

FACILITATION BASICS – roles, goals, and pacing

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Your Role as a Facilitator

All participants are responsible for the discussion **content** as speakers and listeners—but the facilitator is responsible for, the captain of, the discussion **process**. So as a facilitator, when in doubt, err on the side of being more assertive about the process and more restrained about the content.

Facilitation Tips

- **Steering**
 - Always **keep the destination in view**:
 - Explore alternative perspectives on the topic, the ideas in the materials
 - Consider/develop alternative perspectives on what might work better
 - Be alert to **body language** (does it express interest? irritation? fatigue?)
- **Accelerating**
 - When the discussion is **slow to start** . . .
 - Start with the personal: introductions, personal experiences w/ the topic (go first to model time, level of response)
 - Prepare and use questions with real world examples to start sub-topics
 - When the discussion **stalls** . . .
 - Encourage: Ask for additions, elaborations, perspectives not represented (“What’s still missing?”)
 - Challenge: Ask for “outside the group” and/or “outside the box” thinking (OK to wait for responses)
- **Braking**
 - When the discussion is **too fast** . . .
 - queue up participants
 - use flip charts to record key ideas – slows them down while you write
 - ask participants to “go back”/repeat so you can capture it all
 - When **one person is dominating** the discussion . . .
 - encourage others to contribute
 - invoke the discussion timetable and/or discussion ground rules
 - Lean in; get physically close to the domineering person
 - call for a break and talk alone with domineering participant (and get their help to involve others)
 - When it’s **too heated** . . .
 - First—rephrase and *then* generalize (move from personal conflict to statements of interests/value). If that doesn’t work. . .
 - Start by recognizing that “This is hard.”
 - Next—calmly say that “You’ll be better heard by lowering your voice” (appeals to speaker’s interest)
 - Next—say “You might want to think about stopping that.”
 - Finally, invoke the meeting’s purpose and ground rules.
 - *If all else fails, break and demand adherence to ground rules.*