



FACILITATOR TIPS

A facilitator is different from the typical chairperson. The difference is in how they use their roles. The chairperson decides what and how things will be done, tells people they are out of order, etc. The facilitator asks, suggests, reminds, keeps track of the main agenda, and then sees if people are ready for a decision. The facilitator's role is to help a group make progress. A facilitator tries to provide enough structure so the group can move forward.

1. Keep members on the topic:

- Let them know when the discussion has drifted.
- Every now and then, repeat the topic under discussion.

2. Summarize what members have said:

- In particular, summarize what the less active members have said.
- Relate what one person says to others' ideas: "It sounds like you're adding to what Dee said."
- Accept parts of ideas and ask if the person could develop the idea more.

3. Let people know that feelings are OK:

- Summarize feelings as well as content: "Miguel, you seem to be disturbed about something...."

4. State the problem in a constructive way so people can work on it:

- Clearly state the decision that the group needs to make so people don't waste their time on side issues.
- Try to break up giant problems into workable pieces and deal with each separately.

5. Watch group vibes:

- Look around the room to see how people are feeling. Check out body language.
- If people seem bored, you may have to take a break or speed up the pace.
- If people look confused, you may need to slow down.
- If people seem tense because of unvoiced disagreements, you may have to bring concerns out into the open.

6. Ask open-ended questions:

- Give problems and questions to the group, not answers.
- For example, "We seem to be having trouble resolving this issue. What do you think we should do?"

7. Encourage everyone to participate:

- Show respect for members' experience. Use encouraging questions like, "Does anyone have anything to add on that subject?" or "Does anyone feel the same?"
- One way to ensure quiet people get a chance to speak is to do a round. In a round, you move around the room with everyone getting a minute to present their views.

8. Every now and then, summarize what has happened and what has been decided:

- When you finish a particular part of the agenda or process, sum up what was decided and make sure that there is agreement. For example: "It seems that we agree that _____. Is that right?" or "It seems that we can't come to a consensus today. What should we do?"

9. Learn to deal with difficult behavior:

- *Flare-Ups*: When two members get into a heated discussion, summarize the points made by each, then turn the discussion back to the group.
- *Grandstanding*: Interrupt a one-man show with a statement that gives the member credit for their contribution, but ask them to reserve other points for later. Or interrupt with, "You have brought up a lot of points. Would anyone like to take up one of these points?"
- *Broken Record*: When someone keeps repeating the same point, assure them their point has been heard.
- *Interrupting*: Step in immediately with, "Hold on, let X finish what they have to say."
- *Continual Criticizing*: Legitimize negative feelings on difficult issues. You might say, "Yes, it will be tough to increase student attendance, but there are successful models we can look at."

10. Suggest options when times runs out:

- Identify areas of partial consensus, suggest tabling the question, or create a small subcommittee to deal with the matter at a time of their choosing.

11. Consider a round at the end of the meeting:

- Going quickly around the whole group gives people a chance to bring up matters not on the agenda. You can also use a round to evaluate the meeting.

12. Stay in your role as facilitator:

- As the facilitator, you are neutral. When you must add your own ideas, let people know you are doing so as a member and not as facilitator.
- Don't feel that you need to be an expert or have all the information. Your job is to raise questions, not to answer them.