Tool 54: Polls

Aim of the tool
Helping a group to make a decision in case the group can't decide unanimously on a course of action through dialogue.

When to use it?
In the last stages of a MSP when decisions need to be taken.

How to use Polls?

If a group does not come to a common agreement on a course of action, voting, or a poll, can be a last resort. Don't use it as your first option to make a decision, as there are other ways of participatory decision-making that have benefits over polls, because they create a more beneficial common understanding and ownership of the resulting decision.

Polls can not only be used for decision-making, but also to gauge preferences or opinions at any stage of a MSP. It can help the group to quickly see where there is divergence and convergence around an issue.

Voting can be done with stickers, raising hands or using free online services:
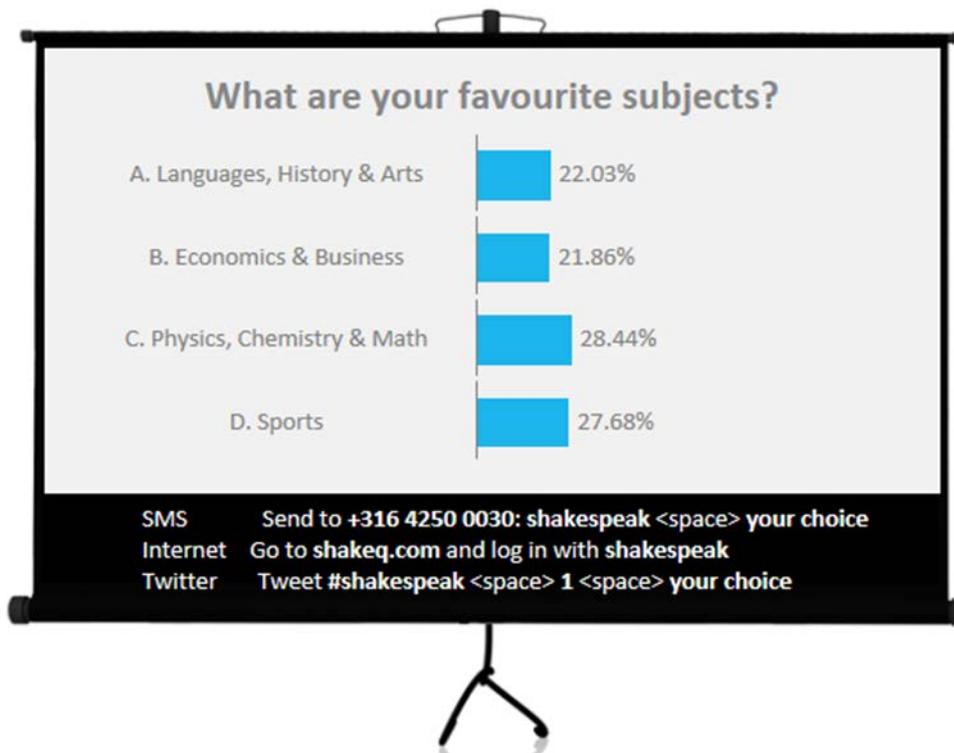
Stickers:

Write down every option on a flipchart. Give every participant three stickers ('voting buttons') to allocate to their preferred options on the flipchart. Variation: provided different colours of stickers and ask two questions, for example for the best idea (green sticker), and the most realistic idea (blue sticker).

Raising hands:

When the facilitator mentions all options one by one, participants can be asked to raise their hands for the option they prefer. The disadvantage of this tool however is that participants tend to influence each other because they see each other's preferences. To avoid this, a free online service where participants can vote anonymously can be a helpful alternative, or take a ballot with folded small papers which are counted by a trusted committee.

Shakespeak:

Shakespeak is a free (up to 20 respondents) online tool to be used in presentations, workshops, meetings or lectures to let participants vote and ask questions on the spot with their mobile phones, tablets or laptops. Anonymous responses can directly be received through SMS, internet and Twitter in a Powerpoint presentation, showing results immediately. Participants do not need to download or register software, which makes it easy to respond, as long as they have a device which is connected to the internet. The software, which will automatically integrate in Powerpoint, can be downloaded at www.shakespeak.com. Shakespeak is not the only available package for online live polling and posting, but we found it to be user-friendly and reliable.

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What are your favourite subjects?

A. Languages, History & Arts — 22.03%

B. Economics & Business — 21.86%

C. Physics, Chemistry & Math — 28.44%

D. Sports — 27.68%

SMS   Send to +316 4250 0030: shakespeak \<space\> **your choice**
Internet   Go to shakeq.com and log in with **shakespeak**
Twitter   Tweet #shakespeak \<space\> **1** \<space\> **your choice**

Source: www.shakespeak.com

Survey Monkey:

For polls and surveys outside a meeting or workshop, Survey Monkey is a suitable free online program to use. In Survey Monkey, any type of poll or survey can be created. Once the poll is designed, it can be sent to all participants via email, with a web link or through a post on Facebook or Twitter. Participants fill in the survey online and the responses are visible at any time to the initiator of the survey. The responses can be analysed and exported in many formats. To create a Survey Monkey, go to www.surveymonkey.com make an account, and start creating your survey.

Learn more

Shakespeak: www.shakespeak.com

Survey Monkey: www.surveymonkey.com

Difference between a poll and a survey: https://blog.questionpro.com/2012/10/11/survey-or-poll-whats-the-difference-and-when-to-use-which/

Kaner, Sam, Lenny Lind, Catherine Toldi, Sarah Fisk and Duane Berger (2014, third edition) Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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