POWER SHIFTING

PREPARING FOR MEETINGS

This booklet is for facilitators who have already done some training or research about sociocracy and are ready to prepare for and facilitate a meeting.

CONTENTS

This image taken at a Rochdale mini-conference using Sociocracy shows how much listening can happen when we all get a chance to contribute.

INTRODUCTION

This booklet, preparing for meetings, includes sections to help you, as a facilitator, to prepare for a sociocratic meeting. This is summarised in a smaller meeting guide which will serve as a "crib sheet" to help you facilitate at the time of the meeting and there's a meeting template to help you with the agenda and notes.
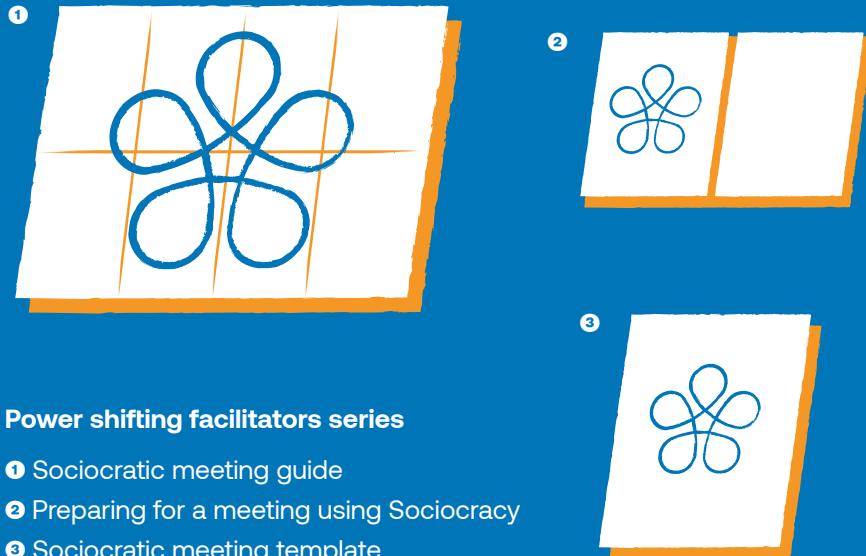
Power shifting facilitators series

❶ Sociocratic meeting guide
❷ Preparing for a meeting using Sociocracy
❸ Sociocratic meeting template

WHY DO WE NEED TO SHIFT POWER?

We are all here to improve equity, fairness and sustainability in our local system. One of the things that will help us with do that is if we change some of the ways we come together and the rituals we have inherited that can hold unhealthy power in place. The result of that unhealthy power can be that people feel excluded: the risk that discussions and decisions take place without full understanding of the issue or the implications of the decisions.

Meetings are full of ritual and ways of being that "some" people understand and can get involved in and "others" don't. This might be in the way meetings are run, the access to them, the communication about them, the way people behave, the language used and the way they are recorded. All of these features are there to make sure the meeting is conducted fairly and robustly, however, they can also, inadvertently "hold" that unhealthy power in place.

The challenge is to find ways to retain (and improve, where possible) the fairness, clarity and efficiency of our structures and governance in a way which builds and holds healthy power.

One way to do that is to build our skills in facilitating meetings and gatherings in ways that are fairer, more accessible and more sustainable.

BEING CO-OPERATIVE

Rochdale borough is the birthplace of co-operation and the designated capital of the Co-operative movement. This means a great many things to us about our heritage, our identity and our practice, which places emphasis on "way" people come together. The Co-operative Movement is informed by what are still known as "the Rochdale Principles".

Thirteen of the surviving Rochdale Pioneers, photographed in 1865.

One example is the principle of "self-responsibility". This is a state of being which brings a person to a piece of work with the intention of contributing. Their contribution will be fair, responsible and they will be accountable for their own behaviour. They will own their flaws and prejudice and welcome challenge; will present themselves with enthusiasm and all the gumption and energy they can muster to show that they bring whatever they can in a spirit of generosity and to make the thing work. They place the good of the work we have to do today, the place and its people before any personal, business, service or ideological needs. There is a lot in this principle and some call it "sovereignty."

A Co-operative approach has much to contribute to fairness, sustainability, equity and the presence of healthy power.

Sociocracy offers us a clear and robust way of being Co-operative when we come together. It is not "policy" to do this for everything, or indeed anything, but there are some useful tools in sociocracy that some co-operators are trying. You can draw on these to help build more co-operative behaviours in projects, meetings and decision making.

There is more about the principles, including a charter towards healthier power, in the Zine that forms part 2 of this facilitators guide series.

WHAT IS SOCIOCRACY?

Sociocracy is peer governance system which can help groups who want work in a values based system.

It is based on the principles of:

→ **Consent** (raising, seeking out and resolving objections)

→ **Empiricism** (testing assumptions through experiments and continuous revision)

→ **Continuous improvement** (changing incrementally to help build steady learning in stages)

There is much more to sociocracy than just how we run our meetings, as the diagram illustrates but this guide focuses on the element called "consent decision making", which is simply about shifting power when we come together in meetings to make them more inclusive and driven towards clarity and action.
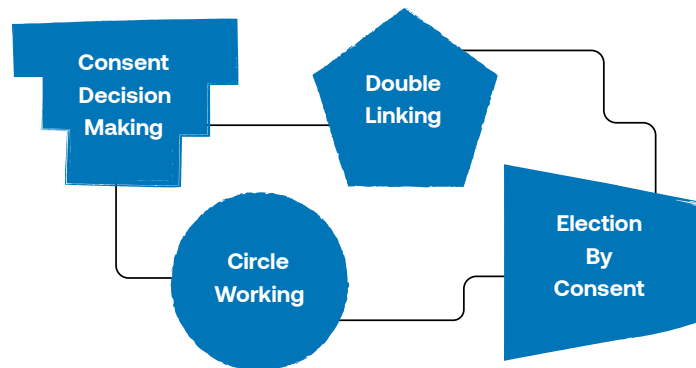
WHO IS INVOLVED?

Have a look at the diagram below and think about whether you will have sufficient representation to make an authentic and informed decisions.

It's great to try and get a balance, for many reasons, not least of which is that we assume all the power is in the "decision making" group. But evidence shows us that everyone feels far more empowered to take action when they have members with a variety of backgrounds and experience like this: they have members with a variety of backgrounds and experiences.
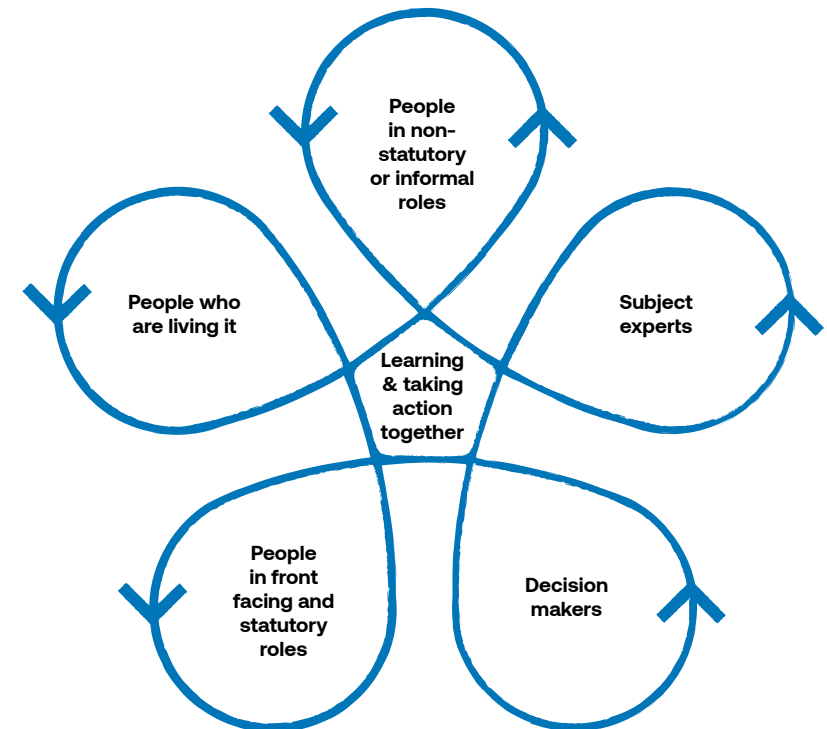
YOU NEED ONLY ENOUGH CONTROL TO SHARE THE POWER!

Have a think about the practicalities and what you will need to make things happen so you have enough control, as a facilitator, to be able to make sure all the power is shared.

For example: **"how are you going to bring people in to contribute?" "Is it an online or face to face meeting?"**

Here's an example. It's ideal, especially when this way of working is new to people, to make it clear out who you're going to ask to speak now and next. That way people are prepared. It might be obvious in a face to face setting (i.e if you're sat in a circle) but less so in different spaces or on a screen.

To call out now and next, you can say:

"I'm going to ask you for your response, now Brookers, and then I'm going to call in Bee." Now Brookers knows they need to be ready to speak and Bee will know what's coming.

SECTION ❶

Opening Round	✔ Check in
ADMIN	✔ Attendance
	✔ Duration
	✔ Minutes
	✔ Information
	✔ Next meeting
Consent to agenda	✔ Yes

SECTION ❷

Main agenda items (will include items which have a different purpose).

✔ **Report** (with a clarifying questions round) → Everybody understands.

✔ **Explore** (with a questions and reflections /ideas round) → Everyone's ideas heard.

✔ **Decide** (with a questions round, ideas round and proposal consent round) → Decision made.

SECTION ❸

Closing round	✔ Feedback and request.

SECTION **1**

OPENING ROUND: CHECK IN

Make a plan to facilitate a check-in that brings the "humans" into the meeting, rather than any role they occupy or power they hold. It's great to use the opening as an opportunity to set some context about who we are, our values and experiences.

Here are some examples adapted from Sociocracy For All:

→ If you could name a theme for the past 4 weeks, what would you call it?

→ What mistake did you learn the most from? What helped you learn?

→ When did you become aware of wealth inequality in the world? How did that happen

→ When did you become aware of racism in the world? How did that happen?

→ What's the best part of your morning routine? Why?

→ How is being an adult different from what you expected?

SECTION **1**

ADMIN

As a facilitator of a sociocratic meeting you will need to check through each of these to make sure we are all ready to go.

Attendance
Who is the facilitator? Who is the notetaker going to be? Take a note of who is absent. Is there anything caring that can be done to maintain contact with anyone who is absent?

Duration
How long will the meeting take? Will anyone have to leave early or exactly on time?

Minutes
Have last meetings minutes been consented to and have they been published or shared where they need to be? If not, make a plan for this to happen in the ADMIN section of the meeting.

Information
Include the purpose of this meeting, the agenda items (making sure the agenda includes both the title and the purpose of each item). Then make sure everyone knows about the method we're using and why, emphasising access and fairness.

For example, here's a way you can encourage members to make sure we all understand what's being said, without having to interrupt the meeting: If someone says something we don't understand we can make the shape of a letter T with our hands. That way the speaker knows, visually, that they need to explain what they're saying without technical language, jargon or acronyms.

Is there anything else that people might want to share today? Anything quick can be shared here. Anything longer can be added to the backlog.

Next Meeting
Do we all know when and where we will meet again?
If not, what's the plan for what comes next?

SECTION ❶

CONSENT TO THE AGENDA

Before moving to section 2, you will need to facilitate a round in which everyone consents to go ahead with the meeting.

That means:

→ We're all aware of why we're here.

→ We know what we're going to discuss.

→ We agree to the order, the timing allocated and the purpose of each section.

→ We are taking responsibility for ourselves, to make sure:

  ▸ The meeting runs to time.

  ▸ The outcome is met for each section.

  ▸ We are inclusive and respectful.

  ▸ We uphold our principles together.

A SET OF PRINCIPLES OR A CHARTER FOR OUR MEETINGS

There are some examples in the "poster" you get with part 2 of this series. But you may have already agreed a charter or set of principles for how you are going to "be" together.

Here are just a few examples, translated from the Universite du nous (in French):

→ **Kindness:** for us, the place, the organisation, the equipment.

→ **Sovereignty** (self responsibility).

→ Everyone is a **guarantor.**

→ **Respect:** everyone has their own point of view. The group is rich in its diversity.

→ We individually and mutually recognise the **right to not wait** for our objective.

→ Able to **disagree** and evolve.

→ Working within a **security framework** (everyone is safe in the clarity we share).

SECTION **2**

PLANNING THE MAIN SECTION OF THE MEETING

Reports – Share information
A person makes a report and then people can ask questions so the information is received

Explorations – Share ideas
Someone gives a prompt and then do rounds until all reactions and ideas have been shared

Decisions – Get consent
Ideas and reactions from a proposal which is then consented to

Plan how the meeting will "flow", which might be a mix of:

Report ◎ 5-10 minutes input, plus
→ 5-10 minutes question round).

Explore ◎ 5-10 minutes input, plus
→ 5-10 minutes question round.
→ 5-10 minutes exploration and ideas round.

Decide ◎ 5-10 min input plus
→ 5-10 minutes question round.
→ 5-10 minutes exploration and ideas.
→ 5-10 minutes decision and consent to proposal.

Note that at first, or if you have a large group, these rounds will take longer.

PREPARING FOR "REPORTS"

As a facilitator you will need to plan for a presenter to share a report of (5-10 mins). Who is going to present it? **Do they know what it is they are trying to gain people's understanding of?** This is helpful advance information and a great question you can ask them to help them be clear and to the point. Offer help and support to the presenter to ensure their content is as accessible as possible.

Question Round

This is a single round to check everyone understands. Each member can offer a brief reflection, share any points of clarification and confirm they understand or not. (5-10 mins).

Prepare for:
→ Noting any questions and then supporting the presenter to answer them all at once.
→ Noting anything that comes up out of the responses which becomes an action or which needs to be added to the backlog.

Once you have done that, the round is complete. Prepare to check everyone understands and is happy to proceed.

PREPARING FOR "EXPLORATIONS"

As a facilitator you will need to plan for a presenter to share content to be explored for 5-10 mins. Who is going to present it? Do they know what it is they are trying to get people's opinion on? This is helpful advance information and you can help the presenter to think about this so their content is direct and what they are asking the group for is clear. Offer help and support to the presenter to ensure their content is accessible. Depending on the content, it may be a good idea to ask prompting questions for the reaction round which you can discuss with the presenter before if they haven't got any of their own (some suggestions are included in this section to help you with this).

Clarification Question Round

Plan to hold a round to check everyone understands. Each member is asked to offer a brief summary, share any points of clarification and confirm they understand or not. Just as you would do in a **report round** (but more brief, because there is more to cover).

Prepare for:

→ Noting any questions and then supporting the presenter to answer them all at once.

→ Noting anything that comes up out of the responses which becomes an action or which needs to be added to the backlog.

Check everyone understands and is happy to proceed to the next stage of this round.

Reaction Round

Make a plan for a round that gathers people's ideas and reactions. You can do more than one round. People can pass if they have nothing to add but you can help by asking questions that will draw out reactions to suit the content.

For example:

→ What is important about what we're exploring here today?

→ What has happened that's got us to this point?

→ What are we ready for?

→ What factors do you think have made this possible?

→ What do you think will make this really good?

→ Describe what you value most about what's been presented.

→ What are your three big wishes for this piece of work?

Prepare for:

→ Noting reactions for a quick appreciation of what's been said at the end.

→ Noting anything that comes out of the responses which needs to be shared; which becomes an action or which needs to be added to the backlog.

Once you have done that, the round is complete. Prepare to check everyone is happy to proceed.

PREPARING FOR "DECISIONS"

As a facilitator you will need to plan for a presenter to share content to be decided upon for 5-10 mins. **Who is going to present it?** Do they know what it is they are trying to get to a decision on? This is a question you can ask as it could be helpful to inform people in advance about the precise thing they're seeking a decision about. Offer help and support to the presenter to ensure their content is accessible.

Clarification Question Round

Plan to hold a round to check everyone understands. Just as you would do for a Report round (but even more brief, because there is so more to cover).

Prepare for:

→ Noting any questions and then supporting the presenter to answer them all at once.

→ Noting anything that comes up out of the responses which becomes an action or which needs to be added to the backlog.

Check everyone understands and is happy to proceed to the next stage of this round.

REACTION ROUND

Make a plan for a round that gathers people's ideas and reactions. You can do more than one round. People can pass if they have nothing to add.

Prepare for:

→ Making notes for a quick appreciation of what's been said at the end.

→ Noting ideas that might feed into the proposal in the decision round. Check that with the presenter and the person with the ideas to make sure that the idea has been understood and they're happy to include it in the proposal.

→ Noting things for action or the backlog.

Decision Round

Make a plan to bring the group to a consensus about a planned course of action or decision.

If necessary, summarise the decision to be made, add in any additional ideas from the reaction round and key decision questions. E.g:

→ Yes, in principle.
→ Yes, unreservedly.
→ Yes, with questions.
→ No.

(once you've become confident as a group, you can swap in hand signals for each of these, to speed things up)

Prepare for:

→ Noting the decisions and proposals, (this might include making amendments to the overall proposal, which you can agree "live").

→ Noting responses to the decision for a quick appreciation of what's been said at the end.

→ Noting any further questions or actions for the backlog.

BACKLOG REVIEW

As a facilitator you will need to prepare for a review of the backlog and any other next steps. You will need to take a little time at this point to summarise what has come up in the meeting, which warrants further action. You will need to be ready to clarify how the arrangements will be made for that.

CLOSING ROUND

Plan for a final round which asks a question to get feedback on the meeting itself and can finish on a note of gratitude for the work done today.

Here are a list of examples adapted from selected SFA cards:

→ What did someone else say here today that mattered to you? Why?

→ What are you proud of in the work we do in this group?

→ Looking back, do you have any regrets or appreciations for the choice of topics today?

→ What would you say is a theme this year? What do you think next year's theme might be?

→ How do you feel about the group's progress? Is there anything you would change?

→ Where would you like more flexibility? Where would you like more structure?

→ How do you feel about how we manage the topics that come up in this group? (e.g identifying topics, noting them down and prioritising)

CONSENT

The words "consent" and "consensus" look and sound very similar. But in Sociocracy we are working with consent. We are not working with consensus.

Here's why.

A common example of consensus is voting. When we make a decision by majority, up to 49% of the votes could be ignored. There are things in what those voters think, feel and believe; ideas which are disregarded in consensus. There are "winners and losers".

Consent goes deeper. It holds trust and difference of opinion. In everyday language, consent is "that's OK" or "that's fine with me."

But it's not just about agreeing. Consent also welcomes objections to a proposal. It doesn't see them as critical but as something important that might be beneficial for us all to understand. That might seem that there is a huge risk of indecision but action can be taken swiftly and efficiently within a principle that "This thing is good enough for now and safe enough to try".

Using consent in meetings, it's possible for the group to take a basic proposal from one person, to participate in that proposal, co-produce and add value to it. Objections can turn into ideas and an even better proposal gets agreed.

OBJECTION

RANGE OF TOLERANCE

PREFERENCE

RANGE OF TOLERANCE

OBJECTION
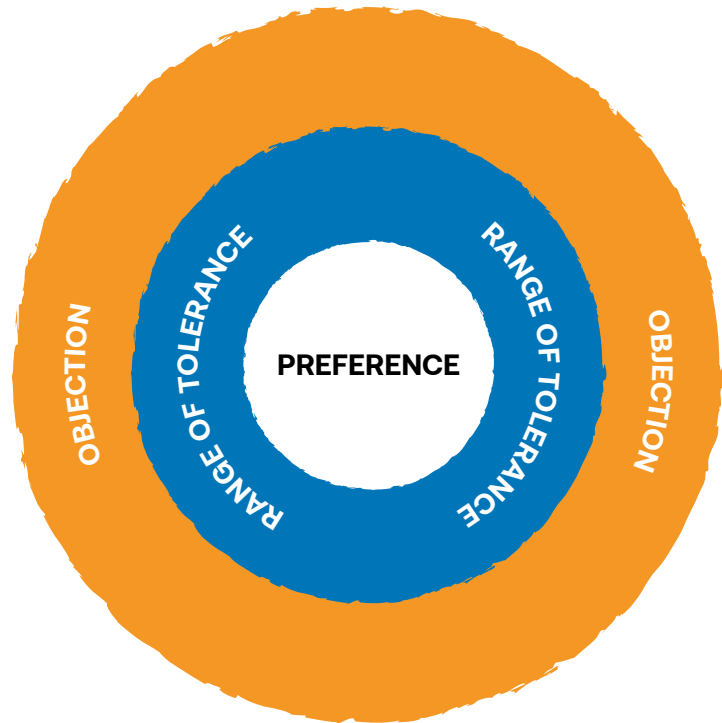
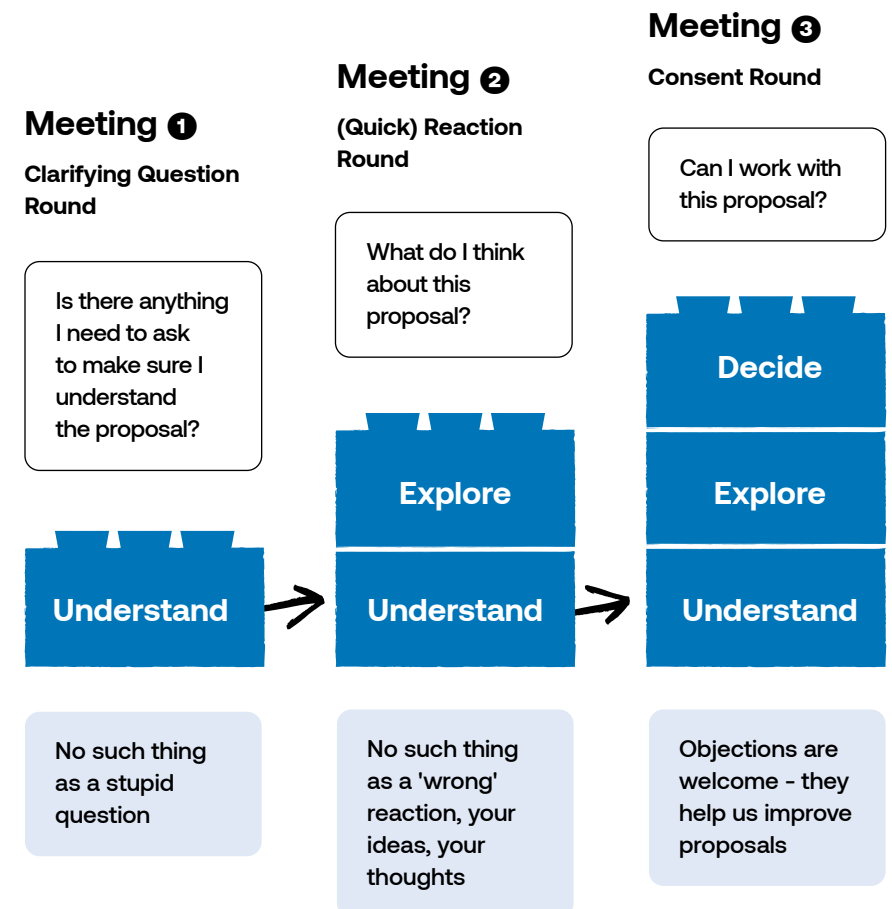From your Sociocracy training, you may remember

We are aiming to get all of our ranges of tolerance and preference to overlap so that we find something that is OK for all of us.

A note on sequencing meetings to work towards a complex decision.

There may be times when you have been in a meeting where nobody feels equipped to make a fair decision because the information is so new and fresh. When

meetings are inclusive it's important that everyone has the time to get to understand a topic, to explore the implications of it and to then come to a meeting where they can meaningfully contribute to a decision and achieve consent.

This will have been covered in training and here's a reminder about how you can sequence meetings to build capacity to make a complex decision:

Meeting ❸

Consent Round

Meeting ❷

(Quick) Reaction Round

Meeting ❶

Clarifying Question Round

Can I work with this proposal?

What do I think about this proposal?

Is there anything I need to ask to make sure I understand the proposal?

Decide

Explore

Explore

Understand

Understand

Understand

No such thing as a stupid question

No such thing as a 'wrong' reaction, your ideas, your thoughts

Objections are welcome – they help us improve proposals

FURTHER READING AND SUPPORT:

The Sociocracy For All Website has a resources section which includes free, downloadable materials and more detailed books, cards and other resources which can be purchased from online retailers. **www.sociocracyforall.org**.

We have some copies of their books at Number One Riverside including:

→ **Many Voices One Song,** which is a comprehensive handbook written by Ted J. Rau and Jerry Koch-Gonzalez.

→ **Who Decides Who Decides,** which is a helpful guide to starting a group by Ted J. Rau.

→ **Facilitating Meetings in Sociocracy** (which informed much of this booklet).

→ **Sociocracy, a brief introduction** (also has heavily influenced our training and support materials).

→ **Meeting cards** from Sociocracy for all and **Pip Decks** which include lots of inclusive workshop activities, check in and evaluation questions.

There are lots of inspring resources and ideas on the website of the **universite-du-nous.org**.

And more Sociocracy resources at **sociocracy30.org**