## What it is

A set of tools and principles for facilitating the sharing of feedback within working groups

## What it can do

These tools can assist you to:

- Assist the effective sharing of feedback within working groups
- Support the healthy growth of trust as a result of sharing feedback
- Help create norms of open and honest communication within groups

## When to use it

When members of a group or individuals in a group need to offer one another feedback.

## How it works

This tool is available online at: atctools.org/resources/tools-for-transformation

***Step 1*** Review Guiding Group Feedback beginning on the following page.

***Step 2*** Depending on the situation, use one of the four tools that follow to structure and facilitate group feedback.

**Tool #1:** Group-on-one Feedback

**Tool #2:** Partnership Pairs

**Tool #3:** The Feedback Line

**Tool #4**: Group Self-evaluation

## Guiding Group Feedback

There are a number of opportunities for groups to give feedback:

- Group giving feedback to itself, for example:
    - Team evaluation of a project, action, campaign, etc.
    - Team evaluation of its group process or performance
- Group-on-one feedback: where the group gives feedback to each of its members
- One-on-one feedback: where members of a group give one-on-one feedback to each other about performance or about their individual working partnerships

### Some Barriers to Group Feedback

Many groups are challenged in giving open and constructive feedback.
Possible factors include:

- It's simply not an established group norm
- Lack of skill in the art of giving and receiving feedback
- Limited trust in leadership or each other
- Lack of agreement on criteria or standards for evaluation
- The natural tendency of many people to want to appear good in front of their peers
- Anxiety about speaking truthfully: e.g., not wanting to hurt others
- Fear that people won't like you if you criticize them
- The usual range of group dynamics: people dominating, people deferring or withdrawing, etc.

### Some Practices for Facilitating Group Feedback

- Deal proactively with potential derailers to feedback processes
- Teach principles and build skills of giving and receiving feedback
- Create safety through your presence, rapport with the group, and skill
- Model good feedback in all your interactions with the group
- Establish clear ground rules at the beginning of feedback sessions about how to act in giving and receiving feedback
- Evaluate the feedback process (against the agreed upon ground rules) at least once during the session, so as to continuously improve the quality of feedback
- Use structured tools and rituals that hold people in a container and support the depth and quality of feedback

### Introducing the Tools that Follow

Groups often resist intensive feedback processes. The most challenging part of using the tools that follow is convincing people to participate. People get anxious. Be prepared for possible pushback. When you describe any of the processes that follow, group members may keep raising questions or objections – anything to avoid actually engaging in the feedback.

This is a time to hold strong. Once groups actually go through any of these processes, they are almost always greatly appreciative. They're not as scary as they may sound, and the open communication almost always leaves people feeling more connected and part of the team.


 

# **TOOL #1:** GROUP-ON-ONE FEEDBACK

## Purpose

This process can assist you to:

- Improve team performance and connectivity by providing a structured and supportive format for giving and receiving candid feedback
- Help build a norm within teams of open and honest communication

## When to use it

With any group that has an ongoing, substantive work together (e.g., work team, board, long-term coalition or alliance).

## How it works

***Step 1*** The group sits in a circle.

***Step 2*** One at a time, the group focuses on each member of the team and offers their feedback to that individual for up to 8-10 minutes each (feedback should be timed)

- The listener responds at the end by saying “thank you” and nothing else.
- Feedback can be focused to meet the needs of the process. For example:
  - Your strengths and contributions as a team member, and
  - Your areas for improvement as a team member
- Feedback may also be focused around a particular program or event, a specific element of performance, or some aspect of group process. For example:
  - Your contributions/areas for improvement to our ____ campaign.
  - Your contributions/areas for improvement in our team meetings.
  - Your strengths/needs for development as an organizer
- In giving feedback, people should be mindful of what others have already said. For example:
  - *“I’d like to build on what ___ said.”*
  - *“I agree with what ____ said.”*
  - *“I see it differently than ____.”*


 

**NOTE**: With groups larger than 15 you may want to consider breaking into two smaller groups. If so, pay attention to the composition of the two groups, as now participants will be only be receiving feedback from half the group.

## Additional considerations

It is often helpful to begin with some training or at least a reminder on how to give and receive feedback (see our tools: *How to Give Feedback* and *How to Receive Feedback*).

At a minimum, offer these guidelines:

- Have positive intent: the purpose is to help your partners improve their own leadership and contribution to the team.
- Speak truthfully.
- Balance affirming and developmental feedback.
- Time is short – get right to the heart of the feedback.
- Receivers should not respond but focus on listening.
- Receivers should pay special attention to patterns of feedback that they hear, or feedback that resonates with things they have heard in other contexts.


 

# **TOOL #2:** PARTNERSHIP PAIRS

## Purpose

This process can assist you to:

- Provide an opportunity to build better working relationships in teams
- Give participants a chance to give frank and candid feedback to each other
- Build a norm within groups of open and honest communication
- Build connectivity and possible collaborations in alliances and networks

## When to use it

- With teams, boards, coalitions, alliances, etc.
- This is an excellent evening activity at retreats in the late afternoon or evening when there may be low energy, as it's an activity that raises energy.
- **Option 1** is useful in groups where people know each other well and the purpose is to improve working relationships.
- **Option 2** is useful in newer groups or groups with less involved relationships (e.g., a coalition or network) as a way of building connection and relationships.

## How it works

### Option 1: For ongoing teams, board, etc.

***Step 1*** Ask people to make a list of everyone in the room with whom they have any working relationship.

***Step 2*** Ask them to rate the quality of the working relationship they feel they have with each person on their list, using a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 representing the best working partnership they have ever experienced and 1 representing a completely broken relationship).

***Make clear that:***

- They are evaluating their effective partnership – how well they work together in serving the mission.
- The number represents the dynamic between the two of you (and/or the functions you represent), not an evaluation of the other person.


 

- A low number might be a result of:
  - Two people not having had much contact with each other
  - Two people who are fine on an individual level, but have challenges in the way their functions relate to each other.
  - Personal mistrust or negative history

***Step 3*** Let people know that:

- They will have the chance to meet with 'x' number of people in the room to explore improving their partnership.

**NOTE:** You choose how many people they will meet, considering that meetings take from 10-12 minutes each.

- Unless the group is small and there's time to meet with everyone, participants should review their list and identify their priority meetings:
  - relationships where strong partnership is especially important to the success of their work
  - relationships where the numbers are low and may be in need of improvement

***Step 4*** Review instructions for finding partners:

- When I say "begin," everyone stands and chooses a partner.
- Some people not on your list may select you because you were their priority.
- Be proactive in going for your priority meetings (alert people to the 'high school dance' phenomenon where some people tend to freeze in these situations).
- You will have ___ minutes for each meeting – I will time you and give you a one-minute warning.

**NOTE:** If there's an odd number of participants, one person may sit out in each round, but the same person may not sit out more than one round.

***Step 5*** Review instructions for meetings:

- Rather than casual conversation, see each 10-12 minute meeting as an opportunity to further your work in the world. What can you do in these 10 minutes to create value?
- Share the numbers at which you both rated the relationship.
- Discuss why you rated the relationship the way you did.
- Discuss how you have contributed to making this relationship the way it is and what you are willing to do differently.
- The conversation may involve the personal relationship between the two of you, but it may also have to do with the relationship between teams or departments you represent. (For example,


 

if this process is being used with a management team, the conversation may be partly about the interaction between the two departments.)

- Offer any feedback you may have for your partner, and requests you might have of them going forward.
- See if there are any next steps or agreements the two of you want to make.
- If you find yourself with people with whom you have little history, the meeting is an excellent opportunity to get to know each other better and explore how to build a new partnership.

***Step 6*** Guidelines for successful meetings:

- Take responsibility for creating higher quality working relationships.
- Speak truthfully.
- Have positive intent: the purpose is to create a better partnership to serve what you both are committed to.
- You can speak about anything that serves these goals: clearing old history, sharing feelings, identifying conflicting perspectives on strategy, exploring how to improve work processes, making commitments about future communication, etc.
- Make sure to end with possible next action steps or new agreements (if any).

***Step 7*** Give a signal to complete the meeting.

- Stress the importance of everyone immediately standing at this point and finding a new partner.
- If pairs linger with each other, they will find everyone else with a new partner by the time they stand.

***Note:*** If each person is to meet everyone in the group, you may need to do some "trading" in the final rounds to make sure everyone has a new partner before starting the timer.

***Step 8*** It may be useful to have some kind of debrief at the end. Possible topics include:

- The kind of value created for themselves and the organization.
- What people learned about themselves.
- How to create/ensure this quality of dialogue back at work.



 

**Option 2: When people need to build relationships and explore possible collaborations.**

Sometimes called "Speed Dating," Option 2 assumes that not everyone has extensive experience or ongoing connection with each other. This can be an excellent tool to use with newer teams or to build relationships and/or explore possible collaborations in a network.

***Step 1*** Let people know that:

- They will have the chance to meet with ____ number of people in the room to explore improving their partnership.

NOTE: You choose how many people they will meet, considering that meetings take from 10-12 minutes each.

- Unless the group is small and there's time to meet with everyone, participants should review their list and identify their priority meetings. The criteria for selection might include:
  - I want to explore possible collaboration (as individuals or organizations).
  - I want to learn more about you and what you do.
  - We (or our organizations) have some difficult interactions or negative history I want to clear.

***Step 2*** Review instructions for finding partners:

- When I say "begin," everyone chooses a partner.
- Some people not on your list may select you because you were their priority.
- Be proactive in going for your priority meetings (alert people to the 'high school dance' phenomenon where some people tend to freeze in these situations).
- You will have ___ minutes for each meeting – I will time you and give you a one-minute warning.

NOTE: If there's an odd number of participants, one person may sit out in each round, but the same person may not sit out more than one round.

***Step 3*** Give a signal to complete the meeting.

- Stress the importance of everyone immediately stopping at this point and finding a new partner.
- If pairs linger with each other, they will find everyone else with a new partner by the time they stand.

NOTE: If each person is to meet everyone in the group, you may need to do some "trading" in the final rounds to make sure everyone has a new partner before starting the timer.

## **TOOL #3:** THE FEEDBACK LINE


 

## Purpose

This process can assist you to:

- Provide people with intensive feedback regarding their performance and how they show up in the team
- Build connection and trust among members of a team
- Help build a norm within groups of open and honest communication

## When to use it

- Only with groups where people know each other sufficiently to have a basis for giving feedback.
- The feedback line, as the name suggests, is about giving and receiving feedback about individual performance within the group. This is a different focus than the partnership pairs, which is about building partnership.
- The purpose is similar to the Group-on-One feedback. However, in Group-on-One, everyone hears each other's feedback, which adds a different dimension.
- The feedback lines create a more intimate contact between people than Group-on-One.
- Both are powerful formats, and may be alternated in the ongoing life of a group or team.

## How it works

***Step 1*** Form the group into two lines, facing one another (like in a contra dance) or with two concentric circles, also facing each other.

- One line first gives feedback; the other first receives; later, the roles are reversed.
- The feedback is short (usually 2 min.) and very focused.
- The focus of the feedback can be shifted to meet the goals of the process, for example:
  - Your strength/contributions as a team member
  - Your needs for development as a team member
- Facilitator guides and times the process very closely, so that participants have the experience of being swept along by the ritual.
- A feedback segment is one-way for 2 minutes, with no response from the receiver except to say, "Thank you," at the end.


 

- At the end of each 2-minute segment, the receiver moves down one person to their left so that they are facing a new giver of feedback.
- When a person comes to the end of their row (in the line format), they move all the way down and enter the head of the same line they were in.
- The process continues until the givers have given feedback to everyone in the opposite row or circle.
- The roles are now reversed, and those who were receiving give feedback to the same people from whom they have just received. Rotate at the end of each two-minute segment as before.

This handles giving and receiving feedback for half the group. If you want everyone to give and receive feedback to each other, have:

- The giving line and receiving line fold in on themselves so that there are now two pairs of lines facing each other, each as long as before repeating the same process of giving and receiving.
- When these lines are complete, people will still not have exchanged feedback with the few remaining people in their own line.
- These last pairs can be done "free-form" in the room (i.e., no longer in lines but standing in pairs) with 4-min. back-and-forth exchanges (2-min. each way).

## Additional considerations

It is often helpful to do a bit of training or at least a reminder on how to give and receive feedback (see our tools: *How to Give Feedback* and *How to Receive Feedback*).

At a minimum, offer these guidelines:

- Have positive intent: the purpose is to help your partners improve their own leadership and contribution to the team.
- Speak truthfully.
- Balance affirming and developmental feedback.
- Time is short – get right to the heart of the feedback.
- Receivers should not respond, but focus on listening.
- Receivers should pay special attention to patterns of feedback that they hear, or feedback that resonates with things they have heard in other contexts.

It is also often helpful to end with a debriefing. Consider the following questions:

- What people have learned about themselves.
- How to create/ensure this quality of openness back at work.

## **TOOL #4:** GROUP SELF-EVALUATION

## Purpose

These processes can assist you to:

- Help teams develop better ways of evaluating and improving their performance

## When to use it

- Regularly – with any kind of work group.
- In order to get great results, teams must learn how to regularly and effectively evaluate their work and work processes in order to improve performance and adapt to changing conditions.

**Common barriers to effective self-evaluation include:**

- Failure to prioritize evaluation
- Individuals' reluctance to say things in the group that might make themselves or others look bad
- Fear of upsetting others (especially those with more positional power)
- Lack of effective, efficient evaluative processes

## How it works

Group self-evaluation can take many forms. The following are some general tips and options for facilitating these processes.

- Train group in the principles and practices of giving and receiving feedback. (See our tools: *How to Give Feedback* and *How to Receive Feedback.*)
- Create clear and useful ground rules for behavior at the beginning of evaluation sessions.
- Evaluate the evaluation process (against the agreed upon ground rules) at least once during the session, so as to continuously improve the quality of discussion.
- When appropriate, collect anonymous data before (written surveys, etc.) to present back to the group. People are usually more honest when giving input anonymously.
- Use numerical ratings to make feedback more precise. For example:
    - On a 1-10 scale, how do you evaluate ____ ?

  **NOTE**: It's good to have people independently write down their numbers and commit to sharing their number, no matter how others in the group vote.

- Used forced choice sharing that challenges people to give both affirming and corrective feedback: e.g., each person names what they see as the group's most important success, and its greatest shortcoming.
- Use a Council/Wisdom Circle (with use of talking object) to encourage people to speak and listen more deeply.
(See our tool: *Wisdom Circles*)
- Use break-out groups:
    - Some people feel safer giving honest feedback in small groups (especially without those with positional power present).
    - The groups can then report out their collective feedback, which may alleviate some individual concerns around feeling too exposed.
- Allow staff to meet without the leader(s) present; then give their collective feedback. There are certain conversations that are more likely to happen without the leader present.


 