Facilitation Toolkit

Here are a few practical tools and techniques facilitators often use to help them fulfil their roles:

**The Agenda** – Having a decent agenda is a key tool in keeping a meeting focused and sticking to time. It’s often easier to keep to an agenda if it’s ‘owned’ by the group as a whole, so try to give everyone an input into forming it. Once the agenda is set, you can put rough timings by each item, and these can give you a guide as to when to move the meeting on. The agenda then gives you a mandate to remind everyone to stay focused when they talk off subject.

**Meeting Ground rules** – Ground rules act as a gentle reminder of the way the group would like it’s meetings to run. So for example you might have a ‘no interrupting’ rule, or a ‘show respect for each others’ opinions’ rule. It is useful for the facilitator to be able to say “we agreed that we wouldn’t interrupt each other. Is everyone still happy that we try to abide by that rule?” It’s a lot less harsh than barking “stop interrupting!”. You can tailor your ground rules to your group – so a ‘stick to time’ rule is useful for groups that often overrun or lose focus etc.

**Active agreement** is a useful groundrule, in which everyone agrees to take an active part in making decisions. When the group is asked a question or has to make a decision, the facilitator must insist on active agreement. Too many bad decisions are made because people stare at their feet rather than clearly agree or disagree. Later on those same people may feel that the decision was not one they supported, leading to tension in the group. By insisting on active dis/agreement this can be avoided and decisions that represent the views of all can be reached. Having an **hand signal** which indicates agreement can be one quick way of showing agreement.

**Hand signals** – make meetings run more smoothly, make it easier for everyone to contribute, and also help the facilitator see emerging agreements and common ground. The most basic and essential hand signal is “put your hand/ finger up if you want to speak”. Some groups also use “2 hands for a directly relevant point”, or waving a hand with fingers pointing up to indicate agreement or down to indicate disagreement.

**Flip-charts**, or any big sheets of paper, can help a group focus together on an agenda item. Good for gathering together ideas (e.g. from a brainstorm) focusing on a set of problems, making sure you have a shared understanding of something.

**Throwing It Back To The Group** -Your key asset as a facilitator is the group you are working with. If you ever find yourself stuck for an idea on how to move things on ask the group. Throwing it back to the group isn’t a cop out - it’s the best tool you have.

**Checking with the group** – regularly ask to find out how they’re feeling, whether they need a break, want the agenda modifying and are happy with the decisions being made. After all you are there to serve the group, and it encourages a sense of ownership.

**Brainstorming** -people shout out ideas without fear of comment or criticism - an excellent way to get the creative juices flowing. Usually ideas get recorded on a flipchart/ big piece of paper. Often works best in combination with other more analytical tools e.g. small groups, go-rounds and prioritising.

**Prioritising** through giving people a certain number of dots to stick/draw by a list of ideas can help focus a group on the ideas/ problems/ campaigns they think are most important.

**Go-rounds** - where everyone in turn is given the same time to speak uninterrupted and without comment or criticism.

**Sharing roles within the group** –You don’t have to take on the burden of facilitation alone. Roles others can take on to support you in the role of facilitator might include:

- **Recorder/ Note taker** – takes down the key decisions, who’s doing what, and when.
- **Mood watcher** – watches the mood of the meeting to note tension rising, lack of focus, flagging energy etc. They can then suggest that the groups takes appropriate action, like taking a break etc.
Doorkeeper/gatekeeper/meeter-and-greeter – meets and greets people (esp. newcomers) on the way in, and can check they all know what the meeting is for, how it will work etc.

Co-facilitator – someone to step in and facilitate if the facilitator is flagging, or feels a need to take a position on an issue.

Timekeeper – makes sure each agenda item gets enough time for discussion, and that the meeting finishes at the agreed time.

Jargon-buster – makes the meeting more accessible and less intimidating by making sure the language is clear to everyone, and that acronyms like “WTO” or “LDF” are explained.

Mingler – makes sure newcomers are integrated into social meetings, encourages other group members not to clump together in scary looking groups…

Reframing - a key use of active listening, that helps show people that they have been listened to. It means listening carefully to what someone says, then repeating it back succinctly in your own words, to check that you have understood their point. It's a useful tool for clarifying and moving forward discussion. Make sure you personalise your statements - "it sounds to me like what you're saying is…"

Breaking into small groups - this can help those intimidated by larger groups speak up and have their views fed back to the rest of the group. It can break up any negative dynamics within a group, and encourage people to listen to different perspectives. It can also save time!

"Think and listens" - people pair up and speak to each other, uninterrupted, for anything from 30 seconds to 5 minutes depending on the issue being discussed. They then swap. It's important that the listener makes a real effort to listen, including keeping good eye contact and remaining attentive! Each pair can then feed back their opinions to the whole group. Some groups find this a useful technique for developing ideas and boosting confidence.

Speakers list ("stacking") - the facilitator notes down people's names as they raise a finger to show they want to speak, then invites them to speak in that order. The group will soon become impatient with people that ignore this protocol and just barge in and interrupt.

“Tension breakers”/Icebreakers/silly games – getting people to play a game/do a silly exercise can lift energy levels and the mood, and so help the meeting re-focus and be more productive. They can also encourage people to feel more comfortable with each other and so more willing to participate constructively. Beware games that make people feel self-conscious/left out.

Note-taking/minutes – recording what’s decided and what jobs need doing, so that your meeting leads to action.

Breaks – often if a discussion is stuck in a rut, people are getting irritable or losing focus, or there’s some interpersonal tensions that need sorting, a break can actually save you time as people have a chance to collect there thoughts and re-focus. A break can also give the facilitator some space to plan a new approach.

“New Voices” – if a discussion is being dominated by a few people, saying that you’ll prioritise contributions from people who haven’t spoken yet can be an effective way of making the dominators hold back and give others a chance to contribute. Avoid doing this in a way that makes a shy individual feel “on the spot” and pressured to speak against their will.