

WHAT TO DO TO CHANGE THE ROOM'S DYNAMIC

To change the energy in the room...

- Break participants into pairs or small groups and give them an exercise that gets them talking by discussing a specific topic or question before reporting back to the rest of the room.
- If you're near the end of the meeting when the energy starts to dip, end the meeting a little early. Otherwise, invite people to take a short break, walk around, get a drink of water, or chat with their neighbor for a few minutes.
- Rearrange the room to give people a fresh perspective. If people are sitting in rows, suggest moving the chairs into a circle.
- Point out the problem. Be honest and acknowledge that energy is low and ask the group for help to get back on track.

For an overly-talkative person...

- Take the talkative person aside during a break and have a quick conversation thanking them for their valuable insight and asking for his help in getting others involved in the conversation.
- Establish a "talking stick" (this can be a ball, a marker, or just about anything else). The object is passed from person to person, and only the person who is holding the object is allowed to speak.
- Refer to the group's ground rules. Remind people if they've agreed to help everyone participate. If necessary, suggest a new ground rule like, "Share the air."

To bring closure to a topic that the group can't get past...

- State the obvious: "We could spend all day on this topic, but in the interest of time, we need to move on. Maybe people can say a final word and then continue the conversation at the break."
- Stand up or step forward. Thank the last speaker by name, and then say, "Ok, our next topic/activity/agenda item...."
- Acknowledge the topic and make a bridge between that topic and the next item on the agenda: "That's a great point, and a great setup for our next topic...."

For a group that wants the facilitator to do everything...

- Do an icebreaker to uncover self-interest and individual strengths. Ask people to explain what leadership experience they have, or why they care about the issue you're working on.
- Be clear and call it out. Explain that you don't have all the answers, and that you want the group to be in charge of their own direction. Be consistent in your behavior and don't make decisions for everyone just because things are challenging.
- Keep a positive attitude, and encourage people who show signs of leadership.
- Redirect the group by asking, "What do you think?", "What's worked for you in the past?" or "Is there something new we could try?"

For tangent chasers...

- Again, state the obvious: "That's a very compelling idea/topic, but unfortunately we aren't going to be able to cover it today."
- Or try, "This is an interesting discussion. I wish we could spend more time on it, but we are getting off topic. In order to accomplish everything we need to today, we'll need to come back to our agenda..."
- Give resources: "I am not an expert on that topic, but if you check with [person, group, organization], they may be able to shed some more light on that idea."