



Roundtables: a more detailed introduction and overview

What's the difference between a Roundtable and other types of meeting groups?

It's not a committee

A Roundtable is deliberately different from a 'committee' style meeting. In its approach, the Roundtable is more informal, more relaxed with a strong emphasis on collaboration and understanding. A committee is appointed and given its remit by an institutional hierarchy. A Roundtable sets its own agenda, decides its own membership and prioritises its task areas. The Roundtable may feed into the institutional committee structure but always maintains its independence and flexibility. Because of this, the Roundtable is able to recognise and adapt to constantly changing learning technology needs and educational advances as well as emerging strategic issues. This flexibility is increasingly important due to the pace at which technologies are emerging and developing.

Neither is it a forum

The Roundtable also differs from 'forums' in that it is not simply an opportunity to hear differing departmental perspectives of group members; it is not just a 'talk-shop'. Cross-departmental discussion is a means to identifying common concerns and opportunities. For the Roundtable it is also an opportunity to proactively identify work areas and **actively progress** them. The Roundtable, although having some 'fluidity' of membership has a core unlike an open forum.

Nor a closed group

The Roundtable is also a *transparent* group. The work of the group is made public at all times and the membership, whilst maintaining a core, will change as appropriate.

HINT:

If the term *Roundtable* does not fit into your institutional jargon and you are unhappy introducing new terms, name the group in a manner that will be acceptable e.g. Board, Council, Group, Senate or Committee. The importance of the Roundtable is in what it can achieve, not in its name. In some institutions a fresh approach and fresh name will be welcomed, in others it may be worth presenting the new approach in terms more familiar to the community.

Who's involved?

The Development Team

This is a small group of two or three individuals who will undertake the initial planning and organisation involved in setting up a Roundtable. Often they will become its first co-chairs.

Co-chairs

An important element of the Roundtable is the co-chair system. Two or three individuals share the duty of chairing and co-ordinating the Roundtable. Normally these chairs would include a member of support staff and an academic member of staff. In this way one group or sector is not seen as 'owning' the Roundtable or setting the agenda.

Champions

The role of a Champion is fundamental to the success of the Roundtable. The Champion should be a high level member of institutional management with strategic influence. He/she should also be motivated and interested in learning technologies personally. The Champion can be directly involved in the Roundtable, participating in the group, or acting as a co-chair. Alternatively, he/she can act as a patron; providing endorsement and support without being directly involved in meetings. The type of Champion needed depends on the institution and the individuals concerned.

Members

The membership of a Roundtable is decided by the members themselves. It is inclusive and representative of relevant departments and communities within the institution, including academic and support staff and students. It is also important for members to represent different 'types' as well as different sectors e.g. technology users and those who are interested but more cautious; enthusiasts as well as strategic appointments. This representation on differing levels helps ensure that the Roundtable is aware of, and works for, the *whole* institution and does not become marginalised, irrelevant or highjacked.

HINT:

An advantage for members of the Roundtable is that it provides an opportunity for establishing informal links and developing working relations with colleagues who they would not normally work with.

Working groups

The Roundtable, having identified task areas, establishes working groups. Membership will consist of Roundtable members and relevant individuals drawn from the institution. They will report regularly to the Roundtable and provide a grassroots, practitioner perspective. The working groups provide an opportunity for people to work in, and influence, areas in which they would not normally have the opportunity to do so. It also allows individuals to meet and form cross departmental working relationships.

Does it need funding?

This depends. You may wish to submit a bid to an appropriate body for the Roundtable itself and/or to progress its identified projects. Factors that you will need to consider for funding the Roundtable itself (as opposed to the projects) include:

- Administrative support
- Co-chair and/or member time buyout

How do we form a Roundtable?

We have produced these materials to guide you through the process of establishing and maintaining a Roundtable. The first step to this is the setting up of a **Development Team** (see the **Development Team Information** and **Exercise Sheets**). Once the Development Team has formed a Roundtable, the members can use the **General Exercise Sheets** to guide them in the process of establishing agreed working areas and missions. None of these materials are prescriptive and we would encourage individual Roundtables to adapt and use as they think appropriate in their circumstance.