these discussions? What would a critical person say? This gives you time to talk about other, perhaps important perspectives about the work, which would otherwise not have come up in your discussions.

## Workshop preparation checklist



Photo: unsplash.com

- Think about how you are going to ensure that **ICLD's four core values** form an integral part of the workshop. Take a look at the methods on the following pages and include them in your planning.
- When writing the invitation, make it clear that the organisation works to promote equality in meetings and transparent meetings, with high levels of participation and accountability.
- **Think about the participants:**
  - Do you need and can you ensure an equal balance, for example, based on gender, disability and ethnicity?
  - What privileges do the various participants have and how could this affect the meeting?
  - Which languages do the participants speak? Do you need an interpreter?
- **Find out in advance about any local organisations** where you can refer participants if they need support during the workshop, for example if someone describes any abuse they have suffered.
- **Participation can be achieved by involving the participants early in the planning stage.** Once you have decided on an activity, try contacting the target group and get them involved. Explain the purpose of the activity and ask for any input. Before a workshop, you could, for example, contact the intended target group and allow them to suggest topics and speakers. Make sure you set the correct expectations for how much influence they are going to have, as this will prevent any backlash. For example, you may want to make it clear that they have complete control of a specific topic and the amount of time that will be spent on it; or that they should only expect you to take their suggestions into consideration.
- Make the invited speakers and others aware of the ambition to have **inclusive workshops**.
- Give them information about your organisation's **whistleblower function**.



Photo: Olga Shadura

## During the workshop

### Opening

What is needed the most at the beginning of a meeting, a workshop or an entire programme is for the participants to get to know each other, have contact with each other and create trust. This phase in a process is important for the work moving forwards, as the group is more likely to be more engaged if they feel a sense of community from the start. It is a good idea to use exercises here that help people warm up, check their expectations, make them curious and get them to share knowledge. Different ideas and thoughts are welcome and positive experiences are highlighted.

### Main content

As you move forwards in a workshop or course, you may need to use process exercises and facilitation, which allow the participants to stop, process and reflect. This is when the group may be ready to listen to other perspectives and other voices, and explore different choices. In this phase, you structure and prioritise, and also prepare for how you will complete the work.

### Ending

A final phase rounds off the process, bringing together all the work that has been done. You normally present a summary of the ideas, results and learning. If necessary, you can also check what worked well and what did not work as well. You might also decide on the next stage, the next process or the person who is going to be responsible for the initial stages, taking you in the direction you want to go. Everyone involved has to take their own individual responsibility to summarise what worked well for them personally.

## ICLD recommended exercises

### Opening exercises

By allowing participants to ‘check in’ and share something personal, it makes it easier for people to open up and share more during the rest of the meeting. The more people who share, the more experiences you will hear about during the meeting. Participants also become more ‘present’ and ready for the meeting after they have ‘checked in’.

#### Simple check-in exercise

Participants sit in a circle and are asked to say who they are and give a status report. This should include something personal, but you do have to be sensitive. As a workshop leader, it can be a good idea for you to start, and this will allow you to set the tone and include things that are not only positive. For example, you could say “I feel excited about today, but I did have a bad night’s sleep”.

#### Send a postcard

Participants are encouraged to think about a memory from a location they have been to recently. They are asked to talk about it as if they were actually there and then write a postcode; they should include many sensory impressions from this location and talk about the way they feel when they are there. The postcard could also be from a favourite location, a business trip, a holiday memory, etc.

#### Introduce your friend

Get participants to interview each other in pairs and then feed back to the group. Provide clear instructions on what information they need to find out, for example their name and job, but also something like an unexpected interest, a hidden talent or favourite film to help create a good atmosphere.

### Set the ground rules for the meeting

This can include everything from switching off mobile phones to listening to each other and speaking up if someone is treating another person badly. One way of making people involved is to get the group to discuss and set the ground rules. This can be as short as 15 minutes for a half-day workshop. If something does happen, this will make it easier for you to deal with the situation and other participants will also find it easier to speak up.

### Simple method to create a climate for inclusive discussion

**Question:** How can we create a climate for inclusive discussion at this workshop? What is important for us to think about?

Participants discuss this in pairs or groups of 3-6. The groups present their most important rules for a climate for inclusive discussion.

The process leader writes the rules on a large piece of paper and asks: “Are we going to keep to these rules?”

### Draw portraits of each other

You need a lot of white paper and pencils. You work in pairs, standing opposite each other. Adapt the number of portraits to the amount of time you have for this exercise and the number of people in the group. People find it most enjoyable when they have the chance to draw a few of them, typically 4-5. If you have plenty of time and there are no more than 10 of you, you could get everyone to draw everyone else!

**The task is to draw each other at the same time, but there are a few rules:**

- You cannot look at the piece of paper, only at each other’s face the whole time
  - You must not take the pencil off the paper until you have finished the portrait
- You keep time: 1 minute per portrait; tell everyone when the minute has finished and ask everyone to find a new partner to draw!





Photo: unsplash.com

**When each pair has finished their portraits, they can write the following on the piece of paper:**

To... (name of the person in the portrait) from.... (name of the artist). They then swap the piece of paper with each other. The first portrait has been exchanged!

It is now time to starting mingling and draw another person; they do this until they have collected the number of portraits that you asked for.

When they have finished drawing each other, the participants can choose one of the portraits they have received: the one that is most similar to them or maybe the one that **“best shows how I feel today”**. Once they have done this, you can go around the group and they can present themselves using the portraits.

## Photo Language

Bring a collection of photos or postcards that you can use for different purposes. Spread them out on a table and get everyone to choose between one and three photos that are linked to an issue that is part of the day, the theme or the workshop. It could be anything from “What are you thinking about?” to “What challenges are you facing in your leadership?” and “What challenge are you facing in your project at the moment?”. The participants then take it in turns to tell their story.

## “Everyone who”

Everyone stands in a circle in an open space in the room/venue.

As the leader, you will say a number of statements that could be everyday statements or values, depending on what the purpose is.

Everyone takes a step into the circle when they agree with a statement/value.

## Main content exercises

### The ‘opposite’ method (30 mins +)

**When to use it:** The ‘opposite’ method is a creative method where you formulate the problem as the opposite of what you want to achieve, for example “How can we get collaboration to work as badly as possible?”. Or “How can we treat our customers in the worst possible way?”. By coming up with suggestions for this, you are able to see things that you take for granted and gain a new perspective on the problem. This is because people sometimes find it easier to express themselves negatively and they will progress more quickly using the ‘opposite’ method, which will help unlock their thoughts. Thinking is stimulated by looking at new ways of coming up with creative ideas.

#### Implementation:

- Ask the participants, in groups or pairs, to come up with as many ideas as possible. Encourage them to come up with lots of ideas and also some slightly crazy ideas. List all the suggestions on the board or flipchart.
- Look at 3 (or 5, or as many as you want) of the worst, most dangerous and most effective ways of sabotaging work. You can highlight them using, for example, sticky dots or putting a mark next to them with a felt-tip pen.
- Turn everything around and think about THE OPPOSITE. What is the opposite of this? In other words, what is the situation like when it is good? You ask the group to turn their thoughts into an opposite creative idea (and they are not allowed to simply remove or add a negation).
- How do we achieve this? Get them to discuss this in their pairs or groups.
- Report back on what the groups have come up with. The result will be a shared view of how you can work together to make meetings and courses as useful, enjoyable, educational and interesting as possible.

### Get to the point

As the name suggests, this method allows the person speaking to get to the point. They say the word ‘point’ to signal that they have finished. Only then can another person take over. The idea behind this is that it will not take as long as people might think.

### Anyone else?

This exercise is quite similar to **Get to the point**, but is designed to go deeper into a topic. You can either use a specific topic or they can use one they choose themselves; one person starts talking and when they have finished, they ask: “Anyone else?”. Then if someone feels that they have something to add and move the topic on, they raise their hand so that they can speak. This person should first give a brief summary of what the person before them said. They then talk and when they have finished, they ask: “Anyone else?” and so on until no-one wants to speak or if it the exercise has to end for any other reason.

### Reflecting teams

**When to use it:** Reflecting teams is a working method to help a group or individual reflect on an issue or dilemma that they think is important. The exercise aims to give the ‘issue owner’ (the person with the issue) greater knowledge, insight or understanding of their issue or dilemma. This in turn can help them see various openings and options, and give them the strength to make an active choice from them.

Another aim can be to help a group process a shared issue or dilemma. You then appoint an issue owner, just to ensure that you have someone who can describe the issue or problem from a personal perspective and create the right atmosphere for reflection within the group. Apart from this, there is no difference in the way that this exercise is carried out.

The reflecting team comprises two or more people who reflect on the issue owner's description of their issue or dilemma. These people then share their own thoughts, associations, angles and perspectives without giving any direct advice or requests.

### Implementation:

- One of the participants is a 'discussion partner'. They interview the issue owner for 15 minutes to help them describe the situation and clarify the issue. The basic question at this stage is: What is the issue that you need to understand more clearly?  
Meanwhile, the other participants sit quietly and listen. These people cannot ask any of their own questions to the issue owner, nor talk to each other during this stage.
- There is then an open discussion for 10 minutes between the other participants ('reflectors') about what they have heard during the initial interview. The issue owner and their discussion partner sit quietly and listen. The issue owner can also note down what they are hearing or reflecting on if they want.
- The third stage is a discussion once again between the issue owner and their discussion partner. The role of the discussion partner is to help the issue owner reflect on what they have heard in the previous section. The kinds of questions that the discussion can include are:  
What have you heard?  
What thoughts and feelings did you have?  
What possible conclusions have you drawn (what have you understood more clearly?)  
What options can you see?  
What feels most exciting moving forwards?  
What do you possibly feel emboldened to do or be?
- The reflecting team ends by every participant, including the issue owner and their discussion partner, talking about what shared lessons or insights have been generated during the exercise.

## Circuit Training

**When to use it** The Circuit Training exercise aims to work on issues that are meaningful to the group and to make the most of the experience and knowledge contained within the group.

The exercise is suitable for slightly larger groups (approx. 20-50 people).

The exercise is called Circuit Training, because, just like circuit training, there are various stations which the participants walk between. At the stations there are 'issue owners', who have an issue or a case where they need advice and answers. The participants walking between the stations are called 'experts' to make it clear that they have a mandate and are encouraged to give answers to the questions raised by the issue owners.

Before starting the exercise, you may want to talk about confidentiality, if you, as the process leader, believe that this may benefit the group's discussions.

### Implementation:

- Preparation in pairs: Identify who in the pair most needs an issue or a case highlighted and addressed.
- Then allocate the roles of 'issue owner' and 'expert' (the other person).
- The participants have an initial exploratory discussion in their pairs: "What is the situation about?" and "What have you, the issue owner, considered doing so far/how have you thought about addressing this issue?"
- The whole group then gathers in a circle. All the issue owners can then give a brief explanation of what the issue/case is about. The reason for this is to provide the experts with an overview of the issue owners' needs and allow them to start 'warming up' so they can give their answers.
- The issue owners then position themselves along the walls around the room and the experts spread out evenly among the various issue stations where the issue owners are standing.

- The exercise begins. The experts give answers and advice for 2-3 minutes at each station. The issue owners can take notes if they want. The process leader gives a signal when it is time to rotate and move on to a new station.
- The exercise ends in a full circle, where some of the issue owners let everyone know how it went and give examples of the expert advice that they found useful.

If you think it is necessary, you can repeat the exercise, changing the roles around.

## The empty chair

**When to use it:** The ‘Empty chair’ exercise aims to give the participants time to reflect on ideas, opinions and perspectives that are different to the ones of the working group itself. These other perspectives stimulate a deeper understanding; they sometimes change our understanding and help us learn. An empty chair represents one perspective. If you want to explore more perspectives, you can put more chairs out (one chair per perspective). This could be, for example, a different unit, manager, parent, collaboration partner or critical citizen who affects or is affected by the issue in some way: “What would unit X say about these discussions?” or “What would a critical citizen say?”

### Implementation:

- Start by identifying perspectives: Who else is affected or has opinions on the issue that the group is discussing? Put out one chair per perspective.
- Ask the participants to stand behind the perspective chair where they feel compelled to talk. Ask the participants to speak from the perspective they represent ... “As a partner, I really feel that ...”, “As a parent, I think ...”, etc.
- To help them get started, it can be a good idea for you, as the process leader, to show them how it can be done (stand behind a chair and say something). Keep this exercise going for as long as the participants feel enthusiastic about it. About 10-15 minutes are usually enough.

- Finish and come together in a circle. Reflect together as a group:

What conclusions can you draw from this exercise? What do we need to add or bear in mind in our own discussions? What is the next step?

## Three-way conversation

**When to use it:** Trio group or trio conversation, is a way to train consultative conversations while the method serves as problem-solving processing and tutorial. Three people help each other to train communication and active listening. You get feedback and reflection on what is being said, at the same time as you get support in the problem-solving process.

### Preparation:

Divide the participants into trio groups. If the number of participants is not even divisible by three it works with groups of four people but avoid couples.

### Implementation:

- Describe the three roles of the trio group. Everyone in the group should try on the following three roles:
  - The actor/Focus person – who chooses the challenge he/she wants to discuss with the consultant.
  - The Consultant – who actively listens to the actor and ask clarification questions. Supports the actor in the description of the situation/ problem/challenge and how to investigate what she/he can learn and/or what actions to take.
  - The Observer – who notes keywords, and then gives feedback to the consultant. Note that the observer’s role is to provide feedback after the conversation.
- Invite everyone to choose an example, a challenge, from their personal and present experiences, connected to the project that they want to use in the role of being an actor.
- The conversation consists of three parts:



**Part 1.** Focus person and consultant: Mapping the situation (about 7 minutes)

The consultant asks questions to the focus person and supports him/her to develop and describe the situation and what he/she wants help with.

The consultant asks open questions like What do you want help with? And supports the focus person to develop new approaches. The observer is actively listening but does not participate yet.

**Part 2.** Consultant and observer: Reflection on the conversation in part 1 (about 7 min)

The consultant and the observer talk about the conversation that just took place. The conversation may have a brainstorming character – all reflections, thoughts and feelings are welcomed: what feelings and thoughts was awakened by listening to the focus person's story? What actions and options do the observer find especially interesting? How can the consultant support the focus person further in the reflection?

During this part, the focus person is only listening. The consultant and the observer are talking to each other as if the focus person was not in the room.

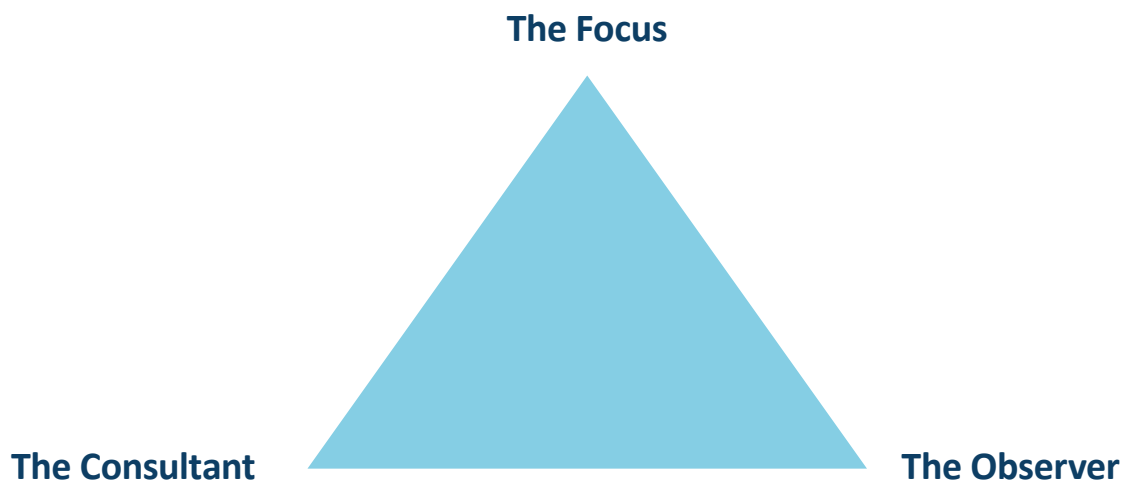
**Part 3.** Focus person and consultant: Feedback and continuation (about 7 min)

The third part is again between the focus person and the consultant. In this conversation, they focus on what the focus person perceived as important and interesting from the conversation she or he just listened to.

The consultant can start by asking what he/she thought and felt when he/she listened to the reflections. In this conversation, the consultant can support the focus person to take steps in the direction towards the desired change, action, or solution, e.g. Through questions like: What different options do you see for that to happen? Or the process to move on? What do you see as a first step on the way?

- Conclude and summarize, not about what has been said in conversations, but how it was experienced, about 3 minutes
- Then the next round starts.

**Time:** 7 x 3 minutes' conversation and 3 minutes' feedback/round, is 24 minutes x 3 = 75 min.



## **‘Answer the question’ — the group knows!**

**When to use it:** The ‘Answer the question’ exercise aims to share knowledge in a group and confirm their ability to find answers to the questions that the group thinks is important.

### **How to prepare this exercise :**

Support the group to identify important questions to look at in more detail around a shared theme, for example, “What do we think is a good workplace?”. These are the questions the group is then going to answer:

- Give the participants in the group time for individual reflection on ‘questions they need to understand more clearly’ that are linked to the theme (5 mins). This kind of question could be, for example: “How do we become more aware of each other’s work?”
- If it is a slightly larger group, give the participants the chance to continue identifying questions in groups of three (5 mins).
- If it is a small group, bring all the questions together for the entire group to answer directly. The questions are written on a flipchart and numbered (10 mins).
- Write the numbers for the questions on separate pieces of A4 paper (preferably coloured paper).
- Spread these pieces of A4 paper around the room.

### **Implementation**

- Welcome the participants to the exercise. Describe the aim and ask the participants to stand by the number where they think they can give an answer.
- Explain that there are a few simple rules for this exercise that will make it easier to share knowledge:

- a. People at the same number talk to each other about the answers they have to this question, before agreeing on which answers they are going to present as a group.
  - b. If there is only one participant by a number, they can reflect individually on the answer to this question and how they want to present their answers.
  - c. There could be numbers where there are no participants and no answers. This is absolutely fine. It simply illustrates that the group does not have the answer to this question, which in itself is useful to know.
  - d. If a participant has answers to several questions, they can change the number during the exercise.
  - e. Everyone stands up. This creates a relaxed dynamic, and makes it easier for participants to move around if they want.
  - f. If a participant comes up with an answer to the question they asked, they can also stand by their own number.
  - g. If a participant feels that they do not have any answers to give, ask them to stand by the question they think is the most interesting to explore. Hopefully they will come up with some answers during the exercise!
- Invite the participants to start the discussion. Tell them how long they have. 10-15 minutes are usually enough
  - Finish the exercise by asking each number (group) to present their answers to the question they have chosen (approx. 2-3 mins/group).
  - Feel free to applaud after each presentation. This is an illustrative way of confirming that the knowledge is here in the group!
  - Alternatively, you can finish the exercise by giving all the participants the chance to explain what conclusions they have drawn or what this exercise has made them reflect on. The cafe method – the knowledge and experience cafe

## The cafe method

**When to use it:** The cafe method aims to share knowledge about a specific topic in a large group in a relatively short amount of time.

### Preparation of the room:

You need to design the room like a cafe. Cover the tables with paper (flipchart paper or paper tablecloths) to look like real cafe tables, which will be used as notepads during the exercise itself. If you want, you can put flowers, fruit, sweets, candles, etc., on the tables to create a cafe atmosphere in the room. Make sure there are felt-tip pens for each participant on each table.

### Implementation

- The process leader prepares this discussion exercise in advance by coming up with a heading, which is the theme of the discussion, as well as some questions about this theme, which is the cafe's 'menu'. In some processes, it might be a good idea for the participants themselves to identify the issues that are going to be discussed.
- Put the theme and questions on each table; if you want, you can write these issues on an actual menu!
- Welcome the participants to the cafe. Divide the participants into groups at each (cafe) table. If possible, make sure that each group has roughly the same number of people as there are tables. So, if you have approximately 25 participants, you could have five tables. Let the group appoint a person who is the host/hostess for each table.
- Explain what will happen in this exercise. It has four stages:
  1. Talk (20 mins)
  2. Listen (10 mins)
  3. Compile (15 mins)
  4. Report (approx. 5 mins per group).
- Tell each table that they have around 20 minutes to talk about the various issues. They need to document the results of these discussions while they are doing this, writing short sentences or drawing pictures on the tablecloth. This could include, for example, thoughts/perspectives, statements or questions.
- In the next stage, you ask all participants at all of the tables (except for the table hosts/hostesses) to spread out and visit each of the other tables. When everyone has sat down at a new table, the table host/hostess presents the results from the discussion they have just had. Encourage the visitors to take notes on what they hear, so that they can present the material when they go back to their original table later on. Visitors are welcome to ask clarifying questions, but they should not start discussing the content. This will take approximately 10 minutes.
- Ask all participants to go back to their original tables. They then each have to report on what they have learned from the other tables, while the others listen attentively. Afterwards the group continues their own discussions based on what they have just heard. The group then tries to summarise the most important insights they have taken from the material they have collected (both from their own discussions and what they have learnt from the other groups). Each group summarises the most important insights in writing on a piece of A3 paper or flipchart, and prepares to present the material orally to the other groups.
- Give each group a maximum of approximately 5 minutes to give their presentations. Let the audience ask clarifying questions and feel free to go deeper into/talk more on the reasoning during the presentation.



Photo: unsplash.com

## Appreciative Inquiry

**When to use it:** ‘Appreciative Inquiry’ is a working method where you initiate discussions where you use storytelling to explore and identify:

- skills and resources of the individual, group or organisation
- motivation and driving forces
- development opportunities and options for the future

It moves away from the traditional problem-focused approach, which risks undermining the participants’ work up to now. Participants receive recognition that will motivate them: they are already doing good things and contributing to the success of the organisation. This development is based on the participants’ own and unique experiences. By talking about and being asked about your own successes, you understand and learn from your experience. This work transforms individual experiences into shared insights. Participants learn how their past successes can be repeated.

### Implementation:

- Formulate the theme: Decide on a joint theme for the group.
- Search for highlights: Each participant is given a few minutes to themselves, so they can search their memories for a positive event or experience that they have been involved in that is linked to the theme. This should be a highlight that the participant has experienced personally.

For example, a course that they did really well in, a positive response from an employee, a successful initiative as a process leader.

- Tell each other about these stories in pairs
- Afterwards, the participants can sit in pairs and interview each other about the positive experience, one at a time. The person interviewing tries to help the other person tell their stories in the most concrete and detailed way possible for about 10 minutes. The interviewer can also take down some notes so that they retell the main points of this experience themselves.
- Retell this experience in larger groups
- Everyone then gets together in small groups of 4-5 people. Make sure that the couples who sat together in stage three are in the same group. Each experience is retold in front of the whole group one at a time by the person who listened to the story when the participants were sitting together in pairs.
- Identify resources/success factors
- As soon as an experience has been retold, all of the participants should talk together for a few minutes about it and identify what made the experience so good: What different factors contributed to this positive experience?
- Summarise these success factors into a shared list in the group.
- Reflection on the results: The exercise ends with the participants reflecting together on how they can build on these strengths and use them to make positive choices for the future.



## One step Forward

**When to use it:** The one-step-forward method helps you understand norms and how they are linked to injustice. The method makes visible the advantages and disadvantages that individuals and groups can get and suffer from, based on how groups are categorized and given the different conditions they face in life.

### Implementation:

- Select or add the statements that you think are best for the group and your purpose.
- The exercise can be done in two ways. Either the participants can start from their own experiences, or they can do the exercise by getting cards with roles that they will then assume. If you choose to have the participants start from their own experiences, it is important that you and the group know each other fairly well. Feel free to point out to the participants that they may also use an imaginary experience if they wish. This can create additional security in the group. The advantage of this version is that participants can gain a greater view of how they themselves are affected and favoured by different norms.
- If you choose to do the version with the role cards, it is important to point out to the participants that they are not allowed to show or tell their cards to each other.
- Hand out the cards and ask everyone to read silently what is on their card. Ask everyone to think about their role for a moment: How do they live? What kind of background does their role have? What do they do in their daily life? How do they spend their days? Their evenings? What are they dreaming about?
- Then ask the group to stand quietly in a line in the room next to each other in silence. Tell the participants that you will read a number of statements. Each time a statement agrees with the participant's experience / role (depending on which version they choose) they should move forward one step, otherwise they should stay in place. Slowly read each statement, pausing for a few seconds in between. Once all the

statements have been read, it is important to stay in the place they have ended up in.

- If the participants chose roles, ask them to tell them about their roles for each other. Have them discuss with the person standing closest to them why it is that they ended up positioned next to each other. In a collective group, it is then important to let the participants reflect on how they relate to the roles. In the role cards there is only a small part of each person's identity. If it is not printed what the person has for ethnicity, sexual orientation, functional ability or gender, what do we put in ourselves? How was the statement addressed when the information on the card was insufficient? What made us give the role other qualities?

### Then continue to discuss:

- Was any statement unclear or difficult to react upon? Why? How did it feel to take a step forward? How did it feel to stay?
- What happens when end up positioned too far ahead or far behind the rest of the group? What do you see?
- What does it mean in a person's everyday life to be someone who gets far ahead? What are the benefits? How does it affect society that certain people have advantages over others?
- How can you go further when you have gained knowledge of the advantages and disadvantages you get from society? What can be done to counteract these injustices?

## Time Walk

**When to use it:** The purpose of the exercise is to broaden the understanding of a perceived situation, increase awareness of what may need to change and support the identification of possible action strategies for the future.

We call the exercise “Time Walk” as we support the participants to reflect by “walking on a time-line”: Current situation - history - future - the next step and then finally back to the current situation. This exercise can be done both digitally and physically.

## Implementation

Give the instruction to the group that they individually will have some time to identify something that they want to achieve or develop in their political leadership, preferably an area as concrete as possible. Give the participants some time to think about what they want to achieve or develop. Then, check with the group if everyone has found an area to explore further.

Next step is to do a demo with the help of one of the participants. You act as process leader and show the different steps to the group.

The participants then form pairs (two and two) to support each other in completing the exercise.

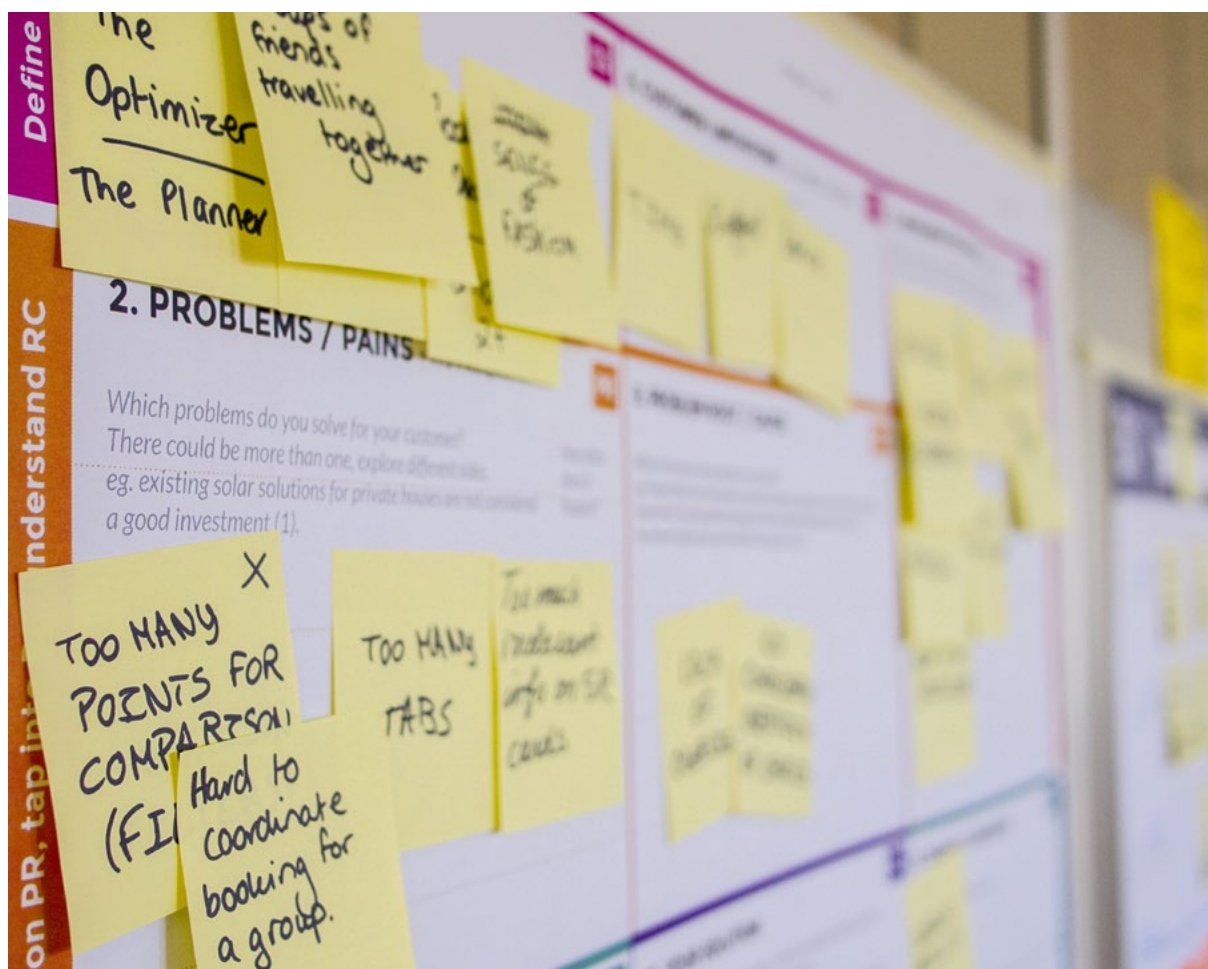


Photo: unsplash.com

## 1. Current situation

Start in the current situation (present time). Introduce the work by asking: *“Please tell me about what it is that you would like to develop in your political leadership”*. You then let your partner talk and and you support her/him by ask in-depth questions that makes her/him reflect further on the choosen area of development. Try to support with questions that shed light on the area from several perspectives. Examples on questions:

*What skills could be enhanced?*

*In what way would it make a difference to develop what you want to develop?*

*In what way would your chosen area have an effect on you and your context?*

*How do you feel about developing this?*

## 2. History

Ask your partner:

*When did this process start? What is the history of the area that you would like to develop?*

When asking this, you invite your partner to go back to a point on the timeline that represents a previous time- “history”.

Ask your partner questions such as

*When in time did the the area of development come up for the first time?*

*What did it look like?*

*How does it feel at this point in time?*

## 3. Future

Ask your partner: *What does it look like when it is the way you want it to be (when the goal is achieved)?* Invite your partner to a place on the timeline that represents a moment later in time. Support with questions that reinforce your partners dreams. For example: How does it feel to be here... what makes it good? How can you see a difference in your political leadership? What has gotten better?

## 4. Next step

Take your partner back to a place that is in the future but close to the current situation.

Ask questions such as:

*What is your next step?*

*What do you want to do now to move forward?*

*Who do you want to involve in your next step?*

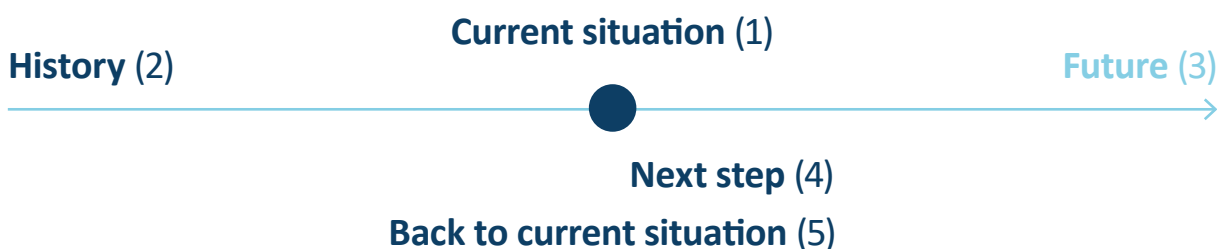
## 5. Current situation

Ask your partner to “step out of the exercise” and reflect on what has been said.

Ask questions such as:

*When you look back on what we have done here, what reflections does this give you?*

*In regards to your political leadership, what do you feel strengthened in?*





## Try Democracy Fitness

ICLD also regularly uses the “Democracy Fitness” method to help encourage participants further in their engagement to strengthen local democracy in their own organisation.

Democracy Fitness is a fun and active training that targets specific democracy muscles. The training is individual but is always exercised in group – because democracy is always a collective exercise!

A Democracy Fitness Training session lasts 30 minute sharp and it is best performed in group. Each session focuses on one democracy muscle. The aim is to make you aware of that particular muscle, activate it, exercise it and thereby make it stronger. All sessions must be both active and fun – but it also needs to be hard work – otherwise it won’t make you more fit for democracy.

In this handbook you find two out of ten muscles to start with.

# DEMOCRACY FITNESS

Which democracy muscles have you trained today?



In a democracy, people are diverse. You need to be able to put yourself in someone else’s shoes.



In a democracy, we’re looking for solutions. Listen, wonder and ask questions.



In a democracy you can follow many paths. You must know what you stand for, and why.



In a democracy, opinions should meet challenge. You must dare to participate in the debate.



In a democracy, we often disagree. Engage in disagreement, without feeling angry or hurt.



In a democracy, we don’t always fully agree. Choose your battles and make good compromises.



In a democracy, you need to engage others. You must be able to speak from your heart to other peoples’ hearts.



In a democracy you can achieve something. Get on with it and do it!



In a democracy we need curiosity - to learn new things, to be open-minded and develop our community and society.



In a democracy, we must have the courage to stand up for our values - and each other. Also when we meet resistance.

Byens hus  
Punkide

WE DO  
DEMOCRACY

DEMOKRATI  
GARAGE

Join us!

[www.democracyfitness.eu](http://www.democracyfitness.eu)

Instagram: #democracyfitness eller #demokratifitness

Read more here:  
[democracyfitness.eu](http://democracyfitness.eu)





## Example: DEEP LISTENING

### MUSCLE

#### WHAT / TIME STEPS

#### Equipment /props

### ACTIVE LISTENING – DEEP LISTENING

#### HOW /WHAT IS GOING ON

### TRAINING GUIDE

#### Always:

Minimum 4 cones (to mark a space for the training within the room you are in)  
Badges for all participants (hand out after training)

#### If you like:

Whistle (Optional, as a metaphor for a fitness-class)  
Clothes that show that you are the trainer (badge/hat/T-shirt etc.)  
A sign with the muscle-poster on it  
A box or a chair to stand on (so everyone can see you well)

#### For this exercise:

- Blind folds (optional, this could be sensitive in some contexts)
- Chairs in a circle/later in pairs
- Cardboards
- Pens

#### 1 minute Intro and setting the scene:

Welcome to Democracy Fitness. My name is xxx and I am your democracy fitness instructor.

Democracy is not something that we can take for granted – it is something, we have to train, practice and evaluate – also, in our day-to-day living. That is why the Danish non-profit association We Do Democracy (together with partners) has identified a number of democracy muscles and developed training programs, that will make us more fit to take part in democracy and live in a democratic society. Each muscle only takes 30 minutes to activate – and when we are done, you will always remember that you and others have this muscle in your body!

Today we are going to train our **ability to listen** – what we call the DEEP LISTENING muscle.



## Example: DEEP LISTENING

### MUSCLE

**4 minutes**  
**Why this muscle?**

### ACTIVE LISTENING – DEEP LISTENING

**We are training this muscle because (as a trainer: feel free to say this in your own words – and a shorter version)**

In a democracy, we have to be able to listen to each other to be able to learn from each other and by that make the best mutual solutions and strengthen social cohesion. We have one mouth but two ears – that means that we have to listen twice as much as we speak. And there is a difference between hearing and deep listening.

Have you ever spoken to someone who made you feel like you were the only person in the world at that moment? Who seemed truly engaged and interested in every word that came out of your mouth? How did that make you feel? Important? Understood?

This is the power of deep listening. Deep listening is more than a valuable social habit; it is a transformative communication tool and extremely important in a democracy.

If we are good at deep listening, we understand more perspectives and are able to see more shades.  
For that reason, deep listening is an important muscle for making maximum mutual understanding.

At the same time listening is important for maintaining, rebuilding, and developing confidence, empathy, understanding and respect for each other.

Deep listening is about real, unconditional curiosity that combats bias and prejudices.

Listening will make us more curious. More exploring at other people and the society, we are living in.

Echo chambers and increasing inequalities and division in our society, makes us more narrow-minded and week-kneed when it comes to handling and understanding difference.



## Example: DEEP LISTENING

### MUSCLE

### ACTIVE LISTENING – DEEP LISTENING

And finally: For us at ICLD, as well as for you \*governmental officials and politicians and representatives for community-based organisations\* we know that the skill of listening is really important for all core values of local democracy: Equity/inclusion, Participation, Transparency and Accountability.

That is why we must be able to listen – deep, active and conscious. That is why we are practicing this muscle today.

#### 4 minutes Instruction

#### Manuscript e.g.:

I will go through the training exercise and after that we will be doing it together.

I will talk you through the exercise that will take approximately 18 minutes. When we have trained deep listening you will never forget, how it feels to listen deeply, conscious, empathetic, and active.

#### Part 1.

At first, we need to get in touch with our hearing. We get there by listening to what we normally do not listening to. We have to listening to silence.

#### Part 2.

Thereafter we must sharpen our sense of listening by repeating, what others are telling. We will do that with our eyes closed (optional blindfolded), so we can sharpen our hearing more.

#### Part 3.

Finally, we practice the ability to ask curios questions that reflects that we have listened – really listened – to what is said. Remember, it is allowed to be fun to practice democracy, but it must also be a bit difficult. If not, we will not get better at it.

***Are you ready?***



## Example: DEEP LISTENING

### MUSCLE

**6 minutes**

**Part 1:** Open up  
the muscle

### ACTIVE LISTENING – DEEP LISTENING

#### **Instruction for the trainer:**

Everyone is sitting in a circle.

#### **Manuscript e.g.:**

*Please make yourself comfortable. Put both feet on the floor. Look at the others in the circle – be sure where you are and what time on the day it is. Massage your ears. Slowly and with full presence.*

*Prepare yourself for sitting quietly and listen for 5 minutes. I will guide you through. Close your eyes now.*

(Guiding in a slow and calm voice)

*Listen to the room surrounding you. Listen to the sounds. Both the ones far away and the ones close to you. Listen to all the sounds at the same time – as a total sound. Do not try to identify the different sounds – just let them be. No sounds are better or worse than other sounds. Just sit, listen, and include all your consciousness and presence in your listening.*

**(These points must be repeated for every 1 minute and 30 seconds – that is 3 times in total)**





## Example: DEEP LISTENING

### MUSCLE

8 minutes  
Part 2:

### ACTIVE LISTENING – DEEP LISTENING

Now we can all open up our eyes.

**Manuscript e.g.:**

*Now we must practice deep listening as a way to intensity and full awareness. Please place your chair in front of someone you don't know (or trainer place people together two and two). Soon I will ask you to close your eyes again. // Optional: Now each of you will get a piece of cloth/blindfold that has to be tied for your eyes. But before doing it make sure to take a good deep look at each other – knowing the face of the other.*

**1. Set yourself comfortable and listen carefully.**

(As a trainer you choose the context – here are some examples)

- A.** Think back to the last time, where you were outraged about something! Something against your values. Something that made you indignant. What happened and what did you do?
- B.** Think back on last time you were surprised....
- C.** Think back on the last year. Try to picture it as a movie. What in this year have made you especially thankful and why?

**2. Take one minute to go through your story in your head.**

*3. Now you must tell the other about this last time you got xxx about something. The history has to last two minutes. I will control the time and tell you when you have 30 seconds left.*

*4. Please reflect the story you were just told and repeat the main parts from the other persons story – what made the other person xxx? You have 1 minute for this. Start by saying: "What I heard you say was..."*

*5. Now, we switch (repeat 3. and 4.*



## Example: DEEP LISTENING

### MUSCLE

4 minutes  
Part 3

### ACTIVE LISTENING – DEEP LISTENING

#### Manuscript e.g.:

*Please open your eyes// (Please take off your blindfold.) Greet each other with your eyes. However, keep staying in the deep listening mode.*

*Don't talk!*

*Take the cardboard and write down in a few words:*

#### As a trainer you choose one of the following questions:

**Alternative 1:** What made you curious? Why?

**Alternative 2:** What was difficult thing for you to understand? Why?

**Alternative 3:** What did it do to you, to listen to the story?

*Hand the card to your partner. Who can now read and think.*

*And maybe respond later.*

*Now the exercise in deep listening ends. I hope that you are able to feel your deep listening muscle – without being all too painful.*

**Greet each other//** Shake hands with your training partner.

2 minutes

#### Relate/Reflect:

*How can you use it in your daily life/in your professional life?*

#### Manuscript e.g.:

You have now been training your deep listening muscles. First your ability to open up your ears and listen to everything around you with full awareness - and then your ability to listen without getting any other expressions than the voice of the other. And last you repeated what you heard without being interrupted by questions or explanations and you gave that back without concluding anything.

Try to pay attention to the relationship between listening and speaking for the next days. In addition, be aware, when you conclude something without having listened and reflected carefully or when you are sincerely aware and deep listening.

#### What did you learn? How will you use it?

### Facts

[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/six\\_surprising\\_benefits\\_of\\_curiosity](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/six_surprising_benefits_of_curiosity)

'Active listening' is originally developed by the psychologist Carl Rogers in 1945: 'The non-directive method'. Deep listening contains of: Contact, Curiosity. Presence, Non-Verbal Feedback and Relational connection.



## Example: **COURAGE**

### MUSCLE

### COURAGE – IRL

#### WHAT / TIME STEPS

#### HOW /WHAT IS GOING ON

##### Equipment /Things you need

##### Always:

Minimum 4 Cones  
Badges for all participants (after the training session)

##### If you like:

Whistle  
Clothes that shows that you are the trainer (badge/cap/T shirt etc.)  
The muscle poster signboard  
A box or something to stand on (so everyone can see you)

##### For this exercise:

- 2 cardboard cards for each participant (1 for messages/1 for sentence)
- 1 pen for each participant

#### MOTIVATION

##### 1 minute

- Intro to  
Democracy  
Fitness  
-Setting the scene

##### Welcome to Democracy Fitness.

This is our fitness room [show with cones].  
My name is xxx and I am your democracy fitness trainer.

##### Why do we do Democracy Fitness?

Democracy is not only what happens in policy and nothing that we can take for granted – it is something, we have to train, practice and evaluate – also, in our day-to-day living. That is why the Danish non-profit association We Do Democracy (together with partners) has identified a number of democracy muscles and developed training programs, that will make us more fit to take part in democracy and live in a democratic society.

##### What is Democracy Fitness?

In Democracy Fitness we do exercises, that will make us better at democracy. And like when we go to the gym we do exercises to strengthen the muscles in our body. Democracy Fitness strengthens our democracy muscles –and so our ability to take part in society as active citizens.

##### Today we are going to train the **COURAGE** muscle

The training program is short and intensive –it only takes 30 minutes. And when we are done, you will always remember that you and others have this muscle in your body!



## Example: COURAGE

### MUSCLE

#### PRESENT 2 minutes

Why we train our  
Courage muscle?

**We are training our courage muscle because** *[as a trainer: feel free to say this in your own words – and a shorter version]*. In a Democracy/Society we need to have courage to speak up and handle our fear, when we fight for our opinions or values – especially when we are young and fear that adults will not even listen to what we have to say. You need to have Courage to express your ideas and argue for them – even defend them -in front of an audience, which might be hostile or distrustful. -If we are courageous, we can stand up for the things or people that we care about. -If we are courageous, we can take action for the values and causes we believe in.

There are many types of courageous actions: sometimes they can be very visible and loud. At other times they can be quiet and thoughtful *[feel free to provide examples]*. Acting courageously generally makes us feel good afterwards, because it involves mastering emotions such as fear, low self-esteem and over-confidence. When our Courage muscle is weak, we can't stand up for ourselves or others – which is important in a democracy (society –to do the right things.

**And finally: For us at ICLD**, as well as for you \*governmental officials and politicians and representatives for community-based organisations\* we know that the skill of courage is important for all core values of local democracy: Equity/inclusion, Participation, Transparency and Accountability. That's why we are training this muscle today!

Are you ready to train the Courage muscle?

#### INSTRUCT 2 minutes

Giving instructions  
for the whole  
exercise

**To have a strong Courage muscle, we have to train physically and mentally. But you also need to be good at teaming up with others who can encourage you for what matters for you.**

This training consists of 3 exercises:

1. In the first exercise, we will train your inner feeling of courage.
2. In the second exercise, we will find/define something we will be courageous about –something or someone we will stand for! Today! And present for everybody here.
3. Then you will express this and be encouraged by others and encourage others as well!

Remember, training must be fun, but it also has to hurt a bit –if not our courage muscle will not become stronger.

I will talk you through the whole exercise that last approx.... 20 minutes.

Breathe in... Shake your body... grounding *[Feel free to improvise as a trainer]*





## Example: COURAGE

### MUSCLE

#### TRAIN

8 minutes

Make your own  
courage posture

### COURAGE – IRL

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Ask everybody to lay down flat on the ground –relaxing and looking up in the sky...

**Trainer do it in your own way/words: Instruct**

Feel your body on the ground. Breathe. Slowly in and out. Close your eyes.

**1)** Think back of a time where you felt frightened or fearful. *(give 1 minute to think)*  
Now stand up: Posture your body in the way it feels to be frightened or fearful.  
Look at each other's postures.

**2)** Lay down again. Breathe. And now think back of a time where you felt courageous, brave or bold (give 1 minute to think). Where in your body is this feeling located? Place your hands there. Get up again. Posture –the courageous body. How does that look for you? Feel that! Now raise your arms like you just ran through the 100-meters Olympic games and won.

Stay her for a minute.  
I hope that was not too hard?

#### TRAIN

6 minutes

What are you  
courageous about?

**Say in your own words:** We are courageous when there is something we really care about and we truly believe in, and when we are willing to stand up for and defend that. Being courageous often requires that we overcome a fear and are willing to run a risk. For example, it can be the risk of failure, or the risk of not being heard and accepted by others. In this exercise we will reflect upon a thing, for which is worth running a risk. A thing, which it is worth for YOU to fight for.

Close your eyes and think of a situation that you find unjust or unfair –and that you want to stand up for. It can be a thing from your daily life or a societal matter.

Write that situation/issue down on your own cardboard in one sentence:

I want to stand of for....

Find a partner –preferably someone you don't know. Tell your partner why this thing is so important to fight for and what you would like to do in your daily life to act upon it! How you would show your courage.

(2 minute each and switch (take and mark time)

Trainer: Altogether! Take a deep breath, look at your card again –and do your courageous body posture.



## Example: COURAGE

### MUSCLE

#### TRAIN

6 minutes

To get encouraged

### COURAGE – IRL

**Say it in your own words:** Courage and standing up for something also have to do with encouragement from the outside world –friends, family, colleagues, or other citizens... We are all motivated to do more and risk more when someone believe in us, supports us –and encourages us to speak up/stand up for.

Now you must get together in new pairs (*Raise your hand when you have a partner*). Take turns: Tell your partner what you want to be courageous about and as a partner you encourage by saying things like : Yeah, Cool, Go for it, I like that, I will support you, You are very brave.

Each round 2 minutes. As a trainer take time and mark when to switch.

When through both rounds: Say thank you to each other for encouragement.

#### RELATING

5 minutes

Use your courage muscle in your daily life

## CONGRATULATIONS! YOU HAVE NOW TRAINED YOUR COURAGE MUSCLE

It is now 3 times better than just 25 minutes ago. What we did was:

- First we explored the difference between fear and courage in our body –and felt how we can support our self-confidence with a physical posture.
- Then we found a cause that for us is important and told about it
- Finally we got encouragement from someone else to encourage us to act on it.

For the rest of the day, I would like to invite you to be aware of your body postured go on with being brave –but also remember to encourage others to speak up and have confidence in them self... when we give, we get.

Thank you so much for being here and training your COURAGE MUSCLES!

Give out badges.

**ICLD believes that creating a healthy learning environment within your own local government will support your staff that are currently or have previously participated in a ICLD interventions to experience, share, combine and apply their new skills further within your local government – allowing individual learning to lead to organizational learning.**

**Read more about ICLD organizational learning**

[www.icld.se/en/publications/organisatoriskt-larande-handbok/](http://www.icld.se/en/publications/organisatoriskt-larande-handbok/)

**Read about ICLD's core values here**

[www.icld.se/en/about-us/icld-core-values/](http://www.icld.se/en/about-us/icld-core-values/)

**Read about ICLD's Pedagogical profile here**

[www.icld.se/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/ICLDs-Pedagogical-Profile-.pdf](http://www.icld.se/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/ICLDs-Pedagogical-Profile-.pdf)



# THE GLOBAL GOALS

For Sustainable Development

**IICLD** Swedish International  
Centre for Local Democracy