



Facilitation Tips and Tricks from NASCO Institute 2015 Attendees

What to do about facilitating a conversation on a topic that you're passionate about

- Establish checks and balances on the facilitator
- One strategy is for the facilitator to withhold their opinion until the end
- Taking off the "facilitator hat" (physical motion) to clearly indicate to the group that you're speaking your own opinion
- Add self to stack - set clear boundary between own opinions and role as a facilitator
- Shifting facilitators if a facilitator is impassioned and is invested in the topic
- Facilitator needs to check body language, facial expressions
- As a facilitator, practice very active listening!
- Avoid being in a conversation with one person

Rotating meeting facilitators

- How this works: meeting 1, A = facilitator and B = note-taker; meeting 2, B = facilitator and C = note-taker (throw in a time-keeper too)
- Rotating facilitators helps to mitigate power dynamics, but may impact efficacy of meeting
- Rotating facilitators is a form of leadership development, member confidence, breaking down power dynamics
- People who have time constraints are often great candidates to facilitate the meeting - will keep the meeting on track
- Develop a chart identifying who will facilitate for the year

Meeting roles

- Make it fun - assign everyone a role, including things like coffee maker, snack provider, etc.
- Appoint a time-keeper to keep everyone (including the facilitator) on track
- Establish a back-up facilitator in advance in case the main facilitator becomes activated/sick/unavailable
- Volunteer/rotating facilitators leads to varying styles of facilitation - facilitator needs to indicate to group how they plan to facilitate the meeting (strictly or loosely, silly or serious)
- Appoint a "Vibes watcher" who can keep a list of who is interrupting and analyze patterns of who is speaking, who may be violating others' space/voices; the vibes watcher should speak out about any awkward or uncomfortable moments; looks out for body language, nonverbal communication
- Consider allowing members to engage in Text message correspondence with vibes watcher during the meeting
- Choose an object or sign for the vibes watcher to hold up in the air to indicate that a community norm has been violated (e.g. not using gender neutral language)
- "Action items" - someone records a to do list throughout the meeting

Managing tense moments

- Take a break! Can either ask folks to stay in the room or allow movement around the house/building/outdoors
- check-ins and check-outs - hold a check-in or “temperature check” at any time to elicit feelings; During check-outs, address things that were uncomfortable in the meeting; share feelings about meeting; observe dialogue patterns
- Shake it out for 1 minute - talk to person next to you
- When things are uncomfortable, name the feeling - e.g. “this is uncomfortable, but really important to talk about”
- Review ground rules, community norms
- Take 60 seconds out of the meeting for mindfulness; sit and breathe and reflect; silence and stillness

Meeting components

- “house awarenesses” section at end of the meeting - members can share any announcements about the house or their lives
- “house appreciations” section- everyone says something that they appreciate about another person in the room
- anonymous comments box available in the house; facilitator reads the comments at the beginning of the meeting; this strategy does present a risk of passive aggressiveness or inappropriate comments
- Educate all members on hand signals (direct response, point of process) and robert’s rules, if you plan to use them; review key points at the beginning of each meeting
- Make sure everyone knows how they can participate equitably and effectively
- liberatingstructures.com - creative facilitation techniques
- Ask participants to all take 30 seconds and write something down
- Review definitions of key terms in the discussion, bring relevant policies and information to participants’ attention
- Avoid creating a Hierarchy of who is comfortable with various hand signals, facilitation strategies
- Setting expectations is key; work together to define expectations and rules for meeting, hand signals, agenda
- Tension comes when expectations are unclear or when people arrive late and miss the overview at the beginning of the meeting; timeliness is key