



Welcome to Module 2, Lesson 3: Facilitation Skills. As an Extension volunteer, you are charged with using your background and expertise to help others to solve a wide range of problems and issues in our communities. To do so, you will need a deep understanding of the issues at hand, as well as an ability to connect, motivate, and communicate with diverse audiences to be able to meet their specific needs. Effective facilitation skills will help you lead individuals and teams to set goals and accomplish them by working collaboratively through cohesion. This lesson will discuss facilitation skills and techniques.

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### Lesson Objectives

**After participation in this lesson, you will be able to:**

- Characterize differing roles of a facilitator
- Identify skills for assisting groups to work together productively
- Decipher techniques to deal with people in difficult and compromising situations and topics

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There are three objectives for this lesson. First, you will be able to characterize differing roles of a facilitator. Second, you will engage in topics that will help you to identify skills for assisting groups to productively work together. Third, you will be able to decipher techniques to deal with difficult and compromising situations and topics that can present challenges to your meeting.

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## Volunteer Facilitation Roles

**Facilitators:**

- Ensure participation of the group
- Diminish bias and discrimination
- Empower a team
- Identify pathways to meet goals



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In previous lessons, the various unique roles of a volunteer were discussed. One important role is to serve as a facilitator. Whether it is in a meeting, workshop, training, or a planning session, a facilitator will shape and guide the processes of joining people together by directing key parts of organizing work. Different than presentation skills, the goal of facilitation is to engage as a human resource to ensure participation of the group, to diminish bias and other discriminatory actions, to empower your team in setting realistic goals, and to identify pathways to meet the goals.

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**Facilitator**



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What is a facilitator? Wikipedia defines a facilitator as “an individual who enables groups and organizations to work more effectively”. Most facilitators are neutral parties. By not taking sides, expressing or advocating a point of view, the facilitator can advocate for fair, open, and inclusive procedures to accomplish the group's work. Facilitators engage in problem solving and use their knowledge of group processes and group dynamics to provide structure and guidance for participants to be able to make key decisions to complete tasks.

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### Why are facilitators important?



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Why are facilitators important when working in groups and teams? For example, why do meetings need a facilitator? Essential to understanding facilitation is to first understand the importance of gathering people together to meet. Before we discuss meetings, think to yourself: *Why do we meet? What are your thoughts about the purpose and goals of meeting?*

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## Meetings

- Share information
- Make decisions
- Solve problems
- Gather ideas
- Learn from each other



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People come together and meet for a variety of reasons. Meetings occur when participants are called upon to work collaboratively to share information, make decisions, solve problems, gather ideas, and to learn from each other. To accomplish these objectives, a meeting needs someone to usher the process from planning and design to implementation and evaluation.

When people meet, they bring with them their differing knowledge, backgrounds, perceptions and experiences. Often times, a facilitator, who stands as a leader apart from the group, is used in helping people interact with each other effectively since working together may not come naturally.

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### Multitasking in Facilitation

- Communication
- Observation
- Encourage participation
- Respect and Fairness



- Consistency and Flexibility
- Enthusiasm
- Assertion



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Multitasking in facilitation is parallel to juggling. Facilitation is complex and often tricky as it requires preparation, focus and observation, and a distinct balance between content and group dynamics. For example, this means keeping the group on task, making sure everyone gets heard, and coming to defined conclusions in a timely manner. In the upcoming slides, facilitation will be discussed through the following critical characteristics and skills: communication, observation, encouraging participation, respect and fairness, consistency, flexibility, enthusiasm, and assertion.

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**Characteristics of Effective Facilitators**



**Communication Skills**

- Communicate clearly and concisely
- Body language
- Eye contact
- Active listening



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Effective communication is an imperative skill that facilitators will need to showcase. Communication is the exchange or transfer of signals, messages, and ideas between a sender and receiver. Whether electronically, on paper, or through behavior, communication is presented in a wide variety of forms and is recognized as a stimulus for feedback, decision making, or relationship building. Since our audiences are so incredibly diverse, it is important to communicate clearly and concisely so our messages are received in the intended form.

An effective facilitator is aware of body language and makes sure that one's posture, stance and demeanor is approachable. Use eye contact to engage your audience and encourage them to be interested in your message. Finally, an effective facilitator is a good listener. Active listening involves acknowledging a speaker's thoughts and ideas, repeating in your own words what the speaker said, asking open-ended questions, and summarizing the speaker's thoughts. Be confident in your message by enunciating your words clearly and choosing words carefully for impact.



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## Characteristics of Effective Facilitators

Good Observer




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Along with these active listening skills, a facilitator also needs to be a good observer. It is important to analyze feedback from the group concerning their response, emotions, and feeling. Is it time to move on? Are people uneasy? Are people happy with what is going on? Is everyone getting a chance to speak? Observation is key.


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## Characteristics of Effective Facilitators



Encourage Participation

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Another important characteristic for a facilitator is the ability to encourage participation. Encouraging participation from the entire group will require individualized attention to motivate people to share their thoughts. This will include making people feel comfortable and interested in your topic. Be cognizant of participants who are more inclined to share, as their opinions can often drive meetings and decisions. Quiet participants can require motivation and reiteration of the notion that their input is valuable to the discussion. Sometimes, this is simply a matter of asking a quiet participant, “What are your thoughts? Would you like to add anything? We would like to hear how you feel about this.”

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## Characteristics of Effective Facilitators




Treat people fairly  
and with respect



Make people feel  
comfortable

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Effective facilitators treat people fairly and with respect. A facilitator needs to be honest and open. If they are part of the group, a facilitator needs to make sure their opinion or idea is viewed as any other participant in the group. Most often, however, it is best if the facilitator of a group remains neutral. Facilitators also need to make people in the group comfortable. This means both physically—things like, is the room arrangement good? Is the temperature comfortable? Is the lighting adequate?—and also mentally and emotionally—does everyone feel welcome and valued as a part of the group? The facilitator needs to be aware of the undercurrents of class, race, gender, and other issues and keep these things out of the discussion.

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### Characteristics of Effective Facilitators

Be Consistent & Flexible



Be Enthusiastic



Be Assertive



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An effective facilitator needs to be consistent and flexible. An effective facilitator is also enthusiastic. The person leading the group sets the tone. If the facilitator is tired, bored, or not interested, the entire group may reciprocate those same emotions and behavior. An effective facilitator needs to be assertive and demonstrate confidence and poise.

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**Responsibilities of Facilitators**

**Meeting  
Agendas &  
Minutes**


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An important task when initiating a meeting is to set an agenda. This is important so you and everyone at the meeting know what the objective is and the plan for the meeting. It can also be helpful to allot time for each item of the agenda to help keep the meeting moving along. If possible, distribute the agenda prior to the meeting, which helps people know what to expect and how long it will take. This also gives participants an opportunity to add to the agenda and get their thoughts together before the meeting. If minutes were recorded for the previous meeting, send them out to the group prior to the meeting.

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## Responsibilities of Facilitators



**Be Prepared**



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Another important responsibility of a facilitator is to be prepared. This can make a facilitator's job easier to manage. Preparing for a meeting is crucial. Meetings take a lot of planning and thought if you want the meeting to reach the desired outcome. First, you need to know why the meeting is being held. What is the purpose? What needs to happen? How long should the meeting be? Where and when should it be held? Who should be invited? Or who is invited? Do the participants know each other or do you need some sort of ice breaker?

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## Responsibilities of Facilitators



Set Ground Rules

Guide Group and  
Keep on Track



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Another task or responsibility of a facilitator is to set ground rules for the meeting. This can be done as part of the meeting, or you the facilitator can develop them and ask for input at the beginning of the meeting. Ground rules can be simple, or they can be extensive. They often include things like: everyone has an equal voice, stay on track, respect each other, cell phones off. One rule that must be decided is how decisions will be made. Will it be a consensus? Will it be a popular vote? Or will there be some other method to decide? Guide the group and keep the meeting on track. As a facilitator, you might assign a scribe, a timekeeper, or any other job that will keep the meeting fair and on time. But, even with others assuming these roles, the facilitator needs to keep the meeting moving and on track.

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## Facilitating a Meeting

- Welcome
- Introductions
- Ice breaker
- Meeting content
- Status Check/Debrief



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Leading a meeting is the ultimate job of the facilitator. Although meetings can take on differing approaches, there are some standard procedures that help make a meeting productive. This is a quick outline of the look of a typical meeting. First, welcome everyone. Perform facilitator and participant introductions to allow people the chance to get to know each other. Implement ice-breaker if participants do not know each other, and then the meeting content should follow. Lastly, use status checks and debrief periods to recap the discussion during a meeting and to make sure that your group members are on one accord.



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### Facilitating a Meeting

- Assign a recorder
- Develop ground rules
- Review agenda
- Review minutes
- Conduct business
- Record data



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Assign a recorder or a scribe. Review or develop ground rules. Review the agenda and objectives for the meeting, and allow time for changes or additions. Review minutes, if applicable. Conduct business. Restate the issues to be addressed. Be sure to record data using flip charts, a white board, or somehow for participants to visually capture the information.

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## Facilitating a Meeting

- Time oriented
- Review decisions
- Assignments
- Next meeting date, time, location




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Be sure that you start and end the meeting on time. Review the meeting decisions that were made and conclusions that were decided. Talk about any assignments or action items as a follow-up to the meeting. Decide or announce the time and location for the next meeting, if applicable.


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## Possible Challenges



Decrease Side Conversations

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As a facilitator, you will face possible challenges. One of the most difficult jobs of being a facilitator is recognizing problems within a group or meeting and finding solutions to those problems. Look at several of the most common problems facilitators face. First, side conversations during a meeting are very distracting. How to handle this situation depends on several things. You might want to try one of the following: maybe a friendly reminder that we agreed to only one conversation at a time or we can only hear one conversation at a time, or you could ask the person if they need a clarification or something. If side conversations continue, you may need to acknowledge that side conversations distract from the meeting. For example, “Team, let’s be respectful and pay attention to Lee and his comments at this time.” On the other hand, if many people are interrupting, you might just ask the whole group, “Do we need to take a break?” Also, you can wait until a break and friendly remind people that side conversations are disrupting.

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## Possible Challenges

Never Ending Discussion




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A second possible problem is never ending discussion. This can happen with the whole group being unable to bring the discussion to an end, or it can be one or two people that insist on continuing the discussion. If the entire group cannot find closure, it is likely because there is not enough information available to make an informed decision. In this case, it may be best to schedule another meeting and ask participants to bring whatever information is needed to find a solution. If the discussion is never-ending because of one member of the group, there are several suggestions you might try. Ask the person to explain how this fits with the discussion, or how this information is different than what has already been said. You might tell them others are waiting to speak; you might also remind him or her of the time constraints for the meeting and to summarize the critical points. Also, you could speak to the person privately and share how he or she is impeding progress.

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## Possible Challenges



Conflict Within  
the Group




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Another challenge is conflict that can exist within the group or one member personally attacking another. One way to address this problem is to make the statement that everyone's comments about the subject are welcome, but please keep the comments constructive. Or you might try asking the person who is attacking another, how would he or she change the idea? If the problem continues, you might have to talk to the individual privately. You might ask if he or she can continue in the meeting without conflict or is there another issue that needs to be resolved first. Regardless of the situation, it is a good guideline to start with the lowest level or least obvious or threatening technique for dealing with a difficult person or situation. This will hopefully solve the problem, while keeping participants actively involved and on track to reach an effective outcome.


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**Possible Challenges**



Returning Late from Breaks

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A fourth challenge facilitators often face is participants returning late from breaks. For this challenge, you might remind the group before a break when the meeting is set to reconvene. If this behavior continues, you might ask if the timing of the agenda needs to be changed so people have time to take care of their needs during the break. Sometimes just a simple reminder of the ground rules will resolve the problem. Remember, do not wait for the masses to return if they are late; restart the meeting at the appointed time.

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Possible Challenges



Silence

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Another challenge that happens less often is complete silence within a group. Simply asking individuals their opinions or how they feel is often a solution to get people involved. You also might try having everyone state their idea or opinion by simply going around the room. Sometimes, if you pose a question and ask for a show of hands, this will be enough to get people talking. However, be comfortable with a little silence. In some cultures, this is a sign of respect and displaying attention.

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## Facilitator Roles Change



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No two situations are the same. As a facilitator, you are dealing with different people, on different days, in different moods, and different locations, which makes each situation different. Strategies for engaging the group will differ according to the audience.




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**In Review**



Effective Meeting or Outcome

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In review, a facilitator is someone that helps a group reach an outcome or have an effective meeting. There are many characteristics of an effective facilitator, including good communication skills, treating people fairly and with respect, making people feel comfortable, being consistent and flexible, being enthusiastic, and being assertive. Facilitators have certain responsibilities before meetings, including being prepared, setting an agenda and ground rules for the meeting, guiding the group, and keeping the meeting on track. Ultimately, the role of a facilitator is to run the meeting. There also are guidelines for a successful meeting, but not all meetings will follow those guidelines.

Finally, facilitators may face a host of challenges requiring solutions to some of these problems. No matter what the problem, it is always important to support the group members and do whatever is possible to help the group have an effective meeting and find a desired outcome.

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**Post Test**



Please proceed to the next slide to begin the post test.

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You have completed the lesson on Facilitation Skills. Please proceed to the next slide to begin the post test.

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**Post Test**

**Facilitators have many roles. These include:**

- ☐ A) Be prepared, Guide the group, Treat people fairly, Remain neutral.
- ☐ B) Guide the group, State your opinion first, Allow one person to dominate the discussion.
- ☐ C) Set an agenda, Cut the meeting short so you can attend another program, Vote on all decisions.
- ☐ D) Guide the group, Never clarify, Encourage side conversations.

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- ☒ A) Be prepared, Guide the group, Treat people fairly, Remain neutral.
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- ☐ D) Guide the group, Never clarify, Encourage side conversations.

Correct - Click anywhere to continue

Incorrect - Click anywhere to continue

Your answer:

You did not answer this question completely

Submit

Clear

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**Which of the following are strategies for dealing with difficult situations during a meeting? Select all that apply.**

- ☐ A) Set ground rules.
- ☐ B) A friendly reminder of rules such as "one person speaks at a time".
- ☐ C) Refocus the discussion to keep participants on track.
- ☐ D) During discussion, point out that one group member is talking too much.

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**Which of the following are strategies for dealing with difficult situations during a meeting? Select all that apply.**

☒ A) Set ground rules.

☒ B) A friendly reminder of rules such as "one person speaks at a time".

☒ C) Refocus the discussion to keep participants on track.

☐ D) During discussion, point out that one group member is talking too much.

Correct - Click anywhere to continue

Incorrect - Click anywhere to continue

Your answer:

You did not answer this question completely

Submit

Clear

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