

5 PRINCIPLES OF FACILITATION

1. You are the servant of the group, the steward of the process.

No content input—if you must give content (opinions, solutions, answers to questions, how you feel about a proposal, input), label it as clearly separate from your facilitation role.

High ethics—act with integrity.

Explain what you are doing (transparency). Admit mistakes.

Ask permission, you are not in charge—it's a service role, not an authority role.

Stay grounded.

Set your intention before you start, and help the group set theirs.

Ask for a moment of silence if needed.

Trust the process and have faith.

2. Plan ahead and work outside the meeting.

Plan agenda ahead of time.

Communicate with each presenter.

Plan realistic time boundaries.

Ensure materials and background documents are ready.

Interview participants ahead of time, especially if you expect controversy.

Think ahead about different formats.

Be aware of group's ground rules if they have them, and decide whether you want to propose any if they don't.

Be ready with your explanatory introduction to what you're doing as a facilitator.

Bring flip chart/easel/markers, chime, whatever else you need for facilitator role.

Your job doesn't start when the meeting starts and doesn't end when the meeting is over—your job is to support the process and that may mean more than two hours outside the meeting for every one hour in the meeting.

3. Help each person feel heard.

Use paraphrasing, scribing (writing stuff up front where everyone can see it), and other methods to reflect back what people are saying.

Focus on interests and not positions—what is the underlying need that someone is expressing?

4. Work with all of what's in the room.

Tune into the energy.

Work with the feelings and intuitions and kinesthetic input (body language and signals), as well as the rational content of what people offer.

Pay close attention.

Bring out underlying dynamics to work with them constructively.

5. Listen for common ground and reflect it back to the group, as often as necessary.

Summarize frequently.

Be active in the role and gently firm.

Celebrate progress.



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Working with Blocks & Concerns in Meetings

Listen for the truth in each person's expression.

Reflect back the feelings.

Look for what needs are underneath the concern.

Remember that differing opinions are a resource. What can you learn from these different opinions?

Seek common ground. What part of the proposal can everyone agree to?

Assume good-faith intentions.

Act as an ally of the person with the concern, while still holding the needs of the rest of the group.

Ask questions:

- How do you see this idea?
- What are you worried might happen?
- How will that follow from this decision?
- Could we monitor that problem?
- What parts of the proposal *do* you support?

Analyze what the origin of the difficulty is. Problems might arise from:

- Genuine content disagreement
- Process issues (e.g. feeling rushed)
- Interpersonal conflicts
- Structural challenges

Listen closely.

Engage the people with concerns in solving the problem. Ask them what would work for them that would also meet others' needs.

Remember the 5 basic principles of facilitation:

1. You are the servant of the group, the steward of the process
2. Plan ahead and work outside the meeting
3. Help each person feel heard
4. Work with all of what's in the room
5. Listen for common ground and reflect it back to the group, as often as necessary

Options, if a concern is unresolved and time is finished:

1. Lay it over to a future meeting
2. Send it to committee, with the person blocking included
3. Talk during a break or outside the meeting— "coffee"
4. Mediation (if interpersonal conflict)
5. If correct block, lay down the item



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ROLES OF THE FACILITATOR

Note that it's fine for some of these pieces, such as Timekeeper, to be officially delegated to others in the meeting, and participants can assist informally in many other roles. The one piece that should probably always be reserved to the Facilitator, in order to avoid confusion, is the responsibility for choosing whose turn it is to speak.

1. Summarizer & Integrater:

- State the sense of the group as best you can discern it
- Reflect back what you are hearing verbally and/or visually
- Weave together diverse input
- List out sub-topics so each can be examined
- State clearly any agreements for the record

2. Vibeswatcher:

- Awareness of emotional undercurrents, gleaned from tones, body language, intuition
- Ask deeper questions
- Call for breaks

3. Process Safeguard:

- Help group follow any process agreements or ground rules that are in place
- Steward the process so that others can mainly focus on the content
- If a conflict emerges, help each person feel heard, and seek common ground
- Help people understand each other by translating information from a participant into terms that the other participants can also grasp

4. Timekeeper:

- Keep an eye on the clock
- Warn the group well ahead of any deadlines
- Note again as the deadline draws near

5. Keeper of the Stack:

- Keep track of whose turn it is to speak

6. Scribe:

- Write information up front large enough for everyone in the room to read it

7. Format Suggester:

- Consider formats other than the default large-group discussion

8. Physical Preparation:

- Seating
- Lighting
- Airflow and heating/cooling
- Supplies: markers, tape, easel, flip chart



“Facilitator’s Box”

An opportunity to set up the framework. In this space you might:

1. Explain how you operate, e.g. how you see your role, specifics of stacking, etc.
2. Suggest ground rules and ask for group agreement on them.
3. Ask for group support as you learn these skills.

Formats

1. Plenary Discussion
2. Brainstorming
3. Go-Round
4. Small Groups or Pairing
5. Fishbowl—homogeneous or heterogeneous
6. Council
7. Guided Meditation
8. Silence

Ground Rules

If you want to use them, there are lots of possibilities. Here is one basic set:

0. *Basics*: Raise hands before speaking. No interruptions. All focus on one conversation. Do not call on anyone twice until all who want to speak on that topic have spoken once. Etc.
1. *Be constructive*. Create a positive context and supportive framework. Acknowledge past fully, yet focus on the future. Make good-faith efforts.
2. *Test assumptions* and inferences. Ask for more information.
3. *Be specific*. Use examples if needed so people know what you’re talking about. (Try to find an appropriate balance between generalizing and detailing.)
4. *Take responsibility for your own feelings and experiences*. Use “I-statements.” (For example, “I felt so angry when I saw that,” rather than “You made me so angry when you did that.”)
5. *Go for the heart*, both in the sense of center and in the sense of feelings. What do you most need to talk about? Discuss undiscussable issues. Be real, share what is most relevant. Be direct, yet kind.

Managing Open Discussions & Equalizing Input

- Head off tangents fast, before they develop fully, to keep things on track
- Create a basic expectation of conciseness and respect for the group’s time; encourage people to get to the point
- Stacking:
 - Don’t make a long stack
 - Weave comments together as you go
 - OK to call on people in a different order than the order in which they raised their hands
- Summarize frequently
- Straw polls: can use to get a quick check of the room, but don’t fall into a voting atmosphere
- Support shy people to speak more, make a little extra space for them
- Can use structures as occasional interventions to provide feedback to people on how much airtime they use, such as yarn, beans, or tallies

