

Facilitation: Remember everything

A facilitator gives the gift of structure to a group of people so they can become a community of minds.

Model facilitation template

Starting well

- Welcome
 - Acknowledgement of country
 - Introduce facilitator
 - Housekeeping (toilets, emergency procedure)
 - Facilitator self-introduction
 - Purpose statement + clarify negotiation space
 - Ice breaker questions to engage participants
 - Ice breaker introductions
 - Name tag check
 - Sketch the running order and available time.
 - Propose 'social' ground rules
- And print copies.

Information and inspiration

- Data and research to inform judgements
- Inspiring ideas from other places

Group work (with slides)

- Questions (open, positive)
- Instructions for answering the questions
- Summarise results (or hear table reports)

Ending well

- A final word from all
- Thank all (celebrate)
- Commit to the next step.

Fine tuning

(1) Purpose statement

"The purpose of this

[workshop/forum/meeting]

Start with common values:
"Values unite, interests divide."

is to contribute to

[insert values at stake e.g. "a happy productive team"]

by increasing/improving/establishing/devising

[insert desired outcomes(s) e.g. "better communication and a supportive environment"].

Together we'll create

[a plan/strategy/model/recommendations]

to be acted on by

[insert who is responsible for acting on the plan, if known e.g. "our team".]

[give an implementation time] e.g. "over the next 2 weeks"

Check-off: [e.g. "Are we happy with that?"]

(2) Clarify the 'negotiation space'

Setting boundaries creates clarity and avoids conflict. Clearly state significant matters which are outside the scope of deliberation. For example:

- timetable and time span
- available budget
- statutory requirements
- who is the final decision-maker
- policies already set in stone that can't be altered.

Check-off: [e.g. "Are we happy with that?"]

Be prepared to explain why.

(3) Icebreakers and introductions

Ensure that everyone has a chance to introduce themselves to at least 2-3 other participants. To make this fun try one of these active icebreakers:

Unexpected facts: "In 4 minutes see how many people you can meet and find out something about them that you'd never guess by looking at them."

Two truths and a lie: Everyone thinks of two truths and a lie about themselves. "In 4 minutes how many people you can meet and guess their lie."

Hands up: "Hands up if you came by car? By foot? By train? By bus? By bike?" (Or any other lifestyle facts).

Pretend the room is a map. Everyone moves to where they live. Then move to where they work. Then move to where their clients live.

Remember these preliminaries

Propose ground rules For each ground rule: "I'd like to suggest XXX ground rule. Is that OK?" Then pause for a response.

Examples: phones off, respect and listen, positive discussion, one person speaks at a time, no personal criticism, confidentiality.

Create a running order Make sure everyone has a copy. Describe it and check-off.

(4) Information and inspiration

What information and inspiration do participants need to be able to deliberate accurately, without misconceptions, and inspired by great examples?

Make a list. Think about baseline data, scenarios, social research, good examples, inspirations, innovations.

Prepare this material and present it [say, a 10-20 min slide show].

Then follow with a short facilitated discussion to embed key ideas: asking, for example, "What occurs to you at this point?"

(5) Focus question(s)

Think carefully about the language of the focus questions: they are the crux of the whole event. The exact wording can have a big impact on the ideas, either enlarging or narrowing the range of possibilities.

Questions should be open and positive.

A good all-purpose questions is:

"What would make the biggest difference to the desired outcome?"

Check-off. If necessary, accept amendments.

(6) Choose methods

Brainstorm with Post-it notes

One idea per Post-it note, written big and clear.

Brainstorm a drawing

Have a sketcher on each table, visualising the ideas

Prioritise with dots/points/fake money

Prioritise with a matrix

Select two criteria, for example urgent versus important; impact versus cost; passion versus ability to make a difference. A good way for people to learn from each other as they collectively position each idea.

Simply take turns addressing the group

Will you simply allocate time for each person to express themselves? Set tight time limits!

Select theme cards

Let participants select from, say, 40 idea cards, plus a few blank wildcards. A good way to pre-load participants with possibilities.

Select ideas from a checklist

An illustrated list, with check boxes, is a great way to speed up consideration of multiple options.

Complete an information form

A sheet of paper with pre-formatted questions that participants fill in.

Use/make a map

Can the ideas be geographically organised?

Assemble a prototype

Can participants assemble solutions with craft materials or Lego.

Roleplay or hypothetical

A fun and engaging way for participants to learn about complex situations and systems before deciding on strategies.

Bring

- Printed running order, manuals
- Post-it notes
- Flip chart paper
- Name tags
- Marker pens
- iPad adapters
- Preso backup
- Creative props

(7) Silent time vs talk time

Have a mix of silent, private activities and speaking activities.

Silence is the best way to get ideas down quickly in a brainstorm.

Talking in pairs helps people formulate complex ideas or clarify half-forgotten lessons.

Talking in tables of 5-6 helps people learn from each other, formulate their own positions, and make commitments.

Reporting to the whole room at the conclusion of an activity or session.

Talk is time consuming and often leads to advocacy, with extroverts dominating. So set tight time limits. Appoint table facilitators to ensure fair discussion.

(8) Gravitas vs hilaritas

Thinking and learning are exhausting. Worrying about correct answers leads to tunnel vision. Playfulness and light-heartedness are therefore vital. Plan how you'll build moments of light relief into the event.

(9) Motion

Take every opportunity to move people around: stand people up, swap buddies, swap teams, and invite them to stretch during the day.

Conflict and difficult participants

Let conflict come out. Acknowledge with respect: "Thank you, that's a good point." Park their ideas so all can see. Don't let it get personal. Make sure they are heard and understood "Is that what you mean?" Ask the group for a ruling: "Should we allow more time for this discussion?" Maybe take time out to cool off.

Facilitation Skills one day training

What's the invisible magic behind great facilitation?

Check www.enablingchange.com.au/cocreate.php for the Facilitation Skills one day workshop with Les Robinson.

Automatic practices

Safety: Protect every participant, without exception. Actively respond when someone is uncomfortable. Working in 2's helps shy people participate.

Make action requests: "Please stand." "Raise hands if you agree." "Turn to your partner and..."

Reflective listening: Bouncing participants' ideas back to the room checks-off that they've been understood and creates clarity for all.

Checking-off: "Is that OK?" "Does that work for you?" "Are we good?" And pause for a response.

Silence: Your silence impels others to respond. It gives them, and you, time to think. Practice often.

In-sync groups: When all intently participate, stand back and enjoy the moment.

Out-of-sync groups: When attentions lapse or withdraw: "Let's move on"; "Let's come back to the topic"; "Please stand, swap seats and find new partners."

When attentions lapse: "Let's move on"; "Let's come back to the topic"; "Find a new partner"; or try a quick quiz.

Land on time: watch the clock and finish when you say you will.

Flexible: No plan is perfect. Always feel free to improvise on the fly.

Be thrilled by their ideas. If you're critical or take sides you'll lose authority.

Anyone can facilitate!

It's a learned skill. Start with small groups. Put time into your planning. Confidence comes with practice. You'll be amazed at what you, and your groups, achieve.

