FACILITATION TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

Developed by: Tamarack Institute
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Appendix 1: Additional Resources: Facilitation Tools and Techniques

Successful workshop facilitation includes a strong knowledge of the content, personalization of the materials and practice. Tamarack’s approach to workshops is to use them as an opportunity to form a learning community. The key elements of an effective learning community enable the participants to achieve the following outcomes:

- **Affirm what you know** - Each of us is a veteran of thinking and working in new and often innovative ways. You know a great deal already – much of what we know has been mined from your experience – and are doing many things well. We want to affirm and celebrate what you know, what you have learned through your work. We want you to wake up every day acknowledging that together we have already got much of it right.

- **Build a common language** - Comprehensive community building work lacks a simple language that describes what we are trying to do and how. How many of us cannot explain our approach to family, never mind to our colleagues, peers and naysayers (and, on many days, even ourselves)? How do we help people understand the nature of the complex problems we are seeking to address? How do we precisely communicate the challenges and issues and how best to reorganize our traditional responses to them? We want to begin to build a common language for our work that makes these discussions normal and part of the mainstream.

- **Highlight emerging knowledge, skills and resources** - Like you, we don’t believe in “cookie cutter” solutions to complex, uniquely local challenges. We do believe that we are collectively building a body of knowledge, skills and resources that can make all of our day to day work more effective and efficient. We have an opportunity to together review what we know so far about doing this work, collectively reflect upon emerging knowledge, skills and resources, and support a broader process of improvement.

- **Build a supportive community** - One of the great metaphors that reflects the power of working together is that of geese flying in formation. While it is not entirely clear whether a goose can get to their destination on their own, we know the chances of getting there are much better if they fly as a community. Flying in formation, geese enjoy exponentially more power as one cut wind resistance for the other. When one goose gets tired it drops back and another takes its place in the lead. Our work can be lonely, but we think it can be easier and a lot more fun if we make this journey in good company.

- **Regenerate a sense of Energy, Mission and Purpose** - Coming together can make learning easier and provide some much-needed emotional support. It also can reinforce our collective sense of mission by refueling our individual sense of mission and purpose. We collectively are involved in what Jane Jacobs – the late, great commentator on community and urban affairs – called ‘a grand effort at self-correction’ of our communities and society. We need to feed our higher sense of purpose to continue this self-correction, particularly given that it often seems like we are swimming upstream while doing it.
Facilitation Tips and Techniques:
Source: OMFRA http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/rural/facts/95-073.htm

A Facilitator's Role

The word "facilitate" comes from the French word "facile", which means "easy". As a group facilitator, you help a group to discuss an issue, make a decision or solve a problem. You keep the group moving, and always towards its (not your) stated goals. By listening, observing and using your intuition, you are also very aware of individual needs and desires. While the group focuses on the task, you focus not only on the process but also the people.

It doesn’t matter what sort of discussion is needed. It could be a brainstorming session to help a group come up with fund-raising ideas, or create a project plan. With the proper facilitation skills and knowledge, you can help any group achieve its goals efficiently and enjoyably.

Knowledge and Skills of a Good Facilitator

An effective facilitator:
- listens and observes
- uses visual aids effectively (overheads, flipchart, etc.)
- records ideas legibly
- asks probing questions
- thinks quickly
- acknowledges and responds to emotions
- paraphrases
- summarizes
- resolves conflict
- uses humour
- knows a variety of techniques for group discussions, including problem-solving and decision-making
- designs or chooses appropriate group discussion techniques
- understands people and groups, and
- energizes the group.
Values and Attitudes of a Good Facilitator

An effective facilitator must also hold certain values and attitudes. To be most productive, the group must share these same values. Demonstrate the following values and attitudes yourself, and you will help foster them in the group you work with:

- **Respect and Empathy:** All ideas are important. No idea or individual is more important than another.
- **Cooperation:** Your group members must work together to reach the group's goals. As a facilitator you cannot force individuals to work together but you can create an environment for it to happen.
- **Honesty:** You and the group need to be honest and open about your feelings, values, and priorities.
- **Responsibility:** The group must assume responsibility for the solutions and their implications. The facilitator assumes responsibility for his or her actions, which ultimately affect the content, participation, and process of the session.
- **Flexibility:** As you manage the discussion, you will be sensitive to the needs of individuals and adjust the process and schedule as required.

Planning for The Process

You have just been asked to facilitate a group discussion. To prepare, you need to talk first with 2 or 3 key individuals from the group. They should represent the group and its wishes. You need to learn about the culture of the group, including its successes and failures, to develop an appropriate facilitation process, one that allows you to think about the task, while being sensitive to everyone’s needs and desires. To do this, you will need answers to the following questions:

- What are the objectives of this meeting?
- What does the group want the product to be?
- How much time do we have?

These questions are not always easy; often you will have to probe for the answers. Once you have them and an understanding of the group's personality, you are ready to design an appropriate process. Many facilitators rely on several specific decision-making and problem-solving techniques to design most of the processes they use.
Decision-Making and Problem-Solving Techniques

There are many proven techniques. Your challenge is to select those which will suit the group size, personality, and objectives. Be flexible. Each technique can be individually tailored to meet the needs of your group. Some can be used spontaneously, while others may require some planning, consultation, and adaptation for the group. In some situations, you could combine techniques.

Experiment! Develop your own methods, but continue to follow the values and attitudes of an effective facilitator, and use the skills described earlier.

Here are seven decision-making and problem-solving techniques for your facilitator’s toolbox.

1. Pair-Share

Pair-Share allows individuals to think about their own ideas and opinions before sharing them. Useful with large groups, it provides every person the opportunity to speak without the intimidation of having to address a large group. It also helps individuals to focus and express their concerns, and allows for more in-depth discussions than would happen among one large group.

Example:

A committee is having its first meeting to organize a Trade Show. The committee members do not know each other well and are unclear about how to accomplish their task. Pair-Share will help individuals get to know others and start the committee on its task.

The Process:

1. Pose the following question(s) to the group:
   - Can you name three businesses that could be invited to the trade show?
   - Can you recommend a possible date for the show?
   - Where could the trade show be held?
2. Ask individuals to privately formulate their responses.
3. Ask everyone to work with a partner to share their answers in turn.

Optional Steps:

1. Together the partners may use their individual responses to create a new one, and report to the group.
2. A large group discussion may follow where individuals should feel more comfortable about speaking out. A decision may be reached on some of the issues.
2. Corners

This technique allows group members to choose which issue to discuss. It maximizes the use of time and people.

Example:

A local Farmers' Market association needs to edit the draft of its marketing brochure before sending it to the print shop. Since the brochure is divided into 4 parts, front cover, pricing list, market produce and crafts, you could facilitate a discussion using "Corners".

The Process:

1. Post the name of each part of the brochure (front cover, pricing list, market produce and crafts) in a designated corner of the room.
2. Ask each participant to select a particular brochure part in response to the focus question: "Which part of the brochure interests you most?"
3. Each participant selects a particular part and moves to its designated corner.
4. At the corner, you will have posted one or more question(s) for the small group to discuss. The question may be a general one like: "How could this section of the brochure be improved?" Or, the question may be more specific like: "What are your suggestions for lettering, layout, content etc.?" The group discusses the questions.
5. After the corner discussion, encourage someone from each group to report the highlights to the others.

3. Consensus

Consensus is a method for making decisions. All group members actively discuss the issue and are encouraged to contribute their own opinions, knowledge and skills. The final decision is one which everyone can live with and support.

Example:

The Economic Development Committee has the task of selecting a project based upon the following three suggestions:

- Create a services and business directory
- Develop a brochure to attract new businesses
- Coordinate a course on home-based businesses
The Process:
1. Explain your role and the purpose of the discussion (the group's task).
2. Explain the values important to a good group discussion.
3. Explain Consensus and the time frame of the discussion.
4. Repeat the explanation of the task (purpose of the discussion – see example).
5. Ask for a recommendation from a group member (e.g., "Who would like to start? What project should the committee take on and why?").
6. Ask for discussion. The discussion should allow for everyone's opinion to be heard (e.g., ask, "What do you think of this suggestion?").
7. Ask for consensus (e.g., "Should we adopt this suggestion?").
8. If everyone is not convinced, then ask for another suggestion and repeat steps 5, 6, and 7 until a decision is reached.

Often a group can discuss and reach consensus on its own. You may be able to withdraw from the discussion as it proceeds. Other groups, not quite as sensitive to individuals, may need you to ensure that each individual is heard, and no one is bullied.

4. ORID

The ORID-focused discussion method has four consecutive stages: Objective, Reflective, Interpretive and Decisional. It is a logical series of questions that probes the natural sequence humans use to think about an issue. As the facilitator of this discussion, your job is to develop a series of probing questions, in sequence, which help group members explore (discuss) their common experience.

Example:

A group has just finished organizing and hosting a 10k road race to raise money for their community's new recreational complex.

The Process:
1. Objective discussion – draws out the facts about the experience or event. As a facilitator you would ask questions like:
   - How many entries did you have?
   - How much money did you raise from sponsorships?
   - How long did it take to organize the race?
   - How many people were needed to marshal the runners?
   - What did you observe?

2. Reflective discussion – enables the group to discuss how they felt about the event.
   - How do you think the race went?
   - What was the most challenging part for you in organizing this event?
What was the highlight for you?
How did you feel when the last runner crossed the finish line?

3. Interpretive discussion – enables the group to consider the meaning and value of the event, its significance and usefulness to the group?
   - What did you achieve by organizing this race?
   - What would you say about this event to someone who was not here?
   - Why did you volunteer to do this in the first place?
   - If you organize this race next year, what will you change? Keep the same?

4. Decisional discussion – enables the group to make a decision or respond to the experience.
   - What were the objectives for holding this race? Did you achieve them?
   - Should you hold a 10k race again next year?
   - Who should be involved in planning next year's race?
   - When should the entry deadline be next year?

Useful Tips for ORID:

Open-ended questions that require specific examples and illustrations work best. The discussion is informal and should flow naturally from one stage to the next. You may need to be patient and wait for responses. Silence is OK. It lets people think. You should not force anyone to speak, but gently ask those that have not contributed what they have to share.

The group does not need to know the theory behind this technique for it to be effective. To help the group remember and consider key points, you may wish to record some of the discussion on a flipchart.
5. Brainstorming Workshop

We all brainstorm or toss out ideas from time to time, but they tend to get lost if they are not adequately heard or recorded.

Example:

A few key leaders in the agri-food industry have called a meeting to identify the critical issues affecting their industry. They hope that once the issues have been identified, people will work together to address them.

The Process:

1. Explain to the group that the purpose of the session is to determine the critical issues facing the agri-food industry today.
2. Explain the process and time frame.
3. Present the first focus question: "From your perspective what are the most critical issues facing the agri-food industry in Ontario?" (Some people find it helpful to hear and see the question. Read the question to the group and write the question in large print on a flipchart or at the front of the room).
4. Ask individuals to write each of their answers on "sticky notes" or index cards. Give them approximately five minutes to think and write as individuals. There is no need for discussion yet.
5. Ask each person in turn for their best/favourite/most unique answer. Post each answer on the flipchart.
6. Ask for additional input from each person. Post all answers on the flipchart or wall. Your wall/flip-chart might then look something like this:
   - no cooperation within food chain
   - GATT
   - poor consumer education
   - decline farm numbers
   - trade barriers (provincial and inter-provincial)
   - being competitive
   - no unified voice
   - food safety
   - change in rural community

By collecting one answer from one person at a time, you reduce overlap and ensure everybody participates.
7. Ask your group to read over the posted answers. Ask them to look for similarities.
8. Cluster the similarities under symbols:
9. Ask the group to look at the answers under each symbol and give each cluster a name. Some facilitators find it helpful to write these names on a clean piece of flipchart paper like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>##</th>
<th>**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- no cooperation</td>
<td>- decline in farm numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- GATT</td>
<td>- being competitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- poor consumer education</td>
<td>- fewer local agri-business dealers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- trade barriers</td>
<td>- food safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- no unified voice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Issues facing the Agri-food Industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>##</th>
<th>**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need for a united industry</td>
<td>Trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in rural community's economic base</td>
<td>Providing a safe, quality food product</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now your group has identified and recorded topics and ideas for discussion.

6. Nominal Group Technique (NGT)

This method is useful for a group that needs to rank ideas or issues. It may not yield a true consensus, but it ensures that individual opinions are given equal weight. It limits conversation, so people are unlikely to be swayed by others' opinion.

If there are not a lot of items, the group may use consensus, as the Economic Development Committee did. However, if there are several items, then the Nominal Group Technique may be just what your group needs.

Example:

Using ORID, your group identified four key issues facing the agri-food industry. Now your group needs to rank them.
The Process:
1. On a clean flipchart page list all the items.

2. Ask each participant to work individually to rate each item listed, giving the least important item a "1". A specific question is needed here. You might pose one of the following questions:
   - "Rate the following critical issues in order of importance to you."
   - "Rate the following project ideas in order of importance to you."
   The rating system depends on the number of items. For example, if there are four items, the most preferred item would get a score of four and the least preferred a score of one.

3. Ask for each participant's ratings, record them on a chart, then total the rating scores with the help of the group.

4. Your chart should look something like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>##</th>
<th>**</th>
<th>@@</th>
<th>&amp;&amp;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>{Person 1}</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>{Person 2}</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>{Person 3}</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>{Person 4}</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based upon the results, the most preferred issue is ##, followed by @@, ** then &&.

7. The Parking Lot

This technique captures ideas that are important but not immediately relevant to the issue currently being discussing. By "parking" these ideas, you do not lose them, and the group can revisit them later. This technique helps to keep the group focused while ensuring important thoughts are not lost.

Example:

The group that organized the 10k road race is having an ORID discussion to evaluate their event when someone mentions that they forgot to thank the grocer who donated the oranges.
The Process:

1. When an idea comes up at an inopportune time in a given process, highlight it. Tell the individual that s/he has mentioned a good point and ask permission to "park" it, with the promise to return to it later.

2. Record the idea on a piece of flipchart paper marked "Parking Lot". Make sure everyone can see the "Parking Lot".

3. At the end of your process or at a suitable break, bring the idea back to the attention of the group. Ask the idea's author to suggest how it should be addressed. You could say something like, "John has mentioned that you forgot to thank the grocer. Should she be thanked? Who will do it? How?"

To Conclude Your Facilitation Process

If you were spontaneously asked to facilitate a discussion, then ideally you immediately return to your original role as a group member once the group achieves its goal. Before doing so however, summarize the achievements of the group.

If instead your facilitation process was a planned one, then your conclusion should be a bit more detailed. Your facilitation process will end when time expires and/or the group achieves its goals. Ideally, the group's goal(s) will have been achieved within the designated time frame, but this is not always the case. Regardless, your remaining tasks are to:

1. Summarize the achievements of the group. With the help of group members, discuss the highlights, challenges, and successes of the process.
2. Ask the group what needs to be done next. Try to get an agreement on who, when, where and how.
3. Thank the group for the opportunity to work with them and congratulate them on their hard work and achievements.

Summary

Facilitating is a challenging yet rewarding experience. It challenges us in the sense that it involves a complex mixture of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and intuition. The knowledge can be developed by reading material such as this. The skills can be developed by doing. The attitudes will be developed once you believe in what you are doing. And the intuition will grow with each facilitation experience.

Group work is fascinating because groups are made up of people. All people are different from each other, and each responds differently to life. Therefore, each group discussion will be different than every other. Your job as a facilitator is to appreciate and understand these differences to help individuals express themselves.