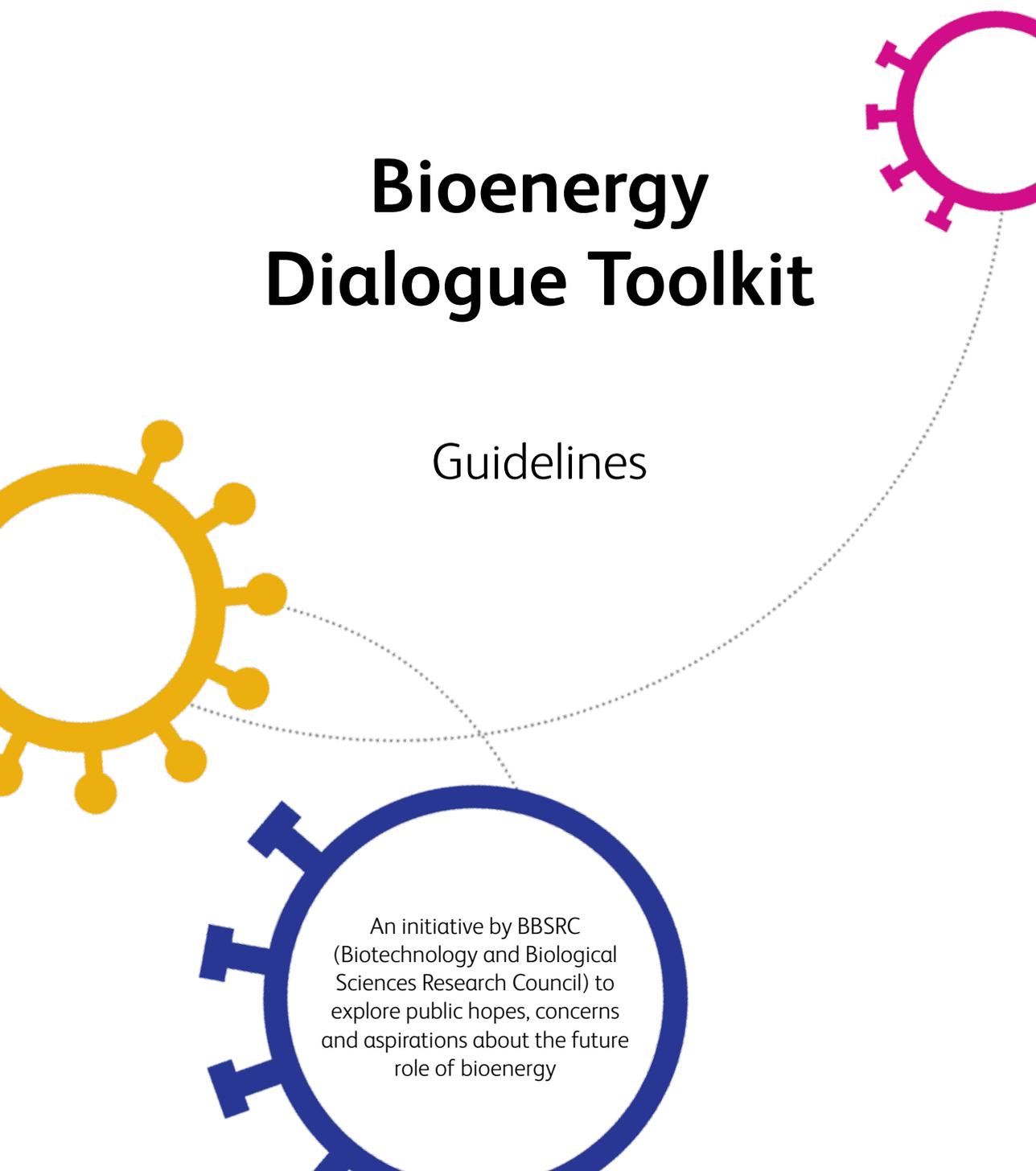


Bioenergy Dialogue Toolkit

Guidelines



An initiative by BBSRC
(Biotechnology and Biological
Sciences Research Council) to
explore public hopes, concerns
and aspirations about the future
role of bioenergy

Introduction

These guidelines are provided to help you set up and run a dialogue event, or events, with public audiences on the impact of bioenergy on society. They are part of a toolkit of resources that BBSRC has developed to discuss bioenergy with a wider audience so that BBSRC strategy and policy development in this area will be responsive to public views, hopes and concerns about the future of bioenergy. It is then vital that you return the feedback collected from the events to BBSRC.

The resources are available for download on the BBSRC bioenergy public dialogue webpage or you can email us to get a hard copy in the post.

Marta Entradas

Biology Dialogue Co-ordinator

marta.entradas@bbsrc.ac.uk

<http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/bioenergydialogue>

Contents

1

Setting up your event

- 1.1. Audience 5
- 1.2. Venue 5
- 1.3. Advertising 7
- 1.4. Getting support 8

2

Running your event

- 2.1. Preparations on the day 11
- 2.2. Opening the event 11
- 2.3. Facilitating the event 12
- 2.4. General techniques for managing discussions 13
- 2.5. Collecting and returning feedback from events 15
- 2.6. Closing the event 16

Setting up your event

The following pages provide useful guidance for planning a dialogue event with public audiences. This includes aspects that you might want to consider, such as how to encourage people to take part, how to find a suitable venue, how to choose your team or how to facilitate a discussion.

1.1. Audience

Think carefully about your audience.

Who is your audience?

Pitching your event in a way that engages with your audience, including their interests, levels of awareness, likely concerns or demographics is important to the success of the dialogue. For example, if you are working with an existing group, such as the Women's Institute, their local organiser should be able to advise you as to the profile of the group and which activities might work best. Alternatively, speak to friends, neighbours and relatives who are in the same social/age group as your expected audience and ask their views on what might work well. The less you know about your audience, and the more diverse your audience is, the more flexibility you will need to build into your event, so that you can adjust activities and timings based on the participants' responses.

Number of participants

The number of participants you might want to involve in the discussion is also an important aspect to consider as it affects the dynamics of the group and the dialogue. 8 participants is a good number to generate an interactive group discussion, but you can run the event with more or less participants. You can also have several group discussions happening at once if venue and facilitators can accommodate this.

1.2. Venue

Think carefully about the venue for your event.

It is important to ensure your venue is suitable for the event. The dialogue resources are designed to encourage interaction and discussion, and to discourage a traditional lecture 'followed by questions and answers' style. Therefore the venue should ideally provide plenty of unrestricted floor space with tables, each able to seat 8 -10 participants, in a Cafe-style layout. Rowed seating will make it physically more difficult for participants and restrict interaction when using many of the resources.

Type of venues – Suitable venues might include:

- City centre venue, Town Hall or community centre
- The regular meeting place of established groups
- Cafe Scientifique
- Festivals
- Universities or Research Centres

Accessibility – Is the venue easily accessible to those who are without transport and do not live very locally, or for those with restricted mobility? For instance, a city centre venue may have the advantage of being easily accessible and centrally located. However, after 7:00pm many city centres may only be populated by theatre-goers and clubbers so do not rely on ‘passing traffic’ to supply your audience.

Suitability – Is the venue suitable for a public discussion? For instance, a venue on a university campus or research centre may be convenient and cheap for the facilitator, but gives your audience the message that this is an ‘academic’ event, which will discourage some participants.

Time – Consider the time of your event. For example, an evening event in winter may discourage some participants, especially among the elderly and infirm.

Projection and sound equipment – If you plan to project images, can the venue be blacked out and do you need to provide projection equipment, including a screen? Will you be able to make yourself heard? Consider using a PA system. Alternatively, a bell or (more strident) whistle can be the pre-arranged signal to gain participants attention.

Checking the venue – It is good practice to check the venue before the event is confirmed and advertised

- Ensure that the venue booking allows plenty of time for setting up the event and clearing up afterwards.
- Establish who is the single point of contact at the venue who you will liaise with. Establish if there are any other people who need to know what you require e.g. catering staff, audio visual operators.
- Establish who is the appropriate person to contact if there is an emergency on the day of the event.

1.3. Advertising

Think carefully about how to advertise your event.

Attracting audiences to events is notoriously difficult – unless you are, or have the services of, a celebrity.

Ways of attracting audiences might include:

- Established groups' networks
- University and Research Institute websites
- Media offices at your University
- Local press
- Social media and intranets
- Flyers and posters

Established groups' networks

- Partner organisations (Women's Institutes, Wildlife Groups, Probus, 'Friends of... organisations', Science Festivals etc.) can deliver an established audience of known size and make up. Advertising and promotion of your event can be done through their established networks.
- Working with a variety of groups allows you to reach a more varied audience.

University and Research Institutes

- University and Research Institute staff should seek assistance and advice from their Media, Public Engagement and Business Development units. It may be possible to associate your event with an Annual Lecture or an Open Day.

Local press

- If possible, engage local press with the project and ensure local coverage ahead of the event to help advertise it. National Science and Engineering Week briefly raises the profile of science and engineering in the media and makes it more likely that a science-related event and associated stories will be picked up by local press.
- Parish magazines are sometimes willing to print short articles about interesting local events.

Social media

- Make use of websites, blogs, Twitter and Facebook, as well as intranets, and organisations' email lists of local members and local media pages to promote your event. They are useful and a cheap means to advertise widely. However, be aware that these means are limited to the networks they tap into.

Flyers and posters

- Flyers and posters in local shop windows, doctor's surgeries, community notice boards, schools and libraries will also help raise awareness of a local event.

1.4. Getting support

Consider asking colleagues to assist you.

This has huge benefits in terms of:

- Mutual support and confidence building
- Greater diversity of expertise, experience and skills (also a potential gender/age/ethnic mix)
- Extra pairs of hands for practical tasks (set up/clear up, welcoming, preparing, distributing and collecting materials)
- Support in running the event (taking pictures to capture outcomes, monitoring and troubleshooting group work)
- Shared leading, this is not essential, but allows each leader to focus on a few activities rather than trying to be prepared and rehearsed across all of them. Changing the leader (new personality/style) changes and refreshes the dynamic/pace of the event. Especially at longer events, shared leadership keeps the leaders fresh.

Choose your team and define roles

The size of the team you will need is very dependent on the activities being undertaken, the audience and the experience of the facilitator. However, you will find that at least one assistant will be useful for almost any event. Ensure you prepare your team early and that everyone understands the purpose and nature of the dialogue event and their role in it.

Roles:

- **Expert** – It is strongly advised that you involve an expert if you are not an expert in bioenergy. The role of experts is critical to steering a successful informed discussion. You could involve a bioenergy researcher to provide information on the research, as well as someone who has concerns about bioenergy, someone from a charity or NGO for example.
- **Facilitator** – The facilitator can be the organiser of the event (you) or an independent facilitator (more information about the role of facilitator is provided in section ‘facilitating the event’ p.12).
- **Logistics** – To provide general assistance on:
 - the preparation of materials (e.g. photocopying, and collating handouts)
 - tasks on the day (e.g. setting up the room, running the event, resources distribution, AV organisation/check, etc.)
 - clear up (everyone helps, but someone designated to gather and save all the ‘outcomes’)
 - or even rehearse and critique anything that requires it e.g. presentations, sketches.

Although it is recommended that each person has a specific role, one person can do more than one of the roles, if necessary.

THINK ABOUT:

- **Your audience** – Their profile. Mobility and access to the venue. Would it be better to work with an existing group or try to attract your own audience?
- **Your venue** – What message does it send to the intended audience, is it suitable in terms of location and layout?
- **Your team** – Get support from others to best effect. Involve your team in the early planning, they will develop a sense of ownership and you can benefit from their ideas, and share the workload of preparing for and running the event.
- **Your checklist** – If you plan to project images, can the venue be blacked out and do you need to provide projection equipment, including a screen? Will you be able to make yourself heard? Consider using a PA system. Alternatively, a bell or (more strident) whistle can be the pre-arranged signal to gain participants attention.

Running your event

2.1. Preparations on the day

- Leave plenty of time to arrive and set up for the event. It is not uncommon for some groups to begin to assemble 30 minutes before advertised start times. Participants travelling by public transport from some distance may arrive even earlier.
- Lay out the room, having due regard to:
 - o routes to emergency exits for fire safety
 - o lines of sight to screens, facilitator's location etc.
 - o access to resources (flipcharts, paper sheets on walls etc.)
- Familiarise yourself with any projection and PA equipment you will be using.
- Check any catering arrangements are in place and confirm timings for refreshment breaks.
- Establish where toilets and emergency exits are located. Similarly, if refreshments are being provided, where they are located.
- Ensure that sufficient copies of all the resources you plan to use are to hand, and in appropriate order.

2.2. Opening the event

- Start promptly.
- Briefly introduce yourself and anyone else involved in facilitating/supporting the event – including your/their affiliations.
- Cover domestic issues such as the location of emergency exits and toilets.
- Outline the timetable for the event - including planned breaks and finish times. It is good practice to have a simple timetable, on a large (A0) sheet of paper, displayed prominently during the event and to refer to it occasionally during the event (when changing activities) to help orientate the participants.
- If you or others (local media) plan to take photographs (publicity, publication, etc.) you should make it clear that individuals will be asked, before photographs are taken, if they are happy for their image to be used. Make it clear that anyone who is unhappy with being photographed should not feel obliged to be included.

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- Describe the purpose of the event and the different activities participants will be involved in.
 - o Explain that this is a two-way listening exercise designed for people to interact and express their opinions and that their views are valued by BBSRC.
 - o Explain that you will be collecting the views, opinions, hopes and concerns of participants anonymously by recording the results of activities and through feedback questionnaires.
 - o Make it clear that the dialogue is not about finding the right answer(s), agreeing (or not) to accept a particular technological solution or even reaching a consensus view on particular issues.
 - Ask that participants observe basic ‘rules of engagement’ by:
 - o respecting one another’s views
 - o allowing everyone to have a voice
 - o not dominating discussion and debate
 - o remembering that this is a dialogue around bioenergy and its use in future society and that it may be necessary to restrict/refocus discussions if they become too wide ranging.
 - o not attributing comments to individuals outside of the meeting
 - o turning mobile phones to silent

2.3. Facilitating the event

The role of facilitator is key to steering an effective dialogue event.

A good facilitator:

- **Explains the objectives/tasks** – a good facilitator will make sure that the participants are clear about both the overall objectives and process they are involved in and the specific tasks they are being asked to undertake. These do not need to be long explanations.
- **Encourages discussion** – a good facilitator encourages others to speak while minimising their own input. The facilitator is not there to ensure that the group comes to the ‘right’ (or indeed any) answers or conclusions on bioenergy. The facilitator is not there to provide the answers to questions that the participants may ask.

- **Manages the event** – is firm, but sympathetic, encourages the group to remain focussed on the task in hand.
- **Models dialogue behaviour** – by being polite, valuing all responses and allowing different voices to be heard.
- **Keeps to time** – indicates how long each exercise is intended to last. Where an exercise has a specific endpoint i.e. sorting a pack of cards in order of importance, the facilitator should indicate how the time is passing. Where an exercise involves more than one task, the facilitator should indicate when participants should be thinking about changing tasks e.g. “We have 5 minutes left for this activity. Can you please start to agree and write down your main reason or reasons for choosing each of your top three cards?”
- **Is sensitive** – to the audience and flexible in responding to them. For example, many public audiences will be uncomfortable with having to read or write large amounts of text. Visual and audio means of presenting information and stories will be helpful to all audiences.
- **Is not too controlling** – the facilitator should not be too controlling, especially in restricting the direction and scope of the discussion, as this will limit the value of (and potentially curtail) the dialogue. However, it will occasionally be necessary to bring discussion and debate back to the central issue of the ‘place of bioenergy in future society’

2.4. General techniques for managing discussions

Using Icebreakers

The dynamics of a group are determined by many factors, most significantly by whether or not the group are familiar with one another and with the subject. In an established group most of the members will know one another, while members of an audience attending a session at a Science Festival are likely to be strangers. In most settings, participants will not be familiar with bioenergy. Therefore, a simple activity that acts as an icebreaker at the beginning of an event is a good idea to start off the discussion and facilitate introductions. Several resources for suitable short activities are provided in this toolkit.

Mixing activities

During your event it will be helpful to mix activities. In particular, use physical movement of participants in exercises such as ‘Here I stand’ or voting for particular issues to change the pace of the event. These activities can remix participants, stimulate fresh debate and refresh participants who may have been sitting and talking for a long time.

Ranking issues

- **Ordered list**

Challenging participants to produce an ordered list can be a very good way to encourage detailed discussion and thinking around a subject. However, it can also lead to frustration if a 'final' list cannot be negotiated within the group. This kind of demotivating impasse can be overcome by acknowledging the difficulty and allowing some issues to be ranked 'equally'.

- **Voting**

Alternatively, participants can 'vote' in order to rank contentious issues. Each member of the group has a number of votes and is free to vote for the issues they feel are most important. They can cast all their votes for one issue or distribute them according to the importance they attach to the different issues. It is important to make it clear this highlights how difficult decision making can be in the 'real world' it is not suggesting that real decision making should be trivialised in this way.

A useful technique for encouraging individuals to quickly identify central issues in a discussion is to ask participants to write down the main topics under discussion or one or two sentences they would want to say to someone in authority, who on hearing their views has the power to change things.

Reporting back

If you are working with more than one group it is important to allow time for the groups to feedback information from their discussions to the whole group. This can be done by a group spokesperson reporting back what they discussed and what they thought. This method can be rather long and dull. Instead, each group could be asked to identify and briefly present two main issues from their discussions.

Dealing with 'off-topic' conversation

The facilitator should acknowledge that 'off the topic' subjects are valid, of concern and worthy of consideration, but cannot be dealt with in detail in this setting. A useful technique to deal with these situations is the 'graffiti wall'. You can ask participants to note down the main points on a 'graffiti wall' – and then to move on. Make sure you point out the resource early in the session (during the explanation of what will be happening at the event) and clarify that the wall is available at any time for individuals to write up points that are not being covered, that participants feel are not being dealt with thoroughly enough, or that are important but off-topic.

2.5. Collecting and returning feedback from events

Collecting audience responses and evaluation is an essential part of this dialogue process. BBSRC takes seriously the opportunity it provides to inform development of its strategy and policy both on bioenergy research and its public engagement activities.

BBSRC would like copies of all the outcomes, not just the summary data, as soon after the event as feasible, but within one month of the event taking place.

The resources developed by BBSRC to collect feedback from the events include:

1. **Organiser feedback form** – The event organiser should complete this evaluation form as comprehensively as possible. Please support statements with evidence where available/appropriate.
2. **Participant feedback form** – Participants should be asked to complete a participant feedback form and be given at least 10 minutes to complete it, within the planned time for the event.
3. **Generic activities** – Activities designed to stimulate and record feedback in various ways throughout the event, for example, the results of simple voting activities. Responses that are not in a collectable format, e.g. graffiti walls and card sorting exercises, can be easily recorded using a digital camera.

The feedback materials collected at the events, should be sent to the following address:

Marta Entradas

Bioenergy Dialogue Co-ordinator

External Relations Unit

BBSRC

Polaris House

North Star Avenue

Swindon

Wiltshire

SN2 1UH

Marta.Entradas@bbsrc.ac.uk

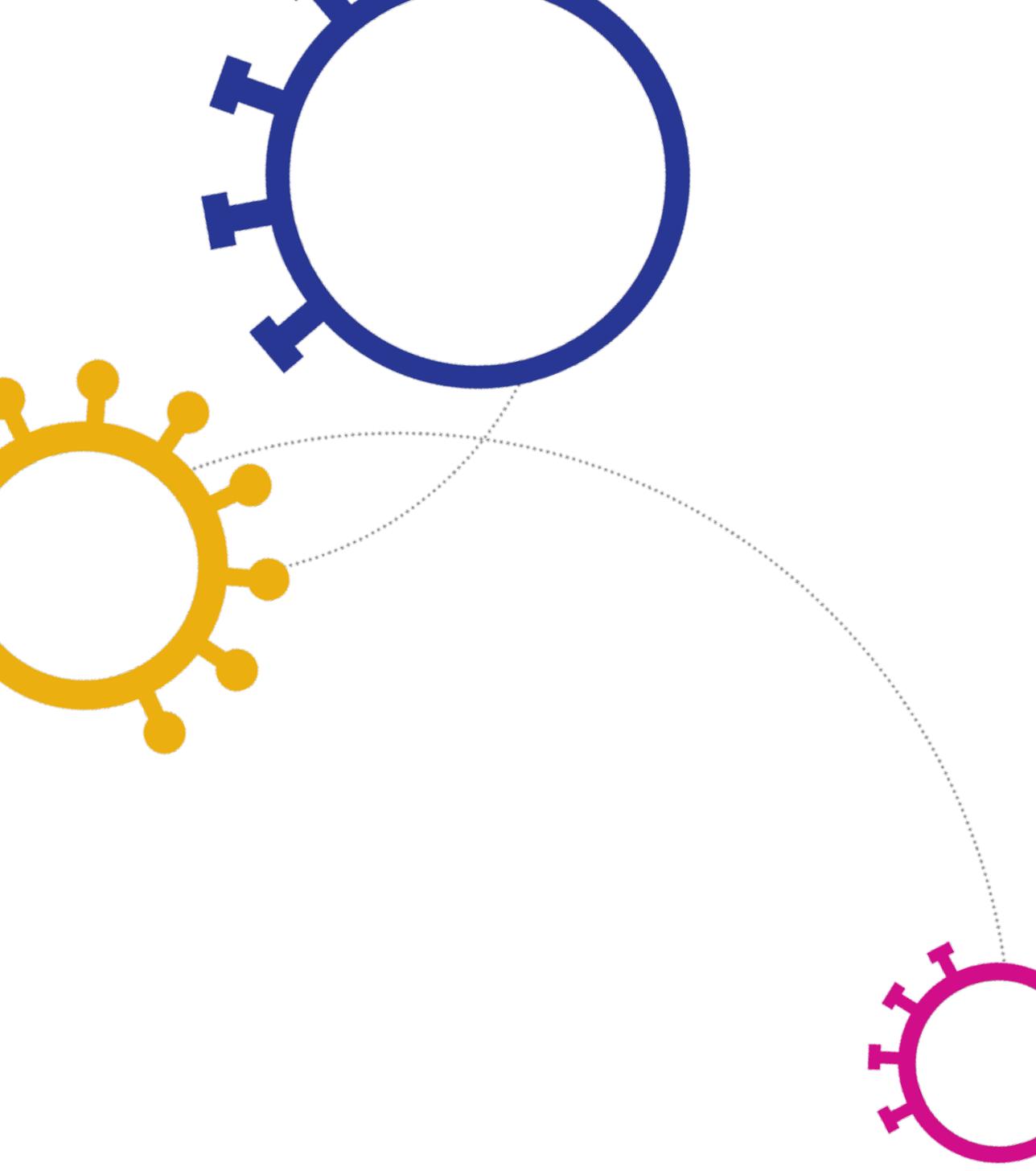
2.6. Closing the event

Recap the main activities and the outcomes – the level of detail will be determined by the length of the event and the diversity of subjects covered. Do not use this as an opportunity to push a particular interpretation of the discussions or a particular position on bioenergy.

Thank the audience for their participation and any partner organisations for their support.

THINK ABOUT:

- How will you establish, from the outset, an active and participatory mood within the event
- How will you collect the views of participants throughout the event, not just at the end
- How can you integrate collecting feedback with changing the pace of the event, to refresh or promote new discussions?
- How will you monitor for participants who are overly dominant or unduly passive in discussions. How will you manage groups to encourage more equal participation?
- How the team will share responsibilities for facilitating, monitoring, recording/collecting feedback
- Additional feedback activities/forms designed to fit uniquely with your event
- How you will manage timekeeping and what flexibility you will build in, for example will you allow some activities to overrun if particularly successful and if so which other activities will be curtailed or abandoned
- How you will minimise confusion and keep the participants oriented within, and aware of, the broader objectives of the event, while tackling specific tasks.



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