

The Role of the Facilitator

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- The facilitator's job is to provide structure and process to group interactions so that everyone in the group may do his or her best thinking. The facilitator must direct the discussion, ensuring that key topics are covered, yet remain flexible enough to allow for exploration of relevant issues that may come up spontaneously. *Above all, the facilitator must be neutral.*

Facilitator Tips

- Establish a “safe” atmosphere, which encourages open, honest participation. Participants should know that you are interested in their honest opinions – both positive and negative – and that there are no right or wrong answers.
- Be sure to go over the ground rules or group norms and get “head-nod” agreement on them. Groups may add their own norms or rules to the list.
- Encourage participation from all group members, particularly those who are less likely to speak up.
- To gain early involvement by all members of the group, ask each participant to introduce self and to respond individually to the first question on the discussion guide.
- If everyone in the group seems to be saying the same thing, ask if anyone sees something differently or if they can “step into the shoes” of someone who might see the issue differently.
- Don't be afraid of a certain amount of tension. Disagreement often breeds creative thinking. If tension in a group leads to disrespectful behavior, revisit the ground rules set by the group at the beginning of the meeting.
- Don't reiterate participants' responses to clarify comments. If the facilitator repeats back to the participant what has just been said, the facilitator may not have understood the point exactly and may introduce an element of bias. Instead, ask the participant to clarify his or her own point.
- Remain neutral. Be careful not to nod your head in agreement or say “uh-huh” to those individuals whose opinions you agree with.
- Stick to time. You can move the discussion along by saying , “In the interest of time, we need to move to the next question.”
- When you have several people who want to speak, you can “stack” speakers by saying “First we'll hear from Steve, then Laura, and then Dave.”
- Shift from a dominating speaker to another speaker by physically turning your body.
- Gesturing with your palm facing up encourages someone to speak.
- Don't be afraid of the “pregnant pause.” It will encourage someone to speak up.



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