

## FACILITATION TIPS

*Adapted from Bens, I. Facilitating with Ease (2005)*

The purpose of facilitation is to enhance group effectiveness and foster shared leadership. A facilitator guides a process that helps group members define and reach their goals in a collaborative way.

A facilitator's role is to manage the process and leave the content to the participants.

Process (i.e. "the how") includes methods, tools and procedures, how relations are maintained, rules and norms, group dynamics, and setting the climate. Group members are responsible for the content (i.e. "the what"), which includes subjects for discussion, the task at hand, problems that need to be solved, decisions made, agenda items, and goals.

### KEY VALUES OF FACILITATION:

- Participation: people sharing and taking part in a process
- Inclusivity: the degree to which all voices are represented including non-dominant groups
- Empowerment: having authority reside in the group
- Consensus: facilitation is fundamentally a consensus
- An effective facilitator will leave a group convinced that "We did it ourselves!"

### FACILITATOR'S JOB DESCRIPTION

- Plans meeting
- Helps everyone feel welcome
- Clarifies purpose of meeting, roles
- Encourages full participation of the group, draws out opinions
- Helps keep group focused and on track
- Clarifies communication between people
- Provides a space for creative ideas
- Listens intently
- Names conflict when it arises and guides group through a process of navigating differences
- Encourages the group
- Summarizes progress
- Guides group in coming to decisions

## CORE FACILITATION PRACTICES OVERVIEW:

*Adapted from Bens, I. Facilitating with Ease (2005) and Kelsey, D. and Plumb, Pam Great Meetings: How to Facilitate Like a Pro (2003)*

Regardless of which type of process you're facilitating, all facilitators need to be constantly using the core practices:

**Stay neutral on content** - your job is to focus on the process role and avoid the temptation of offering opinions about the topic under discussion. You should use questions and suggestions to offer ideas that spring to mind, but never imposes opinions on the group.

**Listen Actively** - look people in the eye, use attentive body language and paraphrase what they are saying. Always make eye contact with people while they are speaking, when paraphrasing what they just said, and when summarizing what their key ideas. Also use eye contact to let people know they can speak next and to prompt the quiet ones in the crowd to participate.

**Ask questions** - this is the most important tool you possess. Questions test assumptions, invite participation, gather information, and probe for hidden points. Effective questioning allows you to delve past the symptoms to get at root causes.

**Paraphrase to clarify** - this involves repeating what people say to make sure they know they are being heard, to let others hear their points a second time, and to clarify key ideas. (i.e. "Are you saying...? Am I understanding you to mean...?")

**Synthesize ideas** - don't just record individual ideas of participants. Instead. Get people to comment and build on each other's thoughts to ensure that the ideas recoded on the flip chart represent collective thinking. This builds consensus and commitment. (i.e. "Alice, what would you add to Jeff's comment?")

**Stay on track** - set time guidelines for each discussion. Appoint a tie keeper inside the group to use a timer and call out milestones. Point out the digression if discussion has veered off topic. "Park" all of-topic comments and suggestions on a separate "parking Lot" sheet posted on a nearby wall, to be dealt with later.

**Give and receive feedback** - periodically "hold up a mirror" to help the group "see" itself so it can make correction. (i.e. "Only two people are engaged in this discussion, while three others are reading. What's this telling us we need to do?") Also ask for and accept feedback about the facilitation. (i.e. "Are we making progress? How's the pace? What can I do to be more effective?")

**Test assumptions** - you need to bring the assumptions people are operating under out into the open and clarify them, so that they are clearly understood by everyone. These assumptions may even need to be challenged before a group can explore new ground. (i.e. “John, on what basis are you making the comment that ‘Bob’s idea is too narrow in focus?’”)

**Collect ideas** - keep track of both emerging ideas and final decisions. Make clear and accurate summaries on a flip chart or electronic board so everyone can see the notes. Notes should be brief and concise. They must always reflect what the participants said, rather than your interpretation of what they said.

**Summarize clearly** - a great facilitator listens attentively to everything that is said and then offers concise and timely summaries. Summarize when you want to revive a discussion that has ground to a halt, or to end a discussion when things seem to be wrapping up.

**Encourage participation** - begin by being participative in your planning process i.e. Co-creating the agenda, including others with roles like getting the food, booking the room, time keeping etc. Provide positive feedback on participation. Allow people time to consider / think. Respond quickly if discussions get heated (focus on issue, remind participants about principles of open dialogue). If there are some people who are not participating, talk to them in between meetings to see if you can identify the source of the issue, and to encourage. If there are participants who dominate, redirect to others (let’s hear from others in around the table). Separate idea generation from assignment of responsibilities (just because someone came up with the idea doesn’t mean they must execute it)

## TIPS FOR NAVIGATING THE ROLE OF FACILITATOR/GROUP MEMBER

*Adapted from Great Meetings! How to Facilitate Like A Pro, by Dee Kelsey and Pam Plumb*

Typically, the literature on facilitation describes a role for a person who is neutral and has no stake in the outcome of the process. That isn’t the case with groups at Hart House, where those of you facilitating are also members of the groups. Here are a few considerations to support playing this dual role.

- if there is a topic you want to participate fully in, ask another member to take over facilitation for that agenda item
- be cautious that you don’t use your power as facilitator to influence the outcome of a decision
- ensure you have agreement from the group on the agenda, encourage participation from everyone present
- if there are issues that members have strong opinions on, or a high stakes item is on the agenda, feel free to ask someone else to facilitate (chair, staff advisor) to allow full participation