

Role Plays

Engagement range	Inform/Consult
Difficulty level	Medium to Hard
Cost	Low (up to \$1,000) Medium (\$1,000 to \$10,000)
When might you use it	To build alliances, consensus
Number of people required to help to organise	A team of people (three - six) may be required
Time to organise	Short (up to six weeks) Medium (six weeks to six months)
Size of audience	Medium (10-30) Large (over 30)
Issues/resources to think about	Publicity; Venue; Furniture; Catering; Staffing; Moderator/facilitator; Audio and visual recording and amplification; Overhead/data projectors and screen; Printed public information materials; Props for working in groups (pens, paper, pins, etc.); Children's requirements; Response sheets
Innovation level	Medium

Description

An activity where participants take on designated roles and act out characters according to predetermined situations, followed by an evaluation of the activity. People may choose from a range of set roles.

By getting people to take on a role that may be unfamiliar to them, this process enhances understanding of the issue from another perspective. However, role-playing requires skilled facilitation, and everyone must be 'de-briefed' and clearly directed to step out of role and return to their own persona before leaving the exercise, or confusion can ensue.

Role plays are highly useful as an ice breaker, to get people talking and interacting with one another about the issue, and also to gain some empathy for the position of other stakeholders. Role playing can involve risks. A person must try to understand another's point of view to the extent that they can act in ways that are appropriate and recognisable.

Objectives

- To help people see other viewpoints, and the range of different perspectives that may affect decisions and planning in relation to natural resources.
- To develop team-building as people see how different roles are necessary in the total natural resource management perspective.

Desired Outcome

- Greater awareness of other people's roles in a group, or in relation to an issue or proposal, and the relevance or importance of these roles.

Uses/Strengths

- Participants can take risk-free positions and view situations from other perspectives.
- Great as an ice-breaker.
- Leads to greater understanding of issues.
- Can be a fun activity that encourages team building within the participation program.
- Good for scoping the extent of conflicts.

Special Considerations/Weaknesses

- People may have little appreciation of other's positions.
- Can insult unless treated in a light hearted manner.
- Participants often require encouragement to take on another's role.
- Requires clear direction that the role playing is now over, and ensure that everyone knows that they are now speaking for themselves alone, or confusion can ensue. Having badges or costumes that are taken off at the end of the role-play can help this process.
- Needs a skilled facilitator with experience of role playing and debriefing.

Step by Step Guide

1. Determine all the agencies or individuals that are likely to influence a particular issue (e.g. commercial organisations, government agencies, non-government organisations, community 'personalities') and develop badges, lists or costumes to develop a number of roles to make for interesting interactions.
2. Assign roles. Generally, greatest success occurs when people opposed to one another take on each other's roles, thus allowing them to put themselves into the other person's position. This works best when there is some visual indicator or the role being played (e.g. a cap or badge).
3. Describe a scenario that introduces the issue in a non-threatening way. This technique can cause conflict when used for a contentious issue, so ensure that trained facilitators are available to defuse any confrontations and address the conflict in more constructive ways.
4. Treat the activity as a light-hearted exercise and encourage participation by indicating the lack of consequence from the activity.
5. The person playing the role may be advised by someone with experience in the role they are playing (e.g. a resident who is playing a natural resource manager may be advised by someone experienced in management in that area). Role plays are then adlibbed, based on the understanding of the activities/attitudes of the person whose role they are taking.
6. Facilitate the role play to maximise understanding of other's positions. Hence, ask participants why they take a position, or express a certain opinion, while in role.
7. Follow up the activity with a debriefing session that seeks to clarify the variety of potential positions as a precursor to the actual participation process.
8. Make clear the point at which the role play is over: Allow people to say any last things 'in role', then make it clear that when they return to their own seat they return to being themselves.