

Your Group Needs a Facilitator if:

- There is a difference of opinion in direction of the group.
- Productivity is lacking, goals are not being accomplished.
- No one seems to care about anything.
- Goals are not clearly defined.
- Newly formed.
- Organization experiences a lack of direction.
- Organization involved in strategic planning.
- Leader not delegating.
- Group dominated by one or two individuals.
- Members not participating in group discussions.

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MEETING ROLES COMPARISON

	Facilitator	Chairperson
Need not be a member of the group	X	
Active in problem-solving	X	X
Makes decisions concerning group/organization tasks		X
Actively participates in group activities		X
Influences members on issues		X
Able to deal with conflict	X	X
Able to remain neutral	X	

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Creating a facilitator's contract and defining your role

A facilitator creates a contract with the group or organization with whom he or she is working. This contract helps to define the role of the facilitator and the expectations of both parties.

Leader: hand out and discuss participant handout #4. This contract can be read directly to the group they will be facilitating. This is a sample contract and can be modified when necessary.

It is helpful to state these points in this contract at the beginning of the first meeting. Make sure everyone understands and agrees with the contract. That way, there are no misconceptions about expectations when conflicts arise (which, in some cases, they do).

Planning ahead

Save time and eliminate confusion by defining what expectations the group has for the outcome of the meeting. Make sure you have at least one planning meeting with the leader of the group that you will be facilitating. Ask the questions outlined in participant handout #5 and agree upon the meeting's objectives. This will clarify in your mind and in the group's what the outcome should be.

Leader: hand out participant handout #5 and discuss each point.

FACILITATOR CONTRACT

As a facilitator I plan to:

- focus the energy of the group on the task at hand.
- maintain complete neutrality.
- provide none of my own ideas about direction, but actively solicit yours.
- not evaluate your ideas or pass value judgments.
- make sure everyone has the opportunity to participate.
- find and define points of agreement and disagreement.
- be more active at the outset of the meeting.
- help develop the agenda and meeting or project objectives, and follow established agreed-upon procedures.

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PLANNING YOUR MEETING WITH LEADERSHIP

1. Why? Why are we having the meeting? Is the purpose of the meeting clear? Does everyone know and agree upon the reason they are meeting?
2. Who? Who should be involved? Have the necessary people been invited to the meeting?
3. What results do you expect? What are the expectations about specific outcomes?
4. What type of meeting are you holding?
 - a) gathering information to move forward
 - b) listening to information gathered from another source
 - c) solve problems
 - d) making decisions -- list action items
5. What is the planned length of the meeting? Will it be several days or hours?
6. Meeting objectives and agenda items. Assist two or three people from the organization in developing an agenda. Discuss how each item should be presented. Arrange for these same individuals to serve as a sounding board as the meeting you will be facilitating progresses.
7. Discuss the process to deal with each agenda item. Will you use large group -- small group combinations? Set time limits on each item?
8. Define the various roles for the meeting. Will there be a recorder? An observer? What will the chair be doing? Who will serve in the various roles?
9. How will decisions be made? What process will be used?
10. Be explicit about who the final decision maker is. Who has the authority to make the decision?
11. How will the group get feedback on the action items? How long and in what form? Who will provide the feedback?

Behavior traits of an effective facilitator

A facilitator continually evaluates ways to improve performance. They ask questions concerning their own behavior and internally evaluate ways to improve performance. The goal is to learn from experience. What worked? How could the process have been improved? From a facilitator's standpoint, how could my behavior have been changed to make the experience more productive?

Leader: discuss participant handout #6 with participants. Allow some time at the end of the discussion for participants to add to the list.

Behavior a facilitator should avoid

There are certain behaviors that have a negative impact on groups.

Leader: first brainstorm a list of negative behaviors. Then hand out participant handout #7. Be sure to cover each item on the handout.

Barriers to learning that facilitators face

Each of us arrives at meetings with what might be termed excess baggage. We may be tired, angry, or bored, and it may affect our ability to concentrate or participate. As a facilitator, it is wise to rehearse strategies to deal with learning and participation barriers.

Leader: take some time to thoroughly discuss participant handout #8. Have participants fill this out, then discuss in small groups. Bring it back to the large group and share strategies. Time permitting, allow groups to add to the list of barriers. These will help give participants statements, courses of action, and group management models that will be very useful in actual facilitative settings.

EFFECTIVE BEHAVIOR TRAITS

- Be a learner. Promise yourself that you will add to your skill bank each time you facilitate a group.
- Respect each person's opinions, values and level of involvement. Attempt to involve everyone, but allow people to participate at their own pace.
- Maintain the helper attitude. You are there to assist the group in meeting its goals.
- Remain in control, but do not dominate. Facilitation naturally requires more active direction at the beginning of the session than it does as the group gains trust in each other and in the process.
- Provide motivation for active involvement. Offer rewards to stimulate volunteers. Actively encourage all to participate. Be creative in how your encouragement takes place (prizes, verbal praise, nonverbal praise).
- Observe the tone of the group. Are they open, closed, anxious, angry, confused, or apathetic? What is the collective pulse of the group?
- Relax. If you are relaxed and obviously enjoying the activity, group members will also be relaxed. Help them to have fun.
- Listen with all of your senses. What are people really saying? Rephrase to capture someone's thoughts, look at those speaking, give them your undivided attention.
- Provide leadership so that the group keeps moving. Use all of your leadership skills.
- Other

NEGATIVE BEHAVIORS

Avoid the following:

- Having a big ego. Your goal is to help the group be successful.
- Using negative verbal or non-verbal expressions. This could include such things as a grimace, a laugh that is out of place, a disengaged look, anger, frustration, etc. Those who are a little uncomfortable to begin with will withdraw completely if they feel as if they are not accepted.
- Being proud or arrogant. Don't exaggerate your own worth or importance in an overbearing manner.
- Losing track of the process. Know where you are going and how you will get there. This requires adequate pre-meeting preparation. Do not go into a meeting without a specified agreed-upon agenda and goals.
- Being too cute or trivial in your approach. This can be distracting and tends to lessen group energy.

BARRIERS TO FACILITATING GROUP ACTIVITIES

Barrier	Suggestion on How to Deal With Barrier
• Lack of interest	
• Personal (home or at work) distractions	
• Past experiences	
• Mind closed to the process	
• Not enough time	
• Fear losing control	
• Poor listening skills	
• Poor instructions	
• Poor visuals	
• Physically uncomfortable (tired, hot, cold, hungry)	
• Poor room set up	
• Overload of information	
• Too abstract	
• Fear of unknown	
• Out of comfort zone	
• Preconceived ideas	
• Hidden agenda	
• Lack of organization	

John Green outlined several barriers to learning in an article in Training magazine (May, 1990). Facilitators should be aware of these three barriers in particular:

1. Using jargon, a technical word, an acronym or a concept that no one understands. Perhaps the language is too technical for the group. Don't move on until, as a facilitator, you are convinced that everyone understands.
2. Too steep a gradient or presenting material too quickly. This can occur when the teacher or facilitator omits a necessary step in the learning process.
3. The information being shared is too abstract. Facilitator uses no examples, experiences, or demonstrations.

Preparation for Success

Pre-meeting activities and strategies are the key to facilitating an effective meeting. Short-cutting the planning process can spell disaster in later phases of the workshop.

Leader: cover participant handout #9. Spend time discussing and clarifying each point in the pre-meeting section and meeting activities section.

Steps in Problem-Solving

Facilitators should have good knowledge of how problems are solved. They should know how to bring a group through a process that identifies and decides on goals, objectives, or directions. Chaos can be prevented through teaching the group the problem solving process and how to use it effectively in the meeting environment.

Leader: discuss participant handout #10. Think back on recent meetings that you have lead or attended and give personal examples of how the five step process was or was not used. Remember, this is a critical step in the facilitation process, so spend adequate time in group discussion.

PLANNING FOR FACILITATING A GROUP

Pre-meeting

- Pre-meeting planning with group representative(s). Walk through "pre-meeting" questions handout #5.
- Determine what your options are if the group can't agree.
- Work with group representatives to make adequate arrangements.
- Set up room with appropriate seating arrangement.
- Develop and agree on appropriate ground rules.

Meeting Activities:

- Make sure all participants are introduced and have name tags.
- Explain your role, cover the agenda, go over facilitator's contract, give overview of goals and objectives, discuss role of other meeting leaders, explain how decisions will be made, and the type of meeting it is, and any other information that would help clarify the reason for the meeting.
- Keep the group on track.
- Help to enforce ground rules.
- Encourage involvement.
- Clarify and check for agreement.
- Encourage creativity.

HOW GROUPS SOLVE PROBLEMS

- Define the problem.

 - Analyze the problem.
 - Brainstorm a list of items that would help solve the problem.
 - Do the same with potential barriers.

 - Develop a set of solutions.
 - Use the previous step to identify potential solutions.
 - Evaluate advantages and disadvantages for each solution.

 - Make a final decision. Importance of agreement will influence follow-through and accomplishment for decision reached.
 - Use decision-making process. See participant handout #12.
- Provide feedback to group members.

Ways a group can make a decision

There are at least six ways groups or organizations can approach decision-making. (Step four in the problem-solving process). These should be clearly defined so that everyone understands how decisions will be made and who will make them.

Those responsible for planning the meeting should think through and decide on a decision-making process. This brings closure to meeting activities and provides future direction for the group.

Failure to develop a decision-making strategy can cause great confusion and lead to chaos.

Leader: Review participant handout #11. Ask if anyone has other definitions for the six categories. Next discuss participant handout #12. Emphasize the need to develop a decision making strategy. Ask for questions or clarifications. Practice the process outlined in handout #13. Use an example of purchasing a house, selecting a college to attend, or other examples selected by the group and practice using the matrix. This process was developed by the Lane County Family Community Leadership team.

How facilitators deal with various behaviors

Facilitators are likely to encounter several types of behavior while working with groups. Some people behave as if they know it all, some want decisions made immediately without discussion or conference, some are very quiet, while some don't know when to stop talking. Facilitators should develop a strategy for dealing with each situation.

Leader: cover each category in participant handout #14. Allow participants to share their strategy for dealing with each type of person. This will add to the list of solutions.

What to say when . . .

What should a facilitator do when the discussion lags, if someone is dominating the discussion if conflict arises? Being prepared will prevent losing the group's attention when it happens.

Leader: go through each example in participant handout #15. Ask for additional suggestions on how to respond.

WAYS TO MAKE DECISIONS

Dictator: one individual has absolute power to make decisions

Consensus: majority of group members agree

Majority vote: each person votes, the majority rules

Unanimous
Consensus: complete agreement

Negotiate: arrive at a decision through compromise, discussion, and conference

No decision: adjourn without making a final decision

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EXAMPLES OF DECISION-MAKING METHODS

- Use dots: most bookstores have supplies of colored dots that are about half inch in diameter. These dots can be used by the group to prioritize a list of alternative solutions to a problem, narrow down a list of organizational goals, select committee members, prioritize community issues, etc. The process is as follows:
 - Brainstorm a list of goals, solutions, members, etc.
 - Write each goal, solution, member's name, etc. on an easel pad. Leave some space on the left side of the items recorded to place dots.
 - Give each group member a specific number of dots. Instruct them in how they can or cannot place dots (one dot per item, all dots on one item, no more than two dots per any one item, etc.).
 - Review list and then provide three to five minutes for each member to walk to listing and place dots.
 - Count numbers of dots for each item. This will automatically prioritize listing.
- Use colored pens or pencils. Follow same instructions as given with dots.
- Decide by raising hands.
- Decide by secret ballot.
- Decide by majority consensus (nodding of head).
- Decide by unanimous consensus.
- Other examples...

DEALING WITH BEHAVIOR OF GROUP MEMBERS

Behavior Type	Characteristics	Corrective Action
Know-it-all	Has all the answers. If he or she does not have the answers may make some up. May correct others with the right answer.	Turn comments over to peers. Check facts with reality. Use consensus to help the group itself confront the person who is always right. In extreme cases may have to take aside and suggest letting others have input. Do not get into arguments.
Whisperer	Leans over and whispers to neighbors.	Establish ground rules of no side conversations. If behavior continues ask to share comments with entire group.
Grandstander	Takes opportunity to show group how brilliant he or she is. Focuses attention on self rather than on group problems.	Recognize expertise and use it to produce group energy.
Griper or Whiner	Complains excessively or gives excuses for lack of productivity. Always sees the negative side of things.	Establish ground rules about being positive. Turn griping statements into positive statements (practice doing this in groups).
Talker	Dominates group discussions or starts side conversations that become disruptive. Never stops talking about a certain issue, thus preventing group from moving on with the agenda.	Develop an agenda with time frames. You can also establish ground rules about time limits for discussion. Appoint a time-keeper. Don't recognize with eye contact. Direct discussion away. Interrupt tactfully and then redirect. Ask for other opinions. Suggest others need to be heard. Take aside and ask for help.

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Behavior Type	Characteristics	Corrective Action
Late comer	Never shows up at the meeting on time. Usually has good reasons why he or she is late.	Don't reward lateness by repeating in front of group, but rather summarize at break what was missed. Start meeting without him or her.
Detailer	Always seems to want more information before making decisions. Needs more facts, statistics. Loves details.	Involve him or her in subcommittee work where he or she can use skills. Give duties to research outside meeting. Thank him or her for eye for detail.
Argumentative, Negative	Expresses negative feelings. Never seems to agree with other members.	Don't support negative feelings. Restate the comment in a positive way. Establish ground rules about being positive. Ignore any comment. Move on without bringing attention to the statement. Confront by asking what's bothering him or her. Keep your cool. Use the group to confront behavior.
Backstabber	Expresses negative comments to cause conflict or strife.	Confront the backstabber one-on-one. Determine why he or she is acting this way and try to restore positive contribution.
Own agenda	Has a hidden agenda. Usually to promote item of specific benefit or interest to own point of view.	Use the group to counter a person with a hidden agenda. Poll the group to determine their desires. Establish ground rules about the good of the group. Go over agenda and ask for additional items at the beginning of the meeting.

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Behavior Type

Characteristics

Corrective Action

Shy or quiet

Speaks very little during meeting. Does not offer opinions or contribute ideas.

Ask for opinion. Use his or her own words when writing down responses. Thank for contribution. Use round robin approach to discussion. Break into small groups. Use open ended questions. Have him or her share feelings.

Tangent talker

Discusses items not pertaining to agenda.

Establish ground rule that discussion will be brought back to agenda item. Restate tangent to get back on track. Suggest it should be discussed at break. Let continue if it seems it might lead somewhere important.

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WHAT TO SAY WHEN...

the group can't get started

- Rephrase meeting objectives or topics.
- Break into small groups and discuss objectives or topics.
- Ask for specific input from an individual.
- Invite a resource person to summarize information.
- Move on.

a conflict arises

- Suggest that there are two points of view.
- Ask for other points of view.
- State the need for many opinions in problem-solving process.
- If it cannot be resolved, move on and assign a committee to evaluate and recommend a course of action.
- Remind the group that differing views are healthy.

If someone interrupts a speaker remind the group about allowing all members to express opinions.

WHAT TO SAY WHEN . . .

the group has lost its energy

- If the group has been on the topic too long, move on by telling them that we have covered this point, so let's move on.
- Check the pulse of the group; ask questions about how they are feeling about the topic.
- Determine if more information is needed.
- Stand up and have participants walk around for a minute.
- Break into small groups with specific, assigned tasks.

the group goes on a tangent

- Ask a question about being off the subject.
- Clarify the topic of discussion.
- Thank them for the input, but bring back to topic.
- Suggest that you're not sure where the group is. Ask the group to clarify where they are on the agenda.

someone dominates

- Thank for point of view and ask for other points of view.
- Ask for a group response - poll the group.
- Restate the ground rules about involving all members in the discussion.

WHAT TO SAY WHEN . . .

someone asks you to make a decision . . .

- Ask the group if someone can provide the answer to that question.
- Let him or her know that your role is not decision-maker.

establishing agreement . . .

- Ask group what topics they want to cover.
- Ask someone to summarize the position the group is taking on an issue.
- Ask the group to summarize a decision.
- Ask the group if they agree with the agenda items.

someone becomes defensive . . .

- Don't cut him or her off, but suggest that he or she has a good idea, and now you want to see how that fits into the agenda, process or solution.
- Thank for concern and suggest that the group needs to hear from everyone.

Leader: if you have the time, allow participants to practice facilitating a group by using the following case studies, or develop your own case study example.

Case Study Examples

Provide time for participants to practice what they have just learned. This will benefit the participants in several ways:

- Practice will help participants become comfortable with facilitation.
- Perspective in the meeting may change as participants move into the facilitator role.

Experiential learning brings theory into practice. It allows participants to become immersed in the topic.

Ask the participants to count off one through five (adjust according to size of group). Select #1 as the facilitator and #3 as the recorder (observer). Numbers 2, 4, 5 are members of the planning committee that will help plan for a session #1 has been asked to facilitate.

The facilitator uses the questions listed on participant handout #5 to set the agenda for the proposed meeting with the planning committee.

Choose one of the case studies. Spend fifteen and twenty minutes on the activity. Then ask #2 and #4 to assume facilitator and recorder roles and go through the same process with another case study.

Continue until everyone has served as facilitator. At the end of each session spend a short time discussing how the facilitator did.

Case Study #1

You have been requested to facilitate a community meeting aimed at getting input for a "children" in need program. The community is in the process of collecting data about problems and concerns involved in developing a community assistance program.

The planning committee includes the paid community coordinator for the program, a county commissioner, and the chair of the "children in need" advisory committee.

Case Study #2

A county extension agent has requested that you help with a county program review. The program has been in existence for over twenty years and involves eight to nine hundred active participants. The agent joined the county staff team about twelve months ago and wants input on program direction.

The planning committee includes the county agent, staff chair, and the president of the program advisory council.

Case Study #3

The State Department of Natural Resources has requested help in planning a program activity. They want input on program needs from other state and federal agencies, private landowners, environmental groups, industry groups, and other stakeholders.

The information they collect will be used to develop recommendations for the state legislative concerns, and additionally will serve in developing the department five-year plan.

The planning committee includes the department head, a member of the legislature, and a departmental employee responsible for editing the final report.

Case Study #4

Choose an example from your own experience.

Leader: Summarize workshop by returning to the opening activity on participant expectations (participant handout #1).

Have expectations been met? What additional follow-up needs to occur?

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