

“Facilitation is the process of helping a group complete a task, solve a problem or come to agreement to the mutual satisfaction of the participants.”

- *Great Meetings! How to facilitate like a pro* by Dee Kelsey and Pam Plumb

“The facilitator’s job is to support everyone to do their best thinking. To do this, the facilitator encourages full participation, promotes mutual understanding, and cultivates shared responsibility.”

- *Facilitator’s Guide to Participatory Decision-Making* by Sam Kaner, et al

Purpose

The purpose of the Facilitator Guide is to help you lead discussions with the individuals and organizations you have identified in your target sector. A range of facilitation styles and tools can be used, depending on the number of participants, the purpose of the meeting, the facilities and resources available, and your comfort level with each technique.

The Facilitator's Role

Facilitators make it easier for a group to work together, even just two people. In fact, the word *facilitation* comes from the French word *facile*, meaning easy. Facilitators increase a group's effectiveness by improving the process and structure. They are often not a member of the group, have no stake in the outcome of the process, remain neutral, and make it easier for each member of the group to have input.

You might need to balance a long-term goal with a neutral stake in the specific recommendations each target audience decides to implement and how. Ultimately, the participants will choose which recommendations work best for them. As a facilitator, you help them reach their own conclusions.

YOU COULD HELP THE TARGET INDIVIDUALS OR ORGANIZATIONS:

- > plan a meeting agenda to discuss the *Guidelines*
- > manage time at the meeting
- > understand key sections of the *Guidelines*, especially the recommendations for their sector
- > identify the extent to which they have already implemented recommendations for their sector
- > identify gaps in their support of caregivers
- > determine which recommendations to implement to address the gap
- > identify next steps
- > monitor progress
- > check in periodically at agreed upon times
- > express recognition and appreciation for their implementation of recommendations

QUALITIES OF AN EFFECTIVE FACILITATOR

The qualities most needed in the moment will depend on the circumstance, but there are core attitudes, skills, and knowledge that provide a solid foundation. Effective facilitators are able to manage processes for individuals and groups – and sometimes the subject matter – yet always remain open to learning from participants. They build trust and rapport by being patient with themselves and participants, finding commonalities, making connections, and demonstrating genuine interest and respect for others.

Some of the most essential attitudes, skills, and knowledge for new facilitators are listed below.

ATTITUDE

How does this image illustrate the essential attitudes listed?



- > Willing to listen and learn from participants
- > Awareness of others
- > Empathy, compassion, and respect
- > Openness and transparency
- > Flexibility
- > Well grounded: able to manage group dynamics and keep participants on track
- > Curiosity

Facilitation Skills and Knowledge

There are thirteen key facilitation skills that can improve the effectiveness of your meetings about the *Guidelines*. Rate your current skills in the table below. Then rate them again after gaining more experience. To build on a particular skill, jot down some resources and activities that would help you improve.

To improve on specific facilitation skills and knowledge, consider the following resources and activities:

- > Obtain some of the resources listed at the end of this toolkit.
- > Review other books, videos, or websites on facilitation.
- > Observe the facilitation skills and techniques of someone you respect.
- > Look for opportunities to practice facilitation, such as discussions or meetings among family, friends, colleagues, or social clubs.
- > Take notes in a journal after each phone call or meeting on what went well and what you would like to improve.

**EFFECTIVE FACILITATION SKILLS
SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

1=very weak | 2=weak | 3=okay | 4=strong | 5=very strong

Facilitation Skill	Rating Today Date:	Next Rating Date:	Ideas for Improvement
Planning			
Active Listening			
Flexibility			
Focus			
Encouraging participation			
Managing			
Questioning			
Promoting ownership			
Building rapport			
Self-awareness			
Managing conflict			
Broadening discussion			
Presenting information			

Facilitation Tips

THE FOUR PS

Keep these words in mind while managing a meeting, no matter the number of participants.

→ **Purpose - The overall reason for the meeting**

Useful expressions: Are we getting a little sidetracked here? Can I put that in the parking lot for later discussion?

→ **Process - The way the facilitator and participants work together**

Useful expressions: I'd like to bring your attention to the group guidelines you agreed on and encourage you to monitor your participation.

→ **Pace - The rhythm and speed at which you move through the agenda.**

Useful expressions: How is the pace so far? Are you ready to move on? Would you like to spend a little more time on this and a little less time on another item on the agenda?

→ **Pulse - The group dynamic and energy level**

Useful expressions: I see several sidebar conversations happening; is there something I should know? Have I missed something important?

How are you doing? Let's do the five-finger assessment: Hold up one hand and indicate your energy level with five fingers meaning you feel so good you could go for a run and one finger meaning you'd like to go back to bed!

ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION FROM THE BEGINNING.

- > Include your contact person in planning the agenda and desired meeting outcomes.
- > Elicit input from participants by asking them open-ended questions. (Questions that cannot be answered with Yes or No.)
- > Allow time for participants to jot down their thoughts on their own and/or discuss in pairs or small groups before sharing their top ideas with the whole group.
- > Pay attention to participants' level of participation; is anyone withdrawing or are they simply quiet and listening intently? Is anyone dominating the conversation? If so, do they seem aware of it? Encourage everyone to take note of how often they are hearing their own voice. Mention the value of hearing different perspectives and making space for everyone to be heard.

KEEP THE DISCUSSION ON TRACK OVERALL.

Enjoy moments of spontaneity and stories, but be aware of just how far away participants (or you) are getting from the purpose of the meeting. Listen for a link you can make to the original task to gently bring the discussion back toward the goal. If one person is repeatedly going off topic, look and listen for clues as to why it's happening. Maybe the person is in fact on topic, but the messages are imbedded in jokes and stories.

There are several techniques for refocusing participants. Here are a few:

- > Without saying a word, pretend to be fishing. Cast the imaginary fishing line in the general direction of the people going off track and then pretend to “reel them in.” Or pretend you are holding a steering wheel. The car begins to careen a bit to one side and then you get it back on the road. This almost always gets a laugh and someone says with a smile, “I think we’re getting off track!”
- > Point to the agenda with a smile, mention the time, and ask how they think we are doing.
- > Politely ask the person who is veering off track to clarify the link with the original discussion topic. *“I’m sorry, I don’t think I’m following the link to our topic. Could you help me out?”*
- > If it is only one person who is repeatedly losing focus, consider calling a short break. Then ask the person privately if everything is all right. Is he or she hoping to avoid a particular issue that the discussion might lead to?

COMMUNICATE POSITIVELY

- > **Listen as much – or more than – you speak.** When you are not giving a presentation, you should hear the participants’ voices much more than your own!
- > **Use listening sounds** (hmm...) and encouragement (Can you tell us a little more about that?) to let the speaker know you are paying attention without interrupting. Be careful not to overdo it to the point of being distracting.
- > **Make eye contact** about 70-80 per cent of the time, being sensitive to other people’s possible discomfort with prolonged eye contact.
- > **Be aware of your body position.** Be conscious of where you are in relation to the participants so you don’t find yourself always sitting or standing near the same people in a large group; the participants farthest away are least likely to share their thoughts. Avoid blocking their view of the screen, flipcharts or other participants. Try not to turn your back to write on a board for more than a few seconds at a time.
- > **Be aware of your posture.** Try to keep your body language open and friendly without getting too casual. Consider whether it is best to sit (informal) or stand (formal) while giving a presentation.
- > **Summarize, rephrase, and clarify** to help participant’s understand each other.

ASK EFFECTIVE QUESTIONS

This is one of the most important skills of a facilitator. There are three types of useful questions to ask to draw out participants' input or check understanding.

1. **Clarification Questions** check perceptions and understanding.
e.g. Did I hear you say...? Let me check if I understand. Do you mean...?
2. **Open-ended Questions** draw out more ideas and information.
e.g. What is your understanding of this recommendation? What is your department already doing to meet it?
3. **Direct Questions** seek specific information.
Is that your understanding of the recommendation? (Yes/No) When was that program implemented? (May 2011)

→ Avoid leading questions.

They are disguised statements that assume others agree with you.

e.g. Don't you think that it is more important to...?
How about this idea – wouldn't it fit right into your plan?

→ Instead, be more open and transparent.

e.g. What do you think of this idea?

MONITOR AND MANAGE CONFLICT

If you feel it is impacting the group, mention that conflict can be valuable for clarifying perspectives and resulting in even better ideas for applying the sector recommendations.

- > **Ask for suggestions** to address the situation rather than trying to solve it yourself.
- > **Refer to the group norms or guidelines** they had agreed to at the beginning of the meeting.
- > **Look for common ground.** "Let's recap what has been agreed on. Now what is the source of this disagreement; difference in needs? Values? Miscommunication?"
- > **Do not place blame.** Instead describe what you saw and heard happening (words and actions) that seemed to lead to the conflict.
- > **Try to avoid it in future** through very clear roles, responsibilities, group guidelines, expected outcomes, and decision making methods.