

FACILITATION



3.1 ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE FACILITATOR

Facilitation is the practice of guiding a dialogue or engagement towards desired goals. Facilitators help to provide the space for stakeholders to share and listen to one another and exchange ideas. Facilitators are skilled in helping stakeholders stay on track, participate, and feel heard. A key component of a facilitator is neutrality, and ensuring a neutral stance to guarantee a smooth and equitable process.

ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS DURING DIFFICULT TIMES

Facing community crises at any time is difficult. Stakeholders can feel disturbed, frightened, or anxious. At the same time, organizations are also grappling with how to adjust, change, and continue to move forward.

Embrace and work with emotions (even if it is not your normal mode of operating). Understand that fear is normal, but it is not 'just' fear; it is a family of emotions ranging from apathy and concern through to denial. Do not try to 'save' people from their emotions. They are part of being human and help us build resilience. Get ready for the long haul. Emotions will pop up continually and impact can be felt for decades.

Acknowledge it. Recognize what is happening and what people are feeling. Over the next year or two, you are going to need to notice, listen, and acknowledge. Remember to be an engagement practitioner, not a counselor. Do not ignore or dismiss what people are feeling. Recognize emotions before you 'park' them; once acknowledged, stakeholders can concentrate on something else meaningful.

Recognize that everyone is feeling the pain. Everyone will be hurting - your colleagues, your boss, even you. 'Anticipatory grief,' linked to uncertainty, affects behaviors and capacities. Recognize and sensitively manage your own emotions, and you will be more empathetic and better able to engage effectively.

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TOOLS AND TEMPLATES

You can use the [Equity and Inclusion Assessment](#) to ensure your engagement is an inclusive, equitable, and accessible facilitated experience.



FIND YOUR STYLE

Here is a [free video and email series](#) from *The Conversation Factory* about developing clarity on your style, values, and approach as a facilitator through the lens of a simple metaphor: visualizing the hats you wear.

FACILITATOR ROLES

Planning the experience. Be prepared for the engagement, so that you can be relaxed, centered, and clear when you are facilitating. For planning tips review the [Mini-Guide for Planning Engagements](#). To support new technology, send an outline prior to the meeting with clear goals, outcomes, and questions for the group. Include instructions on how to use the online meeting technology.

Setting the tone. Ensure you are your natural and authentic self as you facilitate. Attempting to perform as a certain type of facilitator that is not natural for you can negatively impact the tone in the room.

Setting expectations. When you set expectations, you are setting the path for a more cohesive and focused engagement. Make sure your expectations are clear, thorough, and rooted in how these expectations will lead towards achieving your shared goals. For phone and virtual engagements, make sure to walk through the different logistical features of the platform:

- Speakers should identify themselves each time they speak to ensure that members of the public who are only listening in know which public servant is responsible for each comment or decision.
- Consider allowing members of the public to make comments using email or a video conference chat function and reading comments into the record.

Setting and enforcing community agreements. Provide expectations for the experience to ensure you stay on track and are all on the same page. Community agreements, also known as 'setting norms' or ground rules, always sit better when the full group creates them, rather than if the facilitator establishes them for the group. When drafting agreements, be specific to your groups' specific context, and avoid using jargon. Always remember that you are leading by example for the group and should abide by the agreements as well! Try to take the lead in reinforcing the community agreements, as this will help manage other stakeholders who might want to police others' behaviors. The following are examples:

AGREEMENT	WHAT IT MEANS
Stay engaged	Remove distractions (such as cell phones), and engage in active listening.
Be honest	Only speak for yourself, and always speak in the 'I.'
Step-up or step back	Step up if you tend to be quiet, and step back if you tend to be talkative.
Keep an open mind	Agree to disagree. There are no right or wrong answers.
Suspend judgment	Challenge yourself to avoid making generalizations or assumptions.
Accept and embrace discomfort	Explore beyond what you already know, and expand outside of your comfort zone.



BE CONSCIOUS OF YOUR EMOTIONAL STATE

As soon as the facilitator begins to speak, even over video, their emotional/energetic state begins to impact the group through the phenomenon of 'limbic resonance.' This is great if you're relaxed and confident but less beneficial if the group begins resonating with your anxiety! Remember that 80-90% of communication is nonverbal.

REMEMBER

For phone and virtual engagements, community agreements are different from a review of the platform functionality. Make sure to account for reviewing both in your agenda.

FACILITATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Agenda keeper and time management. You set-up each discussion or activity, facilitate transitions, and wrap-up conversations. You provide enough time for stakeholders to discuss a topic freely and are prepared for activities to take more or less time than originally anticipated.

Group well-being. You continuously monitor the room, assess the energy level of the group, and determine when it is time to diverge from or stick to the planned agenda.

Closing a dialogue. When closing a meeting, you always connect back to the original goals, in order to clarify next steps for the group.

ATTRIBUTES OF A GOOD FACILITATOR

Provides a neutral structure for the discussion that values every stakeholder as an equal. You are an active and engaged listener who provides feedback rather than judgment and acknowledges differences as strengths rather than barriers to a solution.

Creates a safe, respectful environment for the group to interact with one another and engage with the topic at hand. You connect with stakeholders and respond appropriately to their needs, monitoring emotions, and ensuring stakeholders' safety and well-being.

Sets clear parameters for the area of focus. Keeps the conversation cohesive and maintains progress towards the primary purpose.

Maintains productive energy in the room, on the phone or through video. You are mindful of body language and non-verbal responses that may indicate approval or disapproval.

Is aware of what is not being said or who is not speaking and elicits these perspectives with challenging questions.

Maintains impartiality to build confidence and trust among stakeholders. You earn this trust through your ability to act fairly and competently in serving the purpose of the group, the goals of the meeting, and the interests and needs of stakeholders.

FACILITATING VIRTUALLY IS THE SAME AND DIFFERENT AS IN-PERSON

Start by changing your mindset/expectations, and allow for more time to do less. Things take longer on a virtual platform. Keep your focus on what is essential.

- **Facilitate with empathy and patience.** Remember that everyone has a lot going on today. Be empathetic to their surroundings, their technology, and their willingness to let you in their home.
- **Stop looking at yourself.** You are cute, but it is like sitting in a restaurant and looking at the mirror behind your friend's head the entire time. Cover the video of yourself with a post-it.
- **Be creative.** Invite stakeholders to bring physical objects and symbols as a way to help large groups visually participate.
- **Do not be afraid of breakout rooms.** Allowing stakeholders' space to have small group conversations can help to move the dialogue forward more quickly. But make sure to set parameters in the room, as people can get off track.

For other key considerations for facilitating online, review the [Mini-Guide for Virtual Engagement](#).



FACILITATION AND COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR PARTICIPANTS WITH DISABILITIES

- **Use "people-first" language.** Focus on the person, not the disability (e.g., "person with a disability" not "disabled person")
- **Ask "How can I help you?"** Some stakeholders' disabilities are hidden; others are more obvious. Allow the person to explain what they need. It is okay if you don't know how to answer a question or accommodation request. Say, "Let me look into that," or "I will find out and get back to you."
- **Avoid using terms that have negative connotations** (e.g., "confined to a wheelchair"). Assistive devices (e.g., canes, walkers, etc.) are tools for independence.
- If you meet a stakeholder with a service dog, **talk to the person first**, not the dog. Make the person your main focus of attention.

3.2 SUPPORTING PRODUCTIVE DIALOGUE

Productive dialogue is when a group can come together and explore ideas, discuss strategies, and make decisions collaboratively. Convenings are accessible, inclusive, and productive for all stakeholders. Productive dialogue helps to decrease hierarchy and provides a space where everyone can feel welcomed, where they know that their voices are equally heard. It helps to increase participation and supports a group to arrive at a mutually beneficial plan of action.

STRATEGIES FOR PRODUCTIVE DIALOGUE

There are participatory methods that you can employ to support your group’s convening. The development of an agenda and specific goals will ensure all stakeholders feel safe, respected, and heard. The following strategies work well not only during in-person engagements, but also in phone and virtual meetings.

Active listening. Good facilitators listen well and ask good questions. A powerful question can generate curiosity in the listener, stimulate reflective dialogue, bring to the surface any underlying assumptions, and invite creativity. There are a range of question types; some provide structure and others help groups reach some form of closure.

ACTIVE LISTENING QUESTION TYPE	EXAMPLE
Open questions are designed to gather information and facts.	<i>What are your concerns about this situation?</i>
Probing questions are designed to gain additional details.	<i>Can you specifically explain why that matters?</i>
Reflective questions are designed to confirm understanding.	<i>Would you prioritize the most critical areas for attention first?</i>
Deflective questions are designed to help transition a negative situation into a collaborative problem-solving dialogue.	<i>What can we do to make it right? If you were to do it, what would be your approach?</i>

Paraphrasing to support mutual understanding.

When stakeholders make confusing statements or repeat themselves, you can facilitate an opportunity for clarification, which simultaneously legitimizes their contribution:

1. Recite in your own words what you believe the stakeholder just said. (e.g. “It sounds like...” or “Have I understood you correctly?”)
2. Based on verbal or nonverbal reaction, confirm with the stakeholder that you paraphrased their point correctly before you move on with the dialogue.

Linking to find common ground.

If a stakeholder is straying from the dialogue, or if stakeholders are not seeing eye to eye, this technique can encourage them to regain their focus, while also building trust by treating their thoughts with care:

1. Start by paraphrasing the topic or point. (e.g. “Let me summarize what I’m hearing from each of you. I am hearing a lot of similarities and differences.”)
2. Ask the stakeholder to link the idea to the topic. (e.g. “How does this tie to...?” or “Can you help us make the connection?”)
3. Validate their response. (e.g. “I see what you mean.”)
4. Encourage stakeholders to write down off-topic statements on paper for review at a later time.

CATALOG OF IDEAS

Find more methods for facilitating dialogue in a variety of engagement formats, check out [Part IV - Catalog of Ideas](#).



TIPS FOR ACTIVE LISTENING

Maintain honesty with the group.

Admit when you have lost track or need a stakeholder to explain something further. By ensuring you understand precisely what the participant has stated, you can avoid assumptions or generalizations.

It can be patronizing to tell a stakeholder “You know how they feel,” as members come to the dialogue with their own unique experiences and perspectives.

MANAGING DISRUPTIVE STAKEHOLDERS

While facilitation is often about managing the energy of the room and interactions between the group, sometimes specific stakeholders may stand in the way of your attempt to create a leveled, creative, and productive atmosphere. When you realize that an individual is creating challenges, it can be helpful to determine whether the person is being disruptive purposefully or unintentionally.

Unintentional disruption occurs when a stakeholder's behavior clashes with the goals of your facilitation. The individual is not trying to be disruptive, but they cause others in the group to be less productive.

Purposeful disruption is an intentional attempt to cause trouble or disturb the process. These behaviors not only hinder productivity but can also affect the energy of an entire room.

Managing unintentional disruption

- **If a stakeholder is being disruptive, stop the person, thank them, and paraphrase what they have said.** Then ask if anyone has thoughts to build on what has been said, a different point to include, or ask a prompting question to bring the group back on task.
- If non-confrontational tactics have not worked, it is time to take a break. **Invite the disruptive person(s) outside the room and politely, but firmly, state your feelings.** Try to uncover what's going on and seek other ways to address that their concerns.
- When working in virtual settings, if a stakeholder is being disruptive, **utilize the mute or waiting room function** to remove them from the main conversation.
- When working in a conference call setting, **managing disruptive behavior can be best addressed by "playing traffic cop"** with a verbal cue; by asking to hear from specific people before the person who is disrupting. You can also bring others into a discussion intentionally, as it is difficult for a dominator to continue talking over another person when someone redirects verbal traffic to a specific person.

Managing purposeful disruption

Confrontation is most effectively handled in a caring context. It is an invitation for an individual member to carefully examine their behavior and its consequences; to express care and concern, not punishment.

- Focus attention on the dysfunctional behavior itself and **avoid labeling or classifying the person.** Personal labeling only increases individual defensiveness.
- **Point out the effects of dysfunctional behavior.** Often the person who is interfering with group functioning is unaware of the negative impact they are having.
- **Suggest alternative activities** that will lead to more productive, satisfying participation for the disruptive member and the rest of the group, as well. (e.g. encourage the disruptive member to be the note-taker for the group for the day).

UNDERSTAND WHY NO ONE IS TALKING, ESPECIALLY DURING VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT

What happens if stakeholders are not talking? Silence or reluctance can feel like failure, but it is a common pain point in virtual or phone environments. While no foolproof solution exists to get quiet stakeholders talking, the most effective strategies start from an understanding of why no one is talking.

- **Embracing silence.** Sometimes a pause is needed for stakeholders to process, reflect, and take themselves off mute before responding. It can be helpful to remind stakeholders how to take themselves off mute.
- **Misunderstanding expectations of participation.** Some may come in with an expectation of a listen-and-learn environment. Be sure to set expectations before the first event, and keep reinforcing the idea of ongoing conversation as a community practice.
- **Discomfort and unfamiliarity.** The online environment can be intimidating for stakeholders because it can feel like public speaking, especially if the event is recorded. When the atmosphere feels overly formal, loosen up the group by using a more conversational and questioning tone. Start with icebreakers that focus on creating social cohesion before diving into the subject-matter.

HONOR EMOTIONS AND TRAUMA DURING CRISIS

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (Health Department) acknowledges how stressful and painful this past year has been. The loss of loved ones, jobs, businesses, homes, and livelihoods, combined with feelings of uncertainty, sadness, fear, and worry, have been a huge weight on us all. We acknowledge that Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and continue to experience and resist the daily impact and reality of years of disinvestment, racism, biased treatment, and oppression. We acknowledge the historical and contemporary injustices in government and health care that have deepened distrust and contributed to the causes of individual and collective trauma and structural inequities. The Health Department names racism as a public health crisis and commits to becoming an anti-racist institution that acknowledges our history, takes action to eliminate inequities, and protects and promotes the health of all New Yorkers.

To support this, build into your practice:

- Grace and patience to promote a space that acknowledges the emotions of stakeholders.
- A culture of checking-in with one another.
- Frequent breaks, as needed. Read the room, and ask if breaks for moments of reflection are needed.

3.3 CHECKLIST FOR FACILITATION

Roles and responsibilities of the facilitator

- Have we planned for a space and tone that is inclusive and welcoming to all?
- Have we considered the ways that the experience is inclusive, accessible, and encourages participation?
- Have we identified a set of community agreements and ensured they are visible to all throughout the engagement?
- Have we set expectations to ensure that roles, responsibilities, and next steps are transparent and agreed upon?

Supporting productive dialogue

- Have we adjusted the experience where necessary to ensure everyone is comfortable and has equal opportunities to participate?
- Have we approached disruptive behavior head-on where necessary in order to create a better experience for the disruptive person and the group as a whole?

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