

Tips for Facilitating an IF Discussion

The discussion facilitator will act with passionate impartiality to create a safe and comfortable environment that builds trust and encourages the sharing of personal thoughts and opinions.

Participants will not solve the problem but will leave with a broader understanding of the topic and an enhanced appreciation of the perspectives of others.

1. Facilitator preparation for discussion

a. Read the guidebook

- i. Highlight/underline key items
- ii. Write questions/observations in your guidebook
- iii. Summarize each possibility in your own words – write on ‘possibilities’ page in your guidebook

b. Prepare ‘Introduction’ questions: Designed to help each participant introduce themselves with info relating to topic

- c. ‘Homework’ question (optional) - Some facilitators send a stimulus question along with their attendance reminder to get people thinking about the topic.

d. Prepare one or two open-ended questions for each possibility

- e. Additional research...Only if you want to. You’re the facilitator, not an expert on the topic.

2. Your role during discussion:

- a. To make all participants comfortable, welcome and important to the discussion
- b. Practice ***Passionate Impartiality*** - Always guiding, never directing
- c. While remaining neutral on the topic is essential, it is sometimes necessary to play Devil’s Advocate when there is so much agreement that differing perspectives are not being considered.
- d. Keep it moving...watch your clock.
- e. Sometimes it’s ok to interrupt, especially if the person speaking can’t find an end to the sentence.

3. The First Session

- a. Thank them for participating and give brief overview of why you are doing this and what will happen during session.
- b. **Discussion Guidelines** (Rules & expectations for the evening, afternoon, etc.)
 - i. We are not here to ‘solve the problem’, we are here to learn more about the topic.
 - ii. Play nice – be considerate of others, listen, avoid side conversations
 - iii. Participate – all thoughts are welcome, all perspectives are valued
 - iv. Guidebooks are yours...write in them, highlight, underline or circle words/thoughts that catch your attention
 - v. Privacy – Individual comments are not to be shared outside of this group, we want this to be a safe and comfortable environment.
- c. **Explain your role** as facilitator
 - i. Keep us on track and keep us moving

- ii. Stimulate discussion by asking questions and occasionally playing 'devil's advocate' (explain term)
- d. **Individual introductions** (very important – takes 15 – 20 minutes)
 - i. Have participants introduce themselves with personal background details that relate to the topic
 - ii. You go first to model answer and set expectation for length
- e. **Review the guidebook**
 - i. The Page with Possibilities List - Review each possibility in your own words
 - ii. Show one Possibility layout (i.e. "look at facing pages 7 & 8")
- f. **General, opening questions** to get participants **started** talking about the topic
These are questions that you will have prepared **in advance** of the session
 - 1. "Why is this topic important to you and how?"
 - 2. "How does this topic impact you?" Etc.
- g. Plan for a short break
- h. Go into the Possibilities
 - i. You do **not** need to start with the first one listed.
 - ii. You do **not** need to do them in order.
 - iii. Some (perhaps most) participants will not have reviewed the guidebooks.
 - 1. One approach is to have people read portions out loud (This can be risky).
 - 2. Another approach is to have them read silently and ask them to write questions or mark words/statements in the guidebook.
 - 3. Start the discussion of each possibility with your prepared question.
 - 4. Or ask someone which words they highlighted and why. Starting with someone who came prepared is ideal as it rewards them for their work and they will feel most comfortable responding
- i. Possibility-related general questions (for your consideration)
 - i. Why would this be a good approach?
 - ii. Why wouldn't this work? What are the obstacles?
 - iii. If we did this, what might be the consequences? Good ones – Bad ones.
 - iv. If you wanted to do this, how would you go about making it work?

4. Involving/managing participants

- a. The 'expert'
 - i. If they are long-winded, you must rein them in: "... and the point is?" (smile while saying this).
 - ii. If they are intimidating others, specifically ask for other opinions.
 - iii. Ask them to make the point from another person's perspective: – "Jane, you have a great deal of experience in this area, what is one of the best alternative comments you've heard about this."
 - iv. You may have to talk to them privately between sessions.
- b. The introvert
 - i. Ask them a question by name – "Jane, what do you think about that?"
 - ii. Keep gently inviting them with questions but don't force them to answer.
 - iii. Some people are 'early' introverts because they initially don't trust the process, and some people observe first and comment later. Trust must be earned and these people will often be more active participants in a second session.

c. The side conversationalist

- i. Nip it in the bud – “Excuse me, one at a time please. John, please continue.”
- ii. After John finishes go to the side conversationalist and ask for his/her response. This shows that you are interested in what they had to say and were not ‘scolding’ them.

5. Ending your first session

- a. Start wrapping things up 15 – 20 minutes before you plan to close the session
 - i. Ask each person to share anything that surprised them about the discussion
 - ii. Do a ‘Once Around’ asking each person to share 2 or 3 words they would use to describe to someone else what they experienced in the session.
 - iii. At a session involving first time participants, ask them how what they experienced compared to what they expected
 - iv. Thank them for participating, remind them of the next session details

6. Session Two

- a. Thank them for coming and remind them of the ground rules
- b. Intros aren’t necessary if the people are the same
 - i. Brief intros only if there are one or two new participants
 - ii. Ask returning participants to summarize what was covered in the first session
- c. Possible discussion starters
 - i. Start by asking them if they thought about this topic since the last session
 - ii. Or ask them what their most vivid memory is from the last session
 - iii. Ask if there are any comments on what was covered in the first session
- d. Transition into the next possibility from the guidebook
- e. You will often notice a change in how people participate

7. Ending your second session

- a. Allow 15 – 20 minutes for the close.
- b. Ask questions that invite reflection and evaluation of the topic and the discussion process.
 - i. Did any parts of this discussion surprise you?
 - ii. If you had one dollar to spend or one hour to invest, which possibility would you personally start with?
 - iii. Based on this discussion and what you learned, which possibility would be the most beneficial if it were to become a reality (or our main approach, etc)?
 - iv. Which do you think is the most likely to happen and why?
 - v. Which do you think is the least likely to happen and why?
- c. Ask for feedback on how the discussion process went:
 - i. What would you do differently?
 - ii. What did you like best?
- d. Possible 2-3 word “once-around” as conclusion
- e. Announce any future discussion plans
- f. THANK THEM

8. Other Facilitation Tips

- a. The 'getting-to-know-you' part of these discussions is crucial. Don't shortchange that time. It builds community and trust.
- b. In session one you will likely only get to one or two possibilities. That's ok. The intros and general groundwork to understand the topic take time and are important
- c. If you don't cover every possibility the world does not end. Better to have a good discussion on fewer points than to rush through some at the end.
- d. Name tags can help, especially if most people do not know each other
- e. Bring extra guidebooks as someone will always forget theirs, especially for a second session.
- f. Provide small notepads and pens.
 - i. Helps people 'play nice' as they can write down those great thoughts they have while someone else is talking.
 - ii. Some people just like to doodle.
 - iii. Pens are needed if you plan to have them mark key words in guidebook as they quickly review the next possibility.
- g. ALWAYS HAVE A PLAN B
- h. **Keep things in perspective...you're trying to build a better community, not a perfect one**
- i. **Have fun – there should always be some laughter during a discussion.**