

How to Facilitate a Meeting



Meetings are a necessary part of working in any group – they give us the chance to share information, reach decisions and get jobs done. If you're organising events or leading a team you'll be running your fair share. Below are some tips and tricks to make sure your meetings are as enjoyable and engaging as possible!

What is facilitation?

Facilitation is about helping the group to have an efficient and inclusive meeting. It combines a series of roles and tasks but is lead by a facilitator.

Skills and qualities of a good facilitator:

- Good listening skills to hear underlying concerns in the group. This includes asking strategic questions to better understand everyone's viewpoint.
- Respect for all participants and interest in what each individual has to offer.
- Understands the aim of the meeting as well as long-term goals of the group.
- Pays attention how are people feeling and what is being said
- Knows when to intervene decisively and give direction.

How to facilitate a meeting

Always have an agenda

Plan the meeting agenda in advance, either by yourself or with the help of the team at the last meeting. Think about timing and order of agenda items, and how to tackle each point.

Prep the space

Make sure the room is comfortable and everyone has the materials they need to participate, eg. paper, pens.

Running the meeting

There are some key things you need to do once the meeting kicks off:

- Introduce the meeting, what it's about and how the meeting works
- Keep the group to the agenda, decision-making process and on time
- Help everyone participate, and keep track of who wants to speak
- Ensure that action points and decisions are recorded

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Help the group make decisions

- Once the group has brainstormed ideas and chatted through proposed plans it's time to decide on next steps. As facilitator, you will need to:
- Clarify and summarise points, make sure everyone has understood the key points.
- Listen for underlying issues, concerns or emotions.
- Test for agreement, make commitments and get clear decisions made.

Supporting roles

Instead of having just one facilitator, you could ask other team members to put up their hand to take on other important roles. This gives everyone a shared responsibility for the meeting going smoothly, and helps keep people engaged. Below are a few usual roles to have filled.

Vibes-watchers pay attention to the emotional atmosphere of the meeting. Are people looking tired? Why not give everyone a few minutes to get a glass of water and move their legs.

The timekeeper keeps track of the time, and the agreed time frame for each agenda item. If a discussion is running over time it's up to them to intervene and negotiate an extensions if needed.

Notetakers take minutes or notes, action points, write up reports, and also draw attention to incomplete decisions, eg. "Who is going to contact so and so, and when?"

The doorkeeper welcomes people at the beginning of the meeting, distributes materials when necessary, and brings late-comers up to speed.

Useful facilitation tools

Use some or all of these tools below to help your meetings run smoothly, encourage creativity and foster an open and safe space.

Group Agreement

The group agrees at the beginning of the meeting what behaviour will help make the meeting a safe, respectful place for everyone. May include things like: switch off phone, one person speaking at a time, no put-downs, respect etc.

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Go-rounds

Everyone takes a turn to speak without interruption or comment from other people. Go-rounds help to gather opinions, feelings and ideas as well as slowing down the discussion and improving listening. Make sure that everyone gets a chance to speak.

Brainstorming

This gathers a large number of ideas quickly. Start by stating the issue and ask people to say whatever comes into their heads – without censoring or discussion. Write down all ideas for later discussion.

Bike rack

When something comes up that's not relevant to the discussion at hand "park" it in the bike rack (a large sheet of paper on the wall) and deal with it at an appropriate time later. This allows you to stay focused but reassures participants they will be heard.

Hand signals

Hand signals can be used instead of speaking to indicate agreement, disagreement, and if someone wants to speak. Hand signals can make meetings run more smoothly, and help establish emerging agreements. Three simple signals should suffice:

Raise one hand when you wish to contribute to the discussion with a general point.



Raise both hands if your point is a direct response to the current discussion.



Silent applause when you hear an opinion that you agree with, wiggle your fingers in front of you. This is a great way to save time and move the meeting along.



Adapted from 'Facilitating meetings' by Seeds for Change. Available at:
http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/short_facil.pdf.