Choosing a venue

The venue can make a big difference to the ease with which a group can meet its aims. There are wonderful stories of facilitators using the dust on the ground for diagrams, and pinning paper to curtains to display work, but if you can choose a more suitable venue in the first place, it really helps!

Layout
A squarish room with chairs and tables which can be easily moved to create different layouts, during the meeting if necessary. Go for a single large room, big enough to accommodate small break-out groups, rather than breakout space some distance from the main room.

Working walls
Choose a venue which has walls which you can blu-tack flip chart paper to. The walls should be free of pictures, mirrors, textured wall paper or acoustic boards.

Projection, screens?
If your meeting involves showing video or slides, or skyping with participants based elsewhere, then you need to balance a big enough visible screen with enough space for your working wall. Ideally, the projector will be ceiling mounted so that it doesn't need its own table which then gets in the way of layout during sessions which don't involve projection. Ideally, the screen will roll away easily into the ceiling, allowing you to use the wall behind.

Projecting the real-time record
For some meetings, for example stakeholder dialogue, the best way to make the real-time record in full view of participants, is to type it directly into a laptop which is projected. Participants can see (and correct) the record as it is made. You know it will be legible, and there is no need to retype it later. You will still need working walls for flipcharts which need to be on display (e.g. ground rules, bike rack) and you may need them for diagrams or techniques like meta-planning. If you also need to show slides, videos or Skype then you may need two projectors and two screens, so that the record can continue to be made and shown at the same time.

Refreshments
Venues should provide jugs of tap water. Hot drinks on tap, in the room or very close by, are also important. For lunch, consider how long it will take people to find lunch and be served. Lunch in the room is, in my experience, best avoided as setting up and clearing away are disturbing, as are little pieces of tomato spilled on the tables.

Accessibility

Think about how participants are going to travel to the venue (bike, public transport, walking?) and how they are going to move around once there (wheelchairs, steps etc). Does the venue have a hearing loop or microphones. Do you need translators and if so, is the room suitable for their equipment?

Setting up

What time can you get in to set up? Make sure you have time either side of the workshop times, to set up and take down.

Technicians and IT

If you need to set up a laptop, access the internet and so on, is there a technician who can help and when are they available?