

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

Making Learning Outcomes Usable & Transparent

Guidelines for Assignment-Design Charrette Facilitators

The charrettes sponsored by NILOA have employed trained facilitators, and this document draws on their experience. But for campus events with large numbers of participants, it may not be feasible to have facilitators (i.e. group members whose primary responsibility is to manage the discussion and the timing of the process). If your event will not have designated facilitators, see the Guide on running unfacilitated charrettes elsewhere [link to it].

- 1 Recognize that participants are likely to be nervous about sharing assignments, which have traditionally been fairly private work. It may be helpful to begin by acknowledging this outright, using the occasion to set a tone of constructive review and sharing (“we’re all in this together”), a focus on improvement, and an understanding that every assignment is a work in progress, which requires adjustments and modifications over time.
2. Following on this first point, work with the group to establish some “rules of engagement.” These might include turn taking, the importance of active listening, a focus on being helpful rather than critical, and mutual respect.
3. Manage the time. NILOA’s charrette model allows 25 minutes per assignment, which includes a brief introductory context-setting by the assignment author, and 5 minutes for written feedback at the end, with discussion in between. You may want to revise this timing to suit the context, but whatever timing is agreed upon, the facilitator’s first and sometimes hardest job is to monitor the time and make sure that everyone in the group can contribute--and benefit.
4. Prepare for the session by reading all the assignments carefully and come with some questions and issues that seem important to raise if they do not emerge naturally within the discussion. It may be helpful to look at NILOA’s list of questions for reflection and conversation:
http://www.assignmentlibrary.org/uploaded/files/Questions_to_Ask_About_an_Assignment.pdf.
This document could also be shared with participants as a way to get started.
5. At the end of each round, ask everyone in the group to write feedback to the person whose assignment has been discussed. NILOA’s feedback form is very simple--just 4 open-ended questions--but you could modify the form to focus it more on local goals. For instance, if your charrette focused on assignments designed to stimulate and assess integrative learning, one of the questions might ask about the assignment’s strengths vis a vis that outcome.

Additionally, facilitators at NILOA charrettes have found it useful to hand out the feedback forms at the beginning of the discussion so participants can make notes on them all along the way rather than waiting for the final 5 minutes.

6. At the end of the charrette, after everyone's assignment has been discussed, the facilitator can invite participants to reflect on the process: what have they learned, what themes seemed to emerge, how did it feel, what next steps (personally or for the program or institution) would be useful? This is also a chance to invite insights about the characteristics of powerful assignments.