Facilitators and activist educators rely on a suite of tools to diagnose the group, to learn about people’s needs and priorities, and to move the group forward.

These tools may include:

- One-on-on conversations
- Maximise / Minimise
- Ambivalence chart
- Questionnaires
- Sociograms
- Mainstream / Margin
- Emotional tracking
- Skits, mime and tableaux
- Noticings
- Evaluations

**One-to-one conversations**
The work of social change is all about communication. As a facilitator it’s important for you to communicate with participants before and during the workshop. This will help you build rapport, strengthen the container, give you a sense of participants’ skills and experience. This in turn may give you ideas for workshop design, check whether people are understanding the workshop content and process, and alert and sensitise you to some of the mainstream and margins in the group.

**Strategic questioning**
Strategic questioning is the skill of asking the questions that will make a difference. It is a powerful and exciting tool for social and personal change. It is a significant service to any issue because it helps local strategies for change emerge. The Change Agency has Fran Peavey’s Strategic Questioning manual on our website.

**Maximise / Minimise**
Maximise/Minimise is a specific kind of discovery list. The facilitator first asks “How, in your experience, do you maximise the value of a learning experience? For example, maybe a friend offers to show you how to use a new computer program, or you go to an evening class to learn a new skill. How have you found that in your life you’re able to maximise the value of a learning experience?”

**Ambivalence chart**
Many topics, like diversity, nonviolent action and community have their upside and down side. This is a type of list where the pluses and minuses for a particular topic are listed to elicit the group’s ambivalence towards something. In a workshop with activists from West Papua, for instance, we used this tool to explore people’s ambivalence towards participating in a workshop on nonviolent resistance.

This tool is a great way to force a group to make a decision: do we really want to work on X? For
instance, do we REALLY want to proceed to learn how to build coalitions, or are we going through the motions to satisfy our funders?

**Questionnaires and building group profiles**

Before beginning a workshop, it’s essential to talk to those who asked you to facilitate the workshop to determine the workshop objectives, structure and process. If other people beside the organisers are also participating, talk to them as well. Designing a questionnaire is one way you will start to get a sense of participants needs, skills and experience. This feedback will help inform the workshop design and will be a useful reference point to go back to as the workshop progresses.

Below is a sample questionnaire that the Change Agency uses:

**Participant profile**

1. Name
2. Organisation
3. Role / position in organisation
4. Briefly describe how you interact with action groups (e.g. are you a member or convenor of an action group? Do you initiate or establish new action groups? Do you provide training and support for action group convenors?
5. What strengths do you bring to your work of supporting action groups? (e.g. extensive experience in community activism, solid facilitation skills, etc)
6. What experience have you had in facilitation and education? How long have you been facilitating/educating for?
7. What approaches do you draw on and utilise?
8. What kind of workshop topics have you facilitated? In what format? For which participants?
9. Learning edge: What would you like to learn or further develop so you can best support action groups?
10. Identify the three top challenges that you feel action groups and their convenors experience
11. Workshop facilitation plans. We expect that participants will lead one or more workshop with action group convenors and/or members in the months following our xxx workshop. Please provide some information about the workshop/s you plan. (e.g. date, location, who will participate? How many people?).
12. Please let us know anything that may impact on the accessibility of the workshop for you (for example hearing, language, mobility, need for breaks).

**Sociograms**

A sociogram is an exercise in which participants arrange their bodies to show something about themselves or to stimulate a new awareness. Types of sociograms include:

- Spectrum: people line-up according to where they would position themselves in relation to two poles
• Community sociogram: people arrange themselves in relation to a centre point symbolising leadership, closeness etc.
• Crossing the line / Moving across the room: individuals move according to whether they match a particular characteristic or not. An example is Training for Change’s “power shuffle” exercise.

One way we use sociograms as a diagnostic tool is in our strategy workshops. Near the beginning of strategy workshops we often ask participants to line up according to where they would position themselves in relation to spectrums such as:

• If your group asked you to develop a campaign strategy tomorrow, would you have a list in your mind already of what to include and feel ready to go (stand toward that end of the spectrum), or unsure and wanting to ask 100 questions about what was involved (stand toward the other end)?
• Stand at that end of the line if you think a detailed written campaign strategy is a must, that it can make all the difference to the group’s campaign impact, and at toward the other end if you feel that other factors are more influential – the group’s relationships, energy and serendipity.

Another example: at one workshop an underlying tension in the group was the awareness, acknowledgement and use of privilege. tCA facilitators placed a chair in the centre of the room and said that for this exercise the chair represented “privilege”. We then asked participants to position themselves anywhere in the room in relation to the chair. The debrief brought up issues and conversations that had been simmering for days.

**Mainstream / Margin**

In any group there are always at least two roles operating at any one time: a mainstream and a margin operating at any one time. The mainstream is part of the group that has its interests recognised. The margin, however, is not part of this universalised interest. Margins are any sub-group (or sub-groups) whose voice is not recognised by the group. In every group, there are mainstream and margins.

For example, in a group that communicates by talking loud, people who tend to be quiet may go left unheard. The people who tend to talk loud, in this case, are playing the “mainstream” role while the quiet people are the “margins.” Both roles are important. The mainstream offers commonality (such as an accepted way of communicating) to the group; the margins offer growth for new behaviours, insights and understandings.

At any time, we might be one role or another (or playing several roles at once) – what is important is for us to recognize which role we are at any time. Each role can make moves to a resolution of conflict – integrating the margin into the mainstream through expanding what defines the mainstream.

By being aware of the mainstreams and margins in a group the facilitator can, where appropriate, proactively support the mainstream to redefine itself and support the margin by creating safety and space to bring their voice and new insights to the group. For example in a four day workshop facilitated by our colleagues from Training for Change, in which one-fourth of the participants were women, men did all the talking in the whole group sessions for the first day and half. The facilitator then did a public interview of the women, drawing them out about their experience in the movement, and their experience as women. After the public interview participated quite actively and raised the quality of the discussions.
Skits, mime and tableaux
A skit is a short drama acted out by a group that has agreed upon a script or narrative. Skits can be a particularly useful way of using humour to relieving tension. A mime is similar to a skit except words are not spoken, so the message is conveyed through movement. Statues or tableaux are similar except that the actors do not move; the message is conveyed through the actors' poses.

Tableaux can also be “dynamised”, so that one or more of the actors move after being statues. This can be done one at a time or altogether, with or without audience participation, depending on the facilitator. These tools can be fun to use. They particularly appeal to kinaesthetic learners and favour non-verbal dynamics. Sometimes they can be catalysts for transformative discussions on group dynamics which might not surface in other contexts. These dynamics can be brought out during the debrief.

Noticings
Noticings are observations without judgement. They could be observations about facilitation, design, group dynamics, personal process etc. Noticings elicit people’s curiosity and observations which gives you as a facilitator a sense of how people are engaging with the material.

Evaluations
Evaluations, individual and group, written and verbal, provide very useful opportunities to get direct feedback on the workshop process. Simple large group evaluations include listing things that were great, and things to change. Another idea is draw a head, a heart, and a pair of hands on a piece of paper and invite participants to list their thoughts, feelings, and comment on the extent to which they might apply what they learnt. An example of a written evaluation form is included below. Change Agency facilitators always get people to fill in an individual written evaluation form before participating in a large group evaluation because we don’t want the group to influence people's individual reflections and comments.

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