

# Facilitation Principles and Roles

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The word facilitation comes from the Latin 'facile' meaning "to make easy". So facilitation is to help make group work easy.

Facilitators help a group to get where it needs to go, whether the focus of a gathering is information sharing, discussion, generating creative options, making decisions, team building or planning for action.

Facilitation is a leadership skill 'designed to help make groups perform more effectively by soliciting the leadership skills and potential of all members'.<sup>1</sup>

## Values and Principles

Facilitation is underpinned by certain values and principles:

- Participatory democracy: people have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them
- Personal responsibility
- Cooperation
- Honesty
- Egalitarianism
- The value of each individual's contribution
- Respect for diversity

And it works best when these values are also shared by the group.

## Ethical Practice

Facilitators should be guided by some basic ethical practices including:

- Seeking the group's permission to facilitate
- Concentrating personal energy on the meeting rather than the issues
- Not controlling the group
- Being transparent about your role
- Encouraging the group to take responsibility

## Skills

- Modelling and encouraging respectful and productive communication
- Equalising participation and ensuring participants hear each other
- Keeping the group on the subject, focusing and avoiding tangents
- Responding to what the group wants while staying focused on the meeting purpose
- Clarifying, interpreting and summarising
- Pacemaking, moving through the agenda and keeping to time (with some flexibility)
- Encouraging creativity and a wide range of ideas
- Supporting the group to narrow the options down and come to decisions
- Defining or calling for proposals to move things forward
- Encouraging evaluation, helping the group learn so future meetings go well

## Some facilitation tools

- Rounds – go around the group and have everyone speak
- Popcorn – fast paced calling out of ideas or examples
- Brainstorm – gathering all the ideas without censorship or judgement
- Strawpoll – voting to indicate support for different options, to narrow a list down
- Paired sharing – give people time to clarify their thinking outside the large group
- Small group break-outs – for practical work or focused discussion

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<sup>1</sup> Manual for Group Facilitators, Centre for Conflict Resolution, Wisconsin (1978)

# Better Activist Meetings

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Holly Hammond, Plan to Win <http://plantowin.net.au/2013/01/better-activist-meetings/>

Meetings are a big part of working collectively but too often... they suck. Life's too short and the stakes are too high to spend time in boring and unproductive meetings.

Here are some simple tips for getting the most out of meetings, relevant to collectives, committees and action groups.

- 1. Have a clear purpose.** Why are you holding the meeting? Why is it needed and what do you intend to get out of it? Make sure the purpose is clear to participants. If you can't figure out the purpose don't have a meeting!
- 2. Set an agenda.** Have a clear process for setting the agenda whether in advance or on the day. The purpose of each item should be clear, such as discussion, decision, or a notice for information. Proposal led decision-making could involve people putting something on the agenda with a pre-prepared motion for the group to discuss and decide upon. This means people have notice of what's expected prior to the meeting and can think about it and ask questions.
- 3. Include an agenda review.** Talk through the agenda at the beginning of the meeting. Ensure items are in a logical order, allocate times to each item, trim the agenda and defer less pressing discussions if needed. Less is more – avoid overloading your meetings to allow more space for quality discussion.
- 4. Make the agenda visible to everyone.** The agenda could be written on the whiteboard during the agenda review, or paper copies handed out. Making the agenda visible, especially with approximate times attached, means everyone has a sense of how long to spend discussing items, and the implications if they go too long. This means the chair carries less of the burden of time management and it is shared more in the group.
- 5. Summarise actions.** At the end of each agenda item check for actions and what needs to be recorded. This is helpful for the minutes-taker, means things don't get missed, and underlines actions for those who are going to carry them out. At the end of the meeting I suggest an actions check-list where each person says what their actions are coming out of the meeting and the minutes-taker can remind people of any that were missed. Saying tasks out loud can deepen commitment to the group to follow through.
- 6. Record actions.** Keep an ongoing action list for the group. Individuals should also record their own actions in diaries, phone calendars, to do lists etc. This can make it more likely that people will carry out their actions, rather than relying on people to read the minutes (which some people only do right before the meeting if ever!)
- 7. Roles.** Most meetings have a meeting chair or facilitator and someone to take minutes. Some groups also have the role of timekeeper and 'vibes-watcher'. The vibes-watcher keeps an eye on energy and mood on the group, can share observations and suggest different approaches eg 'People look tired, perhaps we need an energiser or a quick break?'
- 8. Evaluate.** At the end of the meeting do a quick check of what worked and what to change about the meeting. This allows people to name difficulties and for you to learn as a group how to make the meetings go better.
- 9. Build the group.** Meetings aren't just about ticking off tasks; they're about the relationships between the people in the group. Some ways you can foster the sense of the group and focus people include:
  - Start with an opening round where participants can share what's new in their lives (not just in relation to the organisation) or a check-in (how they are feeling, any issues impacting on participation). One fun and cheesy way to check-in is to use a metaphor for how you are eg 'If I was a plate of food I'd be...' (or a piece of music, landscape, etc)
  - Personalise the space, making a home for your group. This is especially important if you meet somewhere that's not your own space. It could be as simple as a table-cloth or a poster on the wall.
  - Put up your vision, mission, values, campaign goals or group agreements in the space. Remind people of why they work together, what they share in terms of commitment to the group and its vision.
  - Share food. It's a universal human way of relating! Plus a few snacks maintain energy.