



Guide to Facilitation

Version 06_2024. Resources partially adapted from [Greg Wilson](#) and [NASCO Cooperative](#) in June 2024.

In our experience, becoming a good facilitator is a life-long learning process. This guide does not provide training on how to become a good facilitator, nor does it bring together all the possible tools and techniques. Think of it as a collection of things that have worked for the ADVANCEing FieldSafety Instructor team. Check back occasionally, since we may have added new thoughts and ideas. We're right there with you, learning how to do this better!

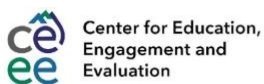
Role of the Facilitator

In the most basic terms, the role of the facilitator is to keep the conversation on track. Sometimes that's as easy as calling on everyone in a small group to share a few thoughts, sometimes it involves the difficult task of navigating a large group through a conflict. As facilitators, we also make sure that the conversation remains respectful if the conversation gets heated.

Facilitation Tips and Tools

- If you are facilitating a conversation with a group that you are also part of as a team member, it's important to separate your facilitation role from that of your team-member role. It can be helpful to remind others that you are "taking off your facilitator-hat" if you are voicing your personal opinion on a matter.
- It's important – but can be hard! – to ensure you don't draw the conversation in your preferred direction when you have the facilitation power. When summarizing the opinions voiced by people as a way to move the conversation forward, it can be helpful to say: "The primary concern I hear is ..." or "It sounds like most people are worried about..."
- Don't be shy to take notes to keep track of peoples' statements. This will help summarize / bring together others' opinions more objectively.

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- If you have a packed agenda to get through, consider asking another team member to be your time-keeper. Pre-allocate a certain amount of time to each agenda item, and have the time-keeper let you know when you are getting close. Ask the group for approval to extend the amount of time for a given item if necessary.
- Assign a separate note-taker if you want to keep a written record of what is being discussed.
- Consider different options for making sure people don't talk over each other:
 - ask people to raise their hand if they want to speak. To avoid people having to keep their hands up while others speak, keep a mental queue in your head, and let people know you've seen their hands up. For example, if several people raise their hands at once, you could say: "I see Jim, Melissa, and then Jorge... Jim, go ahead". That way Melissa and Jorge will know they are next but can lower their hands.
 - Pass around a "speaker-item" such as a small ball. The person holding the ball may speak, and pass it on to the next person once they are done.
 - Pass out "talking-tokens", (e.g., sticky notes, pine cones...) to everyone. Everytime someone speaks, they have to give up one token. If they run out of tokens, they may not speak again until everyone has used up their tokens. If you pass out three tokens, this means that nobody can speak more than three times as often as the quietest person.
 - Other structured options for gathering input (see debriefing-template in Module 2 resources for details): round robin (go around one-by-one), popcorn-style (letting people speak up at random), direct-response to the speaker by someone who is being mentioned or who has the answer to a question being posed.
- Consider using hand-signals to facilitate non-verbal communication, but make sure that everyone is familiar with what they mean. Some common ones are:
 - Twinkle-fingers to signal approval / agreement. This allows people to voice their support of a statement, without having to do so verbally, which can save a lot of time.
 - Holding the hand up in the shape of a C to indicate that one would like to ask a (short!) clarifying question of the person speaking.



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- Process triangle: Indicates that the group has strayed from the topic or that decision making rules have been violated. This signal indicates that the group process has broken down and needs to be repaired. It should be used sparingly and with caution.



Graphics courtesy of [NASCO Cooperative](#).

- Using thumb-o-meters (temperature checks): If you are discussing a proposal, it can be helpful to get a sense of how people are feeling about something by using the thumb-o-meter. Thumb up means full agreement, horizontal thumb means ambivalence, thumb down means full disagreement, and thumbs can be anywhere in between. Check in with those signaling mild to strong disagreement to see what is not working for them.
- Be ready (but not too quick) to interrupt a discussion if it's going round in circles or the group is deviating strongly from the topic. Gently bring people back to the main topic.
- Remind people to stick to the rules (e.g. talking out of turn, interrupting each other) gently but firmly. You may interrupt if someone is rambling on and ask them to conclude their thoughts. Check out this useful guide for some tips on how to handle different kinds of meeting disruptions: <https://coast.noaa.gov/ddb/>
- Facilitation is hard work. If you find that you are no longer able to focus on the task at hand, ask someone else to take over or ask to postpone the conversation to a later point in time.



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- To keep growing your skills as a facilitator, consider using the last few minutes of a meeting / conversation to get some feedback from the group on how they experienced your facilitation.



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