



# Keep In Mind for Facilitation

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## ***Being a Facilitator Means:***

- .. To think of the needs and purpose of the group as a whole
  - .. To be both realistic and confident in the group's ability to succeed
  - .. To motivate
  - .. To inspire everyone's self-confidence and build trust in each other
  - .. To create a caring, lighthearted and generous atmosphere
  - .. To guide the group in such a way that everyone contributes
  - .. To encourage questioning, exploration and innovation
  - .. To welcome diversity in perspectives
  - .. To stimulate collaborative thinking, mutual support and appreciation
  - .. To create a context in which the sum is greater than the parts
  - .. To discern, distinguish and highlight the issues
  - .. To keep people focused on fulfilling their goals
  - .. To synthesize and summarize
  - .. To inspire faith that the process will reveal the best course of action
- .. **BREATHES!**
  - .. Is centered and calm, providing an essential stabilizing presence
  - .. Minimizes cross-talk
  - .. Gets people to address their remarks to everyone, not just to the facilitator
  - .. Is not trying to "fix it" for the group
  - .. Is always conscious of the way in which issues get framed, and by whom
  - .. Is conscious of power dynamics rooted in social and/or structural inequality – and strives to minimize their impact
  - .. Equalizes contributions of all members
  - .. Looks for points of agreement and difference
  - .. Invites difference as a creative force in the group
  - .. Has a good feel for pacing knows when to push, when to stand back, and when to stand firm

## ***Operating Assumptions:***

- .. Everyone is intelligent.
- .. Everyone has legitimate reasons for their thoughts and feelings
- .. Everyone is doing the best they can
- .. Everyone is the expert on their own experience
- .. Everyone has something to contribute
- .. All problems have solutions

## ***A Good Facilitator***

- .. Models new norms
- .. Encourages leadership from all participants.
- .. Ensures that others share responsibility for providing information necessary for the meeting
- .. Creates an upbeat climate of openness, spaciousness, generosity and compassion
- .. Is not attached to any particular agenda or outcome, and therefore can be fully present to the group's process

## ***Sensing the Pulse of the Group***

Good facilitation is not nearly as dependent on formulas or processes as it is on continual accurate pulse-taking of the group. Notice the nonverbal cues. Do not fall into the trap of only paying attention to what is visible. Some things to notice are:

- .. The body language people are using. Are they sitting in open or protected postures? Are they fidgety or slumping over?
- .. The tone of people's voices. Is it patronizing? sarcastic? self deprecating? caring? cynical?
- .. How are people listening to each other?
- .. What is the emotional tone in the room? what is the group ethos?

All of these factors will reveal whether the group is feeling open or shut down, excited or bored, tense or relaxed. This, more than anything else, will inform your choices about both tone and timing in guiding the meeting. It will reveal when to shift gears, when to spend more time on one person's issues, and when to move on.

The single most important way to sense the spirit of the group is to pay attention to and trust your own intuition.

## Keep In Mind for Facilitation

**Tentative Agenda (set before meetings, getting input from all concerned)**

List Agenda Items and include:

Time needed

Process (discussion, brainstorm, presentation, round, small groups, etc. ).

Purpose (to share information, explore, problem solve, make decisions, get input, build trust ,etc.)

Who is taking responsibility for that piece of the agenda?

When setting the agenda, punctuate it with different sorts of activities, breaks and ways to enjoy one another.

### Meeting Components

Opening: set the tone with a poem, meditation, song, game, ritual etc.

Check-in invite people to say how they are doing; sometimes it is good for people to share some good news in their lives.

Agenda Review

Assign Roles timekeeper, scribe, atmosphere watcher, etc.

Discussion and Decision Making

Appreciations it is vital that we acknowledge our efforts and express what we appreciate about one another.

Concerns this can be a time where people have the opportunity to simply and briefly express any issues they have. The speaker says what s/he needs to be heard: for people to remember something, etc.

Schedule next meeting

Review restate decisions and tasks that different individuals took responsibility for. May want to create a buddy system of support and accountability.

Evaluation take time to discover how to improve your process. Briefly ask people to say what did and did not work in the meeting.

It is important that you avoid the trap of only taking care of “business” because there doesn’t seem to be any time for anything else. When people share different ways of being together the business goes so much more smoothly that no time has been “wasted”.

### Meeting Tools:

Sometimes smaller configurations can take a task to the next step for the whole. Different groups can work on different topics at the same time then bring them back to the whole.

Pairs can be good to use to help overcome reticence to speak or to evaluate people’s thoughts.

Triads can help to energize a topic or provide a sounding board for evaluating brainstorming.

Fours and fives can be the basis of working groups, allow deeper discussion of a general topic, or simply provide more chance for people to talk than when they are sitting in a large group.

There are many ways to run the flow of a meeting. Some methods are better to get everyone’s participation. Others are used to energize.

In addition to open discussion there are:

Brainstorms quick fire listing of ideas, concerns or alternatives. Don’t comment on or criticize or explain them, wait until the process is completed to evaluate and prioritize.

Rounds going round the circle, each one giving their opinion (people may pass and speak later). One of the best ways to equalize contributions.

Talking Circles start with a question, then each person tells their own story relative to that question. Each person speaks from her or his heart, without referring to other’ s stories.

Self-Facilitation – each person talks, then calls on the next person.

Inviting the imagination, intuition and vision using silent reflection, guided meditation, drawing or movement.

Fishbowls with some people talking about a topic, while the rest of the group silently observes the discussions. Sometimes fishbowls allow for people to rotate in and out of them.

Ways of evaluating and or prioritizing ideas:

PMI (plus, minus, interesting) asking whats good, bad or interesting about ideas. This is particularly useful to overcome binary thinking or polarized positions. The emphasis should be on what is interesting, where could this idea lead us.

Straw polls They are not a vote in disguise, but a way for members of the group to get a sense of where the rest of the group is at.

Starring ideas on a flip chart.

*Note: Meetings go well when participants understand that they can make the facilitators job easy or difficult. All participants should take responsibility for the functioning of the meeting.*