5 PRINCIPLES OF FACILITATION

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

- Avoid content input as much as possible—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
- Set your intention before you start, and help the group set theirs
- Ask permission, you are not in charge—it's a service role, not an authority role
- High ethics—act with integrity
- Stay grounded
- Explain what you are doing (transparency); and admit when mistakes happen
- Ask for a moment of silence if needed
- Trust the process and have faith

2. Plan ahead and work outside the meeting

- Work on agenda ahead of time for efficient use of meeting 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 of what you're doing as a facilitator and how
- 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), summarizing, 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? How are they feeling?

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

Facilitator's Intro

An opportunity to set up the framework between you and the group. In this space you may:

1. Welcome people and establish a warm tone for the meeting
2. Explain how you operate, e.g. how you see your role, specifics of stacking, etc.
3. Suggest ground rules and ask for group agreement on them
4. Ask for group support as you learn these skills

Ground Rules

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

1. *One focused conversation* (during whole group discussion): Raise hands before speaking if multiple people want to speak. No interruptions (from each other or cellphones) or sidetalk.
2. *Be constructive.* Create a positive context and supportive framework. Acknowledge past fully, yet focus on the future. Make good-faith efforts.
3. *Share the airtime.* Step up, step back: balance your talking and listening. You are one of ___# people here, so please participate appropriately. Wait to call on anyone twice until all who want to speak on that topic have spoken once.
4. *Take responsibility for yourself and the group.* Bring attention to where it's needed; don't walk out of the room with the most important issue unexamined. Use "I-statements" in describing your experience. Be responsible for your own feelings.
5. *Be honest, be kind.*

Formats

There are many other useful formats for group exploration beyond standard whole group discussion. Some common ones include: Brainstorming or "Card-storming;" Go-Round; Small Groups (or pairs); Fishbowl; Roleplay; Multivoting (aka Dot Voting); Drawing Pictures; Guided Visualization; Silence. If your meeting is longer than 2 hours and/or more than a dozen people, chances are you should be considering using some alternate formats during part of the time.

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; kindly encourage people to get to the point
- Stacking (speaking order): Stack only 1-4 people at a time (mostly 2-3)
  Maintain some flexibility around stacking, e.g. pausing stack for direct answers to questions asked. OK to call on people in a different order than the order in which they raised their hands, especially to help balance airtime.
- Weave comments together as you go, using mini-reflections and short phrases
  Summarize sense of the group *frequently*
  Separate topic into chunks as needed, and decide which subtopic to pursue based on group energy or logical sequence
- 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 ("Would anyone who has not yet spoken like to say anything?") or invoke alternate formats
- Can use structures as occasional interventions to provide feedback to people on how much airtime they use, such as yarn, beans, or tallies

Working with Blocks & Concerns in Meetings

Assume good-faith intentions.

Listen closely. Listen for the piece of the truth in each person's expression.

Reflect back the feelings and main points.

Look for what needs are underneath the concern.

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

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

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

Cultivate curiosity. Ask questions:

- What's important about this to you?
- What parts of the proposal *do* you support?
- What are you worried might happen if we do this? (Could we monitor or prevent that outcome?)
- What values (or history) does this touch on (personal or group)?
- What would you like to do next?

Analyze what the origin of the difficulty is. Could be:

- archetypal dynamics, e.g. people taking on roles in group such as "defender of perceived scapegoat," or "let's get it done already" vs. "let's be careful/thorough"
- job roles at odds
- structural challenges, e.g. owners vs. renters
- old interpersonal stuff, bad chemistry or personal history
- process issues, e.g. unclear what stage of discussion the group is at
- lack of known guidelines/procedures (resulting in misunderstandings and accusations)
- need for more visioning/purpose work
- information or trust-building required between a committee or individual and rest of group
- and more!

Shift formats in the meeting, change the energy.

Be ready with your procedures for how to handle a block in case one arises. For example, who gets to decide if a block is valid or not (facilitator, steering committee, full group)? What are next steps?

Stay in relationship with each other. Emphasize friendship and social connection. Be kind.

Affirm the group's creativity. Trust that a solution will emerge. Have faith.

Reflective Listening Guidelines

This is a key skill to use during conflict resolution. In your reflections, keep your attention focused on the other person, and seek to express the essence of what they are trying to convey—especially the feelings. Remember, you don't have to agree in order to reflect back with compassion and accuracy!

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

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

ROLES OF THE FACILITATOR

Note that it's fine for some of these pieces, such as Timekeeper or Scribe, 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 Steward*
   - Help group follow any process agreements or ground rules that are in place
   - Consider formats other than the default large-group discussion
   - Focus and safeguard the process so that others can mainly focus on the content
4. *Peacemaker*
   - 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
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
   - Ensure someone is taking minutes for the record
7. *Timekeeper*
   - Keep an eye on the clock
   - Warn the group well ahead of any deadlines
   - Note again as the deadline draws near
8. *Physical Preparation*
   - Seating
   - Lighting
   - Airflow and heating/cooling
   - Supplies: markers, tape, easel, flip chart