
Tips for chairs and facilitators

1. Focus your attention on the facilitation of the meeting rather than your own feelings and ideas. The chair is not the place to air your own opinions and grudges.

- Before the meeting think through your approaches to situations that are likely to come up and that you might find difficult or distracting.
- Before the meeting talk your fears and strategies through to clear your head and to clarify the issues.
- If you have strong views on an agenda item try to organise (before the meeting begins) that someone, who agrees with you, puts your view to the meeting.
- If you feel you really must speak on an agenda item, pass responsibility for facilitation to someone else while you make your point and while the group discusses it.

The idea is to make the facilitator role as neutral as possible.

2. Be observant. Keep watch over the way the meeting is running and notice where you can make it run better.

- Notice when consensus has been reached and people have begun to repeat themselves. Summarise the consensus you think has been reached and ask the group if they agree with you.
- Notice if two or more issues are getting muddled together when they could be discussed more efficiently separately.
- Notice if several issues are being discussed together when one of them really needs to be decided first.
- Notice individuals that aren't speaking. Make sure that everyone knows that their contributions are valuable.
- Notice confusion. If you feel or see confusion, or that the discussion indicates to you that people have interpreted the questions differently, summarise your understanding and check with others that everyone agrees.
- Provide a summary of the points of view that have been expressed so far if that could help.

It is part of your role to make sure that everyone at the meeting has an opportunity and encouragement to participate. Keep track of the big picture.

3. Always keep in mind the fact that the smooth running of the meeting is in everyone's best interests. Where necessary, remind people who have lost sight of this for the moment.

- If the group has agreed on procedures it wants to follow it is the facilitator's role to remind people about them if they forget.
- The same goes for values that the group has agreed to uphold.

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- If people wander from the point or talk at length they may need a gentle reminder to get back on track.
 - Ask people who have agreed to provide information to send a written report to the next meeting if they cannot get there in person.
 - Remember that relationships are the basis of our CAN work, so consider setting aside time for members to get to know each other one-on-one before or after meetings.

If we have meetings that are lengthy, boring and ineffective, where people feel afraid to speak, we won't achieve much and we will lose people.

4. Don't take sides. Be as neutral as you can.

- The meeting will run better if everyone in the group knows that you will listen to their point of view and allow them to be heard by others.

5. Reaching agreement

- Your neutrality is especially important where conflict arises
- Do not contribute to feeling of 'us and them'.
- When all viewpoints have been presented, draw out whatever common ground is present and encourage the group to maximise it a co-operatively as possible.]
- If the group has come to a clear consensus about an issue with the exception of one or two people, make sure that those people have a chance to express why they disagree and what they propose instead.

Your job, as a facilitator, is not to keep everyone happy but to assist in reaching a workable consensus.

6. Ask for help when you need it.

- As a facilitator, you have an important job to do. Ask for a break if you need one, help with setting the agenda, help from someone/s with skills or information you need, someone/s to discuss strategy with, someone/s to give you constructive feedback. This is a great way to build up other leaders.

A final word...

For a facilitator to do a good job, the group needs to agree on what the job involves. Two things are needed:

- 1. Agreement about what procedures the group wants to follow. For example:**
 - Do we work by consensus or do we vote about things?
 - Do people who have spoken once have to wait for everyone else who wants to speak about a particular issue to speak before they get another turn?
 - Is there a time limit on how long you can speak?

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- Do we agree that we should split into small discussion groups to talk about the main item on the agenda in every meeting?
 - Do speakers have to go through the facilitator?
 - Do we take time at the end of every meeting where everyone has a chance to say how they felt the meeting went?... And so on.

2. Agreement about the values that the group wants to uphold in meetings. For example:

- Do we agree that we don't want sexist, racist, or homophobic language and remarks in our meetings, and how do we put that into practice?
- Do we have a 'no blaming' or put-downs rule?

For meetings to work well, we all need to take responsibility both for ourselves, and for the way the meetings run. The facilitator is there to help with the running of the meeting, not to act as a cop and keep people in line... we need to realise that we're all on the same team and work at co-operating.

Source: *The Change Agency: Effective Facilitation*