

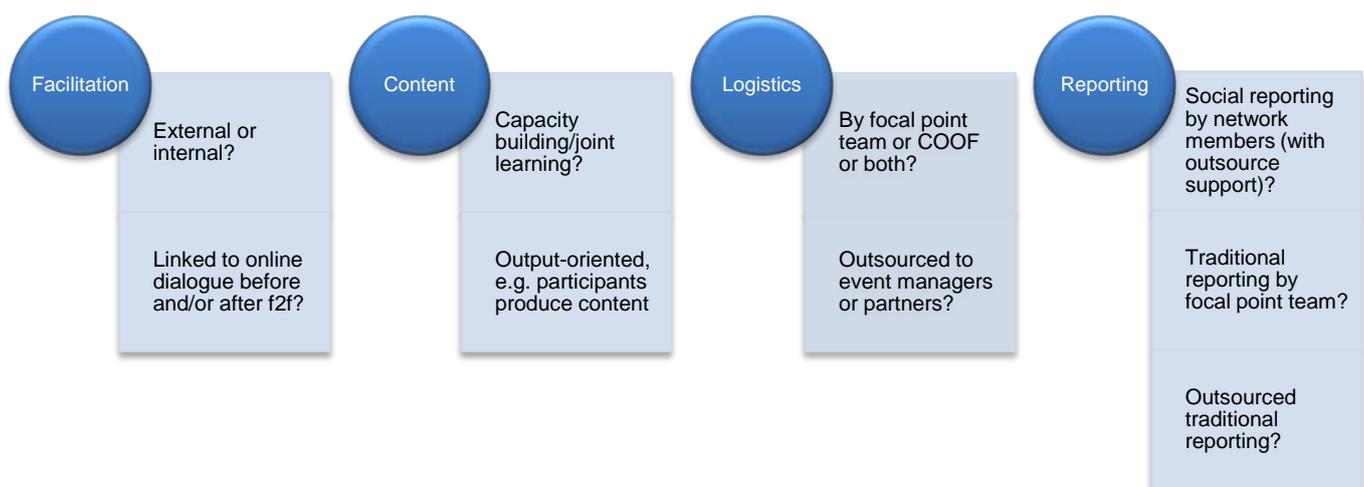
## Good Practice: Planning Face to Face Events

*What should be considered when planning a face-to-face (f2f) event for an SDC network? We will focus here on the process related aspects to consider when preparing a f2f in the context of a network. This includes how to deal with different tension fields regarding time allocation for different aspects that f2f events should cover, e.g. how much time should be allocated to network building as opposed to content delivery. Different possibilities exist regarding the format of f2f events, for example a periodic five day f2f event with a maximum number of members of a given network is quite different from a two hour f2f meeting. This guide will concentrate on the former, examining how to deal with specific procedural issues also depending on where the network is in terms of its life cycle.*

Related guides: (1) linking online and f2f events, and (2) social reporting.

**How are network f2f events special?** The planning of f2f events of networks can be more challenging than non-network related f2f events. This is due to the fact that such events should cover a number of different issues, e.g. network or community building, delivering content and giving participants a chance to cover their personal agendas and make themselves known in their specific field(s) of expertise. Core network stakeholders (e.g. Focal Point and Steering Group) not only have an interest in the event itself but also in its outputs, so their participation is crucial. Contracting an external **facilitator** is one way of ensuring that all key actors within a network, including the Focal Point and Steering Group members, can participate to a maximum in the f2f event. At the same time, network f2f events are also a chance to deliver **content** and reach a common understanding regarding thematic issues of the network. Visiting projects and getting first hand insight into a specific approach of the hosting country can lead to more exchange and deeper understanding among the f2f participants, both during the event and in follow-up after the workshop. However, some thought has to be put into choosing an appropriate project for a **field visit**, as well as how much time should be dedicated to it and when the most appropriate time is for it to take place. Another aspect specific to f2f events of networks is that due to the **network building** and continuity aspect, linking them to online discussions is particularly important. Finally – depending on associated goals – the **reporting of f2f** events of networks may be done through social reporting which also has specific requirements in terms of planning and organisation.

The illustration below highlights important elements and questions or options SDC Focal Points and Steering Group members should consider at the planning stage of a f2f event of their network.



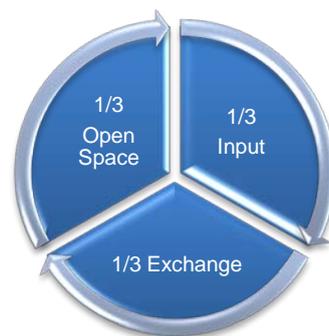
**How does the life cycle of a network affect the planning of a f2f event?** Early on in the life of a network, there might be a stronger focus during the f2f on **network building**, i.e. getting to know each other, defining roles and reaching a common understanding on thematic issues. Alternatively, a network that is more mature might invest more time in **producing outputs** or in **exploring new methods, tools or ideas**. These different context-specific requirements should affect the decisions at the planning stage as well as the programme of a f2f.

**What is an appropriate rhythm for planning f2f events?** It depends, as it is important to consider the social nature of a network and to allow each network to create its own rhythm. Even with networks that mostly interact in an online

way, it is important to have **periodic f2f meetings**. The frequency of f2f events of course also depends on the available resources of a network, the geographic spread of its members, etc. In the SDC context, holding one **global** f2f event every 1.5 to 2 years is advisable. Another variation to this recommendation is to have a **regional** f2f event on an annual basis and a global one every two years.

**What is the best way to structure the programme?** Building sufficient **non-planned time** into a f2f programme is key. Several SDC networks had positive experiences by designing the programme of the f2f around the "**1/3 principle**", in other words having 1/3 **inputs**, 1/3 **exchange**, 1/3 **open space**.

Whereas the inputs and moments for exchange among participants cater to the needs of a network to cover issues considered important to its development, allocating time in the programme to open space addresses arising needs of participants. This time can either be 'filled' by ongoing or daily integration of new topics, or by have a pre-scheduled time slot, perhaps using the Open Space methodology, which gives participants an opportunity to create the agenda for the day(s) on the spot, leading to a very high level of ownership and engagement. Besides mobilising lots of energy from participants, it produces fast and well documented results as participants are invited to take responsibility for what they personally care about. Consequently, it is oriented to action that is meaningful to participants beyond the f2f.



**Dealing with multiple languages** can be an issue in the planning of f2f events and SDC networks have applied different approaches. One is the **buddy system**, i.e. ad hoc whispered translation by colleagues. Another is **professional simultaneous translation**. The former is good for small group work, and can help build solidarity, but it can put a high demand on the multilingual colleagues. The latter usually is expensive, makes participatory, small group work difficult and can cause fragmentation in the group. Both require a lot of organising and planning.

**What is the added value of external facilitation?** External facilitators can help owners of f2f events strike a **balance** between the different elements that should be addressed and can provide **procedural guidance** in decision making related to the questions specific to f2f events of networks. Facilitators can also suggest participatory **methodologies** - such methodologies often lead to more dialogue, engagement and ownership, which is crucial especially in the context of f2f events of networks. It is easy to forget that the most valuable resource at a f2f event is the participants: they bring a wealth of life and work experience, as well as a variety of perspectives that can be combined in various ways to truly enrich an event. Also, the value added does not only concern the atmosphere and output of a f2f meeting itself, but also the way network-members will collaborate virtually beyond the event.

Heidi Vögeli is in the planning stage of the first f2f event of the recently created network in which she acts as the Focal Point. Her personal agenda is packed already even though the next f2f is still some months away. **Today she will chair a meeting with the Steering Group of the network** where some key decisions will be taken regarding the content and process related aspects of the f2f.

- She has just finished **contracting a facilitator** who will also participate in the Steering Group meeting and support them in defining the programme of the event, making it coherent and participatory. With the support of the facilitator, she will be able to concentrate on content related aspects and rely on the facilitator to recommend an appropriate mix of participatory methodologies to ensure exchange among participants.
- Also, at this meeting the **further milestones leading to the f2f** will also be defined. There are so many things that should be decided together with Steering Group members and possibly even with the network members that she is really keen on defining the road map as soon as possible.
- That reminds her: before the meeting she will have a look at the **guide on linking f2f and online dialogues**. The last time she looked at the Learning and Networking Website she also noticed a guide on social reporting, which might be useful as well.
- Ah, the **reporting** aspect is yet another issue to discuss once the programme is more clear. She adds this point to her list of things to discuss at the next steering group meeting. As the reporting relates to the expected output of the f2f, this point deserves to be discussed in depth.

Being an **orchestrator** of the preparation team also requires making sure that the **logistics** are being taken care of by the support staff. For this Heidi decides to plan a **telephone conference for the following week** with her administrative support staff in Berne as well as her colleagues responsible for organising the venue and field trip where the f2f will take place. She will also check whether the facilitator would like to participate in this conversation, as there might be some issues to discuss from the facilitation perspective too. Heidi ponders as she checks her calendar for a meeting slot that although holding the f2f outside Switzerland might require more coordination and planning, it does give network members a chance to visit relevant projects in another focus country.

## Key Resources

[Face-to-face meetings of SDC networks: What have we learned so far?](#) (SDC Learning and Networking Blog)

[F2F-meetings of SDC networks – lessons to be learned \(II\)](#) (SDC Learning and Networking Blog)

[Knowledge Sharing Toolkit](#)