



MEETING FACILITATOR'S ROLE

The job of a "Facilitator" is more of the "conductor" than a participant during the meeting. You direct the flow and energy during the meeting. You observe participants' body language, listening carefully to what they say, drawing out those members who are not speaking, and gently moving the meeting along when a member monopolizes a conversation.

Running a successful meeting will help your group operate efficiently, and provide a worthy experience for all members. As facilitator, you are the key to ensuring that success. Here are some tips:

BEFORE THE MEETING

- Define the purpose of the meeting.
- Develop an agenda in cooperation with key participants.
- Distribute the agenda and circulate background material, lengthy documents or articles prior to the meeting so members will be prepared, feel involved and up-to-date. Indicate next to each item whether it is for information, for discussion or for decision.
- Request that members who cannot attend a meeting inform you in advance and provide you with information about the status of the tasks that have been assigned. This information will enable you to report to the committee on the absent member's accomplishments.
- Choose an appropriate meeting time. Set a time limit and adhere to it, if possible. Remember, members have other commitments. They will be more likely to attend meetings if you make them productive, predictable and as short as possible.
- Arrange in advance for audio-visual equipment, flip charts, markers and other supplies
- If possible, arrange the room so that members face each other in a circle or semi-circle. For large groups, try U-shaped rows.
- Choose a location suitable to your group's size. Small rooms with too many people get stuffy and create tension. A larger room is more comfortable and encourages individual expression.
- Arrive early to set-up
- Provide name tags if necessary
- Supply refreshments, if appropriate
- Have extra copies of the agenda available.

DURING THE MEETING

- One of your most important roles is to create a warm and friendly atmosphere so members feel free to express themselves.
- Be interested and enthusiastic. Enthusiasm can be contagious. Have a positive attitude!

MEETING FACILITATOR'S ROLE (Continued)

- Assign a member to take the minutes. Minutes are essential in recording meeting developments and are also a reminder of what follow-up actions need to be taken. They are also important for future reference in case a question or problem arises.
- Start on time
- Review and revise the agenda if necessary
- Keep the discussion on track and focused on the topic. The agenda will drive the discussions.
- Feel free to ask for only constructive and non-repetitive comments. Tactfully end discussion when they are getting nowhere or becoming destructive or unproductive.
- Pace the meeting and observe specified time limits for agenda items. This will allow everyone a chance to speak and helps insure that all issues on the agenda are covered. However, be sensitive to the need for discussions. Allow the group to talk things through. If they want more time to discuss an issue, adjust the agenda. Recognize when there is consensus and move on. Be gentle but firm with people who speak too long or get off the subject. A simple "let's move on" or "thanks, now let's hear from someone else" can be very effective.
- Call group members by name. This personalizes the discussion and also assists the recorder in accurately noting who shared their opinions.
- Avoid stating that a person is wrong for any idea or opinion that is expressed. Ask for other comments and ideas on the subject. Remain open-minded and democratic. Allowing the free flow of expression allows for creative thinking.
- Ask open-ended questions to stimulate discussion using "why" and "how." Ex. "*How do you think that will impact the project?*" vs. "*Do you think that will impact the project?*" – which may result with just a "no" or "yes" response.
- Listen carefully to each person. Make sure you understand what the speaker is saying. If you're unsure, try restating it or ask the person to clarify.
- If someone suggests something or volunteers to do something, ask them to identify the next step and ask them to commit to taking it on and reporting back to you by a certain date. Ask what they need from you to fulfill what they've committed to. Make note of their needs and follow up after the meeting or the next day.
- Encourage feedback. Ideas, activities and commitment to the organization improve when members see their impact on the decision making process.
- Be certain that the entire group is involved in the discussion. Encourage everyone to speak by simply asking those who haven't spoken for their opinion on the issue at hand.
- Be aware of people who look confused or lost, and restate questions or ideas. Summarize key points when necessary.
- If problems arise, remain neutral and calm. Call on members for assistance and resolution—it shouldn't all be on your shoulders.
- Use appropriate humor—it can release tension and get people talking.

MEETING FACILITATOR'S ROLE (Continued)

- Leave time for questions. Otherwise, your meetings will seem like one-sided dialogues.
- Recognize achievements, big and small. We all want to feel valued.
- Be a role model by listening, showing interest, appreciation and confidence in members.
- Admit mistakes.

AS THE MEETING WINDS DOWN

- Tie up loose ends. Avoid hasty decisions simply because time has expired.
- Table unresolved issues until the next meeting.
- Make sure each member knows what his/her specific tasks are.
- Set specific dates for completion of tasks assigned.
- Summarize conclusions or decisions at the end of the meeting.
- Plan the next meeting. Set the date, select the place, and develop a preliminary agenda, which should include any unresolved issues from this meeting.
- End the meeting on time and on a positive note. This will also encourage members to follow-up on any actions they've agreed to do.
- Thank everyone for attending, for contributing, and for the things they promised to do before the next meeting. Mean it.
- An important note: After the meeting ends, review the minutes of the meeting. You are responsible to see that all follow-up plans are put into action—another reason why complete and reliable minutes are so vital.

AFTER THE MEETING

- Review and distribute minutes within 3-4 days. Quick action reinforces the importance of the meeting and reduces errors of memory.
- Discuss any problems that came up during the meeting with other officers; come up with ways that improvements can be made.
- Follow-up on delegated duties. See that all members understand and carry out their responsibilities.
- Give recognition and appreciation to excellent and timely progress.
- Begin agenda for the next meeting.