



# CO-CREATING SOLUTIONS

A guide to inclusive Policy Labs  
about migration and integration,  
based on the MUST-a-lab project





**Title:** Co-creating Solutions: A Guide to Inclusive Policy Labs about Migration and Integration, Based on the MUST-a-Lab Project

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Thank you for your dedication and collaboration in advancing participatory and deliberative policymaking in the field of migration and integration.





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# Introduction to the guidelines

## Who are these guidelines for?

Migration policy responsibilities are spread across various levels of governance, but meaningful integration and inclusion primarily occur at the local level—within neighbourhoods, schools, health services, leisure activities and workplaces. In these local settings, municipalities and cities encounter unique challenges in addressing the needs of their diverse populations.

This guide distils lessons learned from the MUST-a-Lab project, initiated in response to the 2020 call by the European Fund for Asylum, Migration, and Integration (AMIF) to support cities and municipalities in tackling local integration challenges. The call emphasised the importance of listening to all voices, particularly those from migrant communities and diverse stakeholders, to develop fair and responsive policies. One selected project was MUST-a-Lab, which experimented with and thoroughly evaluated the Policy Lab method in six European municipalities between 2021 and 2024. The MUST-a-Lab approach views integration as a process of hybridisation, where cultural identities and differences are understood as dynamic and fluid, shaped by social negotiation.

The guide is intended for **policymakers, civil servants, and other stakeholders** committed to advancing local participatory policy design using the Policy Lab method. Although focused on migration and integration, the guidelines are adaptable and can inspire participatory policy design in various other fields and topics. The introductory section helps readers confirm the method's suitability for local policy challenges. The **second part offers practical guidelines, inspirational schedules and techniques for Policy Lab organisers** who have determined that the Policy Lab approach meets their needs. Parts of these guidelines can be shared with facilitators once the PL organisation takes shape.

## Policy Labs: a specific form of participatory and deliberative democracy

Policy Labs bring together **small, diverse groups (20-25 participants)** to collaboratively address local policy challenges through an inclusive and structured process. Rooted in **participatory and deliberative democracy principles**, Policy Labs provide citizens and diverse stakeholders with a platform to make exchange narratives and make decisions about policy challenges, transforming “thin” democracy, restricted to experts or professional politicians, into “strong” democracy<sup>1</sup> and creating a more inclusive and equitable political system.<sup>2</sup> Policy Labs, similar to citizens' juries and assemblies<sup>3</sup> are **a specific type of "mini-public"**. These are deliberative settings formed through random or selective recruitment. Within Policy Labs, participants engage in the complete policy cycle: identifying problems, refining policy challenges, offering recommendations, testing solutions, and evaluating outcomes.

Although Policy Labs involve a limited number of participants, their impact can be amplified by incorporating them into broader policy cycles<sup>4</sup> and adopting an iterative approach. Unlike

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<sup>1</sup> Barber 1984

<sup>2</sup> Pateman 1970, 2012

<sup>3</sup> Chwalisz 2019; Drury et al. 2021; Green et al. 2019; Hartz-Kap 2005 Hartz-Kap & Briand 2009; Karpovitz et al. 2009; Knobloch & Gastil 2021; Legacy et al. 2014; Morrell et al. 2022; Niessen & Reuchamps 2019; Richards 2018

<sup>4</sup> Chwalisz 2019; Elstub et al. 2016; Ming & Wong 2018; OECD 2021; Youngs 2019



traditional top-down methods, **Policy Labs function as testing grounds where new ideas can be created, adjusted, and assessed in real time.**

For Policy Labs to succeed, there must be a **genuine willingness** from policymakers and administrative bodies to adopt a more open approach to policy formulation and implementation, ensuring participants' contributions are taken seriously. If the Policy Lab approach is adopted merely as a formality, it risks frustrating participants, particularly if they do not see their input used meaningfully. Therefore, **Policy Labs should only be considered if they have the potential to engender actual participation and influence current or future policy developments** rather than being limited to consultative processes under traditional frameworks.

## MUST-a-Lab: introducing the partnership

In the **MUST-a-Lab project, Policy Labs (PLs) specifically addressed local policy development about migration and integration.** They were organised in six European municipalities, each with its history and practices in migration, integration and inclusion. Using the same methodology and evaluation framework, each municipality focused on locally significant topics:

- **In Mechelen (Belgium)**, the PL focused on the sense of belonging for migrant children in schools by making diversity visible, diversifying the teaching staff, and strengthening teacher-student connections.
- **In Fuenlabrada (Spain)**, participants in the PL developed participatory policy spaces for young migrants, including a youth council and initiatives for co-governance and communication to enhance migrant integration.
- **In Livadia (Greece)**, the PL worked on expanding access to essential services for migrants and refugees, focusing on digital and vocational skills development and communication strategies.
- **In Modena (Italy)**, the PL targeted young adult migrants by supporting career development through job orientation, volunteer opportunities, Italian language courses, and using sports for integration.
- **In Grenoble Alpes Métropole (France)**, the PL focused on enhancing reception policies for newly arrived migrants, creating a newcomers' guide, training for staff, and designing a 'Home of Hospitality'.
- **In Vienna (Austria)**, the human rights districts of Neubau, Favoriten and Meidling promoted participation and social cohesion by piloting open school cafés for children and parents, a social media campaign on human rights and company excursions to enhance job perspectives for young adults.





Some other partners also played a crucial role in the project, overseeing methodology development, research, communication, dissemination, and engagement throughout the project's lifecycle. These partners were the University of Modena and Reggio-Emilia (Italy), the Karel de Grote University of Applied Sciences and Arts (Belgium), the International Institute of Humanitarian Law (Italy) and the Forum des Régions Européennes pour la Recherche l'Éducation et la Formation (France).

The MUST-a-Lab project highlighted the effectiveness of Policy Labs in migration and integration policy design and achieved significant outcomes that can inspire other cities and municipalities:

- **Inclusivity and access:** PLs make policymaking accessible to those often excluded, empowering diverse voices, including those from the migrant community, to shape relevant policies.
- **Renewed legitimacy:** By engaging a more comprehensive range of voices, PLs enhance policy legitimacy, fostering transparency and trust in an open, inclusive process.
- **Insight gathering:** PLs provide policymakers with valuable insights into community needs and concerns, ensuring policies align with local experiences.
- **Enhanced collaboration:** PLs strengthen partnerships between public offices and migrant communities, improving service coordination and integration outcomes.
- **Skill development:** During PLs, participants build negotiation and dialogue skills, equipping them for broader civic engagement.
- **Grassroots innovation:** PLs identify local innovators who contribute fresh, practical solutions to policy challenges.
- **Network creation:** PLs foster relationships that support ongoing community collaboration by connecting diverse stakeholders.
- **Evidence-based testing:** PLs enable small-scale testing of new policies, laying a foundation for informed, data-driven decisions.

These achievements are attributed to Policy Lab participants' iterative, structured engagement, allowing multiple interactions and collaborative learning. For those interested in learning more about the experiences of participants and organisers involved in the project or seeking a deeper analysis of the PL process, **the MUST-a-Lab project website provides access to all project deliverables.**

## Checklist: Should I organise a Policy Lab about integration?

Before launching a Policy Lab, we encourage you to complete a brief survey and reflect on some critical political, capacity and engagement challenges. If your administration, network or organisation can confirm that within your local context, most of these considerations can be met or addressed in the near future, a Policy Lab could be an effective way to develop inclusive and responsive local integration policies and strategies.

1. **Relevance:** Is there a specific issue impacting migrant communities, and is or can it be recognised as a policy priority?



2. **Political and administrative support:** Do local leaders support participatory policy initiatives? Is there a commitment to consider the PL's recommendations?
3. **Participant engagement:** Can a diverse range of participants be recruited, including the migrant community, grassroots organisations, diverse, relevant stakeholders and public officials?
4. **Flexibility and innovation:** Is there an openness to adapt the PL process based on participant needs and an understanding that the process may require iterative adjustments?
5. **Resource capacity:** Are sufficient resources, such as staff, funding, and facilitators, available to support a PL cycle?
6. **Time commitment:** Can participants engage in multiple sessions over an extended period, allowing for sustained dialogue and policy development?
7. **Legal and ethical standards:** Are data protection policies and inclusive participation guidelines in place to ensure fair treatment of all participants?

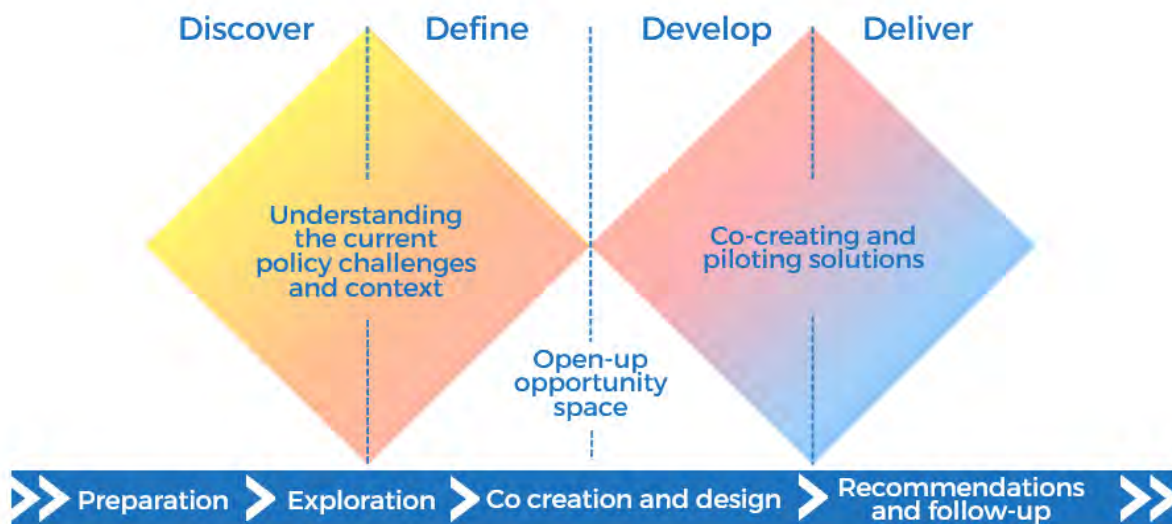




# Guidelines for organising a Policy Lab

## A. Organising a Policy Lab cycle

A straightforward way to conceptualise and organise a Policy Lab (PL) cycle originates from the UK Policy Lab toolkit,<sup>5</sup> was adapted in the MUST-a-Lab project and leverages the double-diamond framework to guide a policy design cycle through five key phases: preparation, exploration, co-creation, design, and recommendation. With the exception of the preparation phase, each stage of the double-diamond framework aligns with a policy design phase: *discovery* in **the exploration phase**, *definition* in **the co-creation phase**, *development* in **the design phase**, and *delivery* in **the recommendation phase**. Each phase consists of a specific combination of preparatory training, informational sessions, facilitated meetings with PL participants and real-life testing. These guidelines outline each phase of the process in detail: section C covers the preparation phase, section D details the organisation of PL meetings with participants, and section E provides facilitation strategies for these meetings. Section F focuses on piloting within the experimentation phase, while section G addresses the follow-up period in the recommendation phase.



### 1. Preparation phase

The preparation phase is crucial in setting the stage for meaningful participation and deliberation in a PL cycle. It aims to **formulate a relevant policy challenge, prepare all participants**, especially those inexperienced in policy debate, such as youth or more marginalised groups, for local policymaking and empower them to contribute actively. In the preparation phase, the organising team examines a preliminary version of the policy challenge, selects participants relative to the challenge and organises several informational meetings and training sessions for different types of participants and facilitators. The preparation phase also sets the agenda for the rest of the PL cycle.

<sup>5</sup> <https://openpolicy.blog.gov.uk/category/policy-lab/>



## 2. Exploration phase

The PL cycle officially begins in the exploration phase, where the pre-selected **preliminary** policy challenge is presented for discussion during the first PL meeting. **Participants collaboratively explore the challenge by sharing personal experiences, insights, and knowledge, fostering a deeper understanding of the issue.** Time is allocated for participants to connect, build trust, and exchange diverse perspectives. This phase is crucial for identifying root causes and ensuring that the policy challenge is understood in a broader, more inclusive context.

## 3. Co-creation phase

The co-creation phase aligns with the definition stage of the double-diamond model, where the **group redefines the policy challenge and co-creates solutions and practical piloting activities** through brainstorming, multilateral discussions, and decision-making. During (a) PL meeting(s), special emphasis is placed on ensuring that migrant representatives and other key stakeholders contribute their unique perspectives. This phase is critical for refining the policy focus and generating ideas that reflect the needs and priorities of the entire community.

## 4. Design and experimentation phase

In the **design and experimentation phase, the focus shifts to development**, represented by the second diamond in the double-diamond model. Participants move from ideation to action in the design and experimentation phase by co-creatively developing and testing pilot activities. These activities are designed to address the refined policy challenge and often involve creating small-scale, practical solutions. Groups may organise by interest or expertise, piloting their ideas in real-world contexts to gather insights on what works and what may need adjustment.

## 5. Recommendation phase

The final recommendation phase aligns with the delivery stage of the double-diamond model. Participants engage in discussions about the outcomes of their pilot activities, collaboratively assessing what was effective, what was not, and the reasons behind these results. The goal is to develop actionable policy recommendations. These recommendations are intended to inform future policy decisions and can be supported by a more detailed follow-up period.

## Timeline and scheduling considerations

Each phase in the PL cycle can consist of a single meeting or span a series of meetings, depending on the complexity of the policy challenge and available capacity and resources. When designing the exact timeline of a given PL cycle it is important, to follow the five phases chronologically and consider that several factors are advisable for maintaining engagement and ensuring effective outcomes:

- It is recommended that there be a gap of no more than one month between the meeting(s) of the exploration and co-creation phases to keep participants engaged and invested.
- After the (last) co-creation meeting, a period of around two months is recommended to allow participants and organisers to delve deeper into the policy challenge, consult stakeholders, and develop a thorough understanding of the political and social context. This time is also essential for logistical planning for the design phase.



- During the design phase, a more extended period (ideally between three and six months) allows participants to pilot and refine solutions. Regular check-ins ensure group communication, enabling them to share progress, address challenges, and keep the process cohesive.
- In the recommendation phase, meetings provide space for reflection on outcomes, fostering a shared understanding of successful strategies and areas for improvement. This phase ensures that recommendations are meaningful and actionable and may include further refinement based on participant feedback.

The MUST-a-Lab project was implemented with more extended intervals between meetings. Although these intervals provided time for reflection, participants in interviews and focus groups noted that longer gaps could lead to communication breakdowns, weakened group cohesion, and diminished motivation. Participants suggested shorter intervals and more frequent communication to counteract these effects to sustain engagement and ensure focus. Organisers learned that balancing time for reflection with momentum-building activities is essential for maintaining participant motivation.

Successfully organising a PL cycle requires a structured timeline and clear communication about roles, expectations, and responsibilities. Key scheduling considerations include:

**Cycle duration:** The cycle length should align with the complexity of the policy issue. Shorter cycles may suffice for straightforward issues, while more complex challenges may benefit from extended engagement.

**Meeting frequency:** Meeting(s) should be spaced to keep momentum without overwhelming participants.

**Reflection periods:** Periods between meetings should allow participants time to reflect on insights gained, while organisers can use this time for planning and consultation, ensuring that subsequent sessions are focused and effective.

**Flexibility:** Building flexibility into the timeline accommodates scheduling conflicts, additional meetings, and unexpected challenges, ensuring that the PL process can adapt to participants' needs and emerging issues.

**Impact assessment:** During the final meeting, it is advisable to include a session to assess outcomes, identify successful approaches, and generate recommendations for future action. Additionally, in the MUST-a-lab project, a mixed-method evaluation thoroughly assessed the interactions in the PL meetings. If you need help evaluating the PL meetings and cycle, you can download two materials on the MUST-a-lab website: a survey administered after each MUST-a-lab PL meeting and guidelines for organising a focus group discussion. If you want to conduct a more thorough evaluation, you can find inspiration in the deliverables of WP3 and WP5.

After the final phase, the PL cycle can either conclude, be repeated for deeper exploration, or pivot to address a new policy challenge. This iterative, adaptable approach enables continuous learning, real-life testing, and refinement. It is recommended that these considerations are taken up with facilitators of the PL sessions as well.

The PL cycle can be repeated indefinitely, delving deeper into specific issues or refocusing on new challenges. This approach offers a clear pathway for participatory policymaking, creating



structured opportunities for exploration, co-creation, experimentation, and refinement, ensuring that the solutions developed are responsive to community and beneficiaries' needs and contributing to the institutionalisation of participatory and deliberative democracy.

## Summary and reflections for your city

PL cycles can vary in length and number of meetings. Effectively organising and communicating a PL cycle is essential for ensuring participant readiness and engagement. This cycle involves exploring policy challenges, co-creatively designing and testing solutions, assessing outcomes and creating recommendations while allowing for flexibility and time for reflection. The final assessment ensures the results of the PL are actionable, with the option to initiate a new cycle based on the outcomes and recommendations. To help plan or adapt a PL timeline for your city, consider the following questions:

1. **How can we structure the PL timeline to ensure participants are adequately prepared while maintaining momentum?**
2. **How flexible should our timeline accommodate unforeseen challenges, including adjustments to meeting frequency?**
3. **What strategies can we implement to maintain participant connection and clarity of goals during extended testing phases?**



## B. Composition

Participants should be deliberately chosen and selected according to the policy challenge at hand. A successful PL thrives on engaged participants and ensures they represent various relevant communities, interests and sectors. Such diversity ensures that a single perspective does not dominate the PL, that the end-users of policies are consulted and that the resulting policies are more equitable. A successful PL about migration, integration and inclusion involves at least three target groups: stakeholders, members of the migrant community and policymakers. Facilitators guide the process. The exact makeup of these categories depends on local demographics and the selected policy challenges. Each group may consist of sub-groups that require specific outreach activities and facilitative actions to engage in meaningful dialogue.

### 1. Stakeholders

Stakeholders include participants used to policy debate (such as union, health and educational network representatives and members from civil society organisations and NGOs) and groups with less experience (such as representatives from grassroots organisations and private networks). All these types of stakeholders bring relevant expertise and experience. Considerations for the selection and involvement of specific stakeholders include:

- **Sector representation:** It is essential to ensure that relevant sectors are represented. Depending on the policy challenge, it may be wise to include partners that focus on education, employment, leisure time and/or health, for instance, or to focus more on other partners to address the broad challenges of integration and inclusion policies.
- **Balance of expertise:** Stakeholders with more professional experience should not outweigh other participants, and allowing space for others to contribute is crucial. Collaboration is vital to ensuring that all voices are heard.

In the MUST-a-lab project, municipalities with an extensive history of participatory processes found stakeholder engagement easier, while others faced challenges due to varying availability and job roles. The municipality of Modena, for instance, addressed this by leveraging existing networks, emphasising the project's value, which helped maintain engagement. Across municipalities, some established stakeholders noted that meaningful collaboration occurred when diverse representatives united on common goals in PL meetings. However, civil society representatives observed that key sectors (education, employment, health) were sometimes missing, limiting outreach to migrant communities. They also emphasised the importance of balancing participant types in small groups to ensure all voices are heard

### 2. Members of the migrant community

For policy on integration and inclusion to work, it is vital to have strong representation from migrant communities, as they are the end users of the intended policies. Depending on the



goals, PLs should strive to involve individuals from different generations, genders and backgrounds to reflect the diversity within the migrant population. When engaging with these groups, consider the following:

- **Generational and linguistic diversity:** Including both first and second-generation migrants can present challenges, such as language barriers. Still, their perspectives are crucial for a holistic understanding of the issues.

In the MUST-a-lab project, local teams experienced mixed success mobilising migrant communities, with some seeing high motivation among participants and others facing moderate to significant engagement challenges. Common issues included limited time availability, uncertainty about outcomes, and “engagement fatigue” from overlapping initiatives. In municipalities without established migrant contacts, this posed an additional challenge.

To address these, the organising teams used trusted local stakeholders like NGOs and community leaders to communicate the importance of the PLs, adjusted meeting times and offered flexible options. The migrant community represented diverse groups, including newcomers, TCN, parents, and children, each requiring tailored approaches:

In **Livadia**, efforts focused on members from the migrant community. The organising team organised the PLs bearing in mind periods that were suitable to them, like evenings and weekends.

In **Mechelen**, children and parents from migrant communities were involved, though attendance was not always consistent. A dedicated facilitator engaged children using arts-based methods, though more child participants would have enhanced their impact.

In **Fuenlabrada**, youth participation was prioritised, reserving half of the PL spots for young people (ages 17-25), of whom 60% were from migrant backgrounds. A young migrant-background facilitator fostered a “safe space,” enhancing trust and prompting policymakers to centre young migrants’ needs.

In **Modena**, outreach was adapted to different cultural groups using multiple languages and informal community events to increase accessibility.

These approaches helped improve trust and participation, especially among young migrants, who felt a greater sense of agency and inclusion.

Inclusive language use and visualisation techniques are highly recommended when facing linguistic barriers. Using interpreters is possible but poses challenges of its own, such as finding trained interpreters that engage throughout the process and deliver qualitative translations. Therefore, the benefits of using interpreters should be carefully weighed against the potential challenges of miscommunication, time constraints, and ensuring an accurate representation of nuanced ideas.

- **Subgroups:** Involving newcomers, asylum seekers, parents, young people, or children can enrich the conversation, though it is essential to ensure that more dominant voices do not overshadow smaller subgroups and that the subgroups are chosen in line with the selected challenges.

One way to achieve balance is by ensuring that the proportion of specific subgroups within the PL is sufficiently high relative to the group as a whole. For instance, when involving young people and children, it is important to ensure they have peers to collaborate with within small groups, are well-represented in all group discussions, and that the brainstorming techniques used are engaging and relevant to their interests.



When engaging youngsters and children, one should always ensure the PL considers them fully competent agents, avoiding the assumption that they need to acquire more knowledge to be taken seriously.

- **Turnover:** Migrant participants may face personal and professional constraints or not be sure the PL offers real opportunities for them, leading to a high turnover. It is crucial to remain flexible while encouraging sustained participation.

In the MUST-a-lab project, local teams experienced varied levels of engagement from policymakers. Many showed positive interest, including those not directly involved, which indicated broad support for the project. However, some teams struggled to secure sustained commitment, as initial enthusiasm sometimes waned after the first PL meeting due to limited early results. Time constraints and the busy schedules of politicians, including district councillors who often volunteer, posed additional challenges.

In Vienna, engaging local politicians was difficult due to their competing commitments. High-ranking officials had limited availability due to vast obligations and unforeseen events with political urgency, while district councillors struggled with all-day meetings alongside their regular jobs. Vienna emphasised the PL's long-term benefits, helping maintain engagement by showcasing incremental successes.

### 3. Policymakers

Policymakers, including public administrators, civil servants and elected politicians, play an essential role in PLs. Their participation ensures that discussions can translate into actionable policy recommendations and actual policies. Important considerations when selecting them include:

1. **Consistent involvement:** Administrators often attend regularly, but policymakers with executive powers may want to participate in some meetings and have more fluctuating attendance. Some form of continuous engagement is vital to the PL's success. One solution would be for elected officials not to be actively involved in the PL meetings but to be thoroughly informed by their administration and repeatedly voice explicit support for the innovative nature of the policy deliberations.
2. **Inclusive dialogue:** Policymakers with and without migration backgrounds may bring different perspectives. Those with personal migration experience often offer unique insights that can enrich discussions, but sometimes these participants identify as part of different categories. At the onset of a PL it is of great interest to make explicit in which capacity you want participants to take part and from which perspective you require them to share experiences, brainstorm and offer reflections. If participants belong to several categories, it is useful that they clearly state from which perspective they take a stand during the PL exchanges<sup>3</sup>. **Clear roles:** Public officials and politicians should be clear about their roles, making space for the perspectives of the migrant community and avoiding dominating conversations. Their presence should not stifle dialogue.

## 4. The role of facilitators

Facilitators play a crucial role in guiding discussions and ensuring that all participants have an opportunity to contribute. We will come back to their roles later in this guide. Regarding the composition of a PL, some requirements must be taken into account:

1. **Facilitators should be selected** based on their ability to encourage inclusive participation and multicultural deliberations and manage group dynamics and conflicts if they occur. They are trained in these matters and preferably have experience before the PL meetings.
2. **Consistent facilitation teams** are preferable over individuals. For each PL meeting of 25 participants, it is advisable to have at least two or three facilitators to ensure balanced and productive exchanges, especially when engaging in larger group discussions such as plenaries.



## Summary and reflections for your city

A successful PL on integration and inclusion involves stakeholders, members of the migrant community and policymakers, with facilitators to guide discussions. Stakeholders provide sector expertise, while members of the migrant community ensure diverse perspectives. Policymakers are essential to turning ideas into policies, though sustaining their engagement may be challenging; updates via administrators can help. Facilitators are crucial for fostering inclusive, balanced discussions and ensuring active group participation.

If you consider using the PL method in your city or municipality, you can ask yourself the following questions about the composition of the PL you envision:

1. **What type of specific participants do we need to engage in our local context to address the challenges in a bottom-up way?**
2. **Do we have specific subgroups in mind? Do these require specific outreach**





**strategies in schools, leisure time, health and/or the workforce...? Do they require one-to-one explanations and/or training moments?**

- 3. How can the PL ensure the inclusion of underrepresented groups to guarantee that their perspectives and needs are considered in the policy-making process?**
- 4. Which mobilisation and continued attendance issues do we foresee in our community? Can we find solutions to these hurdles?**
- 5. How can we ensure support from local politicians and high-ranking officials?**



## C. Preparation phase and capacity building

The preparation phase is arguably one of the most critical stages in the PL process. It lays the foundation for the entire PL cycle, ensuring that all participants are adequately recruited and prepared and that the PL is customised to meet the specific local context and policy challenges. The preparation phase involves several key activities:

### 1. Identifying relevant and feasible policy challenges

The first step in the preparation phase is to identify relevant local policy challenges. Ideally, a PL cycle becomes an iterative, participatory, and deliberative development method integrated within the city's or municipality's political system over time. However, it is important to clearly define the scope of an individual PL cycle at the outset to ensure it is feasible and realistic. For instance, attempting to address challenges that exceed local governance authority can be counterproductive. The specific policy challenge facing a city or municipality should guide all subsequent activities. Capturing and formulating this challenge helps maintain focus and ensures all participants work toward a common goal.

Policy challenges can vary from general to specific. As mentioned in section A, the organising PL team will make initial attempts to formulate a policy challenge, which can then be reviewed with various stakeholders and potentially a local reference group. This policy challenge will serve to attract and select prospective participants interested in it during outreach activities in the preparatory phase. To ensure that actions and policy recommendations are relevant to the beneficiaries' realities, the selected policy challenge is refined during the exploration and co-creation phases of the PL cycle. Any existing local participatory strategies they may align with are collectively investigated.

### 2. Resource allocation

Successful implementation of the PL activities requires adequate resource allocation. This includes financial resources, logistical support, and relevant data and information access. Proper resource allocation ensures that the PL can operate smoothly and that participants have the tools to contribute effectively. Resource allocation should be made explicit in the preparation phase as early as possible.

Some cities of the MUST-a-lab partnership encountered some hurdles when allocating resources. For instance, the municipality of Livadia's project budget did not cover some organisational requirements of initial planned activities such as hiring interpreters to allow migrants to participate fully in PL meetings by speaking in their native languages. As this cost could not be covered, the project team invited only migrants who could speak Greek well - representing their minority - to participate in PLs. The organisational team also activated stakeholders from the public and private sector to contribute to migrants' empowerment and information through the provision of spaces, training and digital courses on a voluntary basis.

In Modena, the organising team also saved costs by using municipal public spaces for meetings and phased its piloting activities, starting with low-cost initiatives while postponing larger ones. This approach helped the city stretch its resources while keeping the PL productive and moving forward.



### 3. Participant mobilisation and engagement

When mobilising participants for a PL about integration and inclusion policies, it is important to ensure that the key groups listed above are represented: stakeholders, members of the migrant community, and policymakers. Mobilising such diverse participants during the preparation phase is a complex and multifaceted task for the local administrations or initiating organisations involved.

### 4. Capacity building and training

Once participants are selected, capacity building becomes essential to equip them with the knowledge and skills to contribute effectively to PL meetings. This can include training sessions and briefings on the policy issue and the deliberative techniques used in the PL cycle. For integration and inclusion policies involving migrant communities to work, capacity building must address the unique needs of members of the migrant communities and stakeholders, especially those new to debate and structured argumentation, to ensure active and empowered participation. Organising teams can seek out training and coaching organisations in their cities or decide they have the necessary experience to develop and guide such a process.

In MUST-a-lab, the city of Mechelen used effective one-on-one preparatory meetings with PL participants. The project coordinator met individually with each participant to explain project goals, structure, location, and expectations, allowing them to ask questions and voice concerns. This approach, particularly appreciated by members of the migrant community, fostered trust and prepared participants for meetings. For children, a primary demographic in the city, the coordinator explained tailored brainstorming methods, like drawing and arts-based narration, to suit their expression preferences.

Here is an **inspirational training day schedule that was used in the MUST-a-Lab project to train migrants and grassroots stakeholders who have less experience in deliberative processes**, structured to foster inclusivity, collaboration, and mutual understanding:



Time	Activity	Steps
9:00 - 09:40	Welcome and ice-breaker	Begin with a brief welcome and an introduction to the day's activities. Icebreaker: Participants introduce themselves using personal avatars (if preferred) and share a brief reflection on their day, experiences, dreams, or a personal mantra related to the Policy Lab. Facilitators should encourage personal stories while offering confirmation and appreciation.
9:40 - 10:00	Introduction to PL techniques	Give a short presentation on facilitation techniques, focusing on group work, co-creation and collaboration methods. Keep the methods simple and relatable, especially for participants less familiar with complex techniques.
10:00 - 10:45	Small-group workshop about general themes	Divide participants into small groups (4-5 people) to facilitate collaboration. Mix migrants and non-migrants for a balanced experience. Discuss general themes like ideal municipality/city qualities. Assign a facilitator to each group or provide clear instructions for autonomous work with group rotation.
10:45 - 11:00	<b>Break</b>	
11:00 - 12:00	Small-group workshop addressing specific topics	Focus on specific topics, such as city integration hurdles, in the next session. Ensure balanced participation, especially for migrant participants, to build confidence in sharing their perspectives. Use Post-its or other tools to organize group ideas for visual presentation during the plenary. Facilitation tip: ask open-ended questions to expand narratives and close-ended questions to clarify key points.
12:00 - 13:00	Plenary session 1: group presentations	Share outcomes from the first group work rounds. Each group presents its main discussion points. Facilitators encourage interaction, summarize, and ensure all contributions, especially from migrants, are highlighted.
13:00 - 14:00	<b>Lunch Break</b>	
14:00 - 15:00	Small-group workshop: final refinement	Refine ideas developed earlier into actionable insights for future PL meetings. In new compositions, groups refine ideas discussed in earlier rounds, focusing on specific outcomes for future meetings. This session encourages deeper collaboration with group facilitators, ensuring inclusivity.
15:00 - 16:00	Plenary session 2: group reflections	A final plenary where group reps share refined ideas and outcomes. Encourage questions and feedback to deepen understanding and integrate all contributions. Facilitators weave group outputs into a cohesive narrative, focusing on migrant contributions.



Aside from less experienced participants, it is equally important to build the capacity of policy-makers, civil servants, and experienced stakeholders in policy design and deliberation. These participants must fully understand their role in supporting the development of public policies and may benefit from training that focuses on listening skills. Below is a **proposed training day schedule for experienced stakeholders and policymakers**, incorporating both theoretical knowledge and practical experience, **with an emphasis on deepening listening skills and understanding the PL process**:

Time	Activity	Steps
9:00 - 9:30	Welcome and ice-breaker	Welcome participants and introduce the objectives of the workshop. Use an icebreaker where participants share personal reflections on their policy work.
9:30 - 10:15	Presentation: Introduction to Policy Labs	Give a presentation on the PL concept and methodology, focusing on systemic thinking and user-oriented design. Clarify how PLs differ from traditional policymaking.
10:15 - 11:00	Understanding the PL process	Explain the stages of the PL process, from identifying challenges to testing prototypes. Emphasise the need for the more experienced participants to understand their roles.
11:00 - 11:15	<b>Break</b>	
11:15 - 12:30	Small-group discussion: exploring challenges	In mixed groups (policymakers, stakeholders, facilitators, and other assisting staff), participants discuss their past experiences with integration policies and the potential challenges of PLs.
12:15 - 13:15	Plenary session 1: sharing reflections	Groups report their discussions, with policymakers and stakeholders sharing their observations about the challenges of the PL approach. Focus on deep listening to others' experiences.
13:15 - 14:15	<b>Lunch break</b>	
14:15 - 15:00	Interactive simulation: role reversal	Participants adopt different roles (e.g., migrant or community stakeholder) in a simulated PL session. This activity highlights the importance of empathy and listening.
15:00 - 15:45	Plenary session 2: insights from simulation	Participants discuss their role-reversal experience, focusing on how it reshaped their understanding of inclusive policymaking.
15:45 - 16:30	Final reflections and wrap-up	Summarise the key takeaways, reinforcing the importance of deep listening and the collaborative nature of PLs. Leave the floor open for individual reflections.

Lastly, **facilitators must be prepared** for the specific task of facilitating a PL cycle about integration and inclusion. Facilitators are responsible for guiding discussions, managing group dynamics, and ensuring that the process remains inclusive and productive. Not all available facilitators in a city or municipality may have prior training; even if they have, they might require additional knowledge and skills. Before the start of the PL process, it is important that facilitators undergo an (additional) comprehensive training program. Firstly, they should be aware of



and familiar with the content of the PL challenge to tackle. Secondly, they must master the techniques and skills related to cultural diversity, narrative production, and decision-making necessary for effective facilitation during the PL meetings.

The following tables present a **two-day training that contains crucial elements for PL facilitators**. Based on the MUST-a-lab deliverables from WP5 and deliverable 2.2, which can be found on the website, it can be self-constructed or delivered by a training centre.

### Exemplary training schedule for day 1

Time	Activity	Steps
9:00 - 10:00	Welcome and ice-breaker	Introduce participants, explain the goals for the day, and conduct an icebreaker using self-evaluation on facilitation skills (using post its). Participants share their experiences and score their facilitation skills.
10:00 – 11:00	Introduction	Present the PL cycle and the role of facilitation as a participatory method. Discuss key areas: policy domain (integration strategies), intercultural dynamics and management.
<b>11:00 – 11:15</b>	<b>Break</b>	
12:30 - 13:15	Plenary session 1: group introductions and reflections	Each participant introduces themselves, shares their experience in integration policies, and explains the self-evaluation from the icebreaker. Facilitators reflect on group dynamics and inclusivity.
<b>13:15 – 14:15</b>	<b>Lunch break</b>	
14:15 – 15:00	Introduction to facilitation in a PL	Explore the critical factors of facilitation in PLs: fairness, empowerment, co-creation, and supporting participant contributions. Practical examples of challenging facilitation scenarios are presented for group discussion.
15:00 – 15:45	Workshop and plenary: supporting dialogic interactions and enhancing narratives in PLs	Participants are divided into small groups and focus on ways of facilitating agency, producing narratives, and fostering the interweaving of participant contributions—follow-up of the workshop and reflections in plenary.
15:45 – 16:00	Wrap up	Summarise the key takeaways, reinforcing the importance of facilitation in PLs. Leave the floor open for individual reflections.



## Exemplary training schedule for day 2

Time	Activity	Steps
09:00 – 09:45	Introduction 2: facilitation and relations among participants in small group workshops	Practical examples of challenging scenarios are presented for group discussion.
09:45 – 10:15	Workshop (simulation) and plenary: supporting small group workshops	Participants are divided into small groups, and a facilitator for each group guides conversations about assigned themes. Follow-up and reflections in plenary.
10:15 - 11:00	Introduction 3: Problems in facilitating PLs	Problems of hierarchical relations, conflicts, marginalisation of (cultural) differences, and difficulties in reporting small group workshops in plenaries are dealt with. Practical examples of challenging scenarios are presented for group discussion.
<b>11:00 - 11:15</b>	<b>Break</b>	
11:15 - 12:30	Workshop and plenary: managing problems of facilitation in PLs	Participants are divided into small groups and focus on ways of managing problems. Follow-up of the workshop and reflections in plenary.
12:30 – 13:45	Creative techniques for facilitators: brainwriting, reverse brainstorming, 'What if'	Participants will experience creative techniques like Brainwriting, Reverse Brainstorming, and 'What If' exercises, which encourage creativity and quick thinking in facilitation.
<b>13:45 - 14:45</b>	<b>Lunch break</b>	
14:45 - 15:45	Plenary session 2: collaborative framework and co-design discussion	Discussion on creating a collaborative framework for future PLs. Co-design principles (Scan, Focus, Act) are introduced to deepen stakeholder collaboration.
15:45 - 16:30	Final reflections and wrap-up	Summarise the key takeaways, reinforcing the importance of facilitation in PLs. Leave the floor open for individual reflections.

In addition to preparing participants, capacity building marks the starting point for planning the PL cycle, including setting schedules, defining content, and developing strategies to encourage open dialogue and exchanging ideas.

## Summary and reflections for your city

The preparation phase is crucial for establishing PL cycles. It involves identifying relevant policy challenges, allocating necessary resources, engaging and mobilising participants, and building their capacity to ensure meaningful contributions. This latter phase also emphasises the importance of hands-on training for all categories of participants to foster inclusivity and equity. Training equips participants with the skills needed to deliberate and listen to voices they might not be familiar with, and it equips facilitators with the necessary skills to perform their roles effectively. If you consider using the PL method in your municipality or city, you can ask yourself the following questions about the preparation phase:

- 1. What critical challenges in integration and inclusion should our city focus on,**



**and which networks, especially those with lived experience, are already involved or missing from this work?**

- 2. What resources (staff and funding) can our city allocate to the project?**
- 3. Which communication channels (e.g., talks, social media, brochures) best attract participants, and what language is most inclusive for all groups?**
- 4. How can we tailor capacity-building activities to meet the needs of all participant groups, especially migrants?**
- 5. Which aspects of the PL method should be explained to each participant group, and where can we find support for developing targeted training?**
- 6. How can we help participants feel prepared and confident in their contributions, especially those new to structured discussions?**
- 7. Do these training sessions for different groups require varied time and budget allocations?**





## D. Organising PL meetings

As mentioned before, the PL cycle consists of five key phases: the **preparation phase** that was covered above; the **exploration phase**, where participants discover policy challenges and share experiences and knowledge; the **co-creation phase**, where they brainstorm on integration issues and possible solutions; the **design and experimentation phase**, during which solutions to the identified policy challenges are developed and tested in pilots and the **recommendation phase**, where participants assess the outcomes of these pilots and co-construct recommendations, ensuring that solutions are responsive to community needs and can inform future policy development. Each phase consists of (a) PL - meeting(s). Some phases also require testing and implementation of piloting activities and solutions. Here, we will focus on how to structure the PL meetings interactively. In section E, we will focus on the facilitation requirements of those meetings. It is recommended that both these sections be shared and taken up with facilitators of the PL sessions as well.

### 1. Guidelines for cooperation in a PL

In the first meeting after the preparation phase, essential cooperation guidelines are set. Key among these is the '**Chatham House Rule**', which allows participants to use the information shared in meetings but prohibits disclosing the identity or affiliation of speakers. This encourages open discussion, allowing participants to express (controversial) opinions without risking their professional reputation, and it helps to separate personal views from those of an organisation.

Additionally, the **concept of agency within the PL context, which relates to the distribution of rights and responsibilities in shaping knowledge** — referred to as epistemic authority — should be clearly articulated. For a PL to function effectively, epistemic authority must be balanced. Facilitators are vital in maintaining this balance by promoting agency and ensuring all voices are heard. In preparatory meetings and during the first PL meeting, it is essential to explicitly address the roles of all participants and explain how equal opportunities for conversation and participation will be ensured.

When creating these guidelines, it is advisable to attend participants to the language they use when engaging in deliberations: technical jargon can discourage participants with less debating or policy-designing experience. **Inclusive language use** should be a starting point when engaging in a PL cycle and can be stressed throughout each PL meeting in plenary sessions and small group discussions.

These 'guidelines for cooperation'—whether prepared by facilitators or co-developed with participants in talking circles—help build an environment of trust and equity. Over time, experienced and new participants will gain confidence, fostering the sense of community crucial for effective decision-making.

Each PL meeting should be organised to support meaningful, equitable exchanges. The following section outlines how to tailor interactions and techniques to each PL meeting's goals, including sample schedules. Section E provides in-depth guidance on facilitative techniques to ensure equity among participants within these interactions.



In **Vienna**, a reverse brainstorming technique was used effectively during the first PL meeting to establish guidelines for collaboration during the whole cycle. The exercise began with the 'Policy Lab of Horror,' where small groups of participants brainstormed on how to deliberately 'sabotage' the PL. This humorous and exaggerated approach encouraged participants to think creatively about potential failures. In the second round, the 'Policy Lab of Dreams,' the groups were asked to reverse the negative scenarios into positive ones by identifying key success factors and creating a code of conduct for the PL meeting. The most important success criteria were then presented in a plenary session and documented on a flipchart, which was used throughout future labs.

This technique can be used with the following instructions:

**Objective:** Identify potential failures and success factors for effective collaboration.

**Timeframe:** Approximately 50 minutes

#### **Instructions:**

1. **Preparation** (5 minutes): Divide participants into groups (4-5 people) and provide flip-
2. **Round 1: "Policy Lab of Horror"** (15 minutes): Groups brainstorm on ways to deliberately sabotage the Policy Lab communicative process. Think of exaggerated, humorous failure scenarios. A prompt you can use is "How can we make sure the Policy Lab fails?".
3. **Round 2: "Policy Lab of Dreams"** (15 minutes): Reverse the horror scenarios. Identify key success factors to prevent failure. A prompt you can use is "What must we do to ensure success and avoid failure?"
4. **Presentation** (15 minutes): Groups present one horror scenario and their top 3-5 success criteria. Record the success criteria on a joint flipchart for future reference.

This technique worked well because it broke the ice, engaged participants in a fun and constructive way, and encouraged them to think critically about both pitfalls and success factors. It allowed for an open and collaborative environment to set shared goals and create guidelines for collaboration.

## **2. Types of interaction during a PL meeting**

While diverse interaction types make PL meetings lively, it is important to ensure that **different parts of the meetings, especially small-group workshops and plenary sessions, are effectively connected**. The goal of a PL cycle is for participants to design policies by going through specific phases. Meetings may include personal narratives and brainstorming exercises about concepts, activities, and solutions, but they should go beyond just talking and/or making lists. They must balance narratives and decisions which are made collectively. Therefore, meetings should be coordinated and facilitated to avoid having too many exchanges without making decisions. One way to do this is for facilitators to guide participants in writing proposals during the small-group meetings and then organise these proposals for discussion during the plenary sessions. We'll discuss this in more detail below, but first, let's look at different interaction types.

### **Ice Breaking activities**

Icebreakers are a good way to help participants get acquainted with one another and the local PL goals at the beginning of the meetings. They foster a safe environment where participants, especially those unfamiliar with policy discussions, can feel comfortable expressing themselves. The structure of these activities often includes personal storytelling and examples of



lived experience, which builds rapport and trust and makes the exchanges relatable. However, tailoring these activities to ensure they do not overshadow the need for deeper discussions and decision-making possibilities later in the process is also important.

During the **exploration** and **co-creation phases**, **ice-breaking activities are crucial in PL meeting(s)**, especially as **participants are still getting to know each other**. It is advisable to focus on **building trust, setting a tone of openness, and establishing a collaborative atmosphere**. Participants can introduce themselves using personal objects or images, for example, or share stories related to the policy challenge.

Participants are more familiar with each other when embarking on the design and experimentation phase meeting(s). Still, a brief icebreaker can help refresh relationships and set the stage for collaborative work. Use a quick, energising activity to reignite participant engagement. Facilitators can introduce a check-in round where participants share their most significant takeaway from the previous PL meeting to reconnect with the process or stimulate their imagination about possible ways to approach a policy challenge.

In the **final recommendation phase**, icebreakers should be short and focused on preparing participants for reflection and decision-making. In this phase, participants could be asked to share one thing they are looking forward to as they finalise recommendations.

Here's two icebreaker techniques proposed in the MUST-a-Lab project:

## PICTURE ME

**Objective:** This icebreaker fosters personal connections and builds trust as participants share meaningful pictures, creating an open, inclusive atmosphere and helping them feel comfortable before collaborative discussions.

**Timeframe:** 10-20 minutes

### **Instructions:**

1. **Introduction (5m):** Begin by explaining the purpose of the icebreaker and how sharing personal stories through pictures will help participants connect. Encourage participants to select or bring an image that represents something important to them—this could be related to their identity, interests, values, or experience. Explain that the aim is to learn more about each other in a relaxed and informal way.
2. **Select a picture (5m):** Ask participants to take a moment to choose or reflect on the image they brought or selected. If they need inspiration, suggest they consider an image representing a meaningful moment in their life or something reflecting their personality.
3. **Share pictures and stories (10m):** Invite each participant to present their image to the group and share its story or meaning. Encourage them to explain how it connects to who they are or what matters to them. Allow time for follow-up questions or comments to foster deeper connection and understanding.
4. **Reflect and discuss (5-10m):** After everyone has shared, facilitate a group discussion on the common themes that emerged from the pictures and stories. Ask participants how these shared experiences or insights might shape the collaborative work ahead.
5. **Wrap-up:** Conclude by emphasising the importance of building relationships and trust as a foundation for the PL meetings or any collaborative work. Acknowledge the diversity of experiences and how these perspectives can enrich the group's work.



## WHAT IF

**Objective:** This icebreaker stimulates imagination by encouraging participants to view the issue from new perspectives, breaking conventional thought patterns and fostering creativity—ideal as a warm-up before brainstorming

**Timeframe:** 10-20 minutes

### Instructions:

1. **Introduction** (5m): Start by introducing the challenge or policy issue. Explain the aim of looking at the problem from fresh, creative angles using "What if...?" questions. Provide context for why it's important to think beyond traditional solutions.
2. **What-if-questions** (5-10m): Ask participants to generate a list of creative "What if...?" questions related to the topic. These questions should encourage lateral thinking and push the boundaries of typical approaches.
3. **Generate answers to the questions** (10m): Ask participants to choose a few "What if...?" questions and create creative answers.
4. **Share ideas:** Have participants share their favourite questions and answers with the group. Encourage the group to expand on these ideas.
5. **Discuss feasible ideas:** Identify a few ideas that could be realistically explored and discuss how they might be adapted.

## Small group workshops: fostering in-depth collaboration

Small-group workshops (with 4-5 participants) are essential for the success of PL meetings and are often seen as the core component of the PL process. These workshops enable focused sharing of experiences and discussions, idea development, and collaborative work among participants. From the co-creation phase onwards, they may evolve from exploratory conversations into practical sessions where participants begin developing solutions and creating piloting activities. When breaking into small groups during PL meetings, some elements need to be considered. It is advisable to:

- Ensure the **composition of small groups is representative**, with a balanced mix of participants, in particular between members of the migrant community and non-migrants;
- Provide **well-defined objectives and goals** for each workshop;
- Develop clear **guidelines for participants to structure the information** gathered during small-group work and present it in written form, allowing facilitators to organise and summarise the proposals for brief plenary discussions;
- Make groups aware of the fact that all participants can function as **spokespersons** that report back to the plenaries, but foresee time to discuss what less experienced participants need to feel confident to take up that role;
- Whenever possible, **involve trained facilitators** in small-group workshops to ensure all voices, especially those with less policy experience, such as members of the migrant community, are equally heard.



- Consider using **non-facilitated small-group workshops only in the later phases** of the PL cycle when participants have gained more experience and confidence. Ensure clear objectives to guide these sessions.

In the **exploration phase**, small-group workshops during the meetings subsequently allow participants, especially members of the migrant community, to share personal experiences, delve deeper into specific issues and **gather diverse perspectives**. Participants can break into small groups to share narratives and mutual knowledge.

During the **co-creation phase**, the discussion becomes multilateral and more targeted. Participants can start brainstorming and discuss **specific ideas and preliminary actions related to the main policy challenges**. In both phases, each group can then present their findings to the larger plenary, ensuring that all perspectives are considered and that everyone understands the broad range of identified issues. Small groups are central in the **design and experimentation phase**, enabling participants to design piloting experiments effectively. Facilitators should ensure that every voice is heard and guide the group to co-create practical and feasible solutions and final pilots. During this phase, small groups can work together to develop and discuss the practicalities of implementing pilots, such as required resources and potential barriers, ensuring that the piloting activities are both innovative and achievable.

In the **recommendation phase**, small-group workshops are key for reflecting on the outcomes of the piloting activities, refining proposed solutions, and drafting policy recommendations. These discussions allow participants to provide detailed feedback and explore lessons learned. These insights can then be used to draft recommendations shared with the larger group to ensure all participants contribute to the conclusions. An alternative to the small-group discussions in the final PL meeting(s) is the 'World Café' approach. Participants rotate the small groups to give feedback and elaborate on each proposal.

**Overall tip:** Small-group workshops are ideally led by trained facilitators who can balance participation, ensure clarity on complex points, and create an inclusive space for all voices. We will elaborate on this in section E on facilitation below. Organisationally, allocating sufficient time for these workshops and adjusting group composition to achieve a balanced mix of participants is important.





In Livadia's Policy Lab, **brainwriting** replaced traditional brainstorming in the co-creation phase, allowing participants to write ideas anonymously, creating a comfortable, equal environment that encouraged everyone, especially reserved participants, to contribute freely. This approach minimised hierarchy and group dynamics by focusing on idea quality over its source, fostering creativity and diverse perspectives. Participants could review and build on each other's ideas, resulting in a well-rounded set of proposals for group selection. Brainwriting is ideal for inclusive, thoughtful input without verbal pressure, though it requires adequate writing skills and skilled facilitation to maintain focus.

The technique can be used with the following instructions:

**Objective:** To anonymously gather diverse and thoughtful ideas from all participants on a specific policy issue, ensuring equal participation and minimising group dynamics.

**Timeframe:** Approximately 30-50 minutes

**Instructions:**

1. **Preparation** (5m): Provide worksheets or blank sheets with clear, specific questions related to the topic (e.g., 'What challenges did you face during your last visit to a public health facility? What would improve your experience?'). Ensure all responses remain anonymous to promote openness.
2. **Group organisation** (5m): Divide participants into small groups of 5-6 members and distribute the worksheets.
3. **Writing phase** (10-15m): Ask participants to silently write their thoughts and experiences in response to the questions.
4. **Review and second writing phase** (10-15m): Have participants exchange their worksheets with another group member. Each participant reads the new ideas and adds their own thoughts or builds upon them.
5. **Conclusion** (10m): Collect the worksheets for analysis and summarise key emerging themes and proposals. You can opt to select final ideas as a group or discuss the analysis results in the plenary group and assign decision-making to the larger group of PL participants.

This method ensures equal participation, fosters creativity, and encourages more diverse and balanced input.

## Plenary sessions collective reflection and decision-making

Plenary sessions are crucial in more general exchanges and discussions, summarising group work, debating ideas, and making collective decisions. These collective exchanges are essential for sharing narratives, reinforcing goals, and fostering inclusive dialogue among participants. However, challenges such as unequal speaking time and language barriers often arise, particularly in larger groups that are composed of different types of participants. The following section (E) will look at more technical facilitative actions that can help guide the exchanges. For now, when preparing plenary sessions, it is advisable to:

- **involve trained facilitators** to ensure all voices, especially those with less policy experience, such as members of the migrant community, are equally heard;
- pay attention to language use and adopt **inclusive language** as much as possible, avoiding technical jargon;



- foresee **sufficient time** for participants from different categories to **meaningfully react to each other's experiences** and reflections (creating interlaced narratives);
- foresee **adequate time for facilitators** to structure written summaries from the small-group workshops and should feed into the plenary discussions.
- **coordinate spokespersons** when they report back on ideas and decisions developed in the small-group workshops so that all reports are compared and elaborated.

In the **exploration phase**, plenary sessions should focus on getting acquainted, establishing rules of engagement, creating a shared understanding of the policy challenge and sharing personal and preferably interlaced narratives.

In the **co-construction phase**, plenaries should focus on collective brainstorming and ensure that all participants have the opportunity to contribute. The plenaries of PL1 are essential for sharing personal experiences and mutual knowledge. After completing small-group discussions, participants can reconvene in a plenary session to present their ideas and preliminary solutions about the policy challenge to the whole group. A facilitator then synthesises the various inputs, helping to create a cohesive overview of the different perspectives and setting the stage for further deliberation.

In the **design and experimentation phase**, plenary sessions can be used to present and discuss the piloting activities developed in small groups. These sessions allow the larger group to provide feedback, suggest adjustments, and identify any potential challenges to implementation before testing. This collaborative exchange helps improve the quality and feasibility of the piloting activities.

Plenary sessions are critical for drafting policy recommendations in the **recommendation phase**. After discussing the experiments in small-group exchanges and drafting ideas for recommendations, feedback from the group is consolidated into final recommendations, ensuring that the conclusions reflect the collective experience. As previously mentioned, the “World Café” can be an effective alternative for drafting recommendations. However, a final plenary session is still recommended to ensure a shared understanding and consensus.

**Overall recommendation:** Plenary sessions should be structured to ensure equal participation from all members. Clear facilitation techniques are essential. In the next section, we will return to those in more detail. Overall, plenary sessions should unite all participants in sharing experiences and making decisions. Visual aids or summarising tools can help maintain clarity and prevent confusion. This approach will ensure that all participants stay engaged and that the session's purpose is achieved.



In **Modena**, the "**agreement ball**" technique was used for priority-setting during plenary sessions. It enabled all participants to share opinions briefly and equitably. The technique avoided redundant discussion by focusing on majority-supported priorities and fostered shared ownership, creating a structured and inclusive process with clear outcomes.

**Objective:** This technique determines the most critical problems or issues the group considers. It is particularly useful when multiple priorities need to be evaluated without lengthy discussions, ensuring that the group reaches a consensus in a timely and democratic manner.

**Timeframe:** approximately 30 minutes

**Instructions:**

1. Preparation (5m): Present a list of issues for prioritisation (e.g., concerns from a previous session).
2. Choosing priorities (5m): Participants select their top two issues.
3. Passing the ball (10-20m): The facilitator tosses a ball to each participant, who briefly shares their two priorities without repeating points.
4. Marking choices (10m): The facilitator tracks each choice on a board, using crosses to show group preferences.
5. Process continuation: The ball passes until all participants have shared
6. Result: The facilitator reviews top-marked issues as the group's priorities for future focus.

## Checkouts

Checkout sessions provide a structured way to close each PL meeting, allowing participants to reflect on their contributions and the meeting's outcomes. These moments help participants consolidate their understanding of the discussions and clarify any remaining questions. Most participants view checkouts as a valuable tool for enhancing group connection and promoting equitable participation. However, some may find that, over time, these moments can feel forced or less effective.

In the **exploration and the co-creation phase**, concluding the meeting(s) with a checkout where participants share their thoughts or feelings about the day's discussions is essential. This allows facilitators to assess engagement and enables participants to reflect on their learning. Each participant can briefly share one key takeaway or insight from the meeting during a circle exercise, for instance, providing closure and reinforcing the day's discussions.

In the **design and experimentation phase**, checkouts can focus on what participants look forward to as they move into the experimentation phase. This ensures that participants leave the meeting(s) feeling motivated and excited about the next steps. Participants can take turns sharing which pilot they are most excited about and why, creating a sense of anticipation and commitment to the work ahead.

In the **recommendation phase**, the final checkout allows participants to reflect on the entire process and share their hopes for how the recommendations will influence policy. This provides closure and emphasises the iterative, ongoing nature of the PL cycle. Participants could offer reflections on the overall PL process and discuss what they see as the recommendations'





next steps, helping reinforce the significance of their collective efforts and opening up the space for future iterations.

**General recommendation:** Checkout sessions should give each participant a final opportunity to voice their thoughts briefly and reflect on the meeting. However, it is important not to make these moments feel overly long or structured, allowing for more natural and organic exchanges.

Municipalities and cities embarking on PL cycles can create a dynamic, inclusive, and productive environment by incorporating these structured elements—icebreakers, small-group discussions, plenary sessions, and checkouts—in an equitable manner. The emphasis should always be on balancing equal participation, personal expressions, and meaningful policy deliberation and decision-making to achieve the desired outcomes.

When developing the meeting’s specific outlay and mix of interactions, the following elements are useful to consider:

- **Meeting schedule:** A clear schedule should be developed for each meeting, outlining the objectives for each segment and the techniques that will be used. For clarity reasons, it is advisable to visualise the schedule and make it available for all participants during the meetings.
- **Meeting length:** The length of each meeting and its composing sessions and workshops should be determined based on the complexity of the topics to be discussed and, above all, by the availability of participants. Typically, meetings may last about six to eight hours, except when they are split into several parts to accommodate participant engagement.
- **Time management:** Time management should be flexible enough to adapt to the circumstances. Facilitators should be trained in techniques for managing discussions, keeping the group focused, and ensuring that all participants have an opportunity to contribute.
- **Breaks and refreshments:** Scheduled breaks are important for maintaining energy levels and allowing participants to recharge. Breaks, refreshments and lunches also provide opportunities for participants to meet informally. This is a great way to stimulate exchanges based on lived experience, improve participant bonds, inspire narratives' co-construction and interlacement, and contribute to decision-making. However, efforts should be made to respect the timings since breaks tend to be overexpanded.
- **Feedback mechanisms:** At the end of each meeting, participants should be given some time to provide feedback on the process and the outcomes. This feedback is valuable for refining the approach in subsequent meetings and ensuring that the PL remains responsive to participants' needs.

We add **exemplary day schedules** for different PL meetings over the PL cycle phases on the following pages. As mentioned before, each phase may consist of more PL meetings. The schedules below do not indicate the required length or number of meetings to achieve the goals of each phase, as these are highly dependent on contextual local factors and the policy challenge under investigation.



### Exemplary 1-day schedule for the exploration phase

<p>Meetings in the exploration phase may consist of half a day to 1 or more days. This exemplary PL meeting is based on schedules from the MUST-a-Lab consortium, is envisioned as a 1-day schedule and aims to bring together participants from various sectors (migrant communities, policymakers, civil society, etc.) and establish a common understanding of the PL's objectives. The focus will be on fostering group cohesion, identifying the policy challenge, understanding diverse perspectives on participation related to that challenge and identifying preliminary barriers and opportunities for action.</p>		
Time	Activity	Steps
09:00 - 09:15	Welcome & introduction (plenary)	Brief introduction of facilitators and participants. Explanation of the day's agenda and objectives.
09:15 - 10:00	Getting acquainted with icebreaker activity (plenary)	Use the 'Picture me' technique to introduce yourself and share meaningful images to understand participants' motivations for attending.
10:00 - 11:00	Session 1: 'Rules of engagement' and discussing the policy challenge (plenary)	Establish ground rules orally or using a group cohesion technique. Briefly explore the challenge and its implications for social and community participation.
<b>11:00 - 11:15</b>	<b>Break</b>	<b>Coffee/Tea break</b>
11:15 - 12:00	Session 2: exploring the policy challenge, sharing views (small-group workshop through structured questions or technique)	Participants form small groups (4-5) to explore the policy challenge and exchange views through structured questions. The 'Persona technique' allows for perspective-taking or role-playing to highlight different views.
12:00 - 13:00	Session 3: explore and brainstorm social participation barriers related to the challenge (e.g., small-group workshop through structured questions, specific technique)	Participants work in the same groups Further exploration focusing on barriers and opportunities for participation related to the policy challenge through structured questions, for example, by using the 'Participation thermometer.'
<b>13:00 - 14:00</b>	<b>Lunch Break</b>	<b>Time to have lunch and engage informally.</b>
14:00 - 15:30	Session 4: ranking barriers and brainstorm on first ideas (small-group workshop)	Divide into small groups (4-5 participants) and rank barriers to participation based on impact and feasibility. Explore opportunities and brainstorm ideas to promote engagement.
<b>15:30 - 15:45</b>	<b>Break</b>	<b>Coffee/Tea break.</b>
15:45 - 16:30	Session 5: sharing ideas (plenary)	Groups present to discuss ideas and check experiences collectively.
16:30 - 17:00	Closing & next steps (plenary plus checkout)	Summary key insights from the session Discuss the next steps for PL sessions and look forward to creating ideas for actions in the next session.
<b>17:00</b>	<b>End of day</b>	<b>Final networking and departure.</b>



### Exemplary 1-day schedule for the co-creation phase

Meetings in the co-creation phase may consist of half a day, to 1 or more days. This exemplary PL meeting is based on schedules from the MUST-a-lab consortium, is envisioned as a 1-day schedule and aims to bring together participants from various sectors (migrant communities, policymakers, civil society, etc.) and establish a common understanding of the PL's objectives. The focus will be on further discussing policy challenges and co-creating preliminary ideas for the design and experimentation phase.		
Time	Activity	Steps
09:00 - 09:15	Welcome (plenary)	Brief introduction of possible newcomers Explanation of the day's agenda and objectives.
09:15 - 10:00	Getting acquainted with icebreaker activity (plenary)	Use the 'Two truths and one lie' technique to (re)connect and understand each other's perspectives. Consider letting newcomers briefly explain their motivation.
10:00 - 11:00	Session 1: revisiting the policy challenge and experiences shared during the exploration phase (plenary)	Use the 'Fishbowl discussion', where an inner circle discusses experiences and reflections on the policy challenge. Other participants observe and rotate to add perspectives. Capture main points to refine the policy challenge based on shared insights.
<b>11:00 - 11:15</b>	<b>Break</b>	<b>Coffee/Tea break</b>
11:15 - 12:00	Session 2: (small-group workshop through structured questions or using a specific technique)	Divide participants into small groups (4-5) and use structured questions or brainstorming techniques to outline possible actions for addressing the policy challenge.
12:00 - 13:00	Session 3: (small-group workshop using structured questions or a specific technique)	Participants work in the same groups and create a written summary for the facilitator.
<b>13:00 - 14:00</b>	<b>Lunch Break</b>	<b>Time to have lunch and engage informally.</b>
14:00 - 15:30	Session 4: sharing and discussing ideas to tackle the policy challenge (plenary)	Groups present their ideas and actions. The facilitator provides structures based on written reports. The group discusses ideas and shares experiences.
<b>15:30 - 15:45</b>	<b>Break</b>	<b>Coffee/Tea break.</b>
15:45 - 16:30	Session 5: sharing ideas (plenary)	Groups present their top ideas. Possible decision-making technique: 'Dot Voting', where participants vote for their preferred ideas/actions. Highlight popular ideas and discuss why certain actions resonate.
16:30 - 17:00	Closing & next steps (plenary plus checkout)	Summary of key insights from the session Discuss next steps for PL sessions and look forward to pilot ideas in the next PL
<b>17:00</b>	<b>End of day</b>	<b>Final networking and departure.</b>

## Exemplary 2-day schedule for the design and experimentation phase

The design and experimentation phase may consist of 1 or more days. This exemplary PL meeting is based on schedules from the MUST-a-lab consortium, is envisioned as a 2-day schedule and aims to expand on the discussions from the co-creation phase, brainstorm new ideas, refine possible actions, and focus on the detailed development of piloting activities. Participants will explore creative solutions to key challenges and establish a solid foundation for actionable pilots. During the second day, participants will evaluate and select the actions to be implemented as part of the experimentation, build on the discussions from the first day and refine concrete solutions to the identified challenges. This meeting will focus on enhancing participation, testing innovative ideas, and refining the scope of future actions.

### Day 1: Generating ideas

Time	Activity	Steps
09:00 - 09:30	Welcome and recap of previous PL meeting(s) (plenary)	Recap of previous PL meetings. Summarise key barriers and opportunities for the policy challenge identified in previous phases. Summarise preliminary action ideas.
09:30 - 10:00	Creative thinking about participation related to the policy challenge (icebreaking plenary)	Icebreaker activity to get participants thinking creatively. Participants share a bold idea related to participation concerning the preliminary actions (e.g. the 'What-if' technique)
10:00 - 11:15	Session 1: framing the experimental pilots (plenary)	Define successful pilots' achievements. Discuss broad goals, criteria, and focus areas for pilots. Brainstorm success for each idea using 'Success criteria mapping'. Finalise pilot actions.
<b>11:15 - 11:30</b>	<b>Break</b>	<b>Coffee/Tea break.</b>
11:30 - 12:30	Session 2: brainstorming on concretising ideas (small group workshop)	Break into small groups (4-5 participants) Each group brainstorms possible concrete pilots to the selected preliminary actions (e.g. 'Reverse brainstorming' technique)
<b>12:30 - 13:30</b>	<b>Lunch break</b>	<b>Time to eat and engage informally.</b>
13:30 - 15:00	Session 2: sharing ideas & feedback (plenary)	Groups present ideas through a spokesperson. The facilitator collects ideas, structures feedback and guides the process. An alternative technique is the 'feedback carousel', where groups rotate to provide feedback on others' ideas, offering suggestions for improvement.
<b>15:00 - 15:15</b>	<b>Break</b>	<b>Coffee/Tea break.</b>
15:15 - 16:15	Session 3: Preliminary development of ideas for experiments (small group workshop)	Divide into small groups (4-5). Each group creates a quick 'Prototype' of their pilot using simple materials (e.g., sticky notes, drawings) to visualize the process.
16:15 - 17:00	Closing & wrap-up (plenary and check-out)	Summary of ideas. Discuss promising ideas for further development on day 2.
<b>17:00</b>	<b>End of day 1</b>	<b>Final networking and departure.</b>



<b>Day 2: Action planning and pilot design</b>		
<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Steps</b>
09:00 - 09:15	Welcome & recap of day 1 (plenary)	Recap of day 1's activities. Overview of selected ideas for piloting activities.
09:15 - 10:30	Session 4: Action plan development (small group workshop)	Break into small groups (4-5 participants) Develop detailed action plans for each selected pilot (objectives, timeline, resources)
<b>10:30 - 10:45</b>	<b>Break</b>	<b>Coffee/Tea break.</b>
10:45 - 12:30	Session 5: Testing feasibility (small group workshop)	Groups evaluate the feasibility of their action plans (impact, resources, challenges, etc.) and make any necessary adjustments. (e.g. force field analysis)
<b>12:30 - 13:30</b>	<b>Lunch break</b>	<b>Time to eat and engage informally.</b>
13:30 - 15:00	Session 6: Refining pilot projects (small group workshop)	Final refinement of the action plans, ensuring all details are in place for implementation. (e.g. use SMART-goals to redefine)
<b>15:00 - 15:15</b>	<b>Break</b>	<b>Coffee/tea break.</b>
15:15 - 16:15	Session 7: Present action plans (plenary)	Groups present their finalised action plans and pilot projects. The group provides feedback and discusses any remaining issues. Feedback is organised using a 'Feedback Matrix' with categories for positives, areas for improvement, questions, and suggestions, allowing structured and constructive feedback.
16:15 - 16:45	Closing & next steps (plenary and check-out)	Discuss the next steps for implementing the piloting activities. Define roles and responsibilities for participants. Check-out e.g. 'Roses and thorns'
<b>16:45 - 17:00</b>	<b>Wrap-up &amp; departure</b>	<b>Final thoughts and departure.</b>



### Exemplary 1-day schedule for the recommendation phase

The meetings in the recommendation phase may last one or more days. This exemplary 1-day PL meeting is based on schedules from the MUST-a-lab consortium. This meeting aims to evaluate the pilots, create policy recommendations based on the outcomes, and discuss the next steps for implementation.		
Time	Activity	Steps
09:00 - 09:15	Welcome & introduction with a possible recap on previous PL meetings and pilots (plenary)	Recap of previous PL meetings and key goals for this meeting.
09:15 - 10:15	Reconnecting and review of the pilot projects and the results (icebreaker and plenary)	Icebreaker check-in (e.g. 'Mood barometer') Every project group presents the status quo of the pilot project and the results.
<b>10:15 - 10:30</b>	<b>Break</b>	<b>Coffee/Tea break.</b>
10:30 - 12:30	'World Café' session in rotating small groups	Each group discusses the pilots and brainstorms policy recommendations based on the results. The groups rotate so every pilot project receives different feedback. This provides diverse perspectives.
<b>12:30 - 13:30</b>	<b>Lunch break</b>	<b>Time to eat and engage informally.</b>
13:30 - 15:30	Review of the World Café results (plenary)	Groups share their recommendations from the World Café discussions and refine policy recommendations. The facilitator maps out key themes and recommendations visually, helping participants see commonalities and refine recommendations collectively. (e.g. 'Synthesis mapping')
<b>15:30 - 15:45</b>	<b>Break</b>	<b>Coffee/tea break.</b>
15:45 - 16:45	Closing session (plenary)	Reflect on the outcomes of the session and the PL process. Optionally: define the next steps for future meetings and actions to embed the pilot projects Use the technique 'Futures Wheel' to envision the potential impacts of the recommendations and outline next steps for implementation, including future meeting options or follow-up actions.
<b>16:45 - 17:00</b>	<b>Wrap-up &amp; departure</b>	<b>Final thoughts and departure.</b>



The **World Café** technique, used in cities like Modena and Vienna, is a structured process with rotating small-group discussions to facilitate dialogue, idea-sharing, and collaborative thinking

**Objective:** To foster collaboration, explore diverse ideas, develop solutions, and build collective understanding.

**Timeframe and group composition:** Conduct at least four rounds of small-group discussions, each lasting 5-20 minutes, with alternating group compositions to enhance diversity and enrich discussions.

#### **Instructions:**

1. **Group composition:** Participants are divided into small groups (preferably 4-5 people), and after two rounds, groups should be reshuffled.
2. **Topic selection:** Discussions can start with general topics and move towards more specific themes related to the workshop's goals. Topics could be autonomous or aligned with the future objectives of the labs.
3. **Facilitation:** Each group works with a facilitator who provides support through questioning and guidance. Facilitators ensure the intertwining of narratives between groups by using post-it notes or similar tools for organising ideas. It is important for the facilitator to keep a non-interventionist role during discussions.
4. **Plenary sessions:** The process typically includes plenary sessions, where all participants come together. These sessions are used for introductions, icebreakers, and summaries, making up 30-50% of the overall time. Group spokespersons may present the outcomes of their discussions during these sessions.

## **Visualisation**

When planning the PL meetings, it is advisable to foresee enough time to think about visualisation opportunities. PLs inherently bring together a mix of types of participants. When organising PLs about integration, chances are that some participants are multilingual. Visualising the timeline and the day schedules and using visual prompts for brainstorming activities can help to create an environment where everyone is informed. Many of the techniques that are listed as examples have a highly visual component. If children are involved the benefits of visualisation might even be higher.



The values-based brainstorming technique, used in Mechelen with children, involved participants completing prompts like "A warm school is one where..." individually on post-its. They then worked in small groups, discussing these responses to identify core values like equality and inclusiveness and generating practical examples, such as encouraging quiet students to participate. This approach combined individual reflection collaboration, allowing participants to explore values and translate them into actions. The structured format ensured everyone contributed while drawing helped make discussions more tangible for children.



## Decision-making

A final key objective of the PL-cycle organisation is to ensure **equitable decision-making**. While designing the PL cycle, the decision-making process should be anticipated and organised with the organisational team, creating a common vision of how decisions will be made during the PL process. There are a variety of ways to make decisions democratically, such as consensus decision-making, majority decision-making, and delegated decision-making. Cities and municipalities can take into account the following key points:

- **Allow decision-making to evolve over time:** Understand that decision-making in PL meetings will shift throughout the process. Early phases should focus on inclusive and collaborative decision-making, ensuring equal participation from all participants. As





projects move toward implementation, make efforts to prevent decision-making from becoming concentrated in the hands of a few individuals or small groups. Ensure that the transition in responsibility is transparent and inclusive to avoid excluding important voices.

- **Prioritise inclusivity throughout the process:** Inclusive decision-making requires intentional planning. Organising teams must consistently engage more marginalised groups, such as members of the migrant community or younger participants, throughout the PL cycle. This includes overcoming challenges such as high turnover by ensuring continuous involvement and addressing language barriers to foster meaningful participation in decision-making processes.
- **Address barriers to full participation:** Identify and mitigate barriers to participation early in the process. These barriers may include time constraints, unclear roles, and language challenges. Ensure that participants understand their roles and responsibilities within the decision-making framework and provide resources such as qualitative translation services or language facilitation when necessary to enable equal participation.
- **Use consensus-building and voting methods wisely:** Employ decision-making methods such as consensus-building and majority voting to formalise the process. However, recognise that more than these methods alone may not be needed to address issues of unequal participation. Ensure that discussions leading to decisions are inclusive and that all voices, particularly those of less experienced participants, are given sufficient space to contribute.
- **Provide adequate time and structure:** Decision-making requires sufficient time for reflection and discussion. Avoid rushing the process and ensure that meetings and workshops are structured with clear roles and goals. The more familiar participants become with the decision-making process, the more they can contribute effectively, particularly as they acquire stronger debating and listening skills.
- **Promote sustainability and long-term engagement:** Encourage long-term engagement from all participants, even after the immediate PL meetings are completed. Sustainable decision-making processes require ongoing involvement, especially in the implementation phase, to ensure that outcomes reflect the needs and contributions of all participants, including those from more marginalised communities. Consider follow-up mechanisms and continued collaboration to keep the momentum going.



In **Livadia**, decision-making was initially viewed as the domain of policymakers, leading migrant participants to hesitate in voicing their preferences. The facilitator worked to clarify the decision-making process and create a supportive environment, which gradually encouraged migrants to contribute meaningfully.

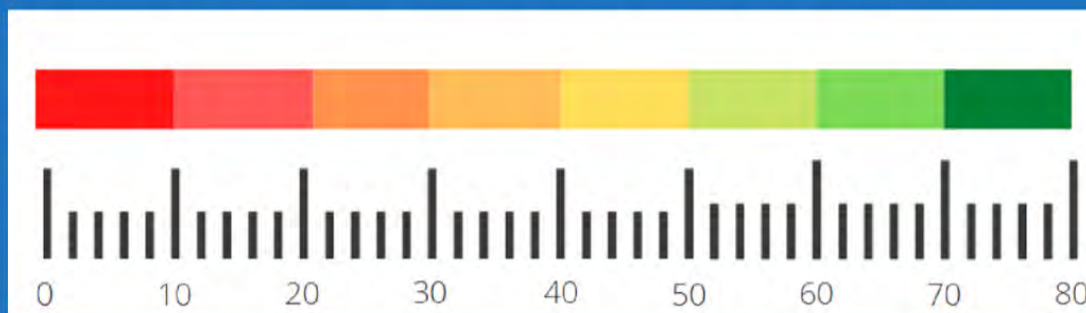
In Fuenlabrada, the "Temperature technique" was used during PL meetings. This visual tool allowed participants to place their perspectives on a metaphorical "temperature scale".

**Objective:** The temperature technique fosters open dialogue and mutual understanding among participants by visualising and discussing differing levels of agreement on a policy issue, ultimately working toward informed decision-making.

**Timeframe:** 60-120 minutes

**Instructions:**

1. **Preparation** (10m): Define the policy issue and set up a visual "temperature scale" (e.g., 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree') in the room.
2. **Introduction** (5m): Present the issue, explaining that participants will position themselves along the scale based on their stance.
3. **Positioning** (20m): Participants place themselves on the scale and briefly explain their stance.
4. **Group Discussion** (30-40m): Facilitate a respectful discussion to explore differing perspectives.
5. **Position Adjustment** (5m): Allow participants to adjust their position if their views shift.
6. **Reflection** (30m): Identify key points of agreement, disagreement, and possible compromises.
7. **Conclusion** (5m): Summarise discussion outcomes and decide on next steps



## Summary and reflections for your city

Each PL meeting should be purposefully structured to align with specific goals, using varied interactions to support meaningful, inclusive exchanges that encourage both personal sharing and collaborative decision-making. A clear, visual schedule with diverse activities—icebreakers, plenaries, small groups—and space for informal interactions, plus a structured rotation and set goals for each exchange, enhance engagement.

If you consider using the PL method in your city or municipality, you and/or the facilitation team can consider the following questions about organising the meetings:

1. **How will we structure meetings to make participants, especially those unfamiliar with policy discussions, comfortable sharing experiences and engaging?**



2. **What steps and techniques will ensure decision-making is equitable and amplify migrant perspectives?**
3. **How can we balance personal stories with solution-focused discussions?**
4. **Which visual tools (timelines, diagrams) will support participants, particularly those with language barriers in comprehension and participation?**
5. **How will we organise and clarify decision-making to ensure transparency and inclusivity, reflective of the diverse perspectives shared during the PL?**



## E. Facilitation

Facilitation is one of the core elements of the PL process, playing a fundamental role in creating an environment that promotes inclusive participation, equitable contributions, and collaborative decision-making. These guidelines have already emphasised that facilitators serve as guides and ensure that group dynamics are balanced and that all voices—especially those from less experienced and more marginalised groups—are heard and respected. Their actions directly influence the quality and outcomes of the PL meetings. It is recommended that this section of the guidelines is taken up with the facilitators of the PL sessions themselves.

The video recording of PL meetings in two cities of the MUST-a-lab project shows the key facilitative actions and the non-facilitative actions. The following lists of actions, therefore, are the result of field research rather than abstract and normative suggestions. Accurate monitoring of the PL meetings is important to understand if these or other actions are effectively or ineffectively employed.

### Key facilitative actions to encourage participation:

1. **Invitations to speak:** Facilitators should actively invite participants to share their thoughts, encouraging them to present, expand upon, or add new ideas. This is especially important for quieter (less experienced) participants who may hesitate to speak without prompting.
2. **Focused and open-ended questions:** Asking open-ended questions that guide the discussion without leading participants in a particular direction fosters a more inclusive dialogue. These questions allow participants to explore their thoughts freely and contribute meaningfully to the conversation.
3. **Minimal responses:** Facilitators can maintain the flow of the discussion by offering minimal verbal and paraverbal responses (e.g., "I see," "okay," "mh mh," etc.) or repeating keywords or phrases from participants. This helps keep participants engaged without imposing the facilitator's views.
4. **Summarising, making explicit or developing contributions:** Formulating the gist of participants' contributions helps ensure that the group understands and acknowledges key points. This can also serve to validate quieter participants' input.
5. **Acknowledgment and thanks:** Simple expressions of appreciation for participants' contributions, such as thanking them for their input, help foster a positive, inclusive atmosphere where participants feel valued.

### Non-facilitative actions to avoid:

1. **Personal comments and suggestions:** Facilitators should refrain from offering their own comments or suggestions, as this can influence the direction of the discussion and limit participants' agency.



2. **Failure to manage interruptions and conflicts:** Not addressing interruptions or allowing conflicts to escalate can disrupt the flow of conversation and diminish the quality of participation, particularly for less vocal participants.

Facilitation should not be a one-size-fits-all approach but must be contextualised based on the group's goal, composition and needs. However, some responsibilities are fundamental when applying the list of facilitative actions above and working in the context of a PL about migration and integration.

## 1. Creating a safe group dynamic, encouraging agency and equitable relations

One of the most important responsibilities of facilitators is to create a **safe and trustworthy group dynamic**. This involves creating an environment where all voices are equally respected and valued.

Facilitators ensure that participants can exercise **agency**, meaning they have the opportunity to contribute to discussions and decisions and shape outcomes. Agency is critical for creating a sense of ownership and empowerment among participants, particularly those with less experience in participation and debate. Facilitators actively promote equitable participation by inviting quieter participants to speak, ensuring that all voices, including those of less experienced groups, such as migrant or grassroots representatives, are heard.

Facilitators can help build trust by maintaining a respectful and open dialogue, encouraging participants to express their views without fear of interruption or being overshadowed by more experienced stakeholders or public officials.





## 2. Guiding speaking turns and managing group dynamics

Facilitators are responsible for **managing the sequence of turns** to balance participation and prevent dominant voices from overshadowing others. By actively managing the sequence of turns, facilitators encourage diverse perspectives to surface in the discussion and prevent more experienced and dominant stakeholders from upgrading their epistemic authority at the expense of less experienced voices.

Tailoring facilitation to group needs is vital here. For instance, pairing specific facilitators in small groups with specific categories of participants, such as children- or youth, can build trust and encourage participation. However, facilitators must be mindful not to dominate conversations or unintentionally reinforce power imbalances. This requires facilitators to be acutely aware of their actions and roles.

## 3. Clarifying goals and roles

Effective facilitation involves **clarifying the goals** of the PL meetings. Facilitators help participants understand the purpose of the discussions and how their contributions will shape the outcomes. To maintain clarity and ensure participants understand their roles, facilitators must **organise a balanced collaboration between PL organisers** and other roles, such as policymakers or administrators, by clearly differentiating tasks and clarifying the roles of all involved.

## 4. Addressing language barriers

**Addressing language barriers** is a crucial responsibility for facilitators in diverse settings. Language plays a significant role in shaping participation, and facilitators must ensure that non-native speakers or participants with limited language proficiency are not excluded. This can be done by slowing down conversations, repeating key points, rephrasing technical jargon, and offering real-time translations where necessary.



In **Modena**, the facilitator tailored her approach by adapting to the varying levels of participation. During the small-group discussions, some participants struggled to contribute, especially those with limited Italian language skills. The facilitator employed direct questions to create space for these participants, ensuring they could share their thoughts without feeling overwhelmed. By fostering an atmosphere of trust and patience, the facilitator helped participants feel more comfortable in contributing to discussions. Over time, even participants who were initially hesitant became active contributors, demonstrating how the facilitator's approach evolved based on group dynamics.

In **Grenoble Alpes Métropole**, facilitators encouraged participants to share their thoughts in their native language. At the same time, interpreters provided real-time translations, ensuring that all voices were heard and understood, regardless of language proficiency. This approach promoted more engagement from migrant participants and helped them feel more comfortable expressing their ideas.

In **Fuenlabrada**, facilitators addressed language barriers in key ways to ensure inclusivity during the meetings. One primary strategy involved simplifying technical jargon that was initially used by some stakeholders, which had caused confusion among younger participants. Facilitators worked actively to reformulate complex terms into more accessible language. For example, they guided younger participants in understanding and expressing their thoughts by providing simpler explanations when needed. According to the young participants, this approach reduced the hesitations they experienced in participating and helped them feel more comfortable contributing to discussions.

Addressing language barriers may also require visual tools such as graphic elements and vignettes, which can be especially helpful for participants with limited language skills. Visual aids enhance comprehension, helping participants remain motivated and engaged throughout the process (*see table below*).

## 5. Supporting the production of narratives

Facilitators play a significant role in ensuring the **equitable production of narratives** within discussions. This responsibility includes **facilitating the integration of personal expressions and proposals**, especially in the early meeting(s) and balancing the proportion of narratives and decisions later on (from the co-construction phase onwards). Migrant participants, in particular, may feel more comfortable sharing personal experiences, which should be acknowledged as valuable contributions to the discussion to ensure policies are based on lived experience and tie in with actual needs. However, continual overemphasis on narratives risks not surpassing individual stories and could hinder progress toward other objectives, such as developing concrete solutions and recommendations. Facilitators can help bridge these personal narratives with other participants' proposals, promoting meaningful participation that is both reflective and pilot oriented.

In many cases, more collective narratives, during which participants react to each other's stories by adding personal experiences, remain within participant categories, such as migrant



representatives or stakeholders. However, facilitating **cross-group interlacement of stories** can lead to more collaborative dialogue.

To further support equitable relations, during plenaries and small-group workshops, facilitators can encourage the **self-organisation of dialogic collaboration** between stakeholders, public officials, and migrant participants, allowing narratives from all sides to interlace naturally. This means offering minimal intervention, allowing discussions to evolve organically while paying attention to fostering collaboration as a group achievement.

## 6. Supporting decision-making

In the previous section, decision-making was already dealt with from an organisational lens. However, **equitable decision-making within PL meetings is also** a final key objective of facilitation. Weak or absent facilitation can lead to decisions being dominated by those with more expertise, undermining the inclusivity of the process. The list of facilitative actions on page 43 can be useful for constructing an inclusive process. Thus, skilled facilitation is key to maintaining balance in decision-making. Facilitators should actively promote equitable conversational space, preventing more experienced or authoritative participants from dominating discussions. By supporting all voices, especially those of underrepresented groups, facilitators can ensure that the decision-making process reflects the participants' diversity.

In the MUST-a-lab project, sharing personal stories or generally taking the floor, especially by representatives of the migrant community, was sometimes challenging. We present some of the cases that arose and how the cities overcome these challenges:

In Mechelen, the representatives of the migrant community, especially the children, sometimes struggled to share stories or generally speak up during sessions because educational (adult) professionals were in the majority. This imbalance led to the participants with a migrant background feeling overshadowed by the more authoritative voices of teachers and public officials. To address this, the facilitators introduced additional methods, such as visual brainstorming techniques and word mapping, which allowed migrants to contribute without needing to dominate the verbal discussions. The project leader, herself of migrant descent, took extra care to facilitate these techniques and ensure a balance in participation. This was done by asking silent participants with a migrant background to contribute or explicitly asking for their perspectives.





During the initial PL meetings in Modena, many young migrants found it difficult to express their needs concerning employment and volunteer opportunities due to the dominance of well-established civil society organisations and labour unions. Migrant participants, particularly those in precarious job situations, felt less empowered to discuss their challenges. After the first meeting, the facilitators were able to involve the migrants more intensively, thanks to direct questions, and collaboration between migrants and non-migrants also improved, especially in the working groups where some non-migrants made sure that the linguistically weaker participants could express themselves.

In Grenoble Alpes Métropole, during the initial PL meetings, migrant participants were sometimes overshadowed by more dominant voices from local civil society organisations and public officials. These stakeholders tended to drive the discussions, leaving little room for migrant representatives to contribute their personal stories and perspectives. Migrants felt hesitant to challenge the established narratives or express their own ideas, which limited their active participation. To address this, the facilitators introduced a rotating speaking system and implemented visual mapping techniques. These changes allowed migrant participants to visually represent their ideas and experiences, which helped balance the discussions and ensured that their perspectives were integrated into the policy-making process.

Throughout this guide, several techniques to help brainstorming have been proposed and referred to. Techniques can be effective in facilitating and enhancing participation and agency. However, **it is of paramount importance that the technique itself does not take centre stage and replaces the goal of sharing experiences, interlacing narratives, and collaboratively making decisions.**



## THE SPIDER TECHNIQUE

In the city of Mechelen, the organisational team used the **spider technique**, which focuses on collaborative brainstorming to generate innovative solutions. The technique worked well in Mechelen because it fostered creative, diverse ideas by using visuals and collaboration. Structured time limits kept participants focused, and the process encouraged lateral thinking, leading to innovative solutions. It also engaged both adults and children, inspiring broad participation.

**Objective:** This technique encourages lateral thinking, shifting focus away from the problem itself, allowing for more creative and diverse solutions. The group dynamics, coupled with structured time limits, help to maintain focus and foster participation and collaboration.

**Timeframe:** 30-50 minutes

### **Instructions:**

1. **Form groups** (2m): Divide participants into small groups of 4-5 people. Each group should work collaboratively to complete the task.
2. **Define the problem** (3 minutes): Provide each group with a template. In the centre of the template, they should write down the key problem or question they will focus on.
3. **Image creation** (10m): Using the three verbs as inspiration, each group should draw nine simple images. The images should reflect the verbs but not directly tied to the central problem. The aim is to stimulate creative thinking through unrelated visual representations.
4. **Idea development** (15m): Once the images are drawn, the group must now brainstorm ideas. For each image, they should come up with at least three potential solutions or ideas that relate back to the original problem or question. Encourage participants to think broadly and explore unconventional approaches.
5. **Present ideas** (optional, 10m per group): If time allows, each group can present their ideas to the larger group, explaining how their images led to the proposed solutions.



## THE PERSONA TECHNIQUE

The persona technique, used in Fuenlabrada, fostered empathy and understanding by assigning participants fictional stakeholder profiles. It helped groups explore each persona's challenges, needs, and goals, emphasizing inclusivity and considering how different backgrounds shape engagement. The facilitator selected diverse personas and guided discussions on systemic barriers, ensuring all voices, especially marginalized ones, were represented. This fostered deep empathy, a richer dialogue, and common goals, leading to more inclusive policy solutions.

**Objective:** The technique enhances a deeper understanding of participants' diverse perspectives, enabling them to design inclusive and equitable policy solutions that address the specific challenges and needs of all groups.

**Timeframe:** 1-3 hours

### Instructions:

1. **Preparation** (5m): Create detailed persona sheets reflecting diverse backgrounds, challenges, and values. Divide participants into small groups, assigning each a persona.
2. **Introduction** (5-10m): Explain that the goal is to foster empathy by discussing policy issues from the persona's perspective. Optionally, review each persona's characteristics.
3. **Group discussion** (30-60m): Groups discuss their persona's needs, goals, and barriers to participation, focusing on equity and inclusion.
4. **Presentation** (20-30m): Each group presents their persona's challenges and how identity affects participation and inclusivity.
5. **Group reflection** (15m): Facilitate a discussion comparing personas, focusing on how equity impacts participation.
6. **Identifying common goals** (15m): Groups explore common goals and suggest inclusive solutions to accommodate all personas.
7. **Inclusive policy design** (15m): Participants propose actions to enhance inclusivity and equity in policy.
8. **Conclusion** (10m): Summarise key insights on inclusivity and equity and discuss applying these to future policies.

Facilitation is the basis for a PL to function. Involving trained facilitators is an important first step when setting up a PL cycle. A second step is to foresee ongoing training and **improvement of facilitator skills**. Facilitators preferably continuously develop their expertise, especially in handling complex group dynamics, conflict resolution, and tailoring facilitation techniques to diverse groups. This ensures that PL meetings remain spaces where all participants can contribute meaningfully, leading to more inclusive and equitable policy outcomes. Ongoing training can be foreseen by a specialised training centre or self-constructed within the organising team, if sufficient expertise is available.

## Summary and reflections for your city

Effective facilitation is essential in PLs to ensure inclusive participation and fair decision-making. Facilitators create a safe space where all voices, especially marginalised ones, are heard and respected, balancing power dynamics and guiding discussions to prevent dominance by a few. Skilled in mediation, policy design, and techniques like open-ended questions and conflict management, they address language barriers and clarify roles. Tailoring their approach to the group's needs, facilitators integrate diverse perspectives, promote collaboration, and may use visual aids and targeted brainstorming techniques.



1. How can we understand and monitor effective and ineffective facilitative actions?
2. How will we incorporate effective facilitative actions and roles within a PL, paying attention to balanced speaking turns and preventing dominant voices from overshadowing quieter or less experienced participants during discussions?
3. How can we use facilitative actions to address language barriers and make discussions more accessible to non-native speakers or participants with limited language proficiency?
4. What facilitation techniques, such as visual aids or brainstorming, can we use to enhance participation?
5. How will we train facilitators? (see capacity building as well)



## F. Piloting activities

During the design and experimentation phase, small-scale pilot initiatives are developed in co-creation to test the feasibility, effectiveness, and impact of new ideas in a controlled setting. These experimental projects allow municipalities and cities to explore innovative approaches, gather feedback, and adjust before broader implementation. Typically limited in resources, time, and scope, pilots enable practical testing to address specific challenges, measure success, and gather insights. Organised collaboratively by the PL organising team, PL participants and possibly other relevant partners and stakeholders, these pilots move ideas from theory to practice, fostering informed decision-making, collaboration, and the co-creation of policies that reflect community needs. Insights from these pilots support future policy development and scaling efforts.

The process of initiating and managing pilot projects by the organisational team involves several steps and considerations to take into account:

- **Involve diverse participants in the selection process:** When selecting piloting activities during the PL meetings(s) in the design and experimentation phase, involve a range of PL participants, including migrants, local community members and people with ties to local policy bodies that can ensure implementation. Ensure that decision-making processes within the PL meetings are inclusive, using both plenary sessions and small-group discussions to gather diverse input as described in section D.

In the Must-a-Lab project, some cities found it best to start with smaller groups and seek consensus in larger plenaries. To avoid confusion or passive involvement, be clear about the role each participant plays in the selection process.

- **Clarify the criteria for selecting pilot projects:** During the PL meetings, decisions about which pilot projects to pursue should be based on clear criteria, primarily focusing on relevance (building on challenges and existing local projects or introducing innovative solutions) and feasibility (budget, time constraints). Ensure participants know in advance that they are actively carrying out the pilots together and are informed about the available resources, deadlines, and scope of the experiments to facilitate informed decision-making. **Use participatory decision-making methods:** Implement inclusive decision-making techniques like consensus-building or majority voting to allow broad participation in selecting pilots. These techniques should be tailored to your city's specific context.
- **Manage expectations and time commitments:** Once the piloting starts, time and resources will be required. Be transparent about the time and effort required for participants to participate in executing pilots from the beginning.
- **Provide adequate support of agency for minorities:** Pay special attention to including minority groups, such as less experienced members from the migrant community and those facing language barriers, in the pilot projects. Ensure they are not marginalised in decision-making and implementation. Use facilitation techniques, visual aids and translation where necessary to ensure their full participation as explained in sections D and E.



- **Encourage ongoing involvement, especially from the migrant community.** Continuous involvement throughout the pilot process is crucial.
- **Tailor pilot projects to local contexts:** Successful pilots often build on existing local initiatives while introducing innovative elements. Cities and municipalities should balance innovation with practicality, ensuring that the experiments can be realistically implemented within existing resources. When possible, prioritise experiments that resonate with local needs and are likely to have a lasting impact.
- **Consider long-term sustainability:** Ensure that pilot projects have the potential for long-term impact. Engage local policymakers, networks, stakeholders and institutions early to foster support for longer-term implementation and replication of successful experiments.
- **Monitor and evaluate throughout the process:** Regularly monitor pilots' progress and gather participant feedback to assess satisfaction with the process and results. Create structured opportunities for reflection and adaptation, ensuring the experiments are on track and meeting participant expectations.

In MUST-a-lab the newcomers guide in Grenoble-Alpes Métropole addresses specific challenges faced by refugees and asylum seekers, particularly missing or inaccessible information. Conducted in phases, the pilot aimed to identify information gaps, especially regarding services and rights. Participants included public service agents, social workers, NGOs, and refugees themselves. Surveys and meetings revealed unreliable information sources, such as the Internet and social media. The guide, tailored to Grenoble Alpes Métropole's needs, combines local and universal content, is available in multiple formats (print, PDF, online), and uses icons for accessibility, supporting refugees in navigating services and integration effectively.

The municipality of Livadia aimed to improve communication between migrants and local stakeholders, primarily via digital platforms like Facebook. The project involved migrant representatives and local organisations to share essential information on work, education, health, and services. A Facebook group facilitated interaction and problem-solving, while local education authorities offered computer courses for migrant parents tailored to their digital literacy needs. For sustainability, recommendations included promoting the Facebook group, expanding topics, increasing local media coverage, and involving more agencies in information-sharing.

If the pilot project is successful, plans can be made for scaling it up or replicating it in other contexts during the follow-up stage in the recommendation phase and beyond. This involves identifying the key factors contributing to the project's success and developing strategies for applying these lessons in a broader context.

## Summary and reflections for your city

In a PL cycle, pilot projects are part of the design and experimentation phase and should be small-scale experiments testing innovative policies with diverse participants. Projects should be chosen based on feasibility, relevance, and inclusion of relevant groups. Clear criteria and



transparency about participant commitment help manage expectations. Successful pilots balance innovation with practicality, are monitored for needed adjustments, and prioritise the possibility of long-term sustainability, allowing for scaling or replication in the follow-up phase or beyond.

If you're considering applying the PL method in your city or municipality, ask yourself the following questions regarding the pilot project you have in mind.

- 1. How can we engage a diverse group of participants, including less experienced groups such as newly arrived migrants, and actively involve them in the pilot project from start to finish?**
- 2. What clear criteria should be used to select pilot projects during the PL meetings, considering they need to be both feasible and relevant to the specific needs of our local community?**
- 3. How can we effectively communicate the time and resource commitments required from participants to manage expectations and maintain engagement throughout the project?**
- 4. In what ways can we strike a balance between innovation and practicality to ensure that pilot projects are tailored to the unique context of your city?**
- 5. What steps should we take to make certain that successful pilot projects are sustainable in the long term?**



## G. Follow-up activities

The follow-up activities are an integral part of the recommendation phase and ensure that the outcomes and recommendations generated in PLs are implemented in the long run and adapted where necessary. Sometimes, they build on activities developed during the pilots; sometimes they involve new ideas and actions. During the follow-up, it is important to maintain participant engagement and continue to promote long-term sustainability. The follow-up activities typically involve implementing (some of) the recommendations, gathering feedback, assessing progress, making necessary adjustments, and ensuring the outcomes are sustained and scaled where possible. Again, several key activities must be considered:

- **Establish clear implementation plans early** where roles and responsibilities are defined. Ensure each participant knows their specific tasks and who oversees the next steps.
- **Securing long-term institutional and political support is essential for the success and sustainability of longer term PL initiatives.** Such implementation and follow-up also take place in a co-creative and participatory manner. Early engagement with policymakers regarding the follow-up builds commitment and eases implementation, while formal institutional backing ensures the initiative's impact and integration into official policies. Cross-departmental collaboration further enhances effectiveness by coordinating efforts on complex issues like migrant integration, enabling comprehensive solutions that address diverse community needs.

In the MUST-a-lab project, one of the pilots in Mechelen involved pupil-led class presentations about their cultural background. This pilot led to the 'Visible Diversity' recommendation and the action plan for this activity was approved by the city council. During the follow-up phase some relevant activities were realised and disseminated into the local education system, with the support of several municipality departments. By promoting buy-in from the council and other educational authorities, the project aimed to transition from an experimental phase and disseminate into the local education system.

In Modena, the city council's formal approval of the PL recommendations ensured that the ideas generated during the PLs were incorporated into the city's broader policy framework. This led to the development of concrete actions such as the digital map 'Modena per Tutti', which provides essential information for migrants, that has been distributed to different sectors of the municipality.

The initiative to establish a creative centre for children in Livadia aimed to foster an inclusive environment where children, particularly from migrant backgrounds, could participate in courses and creative activities. Led by Livadia's Department of Education in partnership with the MUST-a-Lab project team, the centre was designed for children aged 6–12, offering a space to develop new skills, express creativity, and build social connections. To support outreach and encourage diverse participation, the MUST-a-Lab team collaborated with the Directorate of Primary Education to inform migrant families about the centre's opportunities.

- **Promoting transparency and accountability through feedback mechanisms:** Ensuring transparency and accountability in follow-up projects involves consistently sharing outcomes, achievements, and challenges with the community via public forums,





meetings, and online platforms. Feedback mechanisms allow participants to provide input throughout implementation, helping refine recommendations based on real-world insights. Regular community feedback fosters an adaptive project environment, driving adjustments, improving effectiveness, and reinforcing accountability and shared ownership.

- **Plan for scaling up and sustainability:** If pilot projects are successful, plan how they can be scaled up to a city-wide or regional level. Engage with local governments and organisations to ensure long-term sustainability. When pilots have institutional support structures in place, it can help them sustain themselves beyond the initial implementation phase.

A pilot project in Fuenlabrada aimed to boost youth involvement in public participation and policy-making by establishing MUST-FuenLab, a youth-led group organising activities like debate labs and the Youth Plenary. Young participants collaborated closely with local bodies, including the Coexistence Committee and Youth Council, engaging policymakers directly throughout the process.

Youth contributed at every stage, managing social media campaigns focused on identity and interculturality and celebrating small successes online. The project adapted to local culture, using references that resonated with migrant youth to enhance engagement. Efforts to embed the outcomes into local governance ensured sustainability, with MUST-FuenLab continuing as a formalised association and two members joining the Youth Council, signalling a commitment to long-term youth participation.

- **Celebrate successes and lessons learned:** Celebrate the successful completion of pilot projects, publicly recognising the efforts of all participants. This reinforces the value of the work done and boosts morale for future initiatives. Make sure to document both successes and challenges throughout the process. Sharing these lessons with other cities or projects can provide valuable insights for future PL efforts.



In Vienna, the 'Open School and Info Café' was one of the piloting activities. It was conceived as a mobile, multilingual counselling and information service as well as an activity programme in public spaces for children and adults. Families could exchange with experts in a relaxed atmosphere about various problems relating to school and, if necessary, receive advice on the spot. A follow-up was embedded in the district's social initiatives to strengthen school communities. Monitoring this initiative allowed for adaptation and ensured the project's sustainability. Participants gathered feedback to make improvements and expand the initiative to other schools. This iterative approach allowed for continuous improvement of the local PL's recommendations.

In Livadia, the PL recommendations were regularly communicated to local authorities, with follow-up meetings to discuss progress on initiatives like the digital card for public services and the Centre for Children's Learning. The ongoing dialogue ensured that policymakers remained engaged throughout the implementation process.

## Summary and reflections for your city

Consistently sharing project outcomes, achievements, and challenges with the community, along with creating regular feedback opportunities, builds transparency and accountability. This approach fosters shared ownership, enables ongoing adaptation, and enhances the project's effectiveness and relevance.

If you're considering applying the PL method in your city or municipality, ask yourself the following questions regarding the pilot project you have in mind.

- 1. How can we establish clear implementation plans for the follow-up phase and define roles, responsibilities, and timelines, ensuring that all participants are accountable and know their next steps?**
- 2. What measurable goals and indicators can we develop to monitor the progress of the follow-up activities effectively?**
- 3. How can we promote transparency and public accountability by regularly sharing updates and engaging the broader community in discussions about the progress of pilot projects?**
- 4. What strategies can we implement to scale successful pilot projects city-wide or regionally, ensuring long-term sustainability and building the necessary institutional support for future initiatives?**



## Conclusion

A Policy Lab is a powerful and adaptable tool for participatory, deliberative democracy, enabling communities to develop policies that address specific local challenges and needs collaboratively. By creating structured spaces for inclusive sharing of lived experiences and decision-making, Policy Labs foster open dialogue among diverse groups, allowing effective, responsive, and sustainable policy solutions. These guidelines offer a roadmap for organising and facilitating Policy Labs that encourage active participation and cooperation.

The MUST-a-Lab project exemplifies the potential of Policy Labs, particularly in developing inclusive policies in the areas of migration and integration. By adopting a structured yet flexible approach, MUST-a-Lab empowered municipalities to engage diverse voices, pilot innovative solutions, and gather iterative feedback, resulting in policies rooted in real community needs.

The success of the Policy Lab method relies on early and consistent political and institutional support, which helps legitimise outcomes and encourages collaboration across communities, organisations and departments. Involving policymakers from the start ensures that recommendations are more readily integrated into official policies, increasing their long-term impact. Additionally, fostering partnerships enables municipalities to address multifaceted challenges, such as migrant inclusion, with a coordinated and comprehensive approach.

Equally vital is engaging participants through tailored communication and capacity-building activities. Ensuring that all relevant groups, especially migrant communities, feel empowered to contribute actively strengthens the inclusivity and effectiveness of the Policy Lab process. Qualitative facilitation, clear communication and visual aids create an environment where all voices are heard.

Transparency and accountability are also essential to Policy Lab initiatives. Creating feedback loops throughout the PL cycle allows municipalities to adopt policies based on real-time input, reinforcing a culture of shared ownership and trust. Regularly communicating outcomes, challenges, and adjustments fosters community buy-in and strengthens the collaborative spirit of Policy Labs. In summary the following list of 'do's' and 'don'ts' summarise the key recommendations:

### Do's

- **Thoroughly prepare:** Invest time and resources in the preparation phase to ensure participants are well-equipped. Tailor the Policy Lab to address specific local needs, creating a foundation for relevant outcomes.
- **Engage diverse and relevant participants:** Include a wide range of participants pertinent to the chosen policy challenge—end-users of policies, relevant stakeholders, and policymakers—to represent all community perspectives.
- **Employ skilled facilitators:** Select experienced facilitators and, if possible, provide them with specialised training. Their expertise in managing group dynamics and fostering inclusive dialogue is vital to a productive Policy Lab.
- **Establish clear guidelines for cooperation:** Set cooperation guidelines, such as the "Chatham House Rule," and assign clearly defined roles and responsibilities for practical contributions. This fosters an environment of open, respectful discussions and ensures smooth interactions.



- **Provide capacity building:** Offer training and support, especially to those new to policy participation and deliberation so that they can contribute effectively and confidently.
- **Create a clear timeline and flow of PL meetings and sessions:** Respect the chronology of the phases and create a clear timeline with structured interactions, scheduled breaks, and clear objectives that are adapted to the local context. Adjust meeting lengths as needed to maintain focus and energy.
- **Allocate sufficient resources:** Ensure adequate resources for logistics and participant engagement to create an effective Policy Lab cycle and experience.
- **Plan for sustained engagement and scalability of pilots and recommendations:** Schedule a structured follow-up period to evaluate outcomes, measure impact, and maintain engagement with participants after the Policy Lab concludes.

## Don'ts

- **Avoid symbolic or consultative-only processes:** Don't limit the Policy Lab to mere consultation; aim for genuine influence on policies to avoid frustrating participants and to foster meaningful engagement.
- **Don't allow dominance by native stakeholders or policy officers:** actively encourage quieter participants, particularly migrant participants to speak up so that no single viewpoint overshadows the discussion.
- **Don't use unskilled facilitators:** Avoid assigning facilitators without experience in inclusive facilitation techniques and managing group dynamics.
- **Don't ignore language and accessibility needs:** Avoid overly technical jargon or complex language that can alienate less-experienced participants. Use visual aids, interpreters, or clear language to promote inclusivity.

By following these do's and don'ts, you can create a Policy Lab environment that is inclusive, well-organised, and impactful, driving meaningful and actionable outcomes.



## Future directions for Policy Labs

Building on the insights gained from the MUST-a-Lab project, future Policy Lab initiatives can further enhance their impact by expanding collaborative frameworks, leveraging technology, and fostering policy adaptability to address communities' evolving needs. These directions offer pathways for municipalities to deepen inclusivity, refine policy approaches, and create more resilient, adaptive governance models.

- **Institutionalisation:** There is significant potential for integrating PLs into regular governance structures, ensuring their sustainability and scalability. Institutionalising PLs can help embed participatory approaches within government processes, making them a standard tool for policy development.
- **Cross-sector collaboration:** Expanding the range of participants involved in PLs to include private sector partners, academic institutions, and non-governmental organisations can enhance the diversity of perspectives and the quality of outcomes. Cross-sector collaboration can also provide additional resources and expertise, contributing to the success of the Policy Lab.
- **Adaptation to new challenges:** As new policy challenges emerge, such as those related to digital governance, climate change, and global health, the Policy Lab methodology should be continuously refined. This ensures that Policy Labs remain relevant and effective in addressing the most pressing issues facing communities.
- **Creating mechanisms for scaling and sharing best practices:** A valuable future direction is the development of networks or platforms for municipalities to share insights and best practices from PLs across regions and countries. By establishing databases or collaborative spaces where cities can access and contribute knowledge on effective methods, common challenges, and successful outcomes, future PLs can benefit from a wealth of shared experiences. This cross-regional learning would also strengthen cities' capacities to implement PLs that are informed by diverse contexts while contributing to a more unified approach to integration and inclusion across cities. Networks could facilitate peer learning, support the spread of innovative solutions, and contribute to the global advancement of participatory democracy.
- **Evaluating long-term impact:** Finally, future PL projects can prioritise long-term evaluation to understand the sustained impact of their initiatives. Tracking the outcomes of policy changes and integration strategies over time will provide municipalities with valuable data on the effectiveness of PLs. These evaluations can be used to inform future cycles, demonstrating which approaches yield the most impactful results and offering insights into potential areas for improvement. Long-term studies will also strengthen the case for PLs as a cornerstone of inclusive policy making.

By pursuing these future directions, municipalities can continue to evolve the Policy Lab model, ensuring it remains a powerful tool for fostering inclusivity, resilience, and community empowerment in migration and integration or other policymaking domains. The success of future Policy Labs will lie in their ability to adapt, expand, and innovate in response to the changing needs of diverse communities.



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