



Facilitator Resource Book

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CENTER FOR
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COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

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The Basics of Facilitation

What's the role of the facilitator?

- 1. Remain impartial about the subject of the forum.** Facilitators should avoid expressing their own opinion or evaluating participants' comments based on their own perspective. They should create space for diverse perspectives and encourage participants to learn from others with different experiences or perspectives.
- 2. Help participants develop mutual understanding and consider a broad range of views.** Facilitators should ask thoughtful and probing questions to help people explore multiple perspectives. They should note key tensions and tradeoffs among different perspectives and ask participants to explore the information and values that lead to those different perspectives. They should serve as a pathway for underrepresented opinions and experiences and invite the participants to consider points of view that may not be represented at the table.
- 3. Allow the participants to own the process and topic as much as possible, while helping them to meet the goals for the conversation.** Facilitators should allow participants to direct the conversation so that they can take ownership of its results. Participants need to feel heard and comfortable bringing in their own questions, insights, and experiences. Even so, groups often need help starting conversations and using their time well, and facilitators should ensure that they work towards reaching the goals of the conversation. Facilitators should help participants manage their time and transition to new questions or sessions as necessary based on the process plan.
- 4. Encourage everyone to join in the conversation and ensures no one dominates.** Facilitators should be aware of who has spoken and who has not, try to assure that all voices are heard, and attempt to ensure that no individual dominates the conversation. Though experts, advocates, or staff may offer specialized insight, facilitators should recognize and encourage participant experiences as a valuable form of community expertise. Facilitators should create space for quiet participants to join the conversation and encourage more dominate speakers to listen to the perspectives of others.
- 5. Model the ground rules.** By exhibiting strong listening skills and asking good questions, facilitators can model the behaviors they want participates to emulate. Deliberative facilitators can also praise certain participant behaviors, such as sharing of a difficult story or the asking a productive question, while remaining impartial to the actual content and perspective of the information shared.

Primary Facilitation Styles

The Referee: Only interferes as necessary to enforce rules and time constraints. A good facilitator from this perspective is barely noticed. They introduce a topic and let the participants take over. They may only say “So what do you think?” and then step back until it’s time to consider another topic or approach.

The Interviewer: Prepares specific questions beforehand and pushes participants on particular issues. A good moderator from this perspective helps the participants dig deeper and do the hard work that the group may not naturally do on their own.

The Empty Chair: Works to present views that are not represented in the forum. Can be particularly important if the room is not diverse, or if the deliberation is particularly one-sided. A good facilitator from this perspective is able to introduce alternative voices without seeming to lose their impartiality.

Recognizing Deliberation

- A good facilitator recognizes when deliberation is occurring and nurtures it.
- Discussion considers several points of view- a range of views.
- People are talking about what’s valuable to them.
- The group recognizes that the issue is complex.
- People are talking about consequences and weighing tradeoffs.
- People are struggling within themselves and WITH each other.
- “I” becomes “We”.
- The discussion is civil, but also not simply polite. Disagreements are aired but aired in the spirit of seeking increased understanding.

Facilitators should be neutral about the perspective, but they should not be neutral about the process. If a participant asks a good, clarifying question, it is ok to comment on that.

Basic Facilitator Moves

Listening: Listening is your most important facilitator tool and often one of the hardest things to do. Make sure that you are paying attention to the conversation that is happening in front of you, rather than your own idea of what they should be talking about or expectations about what group members would usually say about this topic. All your interventions should be responsive to the conversation and listening helps you meet that goal.

Questions: Aside from listening, a facilitator's primary job is to ask questions that make the group think more deeply about the issue and which encourage reflection and mutual understanding. Generally, we tend to use four types of questions:

- **Transition questions:** These questions are used to introduce a new topic. These can be prepared ahead of time and should shift the conversation from one topic to another.
 - Ex. Now that we have about how housing stability impacts your health, what influence does your neighborhood have on your ability to live a healthy life?
- **Probing questions:** These are questions the facilitator uses to “dig deeper” into topics raised by participants. Facilitators should ask follow-up questions based on participants comments that encourage the participant and the wider group to think more deeply.
 - Ex. Can you tell us more about that?
 - Ex. Can you or others explain how that issue impacts your daily life?
 - Ex. How might that solution address some of the concerns we've heard today?
- **Reaction questions:** These are questions the facilitator asks the whole group to respond to.
 - Ex. How might someone who disagrees respond to that?
 - Ex. How do others feel about that?
- **Tradeoff questions:** These questions ask people to explore the tradeoffs between two different options, or values. Tradeoff questions encourage participants to think about the benefits and consequences of their choices and to weighing competing priorities against one another.
 - Ex. It seems like we value both quality and affordability, how might we balance those competing priorities when developing solutions to this problem?

Remember that not all questions need to be complicated or involve trade offs. Sometimes, simple interventions are all that's needed to keep the conversation flowing.

Paraphrasing: Sometimes it is beneficial to paraphrase what a participant has said. Paraphrasing serves a few purposes. It can validate the speaker, ensure that you understand what the speaker was trying to convey, ensure that others in the group understand the perspective of the speaker, or draw together comments from various speakers. Paraphrases should be relatively brief, and it's always a good idea to check in with the participant to make sure you're not misinterpreting their intent.

Let the silence hang. When asking questions to the group, it may feel odd when no one immediately responds. This is okay! If you ask a question, give participants some time to think about their response. If you ask a question and no one responds after a series of seconds, ask if you can clarify the question. Keep in mind that participants will often ask you to clarify if they do not understand the question.

Bring in the empty chair. While there may be many diverse perspectives in the room, there will be voices missing at each table. Encourage participants to imagine an empty chair at the table and think about who should be sitting at the table and involved in conversation. Remind them that we can't speak for other people, but we can bring up other important perspectives.

- Ex. What perspectives don't seem to be represented in our group? What might they add if they were here?
- Ex. How might someone who's _____ feel about this? [Fill in the blank with a missing perspective. Someone who's younger/older, struggling to afford rent, works in construction].

Set the Conversation Guidelines: Deliberation is more likely to take place if some guidelines are laid out at the beginning, and they can help prevent difficulties later on. A wide variety of potential ground rules to deliberation exist, so individual moderators need to decide which rules to use and how to frame the rules before the forum. Here are the guidelines the CPD uses. You can either borrow these or come up with your own:

CPD Ground Rules

- Be honest and respectful
- Listen to understand
- Participate fully
- Be brief so everyone has an opportunity to participate
- It's ok to disagree, but do so with curiosity, not hostility
- Stay in learning mode

Manage the conversation. Often, a facilitator will need to encourage participants to change their conversational behaviors. Though these interventions might differ from the ways that you normally engage in conversation, remember that your job as a facilitator is to help participants have an open conversation that encourages consideration across difference. The following strategies can be useful to manage the conversation:

- Encourage participants who haven't spoken up as much to join the conversation. This also helps remind more dominant speakers to create space for others.
 - Ex: Let's hear from someone we haven't heard from yet.
 - Ex: I want to make sure we're creating space for everyone at the table to join the conversation. Does anyone who hasn't spoken up much want to add anything.
- Encourage conversations among participants by shifting your eye contact. The participant who is speaking will have a tendency to only make eye contact with the facilitator. To help participants engage in a more natural conversation, move your eye contact around the table while someone is speaking. This will push the speaker to speak to the whole group rather than just to the facilitator.
- It's okay to interrupt when you need to shift the conversation to a new topic or to encourage them to focus on the topic at hand.
 - Ex: I hate to interrupt this great conversation, but I want to make sure we touch on a few more points.
- Rely on the ground rules to manage disruptive or unproductive behaviors. Rather than bringing attention to a single participant, you can often remind participants of the ground rules to ensure a respectful and equitable discussion.
 - Ex: I just want to make sure that we're remembering the ground rules. It's okay to disagree, but we should do so with curiosity and not hostility.
 - Ex: I understand that some of us have strong feelings about this issue, but I want to encourage everyone to stay in learning mode. That doesn't mean that you need to change your mind, but we can learn more about what this issue looks like in our community by listening to people with perspectives different than our own.

Equitable Recruitment

Stakeholder Analysis: An important step to take prior to holding your event is to create a stakeholder analysis. This is a list of every community member, non-profit organization, business, etc that may have a stake in the topic. In each analysis it helps to identify if you already have a built-in connection to that stakeholder group, or if you need to leverage other support to reach specific groups.

Considering Barriers: With each event, there are several barriers that may keep your community from attending. Some questions to ask:

- ***If in-person, is this event near a bus stop?*** Folks who don't have their own transportation will rely on public transportation. Events far from bus stops may not appeal to many.
 - Ex. Consider all transportation options. Can you provide free bus passes? Is there an option to provide transportation in other ways?
- ***What time is your event?*** There is no "perfect time" to hold an event but getting a feel for when your stakeholders are available can help you choose a time that is most beneficial.
 - Can also consider holding multiple events at different times
- ***Is childcare available, or are there activities for children?*** Many community members may be the primary caregiver for their children and need childcare services.
 - Proper childcare through an organization can be *expensive* but can remove one of the biggest barriers to participation.
- ***Are translation and interpretation services available?*** Community members who speak English as a second language may feel uncomfortable committing to an event if it's not clearly communicated that translation and interpretation services will be available.
 - Language Justice Interpretation is a huge equity builder in events.
- ***Is it feasible to provide stipends?*** Often, providing a small stipend for participation can encourage more folks to attend events.
 - Consider grocery cards, or other small-sum gift cards that can be used by anyone. Cash can be difficult to manage if you have many attendees.

Equitable Conversations

Content and Context Experts: Often, if a conversation group contains traditional content experts and citizens of the community, there may be a tendency for the content experts to take over the conversation, or alternatively for the other members of the group to continually defer to the content expert during conversations. This is ultimately harmful to the overall purpose and can be managed by first making it clear that both content and context experts are valued in the conversation. Data and facts are important but cannot be the only things prized in a deliberative discussion.

Content experts: Typically have expertise in a specific area they gained through higher education, professional certifications, or involvement in business/government operations tied to the topic area.

Context experts: Community members whose expertise exists in their experience of the topic area in their own lives. Have personal experiences with the topic itself even if they don't have the credentials of a traditional content expert.

- **Ground Rules are Key.** Creating and maintaining conversation norms throughout your discussion is one of the easiest ways to ensure equity in participation.
 - If a content expert is speaking for too long, the facilitator has the option to reference back to the ground rule about being brief. This can be done without specifically mentioning the participant, but rather as a reminder for the group.
 - Ground rules can be created by the group before the conversation begins. This allows all participants to feel as though they have ownership of the conversation
- **Power of the Empty Chair.** If the same few participants continue to speak throughout the discussion while several others remain silent, introducing the empty chair and sitting in silence for a moment can often allow the quiet participants to feel comfortable sharing their views.
- **Provide Important Information in Advance.** Often, participants may not feel as though they have enough information about a topic to fully participate.
 - Provide handouts and informational videos about the topic in advance so participants can feel more confident in their general knowledge.