

GUIDELINES
FOR
EFFECTIVE
FACILITATION

Guidelines for Effective Facilitation FOR FACILITATORS

Be prepared.

The facilitator does not need to be an expert on the topic being discussed, but should be the best prepared for the discussion. This means understanding the subject, being familiar with the discussion materials, thinking ahead of time about the directions in which the discussion might go, and preparing questions to help further the discussion. It also means having any desired materials ready and available, such as nametags, refreshments, handouts, etc.

Set a relaxed tone and respect people's time.

Welcome everyone and create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. Be sure to get the group started on time and provide time for introductions if necessary.

Establish clear ground rules.

At the beginning, help the group establish its own ground rules by asking the participants to suggest ways for the group to behave. It is important to post the ground rules that have been decided upon. Here are some ground rules that are tried and true:

- Everyone gets a fair hearing.
- Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
- One person speaks at a time.
- Share "air time."
- Conflict is not personalized.
- Don't label, stereotype, or call people names.
- Speak for yourself, not for others. Use "I" statements.
- What is said in this group stays here, unless everyone agrees otherwise.

Monitor and assist the group process.

- Keep track of how the group members are participating – who has spoken, who hasn't spoken, and whose points haven't been heard.
- When deciding whether to intervene, lean toward non-intervention. Be flexible and allow room for spontaneity.
- Avoid becoming the center of the conversation. Don't talk after each comment or answer every question; allow participants to respond directly to each other.
- Allow time for pauses and silence. People need time to reflect.
- Don't let anyone dominate; try to involve everyone.
- Remember: this is not a debate, but a group dialogue. If participants forget this, don't hesitate to ask the group to help re-establish the ground rules.

Help the group grapple with the content.

- Make sure the group considers a wide range of views. Ask the group to think about the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of looking at an issue or solving a problem.
- Ask participants to think about the concerns and values that underlie the discussion.
- Help participants identify "common ground," but don't try to force consensus.

Use probing comments and open-ended questions that avoid yes or no answers.

Some useful questions include:

- What seems to be the key point here?
- What is the crux of your disagreement?
- What would you say to support (or challenge) that point?
- Please give an example or describe a personal experience to illustrate that point.
- Could you help us understand the reasons behind your opinion?
- What experiences or beliefs might lead a person to support that point of view?
- What do you think people who hold that opinion care deeply about?
- What would be a strong case against what you just said?
- What do you find most persuasive about that point of view?
- What is it about that position that you just cannot live with?
- What have we missed that we need to talk about?
- What information supports that point of view?

Reserve adequate time for closing the discussion.

Ask the group for last comments and thoughts about the subject, and provide some time for the group to evaluate the process. Always finish on time and thank everyone for their contributions.

Remember that good facilitators . . .

- help the group set its ground rules, and keep to them.
- help group members grapple with the content by asking probing questions.
- help group members identify areas of agreement and disagreement.
- bring in points of view that haven't been talked about.
- create opportunities for everyone to participate.
- focus and help to clarify the discussion.
- summarize key points in the discussion, or ask others to do so.

And...

- are self-aware; good facilitators know their own strengths, weaknesses, biases, and values.
- are able to put the group first.
- appreciate all kinds of people.
- are committed to democratic principles.