

How to facilitate a session

A guide to hosting a fishbowl — how to set the circles, open the dialogue, and bring the room in.

Fishbowl Dialogue

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1 Prepare

- Choose a clear question and 3–4 seed speakers with different perspectives.
- Arrange an inner circle of chairs (one left empty) inside a wider audience circle.
- Brief the seed speakers to start, then make room for others.
- Agree a facilitator to hold the one rule and keep the empty chair flowing.

2 Run the session

- 5 MIN** Set up — explain the format and the empty-chair rule.
- 10 MIN** Open — seed speakers begin around the question.
- 25 MIN** Flow — invite the audience to take the empty chair, speak, and return.
- 10 MIN** Harvest — the facilitator draws out shared insight and takeaways.
- 5 MIN** Close — thank the room and name the practical recommendations.

3 Follow up

- Share the takeaways and recommendations with participants.
- Feed them into your planning or a follow-up session.
- Note what worked about the format for next time.

4 Running it online

- Use a video call where only inner-circle participants have camera and mic on; others request the empty seat via chat.
- A co-host manages who steps in and out to keep it smooth.
- Capture insight live on a shared board.
- Prefer privacy-respecting tools, and agree recording consent up front.