

Guidelines for Local Organisers Part 1: Data Ethics and Security

As local organisers setting up climate assemblies, it's crucial to handle data ethically and securely to protect participants and ensure the integrity of the assembly process. This guide provides key principles and practical steps to help you manage data responsibly.

1. Understanding the Risks

Information is power. And power can equally be used to drive positive change or to tap into our vulnerabilities. There are many ways in which data could create risks for participants. Some examples are:

1. **Privacy violations:** Personal information could be exposed, leading to privacy breaches. In other words, personal information participants did not want to share could be released to the public.
2. **Reprisal risks:** Participants may face repercussions for their views or participation, especially in politically sensitive contexts. Let's not forget citizens' assemblies are political in essence.
3. **Misinformation:** Inaccurate data handling can lead to misinformation and misrepresentation of participants' views. This could undermine the purpose of the assembly but also be weaponised against participants.

For these reasons, restricting or withholding certain information can be ethical to:

- Protect participant anonymity and confidentiality.
- Prevent potential harm or backlash against participants.
- Ensure that sensitive information is not misused or misinterpreted.

2. Obtaining Informed Consent

Consent is when someone clearly agrees to let us use their information, understanding what they're agreeing to, and doing so willingly without any illegitimate pressure. For many contexts, the standard is to have people read and sign a written agreement, but for most local organisers this may not be feasible for many reasons. This does not mean that we cannot or should not seek consent.

When formal written consent is not feasible, we can find:

1. **Verbal consent:** Clearly explain the data collection process, its purpose, and how the data will be used. Ensure participants verbally agree to these terms.
2. **Practical consent:** Participants can do a specific action if they consent to participating (after we have explained the implications). For example, they can put their names in a bowl, or we could hand out a secret ballot. It is important that there are opportunities for opting out of participating after we start.
3. **Digital consent:** Use simple digital forms or apps where participants can give their consent with a click, ensuring the process is quick and easy.

In all cases, what we need to ensure is that participation is voluntary, that we reserve time to explain the implications and that participants have practical means to opt out whenever they feel like it, without having to justify their decision.

3. Managing and Using Data Safely

Even with the consent of participants, how we manage and store the data can still create vulnerabilities for them and the process. We have to be mindful of the risks at each stage of the process. Here are our suggestions on how to do that.

While you collect data during the assembly:

1. **Minimise data collection:** Collect only the data necessary for the assembly's purpose (i.e. to establish, coordinate, and monitor local actions, and to contribute data about your assembly design and the recommended actions to the global voice).
2. **Anonymise data:** Remove personally identifiable information whenever possible to protect participant identity.
3. **Secure storage:** Keep data safe from unauthorised access. This can mean limiting who can register and access data and avoiding storing data in online places where others can easily access it.

When you use the data to advocate for change:

1. **Respect participant privacy:** Use data in ways that respect participant privacy and do not expose sensitive information.
2. **Be transparent:** Be transparent with participants about how their data is being used and the outcomes of the assembly.
3. **Ask for feedback:** Provide a way for participants to give feedback on how you are using the data after the assembly and try to address any concerns they may have.

When incidents and errors occur:

1. **Report Breaches:** Have a plan for reporting data breaches to affected participants and relevant authorities.
2. **Take action:** Take immediate steps to mitigate any harm caused by data breaches or misuse. This may involve speaking with others about what is the best course of action.
3. **Learn and improve:** Use incidents as learning opportunities to improve your data management practices.

In conclusion

Taking data seriously means protecting participants and enhancing the credibility and effectiveness of the climate assembly process. We should not be afraid of data and these challenges are new to most of us. These guidelines are a first step to help us think of potential risks, how to think of consent and how to manage data throughout the process. Let us know what you think our global community should do around data!

Guidelines for Local Organisers Part 2: Managing conversations

The local assemblies are designed to be safe spaces for participants to share experience, express opinions and dispute ideas. This raises the possibility of harm to participants during the course of the discussion. While this is very unlikely to be the case, we need to be prepared just in case. This guide provides key principles and practical steps to help you manage those conversations responsibly.

1. Understanding the Risks

In the atmosphere of a lively group discussion, it is easy for participants to get caught up in the discussion and forget that they are in a form of public space. Participants may share their own personal details or knowledge inappropriately (“my neighbour is stealing water”), or other participants may comment on their history or personal characteristics (“that’s not what I hear about your son”).

The facilitator needs to be aware of this for three reasons

1. **Duty of care** to participants, to make sure that they are not unfairly attacked or allowed to self-incriminate
2. **Records of meetings** should not include such information
3. **Credibility** of the assembly or the facilitator can be damaged if it is seen as unprofessional

The facilitator needs to be aware of these possibilities, to anticipate them, and take action if necessary. The difficult part is ensuring this doesn’t stifle the discussion.

It is important to recognise that deliberate misuse of information shared is unlikely. It’s more likely to be accidental: if participants share very personal details, other participants might take them home and share with their families – not out of malice, but out of interest.

2. Avoiding over-sharing

You can set the stage when you prepare the assembly by reminding participants that they are in a semi-public space:

“You are welcome to share your own experience, but please don’t go into personal details. Don’t use real names for people if you can avoid it.”

If a participant does share too much information, try to close down or change the conversation while emphasising the contribution the participant has made:

“Thanks. That’s a useful example, although we don’t need all the specific, personal details. Do others have similar experiences, without going into personal details..?”

Make sure that the note-takers understand that they do not need to record everything of interest. They should focus on the parts of the discussion that changed attitudes or shed new light on the conversation.

However, do not worry too much about the note-takers taking down too much information. You want them to concentrate on good notes, not on whether something is inappropriate. Checking the records yourself after the event will be sufficient.

3. Keep the records clean

Check to make sure that notes taken from the meeting don't contain excessive personal information. This is particularly important if you are sharing the notes with people who weren't at the meeting.

However, remember that you want to retain useful information, not to remove anything that might possibly be personal. The Guidelines on presenting safe results give some tips on how to usefully reduce detail while retaining important information.

Guidelines for Local Organisers Part 3: Presenting safe results

When reporting on the findings of the community assemblies, we may use quotes or information from attendees that accidentally reveals inappropriate information about the attendees. This guide provides an introduction to help you manage outputs responsibly.

1. Understanding the Risks

Consider the following quote taken from a (fictional) assembly report

“Our local council’s response to the water crisis was a disaster. The mayor is an idiot, just interested in lining his own pockets. I don’t think the other politicians are any better anyway. That’s why we needed to set up the Cambrian Water Coalition. We needed real action by real people.” Newtown ex-councillor, female, 32.

The quote doesn’t contain names, but it names the area and some characteristics of the speaker. One could reasonably imagine that local politicians accused in the report might try to guess who was the commentator, and take action against them. It doesn’t matter if they find the right person. If they mis-identify the speaker but still take action against the wrong person, then people will still suffer as a result of your report.

If the quote or reference is defamatory, even if you can’t identify who the speaker is, you also need to consider whether it should be used. The credibility of the assembly may be affected if you allow personal remarks to be included, and you run the risk of legal action if the quote or reference is very damaging.

2. A checklist for reviewing reports

- 1) Does your report include direct quotes or references to specific events or people
If no ☐ it’s okay. Stop here
- 2) Do the quotes/references include problematic statements (discussing the characteristics or behaviours of individuals, whether good or bad)?
If no ☐ it’s okay. Stop here
- 3) Is the information relevant to the report?
If no ☐ remove it. Stop here
- 4) Consider whether you can edit the quote while retaining the meaning
- 5) Also consider getting explicit approval from the participant
- 6) Remember that not reporting may be the only option – but get a second opinion as the aim of the report is to get information out there

3. Editing results

You can reduce the problem by editing problematic information while retaining the key message. For example, a phrase that doesn’t help the discussion can be removed:

“Our local council’s response to the water crisis was a disaster. ~~The mayor is an idiot, just interested in lining his own pockets.~~ I don’t think the other politicians are any better anyway. That’s why we needed to set up the Cambrian Water Coalition. We needed real action by real people.”
Newtown ex-councillor, female, 32.

Personal details can be made less specific:

“Our local council’s response to the water crisis was a disaster. ~~The mayor is an idiot, just interested in lining his own pockets.~~ I don’t think the other politicians are any better anyway. That’s why we needed to set up the Cambrian Water Coalition. We needed real action by real people.”
***NewtownMid-Wales** ex-councillor, female, ~~32~~ 30-39.*

And edit references to events which might allow tracing of contributors:

*“Our local council’s response to the water crisis was a disaster. ~~The mayor is an idiot, just interested in lining his own pockets.~~ I don’t think the other politicians are any better anyway. That’s why we needed to set up **the Cambrian Water Coalition [local lobbying organisation]**. We needed real action by real people.”*
~~Newtown~~Mid-Wales ex-councillor, female, ~~32~~ 30-39.

In this case the new quote is:

“Our local council’s response to the water crisis was a disaster. [...] I don’t think the other politicians are any better anyway. That’s why we needed to set up the [local lobbying organisation]. We needed real action by real people.”
Mid-Wales ex-councillor, female, 30-39.

You need to judge whether this (a) retains the important elements of the original quote and (b) provides sufficient anonymity of the participant. If not, try again – and remember that the aim is to allow evidence to be presented safely, not to remove all information “just in case”.

4. Getting approval

Sharing the findings or write-up with participants serves to demonstrate how quotes are being used and interpreted by researchers; invite them to raise any concerns with the research team. Note however, that participants may not be the best judge of what is ‘identifiable’ – your judgement is what matters.

In some cases you may want to use named quotes or reference named individuals; for example, the remarks about an ex-mayor is important because she is an ex-councillor . In these cases, you can consider asking the participant if they are content to be associated with the quote.

Guidelines for local organisers part 4: Introductory rubric

[To be read out to delegates after thanks/welcome etc but before the main work of the assembly start. Delete or edit sections as appropriate]

We will be [recording/taking notes] of the assembly and using this for writing up the report. We will not identify any one in the report who has not agreed to it. [We will also be taking photographs for publicity/for social media/to illustrate the report]. If you have concerns about this, please speak to one of the facilitators, or feel free to leave. There is no compulsion to attend.

We look forward to hearing different voices and opinions. However, please be aware that this is an open environment. You are welcome to share your own experience, but please don't go into personal details if they could reveal clues about someone's identity. For example, don't use real names for people if you can avoid it. Please also respect any confidences shared by others.

Thank you.

Guidelines for local organisers part 5: Template Privacy Information Notice

[delete or edit sections as appropriate]

Privacy statement

The organisers of this assembly are [the organisers].

The organisers will use your contact details to keep you informed about the assembly and any follow-up activities, including the organisation of future assemblies. This information may also be used to verify statements made at the assembly. This information will be retained until [date]. You may ask the organisers to delete this information at any time.

During the assembly, notes [and recordings] will be taken. These will be held by the organisers, and only used to facilitate writing-up and reporting. These notes [and recordings] will be deleted once the assembly report has been completed.

The reports and quotations used will be made openly available. All direct quotations used in reports will be anonymised unless this is not feasible. If anonymisation is not feasible, the organisers will contact the individual to discuss ways to present the information. No identifiable information will be presented without consent of the person making the quote.

We are sometimes asked by journalists, researchers and other third parties for contact details of participants. We will only provide this information if you have explicitly agreed to it.

All contact details, assembly notes and consent forms will be held by the organisers on secure password-protected computers to which only the organisers [and their administration teams] have access.

If you have concerns about the management of your data, please contact [details].

**Guidelines for local organisers part 6:
Template paper consent form**

[delete or edit sections as appropriate; use option 1 or option 2]

Participant's consent [option 1]

I have read the Privacy Information Notice. I confirm that I consent to:

- My contact details being retained by the organisers for the purposes of organising the assembly [, organising future assemblies,] and distributing information about the assembly afterwards.
- Comments I have made in the assembly being anonymously used in the final report, or identifiably with my explicit consent
- [The organisers sharing my contact details with interested third parties] / [the organisers asking for my permission to share contact details with third parties]

Signed:

Date:

Participant's consent [option 2]

I have read the Privacy Information Notice. I confirm that:

- | | Delete as appropriate |
|---|-----------------------|
| ● I consent to my contact details being retained by the organisers for the purposes of organising the assembly [, organising future assemblies,] and distributing information about the assembly afterwards. | Yes/No |
| ● I consent to comments I have made in the assembly being anonymously used in the final report, or identifiably with my explicit consent | Yes/No |
| ● I consent to [the organisers sharing my contact details with interested third parties] / [the organisers asking for my permission to share contact details with third parties] | Yes/No |

Signed:

Date: