Facilitation Tips

A Quick Reference Guide to Effective Facilitation

Meeting Planning Tips

A. Where available, refer to meeting facilitation guide for the section of the meeting that you will be facilitating.

B. If there is no set meeting facilitation guide, you can create one using the following tips as guidance.
   - **Purpose** – define the purpose of the meeting
   - **Agenda** – define what topics will be discussed and determine the appropriate structure for the discussion – presentations, team exercises, etc.
   - **Limits** – determine the amount of time needed for each meeting topic and what topics, if any, will require continued discussion at future meetings
   - **Outcomes**- list the intended outcomes for the meeting – what you hope to achieve
   - **Participants** – list the people who should attend the meeting and if any participants are required or optional.

C. Plan logistical details for meeting – meeting location, date, time, materials needed, and invite participants.

What does a Facilitator do?

1. Prepares agenda, meeting structure, participant list and logistics
2. Introduces and enforces meeting ground rules
3. Encourages appropriate participation from all meeting attendees
4. Builds consensus & seeks win/win outcomes
5. Creates a safe environment
6. Maintains neutrality
7. Demonstrates good active listening skills
8. Guides without controlling
9. Asks questions that help others contribute
10. Adapts to audience needs & deals well with group dynamics
11. Keeps discussions on track
12. Effectively handles conflict

Listen Effectively

5 Elements of Active Listening

1. **Pay attention**. Give the speaker your undivided attention and acknowledge the message. Recognize that what is not said also speaks loudly.
2. **Show that you are listening**. Use your own body language and gestures to convey your attention.
3. **Provide feedback**. Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said. This may require you to reflect what is being said and ask questions.
4. **Defer judgment**. Interrupting to state your view is a waste of time. It frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message.
5. **Respond Appropriately**. Active listening is a model for respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective. You add nothing by attacking the speaker or otherwise putting him/her down.

Techniques for Managing Discussion

- **Review the purpose** – continually revisit the purpose statement and link comments made by participants to the purpose statement
- **Orient the group** – periodically remind the group of what has been accomplished, where they are now and what still needs to be achieved
- **Enforce ground rules** – when needed, remind the group of the previously discussed ground rules
- **Create a "parking lot"** – use a flipchart to capture comments or suggestions that are outside the scope of the discussion, review the list at the end of the meeting and share the list with appropriate process owners for action
- **Redirect questions** – balance participation by redirecting questions to the entire group, a specific part of the group or a specific person

Techniques to Reach Agreement

- **Three step process** – (1) restate the idea (2) check with the group for understanding (3) confirm the agreement
- **Build agreements** - check frequently with participants for differing opinions, discuss and form consensus
- **Conditions for yes** – work to combine ideas so the group can reach agreement or consensus

Techniques to Handle Conflict

- **Acknowledge the dilemma** – state the problem that the group is dealing with so they can openly address it
- **Recognize different points of view**
- **When there are different points of view, ask team members to state the opposition's point of view** - this helps group members feel acknowledged and understood by the other side
- **If agreement cannot be reached in a reasonable amount of time** – move on to another topic and revisit the discussion at a later time during the meeting

Facilitative Language – to stimulate discussion

- What would you like to see happen?
- What other things come to mind?
- How can we combine these ideas?
- How can we build on these ideas?

Facilitative Language– to manage discussion

- That's an interesting perspective, tell me more.
- I'm not sure I'm following you. Could you give me an example of that?
- Let me see if I understand your position. Are you saying that…?
- <Name>, I know you have experience in this area. Can you give us some ideas?
- How might this work?
- Can I remind you that we agreed that every idea is a good idea?
- I suggest we hold off on evaluating these ideas until we have finished brainstorming.

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Facilitative Language – to get agreement

- Is everyone clear on the purpose?
- Can we agree to…?
- Is everyone willing to support this decision?
- What do the rest of you think?
- How do you suggest we proceed on this?
- What else should we be considering here?

Facilitative Language – to handle conflict

- It is very quiet in here. What's going on?
- What needs to happen before we can move on?
- Tell me about your concern.
- What would it take to resolve this?
- How close are we to agreement?
- What would it take for you to support this?

Facilitative Language (invitational) – to acknowledge participation & keep it coming

- I'm glad that you brought that up.
- That's an interesting thought. What else might we consider?
- Okay, let's build on that.
- Let's keep going with this.
- You're on the right track. What else?
- Good idea. Who else has one?

Facilitative Language (invitational) – to encourage involvement of other team members

- What ideas do you have?
- What are your thoughts on that?
- What are you thinking?
- How would you like to see it?
- How else might it be handled?
- <Name>, you look like you might have a different opinion on this.

Facilitative Language (invitational) – to encourage discussion & sharing of ideas

- What do you think?
- How would this work for you?
- Who can tell me…?
- I invite you to…
- What might be another way of looking at this?
- What has been your experience?

Facilitative Language – What NOT to Say

Examples of judgmental language that will hinder open communication:

- I don't think that would work.
- Someone already said that.
- We've tried that before.
- We've never done that before.
- It's not in the budget.
- We don't know how to do that.
- We don't have the resources for that.
- That's not practical.
- We'll never get it approved.
- That's crazy!
- Why on earth would we do that?

Dealing with Problem Participants

As a facilitator, there is always a chance that you will need to deal with problem participants. These are some techniques you can use.

If a participant talks too often…

- You can talk to the person outside of the meeting.
- You can solicit participation from others by asking the rest of the group:
  - What does anyone else think about this point?
  - Who else has an idea?
  - Let's make sure that everyone gets a chance to contribute
  - before any one person speaks twice.

If a participant talks too long…

- You can talk to the person outside of the meeting.
- You can wait for a pause and interrupt saying "Could you please
- summarize your idea in a few words so I can write it down?"
- You can interrupt and say something like, "Thank you for your
- contribution, perhaps this discussion could continue in more detail
- later. However, we need to cut this short so we can move on…"

If a participant talks to someone else at length…

- You can ignore this, if you think they will finish quickly.
- You can stop the session and wait for the conversation to stop.
- You can say, "Pardon me, <Name>, we can't hear what you and <Name> are talking about. Would you mind sharing this with the rest of the group?"
- You can say, "<Name>, what are your thoughts on the point that <Name> just mentioned?

If a participant brings up personal or irrelevant issues…

- Say, <Name>, "I'm not clear on how that fits into the issue we are talking about. Could you help me understand?"

If a participant talks too little…

- Ask, "<Name>, what are your thoughts on this question?
- Ask, "<Name>, you are new to this group so I think your views could be especially valuable. What do you think?"

If a participant challenges your ideas and opinions…

Try one of the following:

- Cite the authorities you used as a source and acknowledge that they think otherwise.
- Acknowledge that the challenger's idea or opinion has merit and that you will need to think about the effect it has on your own thinking.
- Ask the group what they think about the challenger's idea or opinion