

FACILITATION STATION

[2 - 4 HOURS]

OVERVIEW

As organizers and people working in groups, facilitation is a skill all of us can and should learn. We desperately need more strong facilitators. This is not some secret set of skills reserved for consultants, experts, or extroverts. There are many tools out there to help support good facilitation but the most important part is practice. You can't study or read your way into being a strong facilitator.

GOALS

- To clarify what facilitation is (and what it isn't)
- To inventory skills and tools needed and available in your group
- To practice flexing facilitation muscles

TIME NEEDED

2-4 hours depending on the size of your group and amount of time devoted to roleplays

MATERIALS NEEDED

Flip charts, tape, markers, scenarios (handouts cut into strips), printer paper or construction paper, and writing tools for all participants

READINGS/RESOURCES

- *SOUL Curriculum Training for Trainers*
- *Critical Resistance Facilitators Manual*
- Preparing the Space: Facilitation Tips and Tricks (p. 5 of this workbook)
- *Emergent Strategy* by adrienne maree brown
- *Educating for A Change* by Rick Arnold and Bev Burke

FRAMING

We discussed the role of meetings and decision-making in the Common Needs of Democratic Groups session (p. 57). A lot of what comes up around meetings and decision-making is the role of facilitation. You could open this session with a refresher from that conversation, bringing back some key highlights.

Facilitation is a craft. It takes practice. You do not need to be extroverted to be a facilitator. It's not something you are born with, but something you practice and refine over time.

SEEING OURSELVES

1. Ask everyone in the group to **draw a picture of themselves in their power as a facilitator**. Stick figures are fine!
Ask: *What tools are you equipped with? What muscles have you built? What is in your facilitator's fanny pack?*

2. Break into small groups and share drawings then answer the question: **What is the baseline of facilitation necessary to ensure a successful meeting?**
3. Put up your facilitator drawings and do a gallery walk (silent review of people's drawings) for five minutes.

Big group discussion:

Harvest responses to the baseline question above. The goal is not to make an overwhelming laundry list, but to hone in on more of a top five.

Consider:

- **Be prepared:** make a good and thoughtful agenda, review old notes and action items, and give information to people ahead of time.
- **Start the meeting with grounding agreements and time frames** for the meeting so people know what to expect (even if it is just a 30-second review of existing agreements).
- **Keep stack well:** call on people in a fair and timely manner. Don't allow any one or two people to take up all the space. Find fair and consistent ways to deal with interrupting.
- **Understand and embody the role of humor in facilitation.** Make fun of yourself a little bit or use yourself as an example around mistakes or imperfect behavior.
- **Push toward a culture of proposals** vs. endless discussions in meetings.

Ask the group: **Where do we often go astray as groups (or in this group)?**

Consider (emphasize the struggles that are relevant to your group):

- **We rely too much on one person because they are a good facilitator.** *How can you solve this problem?* You could have potential facilitators shadow the existing main facilitator in your group, or do a skillshare to transfer tips and how the role works, or double up on facilitation and allow people to make mistakes and learn "on the job." The facilitator is a role of power in any group and that power should be shared.
- **We struggle to manage the expectation that only the facilitator is responsible** for how well or badly the meeting goes. In actuality, all parties are responsible for the success of the meeting, not just the facilitator.
- **We can be heavily swayed by social dynamics and are hesitant to tug the reins** (to ask people to wrap it up or come back to the topic at hand), so things don't get done in meetings. One way to solve this is to give groups a heads up and get consent to tighten up the facilitation. You can say something like, "Hey y'all, we have 30 minutes left and some of us really have to end on time. Three more big agenda items remain, so I am going to tighten up my facilitation and ask everyone to tighten up their comments too, okay?"
- **We aren't always mindful of different learning styles, languages, or literacy.** People read at different levels (overall and in English) and most of us who read at a quite high level forget this. So, write up the agenda on big paper, have ways to get information from people and hear from the whole room other than discussion. Include physical movement and drawings or other visuals.
- **Things can get difficult when the group or facilitator needs a break and they/we don't call for one.** If you need a minute, or things are heated, take a break so you can collect yourself.
- **Meetings sometimes fall apart because people block votes or offer criticism without making any suggestions.** This is unprincipled behavior. Just say no to people that block and offer no suggestions or solutions!

FACILITATION SPECTOGRAM

Use the **Spectrogram Activity** set up (p. 133) to learn more about folks' beliefs and experience with facilitation. Recall that you have options as you move through this activity; after each statement you read, you can ask follow-up questions and take a couple comments each time, or not. Tailor the questions to the specific needs of your group: *What do you need more information about? What is contentious that could benefit from more exploration?*

- **Facilitating meetings freaks me out.** (*Where is there fear? From where do you pull confidence?*)
- **You have to be a good public speaker to be a good facilitator.** (*Examples of other skills that work?*)
- **Facilitators are the people primarily responsible for a meeting being effective.** (*Who else?*)
- **It's necessary for facilitators to cut people off.** (*When does it work well? When is it needed?*)

FACILITATION MAD-LIB

The goal of this activity is to practice giving and receiving feedback. This is important for healthy relationships, strong meeting culture, and growing our facilitation muscle. We often struggle with giving and receiving feedback in direct and constructive ways for fear of "hurting" each other or being called out. But not being able to be direct with each other also hurts our relationships.

Directions: Have folks break out into pairs or small groups (by counting off, not by choice). Give people five minutes to reflect on the following prompts and then share the following reflections:

All parties offer personal reflection:

- The places I feel solid in my facilitation skills are _____ .
- I feel like my growing edges are _____ .

All parties offer feedback to the other:

- I experience you as strong (or have seen growth around) when you _____ .
- I feel like some ways you could grow are _____ .

All parties thank each other for the feedback and then work on answering the final question together.

Two ways we could support each other are _____ and _____ .

Debrief:

- *What was uncomfortable?*
- *What did you notice about how you **felt** when giving and receiving?*
- *How will you take this as a gift even if it was challenging?*

The support lists could also be put on the wall (and written in the notes!) and folks could look for patterns.

SCENARIOS

Practice, practice! Have people pick different scenarios from the list on pages 112-113 and then roleplay them out with the group. The goals are to have everyone practice common challenges in facilitation and to have non-facilitators reflect on their responsibilities in making a meeting, event, or workshop successful.

As the facilitator, you should have each scenario typed or written onto a slip of paper (or photocopy the scenarios and cut them into strips). If it is a big group, you can break people out into smaller groups or even triads. This can be a timed exercise; 5 or 8 minutes per scenario would work well.

The person doing the roleplay should read, take a minute to collect themselves, and then proceed. Some scenarios everyone will have to be in on, and in others, the facilitator will have to assign roles as needed before you start. But don't spend too much time "prepping."

After the scenario, the group can discuss what was successful or unsuccessful. Another option is to have someone else in the group give it a try.

POWER DYNAMICS IN GROUPS

Conditions of oppression and domination are so real and woven into the fabric of our lives that throwing up our hands or not working to reshape those dynamics means Power Over wins.

Ultimately, no curriculum can offer a cookie-cutter method for addressing power dynamics in groups. While sometimes dynamics show up in ways that are pretty obvious and clear-cut (like when white entitlement shows up in the form of interrupting, talking over people, or itching to be the first to speak on everything), other times the dynamics at play are much muddier, murkier, and dynamic. Context, relationships, experience, identities, and conditions inform our diagnosis of health in our groups, and like our physical health, there are patterns *and* things are different every day.

In addition, we know that some of our political spaces can get pretty twisty around power. Some have adopted the toxicity of academia, so we revolt against white supremacy or classist institutions, and then those with oppressed (or many oppressed) identities are given free reign to take over meetings or enact bad habits. Sometimes, people are afraid to cut folks off or hold everyone to shared standards based on perceived need or identity. There's also a reflex in some spaces to try to bypass oppressive dynamics by working with people "like me." But homogenizing your group will not eliminate the need to address power because people are not one-dimensional. This is not to say don't work with your folks, but to acknowledge that **wherever we work in groups, we've all got our work cut out for us.**

To navigate power dynamics effectively, we must first acknowledge that they are always gonna be there. Navigating power will **always** be a thing. We will **always** be strengthening our collective will and skills to reshape power and create spaces of liberation. Second, we must build a shared toolbox and culture of norms and agreements and stick to it, rather than sidelining folks or exempting individual people from responsibility. We must nurture courage and humility in naming and addressing power dynamics.

CUTTING AN AGENDA:

Because of rain, everyone arrived late to the meeting. Your meeting is about getting three new playgrounds built in your county. Your group meets every other month, and it is clear the group needs to cut the agenda down by at least one hour. *What do you do?*

POWER DYNAMICS:

Facilitator: Engage a member in the group without allowing them to bulldoze the process and overturn decisions already made.

Participant: You are a person with power in the group (because of age, experience, race, gender) pushing the group to overturn a decision they weren't present for at the last meeting.

NO ONE DID ANYTHING THEY COMMITTED TO:

Facilitator: You are asking working groups or committees to report back on their progress and no one has done anything. This is an ongoing challenge in the group: lots of ideas and enthusiasm, but little follow through. You have to decide what to do.

Participants: You have a variety of individual and collective excuses for why you have not done what you committed to doing, for example, "Why didn't you remind us?"

NEW PERSON WITH A LOT OF OPINIONS:

Facilitator: Hold a warm tone for new members and reset expectations on meeting culture. Hold the need for this person to get brought up to speed but not take over the whole meeting or weigh in hard on things they don't know anything about.

New Person / Participant: You are a new member of the group coming in with a lot of enthusiasm and a lot of critique, taking up a lot of space. Perhaps you haven't been oriented or brought up to speed.

CUTTING PEOPLE OFF:

Facilitator: You have to keep the meeting going in a respectful way.

Participant: You are running your mouth non-stop, not only about random stuff but about things that are very important to you. When the facilitator tries to intervene, you keep on going. You are a seasoned activist/organizer with a lot of relationships in the room and strong commitment to the group.

MEDIATING CONFLICT / DIFFUSING A TENSE SITUATION:

Facilitator: You are facilitating a meeting about "Fighting for Self-Expression." You need to mediate the inevitable conflict that comes up between people in the room.

Participants (2): You are in a fight. You know each other well from this group and community. There seems to be some history about the fight. The meeting you are at is about "Fighting for Self-Expression." The fight is about picking or not picking your nose in public.

BEING DISRUPTIVE:

Facilitator: You are responsible for diffusing a situation with someone in the group who is being disruptive, and resetting the tone in the group.

Participant: You seem to have come to the meeting today with a bee in your bonnet, and because the group never did a check-in, you never got to share with the group that your car broke down (for good) and your mama's sick. So you are doing everything in your power to get some attention and are accidentally hijacking the meeting.

HARD FEEDBACK:

Facilitator: You need to give Sophia some hard feedback. She has been making some disrespectful side comments, rolling her eyes, and not following through on tasks she signed up for. Use your discretion: either let her know how this is impacting you and the group during the meeting, or pull her aside when you are done.

DRAWING PEOPLE OUT & MAKING A DECISION:

Facilitator: You need to decide if the group is going to spend its budget on the Día de los Muertos event.

Everyone else: You are not interested in participating; you are bored, distracted, cranky, quiet, shy, etc.

LOOKING FOR CLARITY:

Facilitator: You need to make sure that everyone fully understands the report that you just gave about _____ (topic) _____ and determine if the group wants to continue with participating on the leadership council of the local _____ (coalition) _____ .

RECAPPING:

Facilitator: You are at the end of a hearty meeting. Practice recapping: scan and name decisions, flags, or outstanding things that aren't resolved, and push for deadlines and people. Put a name by each task.

THOUGHTS V. FEELINGS:

Facilitator: Your group is discussing a proposal. Push people to say what they think or suggest and why, versus just sharing feelings. The goal is making a decision at the end of the meeting.

Participants: One person only has criticisms and no suggestions; two other people are just saying their feelings in regard to a proposal on the table.

NO CLEAR DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURE:

Facilitator: You have decisions to make but no clear decision-making structure established. What do you do, and why?