

A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH FOR COLLABORATIONS

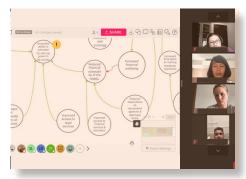




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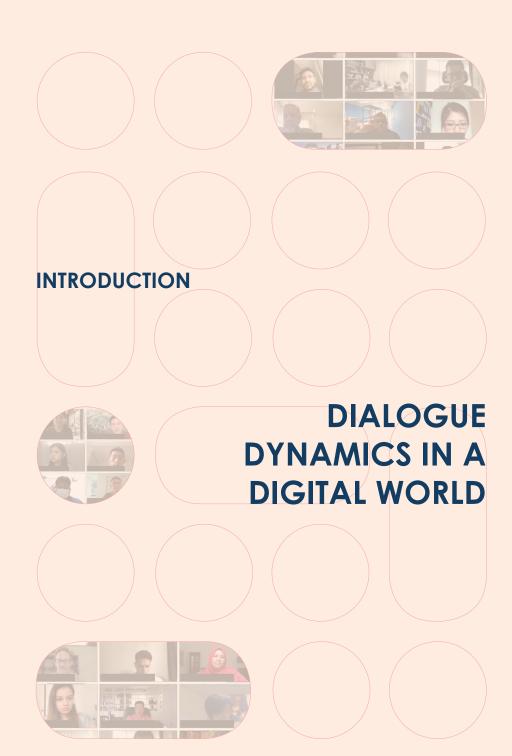
NEW JOURNEYS

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DIGITAL DYNAMICS PRESENT NEW CHALLENGES TO BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH EMPATHY AND LEARNING

Navigating Complex Problems Digitally

Many describe our world today as Volatile, Unpredictable, Complex, Ambiguous, and Hyperconnected.

In particular, hyperconnectivity in the forms of our growing digital presence and relationships present new challenges to cultivating the Colabs principles and phases.





Dur three principles

Our three phases

For example,

- Encountering others' gestures and experiences via screens hampers our ability to learn from and empathise with them through tactile shared experiences.
- In a digital space, people cannot freely and easily move around. We are easily distracted by emails and other work.
 These impede the natural intermingling inherent to community building.

ADAPTING TO THE VIRTUAL REALM REQUIRES THE RIGHT MINDSETS - EMBRACE CHANGE AND EXPERIMENT WITH NEW TOOLS

Rising to the Digital Challenge

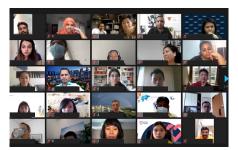
To overcome the challenges presented by digital encounters, the whole community of online convenings - from convenors / organisers to process designers to participants - needs to adopt new mindsets and capabilities:

- Organising a virtual Colabs series requires greater sensitivity to the changed nature of digital encounters and intentionality in creating experiences that build empathy, understanding, and community.
- Members of the community should also be intentional in wanting to participate *actively and attentively*, since it is easier to be distracted or disengaged in virtual settings.
- Organisers and members must also be willing to explore and experiment with new digital tools for collective learning and collaborating.

Open-source Colabs

This companion guide to the <u>Colabs Toolkit</u> details some of the most valuable learnings from NVPC's first virtual Colabs series. This series, held between September and November 2020, focused on Singapore's migrant workers and their quality of life.

For more information about the Migrant Workers Colabs series, click here.

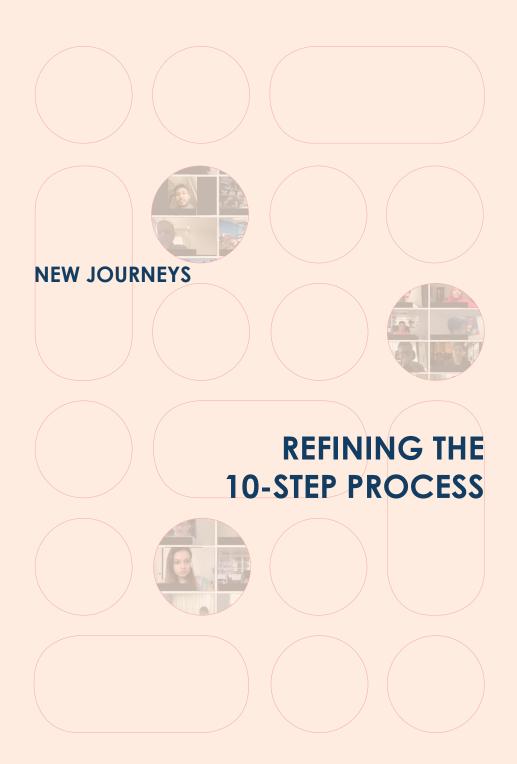




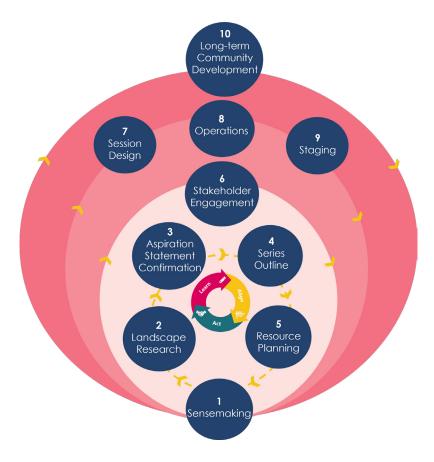
Screenshots from our series

Just as the Colabs Toolkit is an open-source document meant to be shared and improved upon, the processes and learnings here will continually be built up and refined over time.

One platform for this communal learning is the Community-based Collaborations Community of Practice. Get in touch at connect@ colabs.sg with the team to find out more!



The 10-step Iterative Process: A Recap



The above diagram illustrates the 10 steps in designing a Colabs series, with the course of action starting from the innermost circle and moving outwards, representing an iterative loop.

Instead of going through all 10 steps as in the Colabs Toolkit - Complete Guide, we focus on learnings at key stages in the process.

Series Outline (Step 4)

In our Toolkit, we outlined the 4 key stages of a Colabs series: Landscape Overview, Deep Dive, Experiential, and Alignment.

In particular, the **Experiential** stage refers to an immersive experience which aims to increase stakeholders' socio-emotional learning, empathy, and motivation to act.

Since in-person learning journeys are not possible in the virtual realm, here are some digital alternatives you can consider:

- **Multimedia channels** can be an effective means of learning and empathy-building. These include:
 - online videos and documentaries.
 - human interest features.
 - news articles and reports,
 - and the direct writings of beneficiaries (like diaries, guided reflections, or creative pieces like poems).
- Journey maps depict a 'typical' sequence of events for an individual or group of individuals. Such maps can cover experiences from 'a day in the life' all the way to multi-year journeys. Each map records the key activities, thoughts and feelings of the individual at the various high and low points throughout the journey. For example:



MULTIMEDIA CHANNELS AND INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES CAN BE EFFECTIVE MEANS OF GROWING SOCIO-ECONOMIC CAPITAL

LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

For the Migrant Workers Colabs series, we opted for journey mapping exercises.

Why journey maps?

Given the high variability in the experiences of different workers, journey maps were useful for two reasons:

- They provide a structured and interactive activity designed to extract as much relevant information as possible.
- Furthermore, these exercises allowed to create composite maps stitched together from various conversations with workers.

Our maps

We created 3 kinds of journey maps: **End-to-end migration**, **work day**, and **rest day** of a migrant worker. We did these for 15 workers, and then consolidated them into maps for 2 migrant worker personae.

Our challenges

Some of the challenges we faced include:

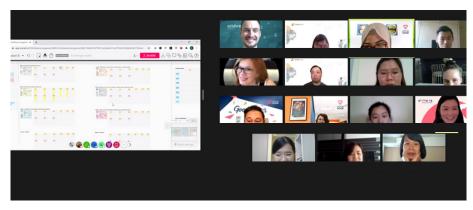
- Connectivity issues (workers in quarantine may have been in locations with poor data connectivity);
- Scheduling difficulties due to work commitments of workers;
- Language barriers.

To overcome these difficulties and maximise our experience of workers' lived realities, we:

- Conducted separate engagements with workers on Sundays. This enabled our facilitators and working group to create skeletal maps which provided participants with key information to develop with the workers during the sessions.
- Engaged translators through our NGO partners.

Check out our journey map template at the end of this guide!

TO BECOME DIGITALLY FLUENT WE NEED FOCUSED AND EXTENDED CAPABILITY BUILDING PROGRAMMES



From our series: the working group at a pre-session briefing

Resource Planning (Step 5)

Capability building and partnerships

When considering the manpower requirements and the timeline for a virtual Colabs series, structure in capability building programmes or external partnerships to become digitally fluent together:

- **Pre-series training** is an important part of virtual Colabs series. This allows the organisers, facilitators, and scribes to get familiar with new styles of digital facilitation or digital tools.
 - For example, even if the working team is familiar with approaches like systems thinking, they may need to 'translate' physical exercises (like mapping system forces using post-its) to virtual ones (like using a digital whiteboard or a platform like kumu.io).

- Another aspect of capability building involves having more regular debriefs and after-action reviews, after each session, for example.
 - In addition to sensemaking the previous session and collaboratively designing the process, these reviews are important for reflection (both on the high and low points) of digital facilitation and the use of digital tools.
- Partnerships with external parties who are well-versed in digital facilitation or the use of digital tools may be valuable, especially if you are undertaking your first virtual Colabs series we are better together!
 - Like-minded convenors or process designers;
 - Volunteer facilitators:
 - Paid consultancies or vendors.

Budgetary considerations

We also included some expected basic budget items in the Toolkit. However, items like venue rental, logistics (e.g. stationery and audio-visual systems), and marketing do not apply in the virtual setting.

In the virtual setting, there are some other budgetary considerations. For example,

- Organisers may need to consider paid business / corporate subscriptions to video conferencing or other digital tools.
- Beneficiaries may require mobile data top-ups or the temporary provision of digital devices so that they can join the journey without disadvantageous costs or technological barriers.
- Finally, there may be additional costs associated with **capability building** / training or tapping on external partners.

Stakeholder Engagement / Community Growth (Steps 6 & 10)

In between sessions

During a virtual Colabs series, extra efforts need to be made in between sessions to maintain the learning environment and cultivate an atmosphere conducive to active networking.

This is all the more crucial in the virtual realm since digital experiences can feel less tactile or interpersonal. Some of the ways to achieve these include:

- 1-page insights of each session, compiled and distributed to participants within 48 hours of the session. The quick turnaround enables participants to have an simple resource to reflect upon and discuss with others.
- Regular calls for feedback. This can be done on single or multiple channels (e.g. calls, replying emails, using SurveyMonkey or Airtable), depending on participants' comfort level and bandwidth.
 - For example, organisers can compile and export responses to a SurveyMonkey form, but participants may prefer to leave feedback via an email, finding it a hassle to fill out a form.
- Opportunities for continued co-creation of collective understanding. Depending on the primary approach and artefacts of your Colabs, allowing participants to make edits or add to artefacts like systems maps can help sustain the learning process.
- Opportunities for further networking, like calls or in-person meetups between pairs or groups of participants from different organisations and sectors who may have similar interests and initiatives.

LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

For the Migrant Workers Colabs series, in addition to post-session insights and feedback channels, we experimented with:

Co-creation of systems maps

In between sessions, we provided participants with access to our digital whiteboard spaces on Mural which had our draft systems maps featuring the stakeholders and issues in the ecosystem.

- This allowed participants could suggest additions and amendments to the maps by posting sticky notes.
- However, we only received a few inputs. It may have been more effective if we sat down with stakeholders new to the digital tool and the complexity of the maps.





From our series: in-person and virtual 'coffee dates'

'Coffee dates'

We also organised virtual or in-person 'coffee dates', more intimate conversations to enable participants to get to know each other better and stimulate deeper dives into topics discussed at a session.

- We did these by random assignment or intentional assignment (according to interest areas or potential collaborations). Pairings / groupings, as well as guiding questions, were given as part of the post-session correspondence which included the 1-page insights.
- Since our participants had packed schedules, we only offered 'coffee dates' once every 2 sessions, to give them a chance to arrange the meetups.

Session Design (Step 7)

The challenges

As mentioned, we must be very intentional in creating meaningful interpersonal encounters, since digital interactions are less organic and tactile than face-to-face dialogue:

- We cannot freely and easily move around a virtual call compared to a physical room;
- We can also be **easily distracted** by emails, other calls, or other pieces of work while being 'present' in a conversation.
- **Digital fatigue** can set in rather quickly, since we spend so much of our day on the computer and on virtual calls.

Staging a session

Given these challenges, greater attention to the flow of the session is needed to ensure that participants remain engaged. Based on the purpose / objectives of your session, it may be appropriate to:

- Have a mix between whole group discussions / sharings and more intimate breakout groups (for focused dialogue or deep diving into issues).
- Have different kinds of **breakout group arrangements**, whether during one session, or across sessions (see further pp. 29-32).
- Or, it may be more appropriate (e.g. if the session involves only 12-15 people) to not have breakout groups but to foster exchanges as a whole community.

• Have sufficient **breaks**, or even stretching exercises at the start of the session / just after a break.

Group size

Based on our experience, the optimal range for breakout group sizes is **4 to 6 participants**, **plus 1 facilitator and 1 scribe**. These figures depend on:

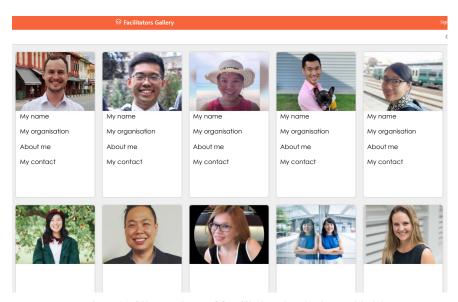
- The purpose and agenda of the session.
- The nature of the discussion (sharing stakeholder interests and constraints may benefit from bigger groups, while deep diving into complex topics may benefit from smaller groups).
- The number of facilitators and scribes available.

Encouraging active participation

Building on the stakeholder engagements in between sessions (see pp. 16-17), here are some ways to design active participation and networking during sessions:

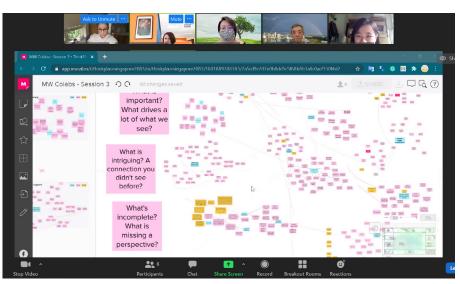
• Online galleries of facilitators and participants (if consent is given, you can feature photos, basic contact information, and areas of interest / potential collaboration).

WELL-DESIGNED SESSIONS ARE ATTENTION-HOLDING AND ENCOURAGE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION



A snippet of the gallery of facilitators hosted on Airtable during the Migrant Workers Colabs series.

- The **chat function** on video conferencing applications can be a parallel discussion track.
 - For example, during a large group sharing, participants can provide reflections, feedback, and suggestions via the chat. Remember to explicitly ask participants to do this; it is easy to forget about the chat function!
- Hands-on activities, like polling and digital whiteboarding.
 - Note that for large groups (of around 100 people), digital
 whiteboards may lag. Having duplicate boards can help
 resolve this problem. For example, have half the breakout
 groups use one board, and the other half another. The
 working team will then sense-make the insights in toto.



From our series: sharing our Mural board on Zoom

Digital tool options

Some of the video conferencing and other digital tools available include:

- For video conferencing: Zoom; Microsoft Teams; Google Meet; Cisco Webex.
- For digital whiteboarding: Mural; Miro; Microsoft Whiteboard; Google Jamboard.
- For polls and sensemaking: Zoom functions; Mentimeter.
- For administration or document co-creation: Google Docs Editors (Google Docs, Sheets, Slides, etc.); shared Microsoft Office documents via Sharepoint; Airtable.

Where appropriate, be sure to utilise the full suite of functions on an application. For example, *Zoom* has polling and chat functions to enhance the interactivity of sessions.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT DIGITAL TOOLS WILL HELP YOU ACHIEVE YOUR OBJECTIVES EFFECTIVELY

Choosing the Best-fit Digital Tools

Ensure that	Yes	No
The tools enable and empower you to achieve your objectives. One way to validate this is by testing if the virtual process 'mirrors' the physical / in-person process. For example:		
 For getting consensus or convergence, a Zoom poll mirrors an in-person hand-raising activity; For ideation, post-its on a digital whiteboard mirror physical post-its on canvas sheets. 		
The tools are freely / easily accessible by all, particularly the 'beneficiaries' of the Colabs series.		
 Everyone is familiar or has a working knowledge of the tools. For the organisers and facilitators, this might require training; For participants, this might require taking a preseries survey or sending a 'how-to' guide. 		
If the answer to the above question is 'no', consider whether it is more appropriate for only facilitators and scribes to access / share the digital whiteboards.		
 This streamlines the harvesting and insight-capturing process, and resolves concerns about participants' comfort levels with new tools. However, this takes away a sense of agency and participation from the process. 		

LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

The setup

During the first session of the Migrant Workers Colabs series, we asked participants to:

- Individually sketch pen-and-paper maps of stakeholders in the migrant worker space;
- Take a picture using their mobile phone;
- Use a QR (quick response) code to upload the picture onto Airtable;
- The facilitators / scribes would then copy the picture from Airtable to Mural, for all to see on the shared Mural boards.

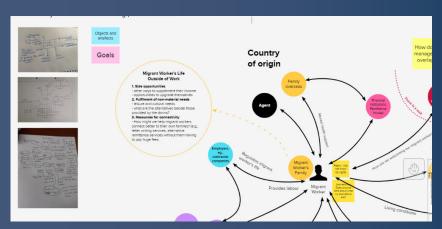
The results

Not all participants managed to upload their maps:

- There were too many steps involving multiple tools (pen and paper, mobile phone, QR code, Mural);
- Others were using Zoom on their phone, making it even harder to switch between applications.

The lesson

We recommend limiting such interactive tasks to 2 or 3 steps at the most, and to limit the number of applications used to the minimum.



Screenshot of Mural board with participants' hand-drawn maps imported onto the digital whiteboard

Operations / Session Hosting (Steps 8 & 9)

In the Toolkit, we noted some logistics and manpower support required for the operations of each session. Note however that these requirements may change if you have engaged external support (see p. 13).

Manpower support -Hosts and co-hosts

- Each virtual conference tool typically has a host who has overall control of the call and its settings.
- While functions like assigning breakout groups to participants can only be done by the host (e.g. on Zoom), other operational tasks can be delegated to co-hosts and the tech support team, like:
 - Renaming participants' display names for breakout group assignments (see the following pages)
 - Monitoring the waiting room, and keeping time.

Lead facilitator

- The lead facilitator takes charge of full group discussions in the main room, and does not lead breakout aroup discussions.
- As somebody with deep expertise in facilitation, the lead facilitator may decide to jump in and out of rooms to check on the progress in each breakout group. However, this might get distracting, and it should be announced upfront.
- The call host (above) may or may not be the same as the lead facilitator, depending on manpower availability and if the lead facilitator needs to control breakout group movements.

Tech support

• A small tech support team of 1-3 people (depending on the size of your convening) is vital to ensure the smooth operations of a virtual call. Key functions include:

• Admitting participants from the waiting room (if applicable) and taking attendance.

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- Coordinating with facilitators and scribes on the **renaming of** participants' display names for breakout group assignments.
- Monitoring back-end communication channels.
 - Using a separate Whatsapp, Telegram, or Microsoft Teams chat for coordination and operational updates is important so that facilitators and scribes are able to concentrate on their work without being distracted (by e.g. private messages on Zoom or technical problems).
- Troubleshooting **technical issues**. For example:
 - If a participant faces connectivity issues, it may seem that they have joined the call, but their screens remain blank and microphones disconnected.
 - A participant may not have received an invitation or is unsure how - to join a breakout group (e.g. on Zoom) and is thus 'stuck' in the main room.
 - In such cases, effective communication between the team and facilitators is needed so that the latter can decide to start the dialogue instead of resolving the technical issue themselves.

Before the session

Pre-session briefings / team huddles (of around 30 minutes) are an effective way for the working team (from covenors to facilitators and scribes) to settle in and settle down:

- Take the opportunity for **announcements** and give last-minute updates on attendees, breakout groups, and operations.
- By starting the virtual call early, you can also ensure that all the call settings are correct.

- Assigning 'co-hosting' rights (if applicable, particularly on Zoom) to all facilitators and scribes helps streamline several operations during the call.
 - This is especially useful to change the display names of any participant to a standardised format, thereby speeding up the breakout group allocation process (see pp. 29-32 for variations of breakout group arrangements).
 - For this to work, be sure to share the breakout group allocations (where possible) with your facilitators and scribes.
 - A standardised format could be: <group number> <name> <organisation>, e.g. 4 John NVPC.
- Monitor the waiting room (if applicable) to both make sure the right people are joining the call, and to check if anyone has joined early.

ESTABLISH A PRODUCTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT WITH A HEARTY WELCOME AND REITERATING THE COLABS PRINCIPLES

Setting the scene well - the welcome

Having some time (around 5 to 10 minutes) at the start of the session proper for participants to settle in, see who is in the room, and greet one another is a useful way of creating a **warm and welcoming atmosphere**:

- Facilitators can assist in this by greeting those already assigned to their breakout group (if applicable).
- Informal *chats* may start, whether on the chat function or on the call both are good ways of building energy in the room. But remember to stay on time and not get carried away!

 Another way to build energy is to have music, ideally curated to suit the theme / topics of the day. Music can also be an alternative conversation starter.



Encourage participants to turn their cameras on as a sign of attention and respect for others in the room

Setting the scene well - the learning environment

To create engaging and enriching spaces of active online collaboration:

- **Reiterate the purpose** of the series (e.g. by restating the aspiration statement) and the Colabs principles at the start of each session.
- Encourage good digital habits that participants should try to adopt so that meaningful and honest exchanges can take place during virtual calls. At the minimum, these include:
 - Turning on cameras as a sign of attention to and respect for the others in the room.
 - Turning on microphones during breakout groups, since the group size is small, can facilitate organic discussions without the need to mute / unmute oneself.

Maintaining the learning environment

Under Session Design (pp. 19-20), we offered some ways of building active participation into a session. In addition to setting out the principles and habits of a healthy environment, consider also the *level of interactivity* during whole group / breakout group discussions:

- If you want a lively, person-centred discussion, it may be best not to share the digital whiteboard on which the scribe is capturing live notes.
- On the other hand, sharing the whiteboard enables the group to follow the conversation intently, as they will be able to see how the scribe captures and synthesises the conversation.
- The other end of the spectrum involves participants accessing the whiteboard themselves, so that they can actively include their inputs. This process can be messy and depends in large part on how comfortable participants are with the digital tools.

Post-session

- Conducting a post-session debrief (right after, or the next day, while things are still fresh in people's minds) is important for both the capability building of the team and sensemaking of insights:
 - Having facilitators and scribes share their learnings on the facilitation process is a good way for collective learning and growth.
 - In addition, having facilitators and scribes share about the content of breakout group discussions is key for the consolidation of insights and learnings.
- It is also important to have **knowledge management processes**, including folders (shared, where appropriate) for each session's insights, digital whiteboards, and artefacts (e.g. systems maps).

Breakout Group Setups

Here are five breakout group setups organisers can consider using for a virtual Colabs series. Depending on your objectives, using one or more of these setups within a session or across sessions can help maximise networking and learning opportunities for the community.

Pre-session

1. Random (Pre-) Assignment

When to use

Completely random assignment of breakout groups may be helpful:





How to create groups

Some video conferencing tools, Zoom included, can automatically randomly assign participants to breakout groups.

However, if you wanted to ensure that each group has participants from a variety of sectors / organisations, you may need to adjust randomised groups (by using a spreadsheet, for example).

2. Intentional Pre-Assignment

When to use

 If you have additional information about participants' interest areas / potential partnerships (e.g. through a survey).



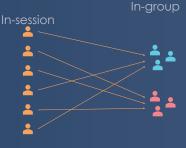
How to create groups

Pre-assign participants by using a spreadsheet to ensure that each breakout group has the right mix of individuals and organisations.

3. Participant Free Choice

When to use

 If you have specified particular discussion topics to each breakout group, and want participants to choose which group they want to join.



How to create groups

Participants can rename themselves to the standardised format. This process may take a couple of minutes. To facilitate the process, consider attaching a short guide on how to rename oneself on a call might be useful in such cases.

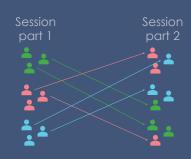
Alternatively, participants can request via the chat function to be renamed, if they have trouble doing so themselves. To facilitate the process, particular tech support staff can be assigned to rename people for certain groups, e.g.:

• Staff A renames anyone wanting to be in groups 1 and 2; Staff B renames anyone wanting to be in groups 3 and 4, and so on.

4. Midway Changing of Groups

Option A - Multiple groups

 If you decide to have World Café /Human Library groupings, have domain experts or breakout group hosts to rotate among the different rooms, instead of having dozens of participants do so.



As call host, the lead facilitator should take charge of this
process as they will be able to control who moves in and
out of breakout groups. Time management is crucial for the
success of this setup, in order to avoid people being abruptly
cut off and sent to another group.

Option B - Two-segment session

- If your session has only two broad segments, it is possible to conduct en masse breakout group changes at the halfway juncture of a session, e.g.:
 - If you want the first segment to involve groups of people from similar backgrounds, and then groups of people from diverse backgrounds in the second segment.
 - If you have only two discussion topics in the session and want a diversity of views on them.
- Time the switch during a rest break. This helps the support team, facilitators, and scribes change participants' display names more seamlessly. For this process, ask participants to stay on the call (cameras and microphones can be switched off for people to have a proper break).

Option C - Changes at any time

- If you would like maximum flexibility, the lead facilitator, as call host, can jump in and out of breakout groups to ask if any participants would like to switch groups.
- This may be helpful if you have a variety of topics being discussed at the same time, and participants are interested in several of them.
- However, this can be a potentially disrupting process, if participants leave or join discussions midway and need to catch up quickly. Facilitators and scribes too may be unaware if new participants have joined the group.

5. Closing and Consolidating Groups

To maintain breakout groups of optimal sizes, it may be necessary to close certain groups.

Start of session groups

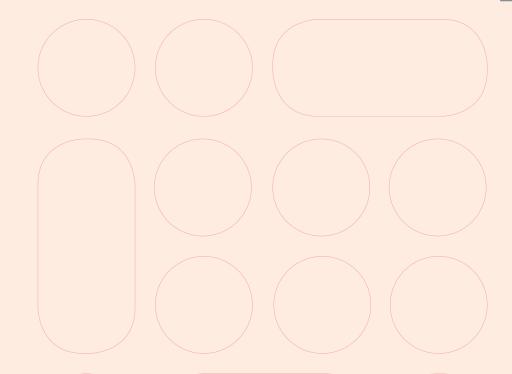
When to use

 If the actual number of participants is fewer than the expected number, due to last minute commitments or illnesses.

How to close groups

If this is done before any discussion starts, the participants' experiences would not be affected.

However, this requires quite a lot of back-end work between the support team, affected groups' facilitators, and the lead facilitator in charge of breakout group assignments. You would need to decide which groups to close, where to assign participants to, and where to reassign facilitators and scribes (if appropriate).



...ANOTHER NEW CHAPTER STARTS HERE.

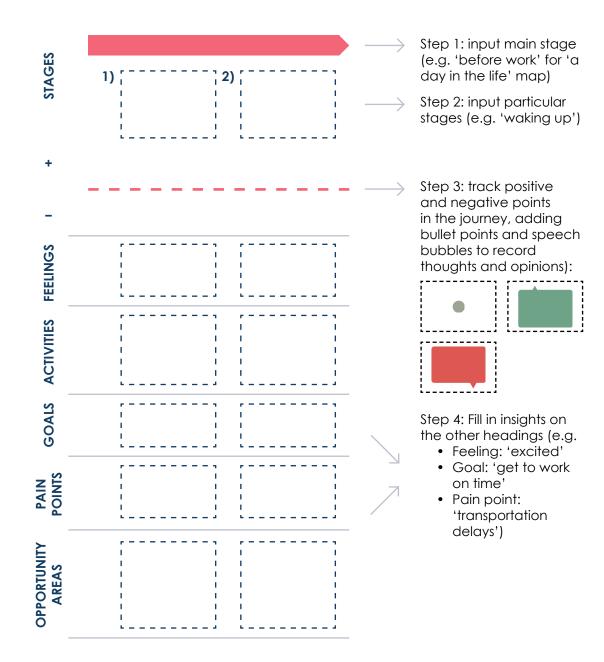
The accelerating digitalisation of how we live and work demands our quick adaptation to the virtual realm and online processes.

An openness to technology, reinvigorated creative thinking, and a renewed sense of purpose will help us as we journey together.

APPENDIX: JOURNEY MAP TEMPLATE

On p. 11, we described the process undertaken to create journey maps for NVPC's Migrant Workers Colabs series. Here we provide a format for this empathy-building activity.

Journey title (e.g. 'a day in the life of...'): Demographic information of persona (e.g. name, age, occupation, other relevant information): Field notes (observations of tone, emotions, behaviour, or details to place onto the map):



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CONTACT US

This guide was prepared by the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre (NVPC) in March 2021.

This guide is constantly being updated as we and our partners host more virtual convenings. We invite you to share your experiences to make our Toolkits more comprehensive and truly open-source.

If you need more information on how to apply the Colabs framework, you may visit **cityofgood.sg/colabs-sg/** for the Starter's Guide of our Toolkit.

Do write in to **connect @colabs.sg** if you have any queries or if you would like to share your Colabs experiences.

WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

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