

Tips for Cluster Facilitators



Draw in the Shakers & Movers

Clustering is a team activity, not a solo effort. It is a process of inclusion, not exclusion, and is vulnerable if dominated by an elite few.

A clustering process is not a closed shop - attracting new people into the process is important in developing a collaborative approach. It is also important in extending the pool from which new champions can emerge.

Cluster workshops benefit substantially from having a wide range of participants, in particular from the larger private sector operators. In two of the pilots some of the key stakeholders were not invited to the workshops and the process suffered as a result. It is always easier to attract (salaried) government officials and others to meetings than (self-employed) entrepreneurs.

However, having a number of onlookers and participants from beyond the geographic area of the cluster, or a dominance of officials, distracts from the main purpose of the workshop.

If possible, meet with the main shakers and movers ahead of the first workshop. This helps in gaining their interest and their commitment to act as champions in the workshop.

Dropouts from the process are not unusual, though if they are senior stakeholders the gap they leave needs to be quickly filled.

Facilitator Identified from Day One

With one of the pilots, substantial delays occurred due to uncertainty as to the Facilitators' identity. Earlier resolution would have significantly sped up the process: momentum was lost after the workshop, and this takes time to rebuild.

Early Political Support a Key...

Participation by senior politicians at three of the initial workshops - the Deputy Tourism Minister at one and the MEC at two - greatly assisted the early stages of the initiative. Private sector participants valued the early commitment of the politicians to the project.

The strength of the clustering process is its spread of leadership and mobilisation of talent.

...Followed by Private Sector Leadership

Leadership needs to move as soon as possible from the initial politicians, or the Facilitator, to the private sector.

There is a danger in clustering being positioned as a 'government initiative'. Well-respected business leaders need to take charge as soon as possible.

Strong Leadership, or Sink

The Chairperson is a mover and shaker of note, moving in influential national circles. The Chair needs to have the necessary connections to shake free any hindrances to the cluster's objectives. Having a Chair of stature brings additional resources to the table eg. sponsorships, access to SATOUR board members etc. A happy coincidence of self-interest sustains a group.

Share the Workload

A clustering initiative is a collaborative, team-driven strategy, not a one-person show. If the key initiatives are developed and agreed to by the Leadership Group, it is much easier to obtain their energy and enthusiasm in driving those initiatives forward.

Each initiative should have close support from one member of the Leadership Group.

Cluster Culture

The culture, the way of working, of the Leadership Group should be more in keeping with the private sector than a government department.

The culture of a high performing cluster is characterised by a desire to make a difference rather than producing wish lists; to generate action, not to generate reports.

Upskilling Team Members, Building Capacity

Many cluster participants, particularly in poor communities, have little relevant experience to draw on to support specific initiatives.

Their skills in preparing project plans, in marketing, in forming links with outside agencies... can be very limited. There is, therefore, a need for more proactive support in disadvantaged communities.

Leadership Groups are composed of volunteers, and need specific training and capacity building in developing a new type and style of leadership.

Build Media Coverage

A clustering initiative requires broad community involvement, and the media is a key means of securing this.

With each of the four pilots media coverage quickly faded after an initial burst of activity covering the workshop, often focussed on the MEC's or the Minister's participation.

No one person had responsibility for maintaining media contact in any of the pilots, and as a result this aspect of communications did not receive sufficient attention.

As part of a pro-active media campaign, a newsletter primarily aimed at cluster members can usefully be distributed to the media.

Generating Local Rivalry

In one pilot with three distinct geographic areas, competition played a significant role in stimulating each of the nodes to move forward to action plans. Each of the area convenors played on the competition with other nodes and between the other pilots to produce credible action plans for the final workshop.

This rivalry between the local groups was a positive factor but it needs to be managed to ensure that it doesn't become destructive.

In other situations rivalry can be induced by simultaneously driving a number of local clusters at the same time. These could well be related clusters, eg crafts & culture.

Use Neutral Corner to Remove Grid Lock

At each of the pilot workshops speakers made reference to the number of plans that had been developed, and yet the lack of action. Each community had wish lists sitting on the table, with little engagement.

Under the auspices of a national clustering initiative with clearly neutral facilitators the deadlock was unlocked. It was also important that the facilitators were seen as neutral without baggage from the past.

The neutral corner offered by a national initiative provided a forum that opened dialogue and set events in motion.

Early Action – Small Bites

A clustering initiative is not yet another "Talk Shop" or opportunity to prepare large plans. It needs to be very much action orientated, holding the commitment of stakeholders through generating early benefits.

Allied to achieving early results is the practice of initially aiming for small modest benefits, which can be achieved early. For example, developing shabeen tours is a lower risk, earlier return strategy than developing a new tourism rail route, or a new international airport.

A portfolio of action initiatives need to be developed, with initially a low risk/early return focus. All eggs should not be placed in one basket.

Larger, longer-term projects are better introduced after the cluster group has achieved some positive results. Such projects should be broken down into short-term milestones - small bites - to give the group impetus.

Early benefits motivate the teams to achieve even greater results.

Maintaining Momentum - Can Be a Struggle

Some important, but difficult issues, such as safety in Khayelitsha, have not been picked up and the initiatives are in suspension. It is not always easy to maintain momentum...a key is breaking the task down to bite-sized pieces and empowering/motivating participants to take responsibility for those pieces.

Political Borders and Cluster Boundaries

The geographic boundaries of a tourism cluster do not necessarily conveniently coincide with political boundaries. The Magaliesberg cluster, for example, spills into the Gauteng province.

These different boundaries are usually of no interest to the customer - the tourist - and of marginal interest to the private sector. The difference is of greater consequence where the cluster requires significant involvement from the two provincial governments.

Pro-Active Black Empowerment

Tourism is still predominantly a white activity, and it is therefore no surprise that local tourism structures are usually dominated by whites. It was apparent in most workshops that whites and blacks gravitated round separate tables. Most workshops were dominated by whites, with the exception of Khayelitsha, where only a few white tour operators attended, with some of them clearly nervous.

However, in the Valley of the Oliphants, the existing white-dominated community tourism associations bent over backwards to ensure Bushbuck Ridge participation – as it was in their interests to do so.

Building linkages across all members of the local cluster is a first step in establishing the necessary trust and cooperation.

Cluster Benchmarking – Opening Eyes

Two of the local pilots have engaged in informal benchmarking - a group from Magaliesberg visited Soweto and then developed their shabeen tour initiative, and a fact-finding visit was made by senior representatives from the Eastern Province's Sunshine Coast, part of the Fish River cluster, to Queensland's Sunshine Coast.

Informal or more formal benchmarking provides a very valuable means of galvanising activity towards a higher level agenda. Further, a group visit to another cluster provides a key learning opportunity and helps build the necessary team spirit.

Terminology Clarity - or Consultant's Clutter

Buzz words and strategic jargon fail to communicate. For example, the term 'Project Plans' for a clustering initiative is understood, 'Business Plan' is not.

Confirming Authority - Empowering

Participants in one cluster had difficulty as they carried no formal documentation and at times, were met with suspicion in their community. More substantially, they were also unclear as to their role - were they advisers or implementers? Clarity of purpose, supported by appropriate documentation is needed.

No Glass Ceiling

Women have important roles to play in championing initiatives, particularly in black communities.

Broadening Social Capital

An understated roadblock to the development of high performing clusters can be an absence of social networks. In each of the pilots there was social cohesion between a few, in particular whites, but minimal involvement by the majority.

New Data

New information and analysis can be the key to questioning current assumptions, and resetting direction. A 'data shock' can galvanise action.

Unfortunately, quality information on tourist activity at the national and provincial levels is sparse; at the local level it is essentially non-existent.

Bring Additional Resources to the Table

In the early stages an important ingredient in gaining private sector attention is to garner additional resources on behalf of the local cluster. This resource could be funding, training programmes, promotional support...