



## Being an Effective Facilitator

### Description:

This tool discusses the role of a facilitator, provides steps to follow when facilitating, and offers several tips on what to do and what not to do as a facilitator.

### How it can be used:

Being asked to facilitate a meeting or workshop is an honour and a responsibility that requires preparation. Be prepared by knowing the key steps and best practices for facilitating and practice them in a number of different situations.

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Facilitation refers to leading or guiding a session by enabling others to participate and assume responsibility for their decisions. It is often used by groups who need to work through issues or come to decisions and require a neutral enabler.

A facilitator is required to be neutral, withhold their ego and ensure that the group succeeds in achieving their meeting objectives. In fact, if you are truly effective, participants will feel like they came to conclusions and solved their issues by themselves.

**Facilitator** - One who contributes structure and process to interactions, so groups are able to function effectively and make high-quality decisions. Content is provided by the participants.

Note the difference between a facilitator and an Instructor.

**Instructor** – One who brings additional content to the structure and process resulting in new knowledge for a group. A good instructor will incorporate many elements of facilitation.

There are two key elements in facilitation:

- Content – the topic, issues or subject under discussion
- Process – the structure, methods, tools and techniques used in managing interactions.

Content	Process
What	How
The task	The methods
The subject for discussion	How relationships are maintained
The decisions that are made	The tools that are used
The agenda items	The rules or norms
The goals	The group dynamics





Being a facilitator is not simply leading a meeting. There is a process to be followed that helps ensure success in achieving the meeting objectives. Your facilitation experience may not include all of the following steps; however most of the guidelines do apply to all situations.

### **Steps in Facilitation**

1. Assess and design the approach.
  - a. Gather information from the person who asked you to facilitate. Gather information from other participants or stakeholders as relevant.
  - b. Confirm the traditional territory in which the session will be held.
  
2. Share and prepare.
  - a. Share your potential design and find agreement on the direction and approach for the meeting.
  - b. Prepare the agenda.
  
3. Finalize the preparations.
  - a. Ensure you plan for enough time to do the preparation and design. (Rule of thumb is 1-2 days of preparation for each day of facilitation.)
  - b. Clarify the roles and responsibilities of all parties.
  - c. Confirm the suitability of the meeting location.
  - d. Confirm whether there will be an Elder participating. Will there be an opening ceremony? Will there be smudging? Will the Elder be staying for the entire session or opening and closing the session? Are there any special accommodations required?
  - e. Provide the final agenda (depending on roles and responsibilities).
  - f. Identify all materials and supplies required. If relevant, ensure there is a gift of tobacco for the Elder.
  - g. Design and prepare all workshop materials (including handouts).
  
4. Start the facilitation.
  - a. Be the first to arrive. Give yourself a lot of time to ensure that the technology works.
  - b. Confirm the seating arrangement (how will the tables be configured?) and that you have the supplies that you need, including wall space for flipchart pages.
  - c. Chat with people as they arrive to welcome them and break the ice. Welcome the Elder as soon as they come in and offer tobacco.
  - d. Begin on time.
  - e. Introduce yourself.
  - f. Acknowledge the traditional territory in which the session is being held and introduce the Elder if one is present.
  - g. Have an opening ceremony if appropriate.





- h. Give a brief personal background. Clarify your role and the role of others.
  - i. Have people introduce themselves. This may be done as an icebreaker activity.
  - j. Have key points written on a flipchart or handout, answer any early questions.
  - k. Clarify the goal and objectives of the session.
  - l. Review the agenda and invite comments.
  - m. Specify timeframes, appoint a timekeeper if necessary.
  - n. Take care of housekeeping items.
  - o. Set the group 'norms' for the session. Post on the wall.
  - p. Set up a "parking lot" sheet.
5. During the facilitation.
- a. Ensure that all participate.
  - b. Keep the group on topic and park items that are not on topic.
  - c. Help participants adhere to the norms that have been agreed to earlier.
  - d. Intervene if there are problems.
  - e. Maintain a high energy level and set a positive tone.
  - f. Keep track of the discussion with clear and concise notes.
  - g. Check the pace "*Are we moving too slow? Too fast?*" "*What can we do to improve the pace?*" Implement suggestions right away.
  - h. Check the process "*Is this helping us with our discussion?*" Adjust if necessary.
  - i. Be aware of participants' body language so you know when to stop for a break or bring focus back to the discussion.
  - j. If an Elder is present, ask their thoughts on key points.
  - k. Check the group pulse "*How is everyone feeling?*" "*Do we need to take a break or pick up the pace?*"
  - l. Summarize the ideas that are being shared "*Let's see what we've got so far.*"
6. Ending the facilitation.
- a. Ensure that decisions are completed, and detailed action steps are developed.
  - b. Make clear statements about what has been decided. Record these decisions.
  - c. Ensure action plans have names, accountabilities and timelines.
  - d. Review items on the parking lot; deal with them or make a plan for how they will be dealt with.
  - e. Create an agenda for the next meeting (if applicable).
  - f. Decide on the meeting follow-up; for example, creating a written report or another session.
  - g. Clarify who will transcribe the flipchart notes.
  - h. Pass out the session evaluation form (if applicable).
  - i. Give the Elder time to give their final thoughts.





- j. Ask for feedback; conduct a round table or other approach to give participants an opportunity to share their experiences.
- k. Thank the participants for coming and sharing and for having you as their facilitator.

### Using Effective Questions

Asking questions can be an effective way to move a discussion forward or to encourage individual reflection. Seek to ask the right question at the right time directed to the right person/people.

If you want to....	You might say...
Stimulate everyone’s thinking	<i>“I’d like to hear from everyone on this...”</i>
Avoid putting an individual on the spot	<i>“What experiences has anyone had with this...?”</i>
Stimulate one person to think and respond	<i>“How should we handle this, John?”</i>
Tap the known resources of an expert in the group	<i>“Sue, you have a lot of experience...what would you do?”</i>

### Questions – Do’s and Don’ts

✓	✗
Ask clear and concise questions covering a single issue	Ask rambling ambiguous questions that cover multiple issues
Ask challenging questions that will stimulate thought	Ask questions that don’t provide an opportunity for thought
Ask honest and relevant questions	Ask trick questions to catch people or make fun

### Flipchart Management

Flipcharts can be an effective way of gathering and sharing information. Use these best practices to help as you facilitate.

- Write down exactly what people say. If you need to edit, use their key words. Check to make sure you’ve captured their message accurately.
- Make phrases fairly complete.
- Talk and write at the same time to maintain a good pace. Stand beside it and face the members when reading back the notes.
- Move around. Walk closer to the person making an important point. Make note of key words and ideas which can be expanded upon when the person is finished speaking.
- Use a dark marker to make your notes. Write in large enough letters so it can be seen at the back of the room. Print unless your handwriting is very clear.
- Post flip chart pages around the room for continued reference.





## Best Practices and Worst Practices

Facilitator Best Practices	Facilitator Worst Practices
Acknowledge Elders and the territory	Assume that everyone knows what is going on
Carefully assess the needs of the members	Be oblivious to what the group thinks or needs
Probe sensitively into people's feelings	Use inappropriate humour
Create an open and trusting atmosphere	Fail to listen carefully to what's being said
Use the wisdom of participants	Lose track of key ideas
View yourself as a helper to the group	Take poor flipchart notes
Make participants the centre of attention	Change the meaning of what someone said
Use simple and direct language	Try to be the centre of attention
Work hard to stay neutral	Get defensive
Bring energy and use eye contact	Get into personality battles
Be appropriately assertive	Be insensitive to cultural diversity
Champion ideas even if they aren't your beliefs	Impose your own ideas or your own agenda
Treat all participants as equals	Let conflict go on or disrupt the session
Stay flexible and ready to change direction	Let a few people dominate the meeting
Make notes that reflect what participants mean	Never check how the meeting is going
Listen intently to understand what is being said	Be overly passive on process
Pay attention to body language	Not acknowledge Elders in the room
Periodically summarize complex ideas	Push ahead on an irrelevant agenda
Know how to use a range of discussion tools	Have no alternative approaches
Stay on track using a timekeeper	Never check out member concerns
Make sure every sessions ends with clear steps	Let discussions get badly sidetracked
Ensure that participants feel ownership	Let discussions end without proper closure
End on a positive and optimistic note	Fail to know when to stop the discussion

