



Convening participants in dialogue after a panel discussion, Ethiopia | © Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation / Jiro Ose

Module 7: Sustaining Momentum and Relationships

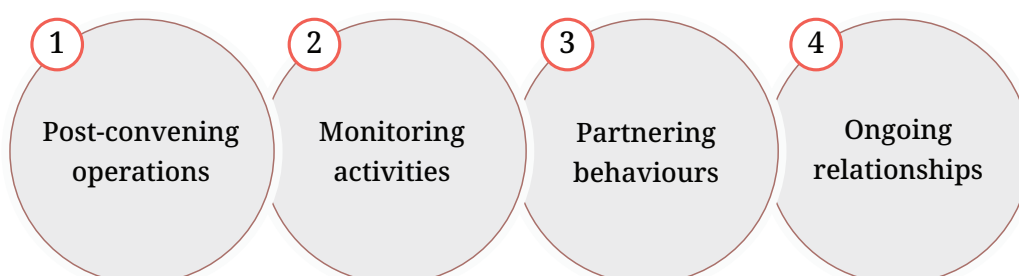
This module focuses on how to sustain momentum and relationships with participants and their organisations after or between convenings.

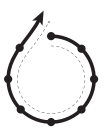
We often think of post-convening activities as firstly operational; sending thank you notes, sharing convening summaries and agreed actions, followed by monitoring actions and chasing people to do what they said they would do. Actually, the post-convening phase of the convening cycle is about sustaining momentum and relationships with and between participants and their organisations.

This tends to be the role and responsibility of the convener (and their team). It involves some necessary operational activities and of course monitoring actions and accountabilities, but as we said at the beginning of this [Toolkit](#): '.....at the very heart of this approach is the understanding that actions will get you so far but if the intention of your work is to achieve change at scale and pace, relationships will get you further.'

So, sustaining momentum towards a system-level impact requires continuing to build relationships through post-convening engagement and partnering behaviours.

Flow of this module





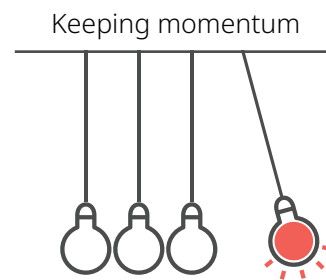
1. Post-convening operations

Send simple notes

As soon as possible after a convening send thank-you notes and possibly 'sorry we missed you' notes. These may just be simple emails but give the opportunity for the convener to connect with the participants and act as a reminder of the energy shared by the group.

Send thank you notes to those people who came to the convening to recognise their effort and commitment in making the time within their schedule to join the convening. A nice touch might be to include an insight or meaningful quote shared during the prior convening.

Send 'sorry we missed you' notes to who were invited to the convening but didn't end up making it to let them know they were missed. This will send the signal that they are important to the convenings and subtly imply that you don't want them to miss anymore. It also offers the opportunity to reconnect with stakeholders that didn't attend the convening and understand if or how they'd like to keep engaged with the work, topic, or issue.



Share convening outcomes

This contact with participants is more strategic in approach than the simple notes. Sharing convening outcomes is a way of maintaining excitement about what is possible so that people continue to feel connected to the work, topic, or issue. It also serves to remind participants of agreements made while together and informs people who weren't at the convening about what happened, keeping everyone on the same page and focused on what collectively needs to be done.

Convening outcomes need to be shared and written in such a way that they:

- > can be easily shared within a participants' organisation, to aid with any intended delegation of tasks.
- > can be understood by stakeholders that did not attend but may need or wish to engage with the work post-convening.
- > show what was achieved in the convening, framing it as a step on the journey to keep people engaged.
- > record the forward actions and who is accountable for their completion.

This summary communication might include; the convening purpose, outcomes, decisions, agreed actions, timescales commitments, and accountabilities. Explain their implications for the system-level impact aimed for and be sure to identify workstream owners or leads. The summary could be as short as one page. It is helpful to share this within a few days post-convening, while the experience is still recent.

The sharing of short notes and convening outcomes might be undertaken as two separate activities or combined. We recommend that they are sent separately, simple notes immediately post-convening and convening outcomes a short time later, once the convening team have processed any outputs and content derived from the gathering.



2. Monitoring activities

It is human nature that motivation, energy and commitment diminish over time. So, a convener or designated coordinator needs to monitor to ensure that post-convening activities are taking place as agreed by asking for updates from those accountable for taking forward action.

This could be achieved by putting an accountability reporting structure in place.

Alternatively, monitoring might be undertaken with an email, phone call or a virtual group meeting to update on progress. Consider arranging a group or individual follow-up calls within a month post convening to maintain momentum and check-in on action, update, coordinate, resolve problems, and next steps.

Most importantly though, monitor activities. Not following up with people in some way may send a message that not much action is really expected.

As you go about monitoring activities with stakeholders, remember the influence potential of acknowledging and praising progress to motivate people to take act.

As the convener monitors activities, it can be useful to consider the different roles that are necessary to complete forward action, particularly as achieving each post convening action is likely to require the involvement of people across several institutions, only some of which may have been participants in the convening. Defining these roles could be initiated during the convening, but it is likely that adjustments will be made once participants engage others within their organisations.

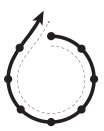
The RASCI Matrix offers a useful framework for understanding the roles needed to complete each action. In the context of taking forward action, we might understand these institutional systems as being structured around RASCI Matrix roles.

- R - Responsible** | Those responsible for carrying out the action or activities which contribute to completion of the action.
- A - Accountable** | The one ultimately answerable for completion of the forward action, the one who ensures the prerequisites of the action are met and who delegates the work to those responsible.
- S - Support** | Those providing support during the implementation of the activities and action.
- C - Consulted** | Those who can provide valuable advice or consultation, typically subject-matter experts, for the activities and action.
- I - Informed** | Those who should be informed about progress or decisions made often only on completion of activities and action.

It might be the case that the person **accountable** for an action may also be **responsible** for completing it, or part of it. It is always the case that although many people may be allocated responsibilities, only one person is accountable for completion of the action.

Supporting post convening accountability partners in engaging with people in each RASCI team so that they feel their activities are part of something bigger will motivate progress. Sharing convening outcomes through the accountable person is a straightforward way of initiating this.

It might be useful to conveners to be aware of those people undertaking these various RASCI roles within stakeholder institutions but post convening monitoring by conveners should concentrate on engaging with those **accountable** for forward action.



3. Partnering behaviours

From a participants' perspective, monitoring of post-convening activities can sometimes feel like being checked up on or chased. So it's important to continue to role model the behaviours of a partnering environment in all post-convening engagement to grow the trusted relationship that was seeded or fostered in the convening itself.

We might view the role of the convener at this point in the convening cycle as the central relationship 'node' within the system of participants and institutional stakeholders. A convener monitors progress and holds people accountable but also maintains connection with and between participants. Generally by making themselves available and by being helpful and supportive (without judgement) in moving things forward.

If a participant or their organisation isn't making much progress, you might inquire about the challenges they are facing in taking the agreed action and ask what they might need in order to move forward? As the convener or coordinator, you may be in a position to unblock a barrier for them by speaking to someone on their behalf, or introducing them to someone who can help them.

A lack of responsiveness might be due to a lack of clarity so some gentle inquiry should illicit whether this is the case.

At this point it might be necessary to remind yourself as the convener, your team if you have one and any participants and organisations that need to hear it that transformation within the agricultural sector is a marathon not a sprint so focus on small, straightforward and effective action steps.

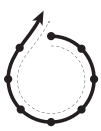
Inclusivity



Participants attend scientific track sessions during convening, Ethiopia | © Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation / Mulugeta Ayene

Even though the convening environment may have been inclusive, this may not be the case for the institutions that participants are coming from. As participants return to their respective institutions, consider how they can be supported to remain accountable and gender sensitive in potentially non-inclusive environments.

New networks formed post-convening, can be susceptible to perpetuating some of the unbalanced power dynamics that an inclusive and equitable convening attempts to mitigate. A convener could appoint a diverse group of champions among the participants to help support the development of inclusive networks that promote a team-based approach to working towards system-level impact.



Country specific insights

If you intend hosting a convening in or inviting institutional stakeholders from Ethiopia or Nigeria, you may find the following country-specific contexts useful.

Ethiopia

Ethiopians need a gentle push post-convening to sustain momentum. Keep participants connected and informed about developments and wider related issues since the convening, through emails and phone calls.

In addition to formal communication, maintain a personal relationship with participants to strengthen partnerships.

Nigeria

Nigerians tend to value when people check up and ask after their wellbeing over the phone from time to time. This high esteem of continued connection could be leveraged by the convener to maintain relationships with convening participants.

The most effective follow up is when a personal relationship is maintained with the participant, as well as a relationship with their institution. Keep them both abreast of developments since the convening.

Further context on convening with institutional stakeholders in Ethiopia and/or Nigeria is offered in these guides:

- › [Holding a Convening in Ethiopia](#)
- › [Holding a Convening in Nigeria](#)

4. Sustaining relationships

Relationships matter

No matter who you're engaging within the agricultural system, or the impact you are seeking to ignite, sustaining connections and relationships with and between institutional stakeholders is essential to success.

When we place this in the context of moving from igniting a system-level impact to driving agricultural transformation over a longer period of perhaps several convening cycles, relationships become ever more critical.

Sustaining long-term working relationships with and between institutional stakeholders helps to drive transformation by:

- › Overcoming roadblocks or barriers by having a network of trusted relationships across the agricultural system.
- › Continuing to develop a shared, deeper understanding of the topic, issue, or challenge and evolving the purpose in response.
- › Enabling alliances so that resources, expertise, and/or influence is shared and enhanced, accelerating impact at scale and pace.
- › Closing the stakeholder gaps by asking those we know well who else we should involve in the work (Snowball technique) and making the necessary introductions to accelerate or enhance impact.
- › Sparking unforeseen collaborations or alliances to address new challenges and opportunities that emerge on the longer journey.
- › Influencing across the agricultural system to drive greater inclusivity, mitigate power imbalances, and champion gender equity.



Relationships matter: the currency for systemic change is trust, and trust comes through forming healthy working relationships. People, not programs, change people.

Bruce D Perry

Professor of psychiatry and behavioural sciences

Building a community

We might think of an approach sustaining these long-term relationships as building a community.

Of course communities at different levels and scales within the agricultural system already exist so find out what groups are already in place. Tap into existing networks, newsletters or structures if relevant to the institutional stakeholders and/or aligned with the system-level impact you are aiming for.

If there is a gap in the system for this community, as the International Water Management Institute found in their post-convening engagement work (see [IWMI Case Study](#)), some ways to engage institutional stakeholders in this way are to:

- › Offer an opt in to 1:1 pairing after convenings.
- › Set up working groups or pods of people in different organisations with accountabilities, influence or interests in the same workstream.
- › Create a newsletter to share following the convening, which might include at various times; resources mentioned during the convening, progress made and any successes relating to the convening, relevant news, spotlight a participants biography, opportunities about participants and/or participating organisations.
- › Gather the group together regularly for an opportunity to maintain momentum and check-in on action, next steps, and resolve problems together.

There are also plenty of digital tools and social media networks to link community members. However, these may require a designated person to keep the conversation and technology going. Some options are; Slack channels, Facebook or LinkedIn groups.

Whatever approach you choose to take know that through building a community or sense of community with institutional stakeholders you are, through your own post convening action, extending ripples of influence and impact throughout the wider system.

Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.

Henry Ford



Sustaining momentum and relationships: module summary

Watch outs

- › Making action monitoring interactions with stakeholders feel mechanical or impersonal. Use partnering behaviours to sustain healthy working relationships.
- › Focusing on action over relationships. Actions will get you so far but if the intention of your work is to achieve change at scale and pace, relationships will get you further.
- › Thinking and acting short term. Given the complex challenges, working with others towards agricultural transformation is a long-term aim.
- › Overlooking what already exists. Leverage engagement opportunities with existing communities, networks and structures with the same or similar aims.

Sources of inspiration

- › RASCI Matrix. *Multi-Company Project Management: Maximizing Business Results Through Strategic Collaboration*. Dean Baker. J Ross Publishing. (2009). (p. 58).
- › Relationships Matter: [The Five Elements of Developmental Relationships](#). Search Institute.

Key points of this module

- › Sustaining connections and relationships with and between institutional stakeholders is essential to driving a system-level impact.
- › Post convening monitoring by conveners should concentrate on engaging with those accountable for forward action.
- › Continue to role model the behaviours of a partnering environment in all post-convening engagement to grow the trusted relationships that were seeded or fostered in the convening itself.
- › Consider how you might be helpful or supportive to those participants working and operating within non-inclusive environments.
- › Consider appointing a diverse group of champions among the participants to help develop new networks.
- › We might think of and approach sustaining long-term relationships as building a community.



What next?

The convening team is coming to the end of this convening cycle. Use the guidance and tools in **Module 8, Assessing Impact**, to look back over what has been achieved and decide the next strategy to drive a system-level impact with government and other institutional stakeholders.

