

# Youth work, works.

## *The Art of Facilitation:*

### **PLANNING**

Incorporate and use a variety of activities. Participants have different learning styles. Varying the pace and type of activities will help to stimulate learning.

Pay attention to pace and timing.

Will you be presenting completely new information to the group?

If so, you may wish to allow more time for discussion and reflection so that the learners can digest the new material.

Are you working with children or adults? Children tend to need more variety and frequent changes of pace, whereas adults can focus for greater lengths of time.

Come prepared with necessary supplies.

Check your hand-outs, flipcharts and other visual aids for accuracy and legibility.

Practice the techniques you will use beforehand so you don't get too nervous or lose your train of thought. Visualize the entire session or meeting the night before—imagining how you will arrange the room, what you will say, how you will make transitions between activities, etc.

Make short notes on a card to briefly refer to during the session.



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## ***IMPLEMENTING***

Be positive and confident. Smile.

Communicate enthusiasm for the meeting, the topic and the people involved.

Express genuine interest in each individual's contribution to the discussion

Speak loudly and clearly enough for everyone to hear easily, and enunciate words—especially if you, or the participants, are struggling with a second language.

Use open questions, rather than closed questions. Open questions invite discussion and critical thinking, while closed questions evoke short answers. For example, the open-ended question: “How might we encourage Ruth to participate in class better?” invites a thoughtful response. The closed question: “Do you think Ruth is able to participate in the class?” may limit the learner to one word answer.

Encourage discussion among group members instead of between participants and yourself. You can do this by redirecting questions to the entire group, perhaps by saying: “What do you think of Mr Gomez's suggestion?”

Use small group discussions to foster greater communication and participation. You can form small groups in many different ways.

Ask participants to count off around the room. If you want four groups, they should count to four as you go around the room. Then, all the “ones” form a group, all the “twos” and so forth.

Ask people to self-select into groups with people they don't know.

Write the name of different animals, colours or foods on cards around the room, and tell participants to go to the one they like the most.

If you are working on specific topics, you might write down the different topic choices instead, so that participants can self-select groups according to the topic that resonates for them.

Use your tone of voice, your energy or “presence” and your interested silence to keep the group focused.

Let participants know when you have learned something new from them.

Write legibly in dark colours. It helps to alternate between two colours when writing on a flipchart or chalkboard.



## ***FOLLOW-UP***

Set aside some reflection time immediately after a session or workshop to reflect on your and your learners' experiences.

Consider what worked well and what could be improved in the future. What parts of the session went really well? Were there times or situations where you really had to stretch as a facilitator? What did you learn about yourself? About the group? How can you build on that learning in the future?

Immediately after the session, add your reflections on, and reactions to, the session to the bottom of your notes so they are there for you the next time you do that session.

Compile any notes, feedback, evaluation results or action plans and distribute them to the participants as appropriate.

If you plan to facilitate a similar session in the future, take stock of your supplies and resources.

## ***ENCOURAGING HEALTHY GROUP DYNAMICS***

As we noted earlier, one of the most challenging yet rewarding aspects of facilitating is empowering participants to take charge of their own learning.

Effective facilitators capitalize on teachable moments and create opportunities for learners to participate.

Encouraging, recognizing and then allowing those moments to happen is largely a function of understanding and managing group dynamics.

Some tips for fostering healthy group dynamics.

**Encourage open discussion:** Let the participants know they don't have to agree—either with each other or with you. Be clear that they are free to come to their own conclusions, learn what they want to learn, and reject what they don't agree with. At the same time, try to keep the group on track by letting them know when it is time to move on.

**Break off lengthy discussions kindly:** Interesting discussions must sometimes be cut short in order to respect time constraints or cover other important topics. If several people have indicated that they still have something to say, you might say something like: "Okay, first Georgi, then Lydia, then Elena, and then we'll have to move on because we're running out of time." This is both more respectful and more effective than just trying to end the discussion abruptly.

**When the whole group is silent:** When people feel hesitant about speaking up, or when it is hot or people are tired, you may have difficulty getting discussion started. If you ask a question and no one answers it, wait—count to five very slowly to yourself without betraying any anxiety or irritation. Be comfortable with the silence. If no one answers, smile, rephrase the question and wait again. If discussion continues to be slow, consider using "buzz groups," in which participants discuss the question with a partner for a few minutes. Then go around the room, asking several pairs what they



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came up with—the whole group may be surprised at the number of good ideas that emerge. Or, have people individually write down points and then ask if anyone wants to share. If no one volunteers, move on.

**Integrate the big talkers, encourage the silent types:** Often a group will have one or two highly vocal participants who tend to dominate the discussion as well as a few who seem interested but keep their ideas to themselves. You can balance the group a bit better by trying some of the following:

Don't force the quiet ones to talk by calling on them. People have different learning styles. Some prefer to quietly reflect rather than speak publicly what first comes to mind. Try to balance the desire for full participation with the learning styles of various participants. Frequently change the makeup of small groups. This way, quieter people will eventually meet up with other quiet types and be able to speak up, while the talkers will meet and be challenged by talkers like themselves.

In a large group discussion, after asking for ideas on some topic, ask participants to jot down one or two ideas before anyone speaks, then go around the room and ask each person to read one idea.

Look for body language. People who are ready with ideas often sit forward, or meet your eyes, or shift in their seats while another person is speaking.

If a participant really begins to dominate the discussion, talk to that person after the session and enlist their help in encouraging others to speak up.

Remember that there may be a cultural reason for lack of participation, or it may be the result of gender roles.





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