

## Tips for Effective Facilitation

Facilitators play a key role in creating a positive and respectful learning environment for participants, and for making sure that a workshop creates and develops new learning and knowledge for participants through activities and discussions. Here are some tips on effective facilitation:

- Listen to your group, and flow with how they are feeling. Good listening includes checking for non-verbal cues, such as body language, which may suggest more about how participants are feeling than what they are saying.
- Develop ground rules as a group. Ground rules can be an effective way to develop an atmosphere of trust and respect; you can refer to them later in the workshop when needed.
- Equalize participation throughout the group. Encourage a variety of participants to report back from discussions and in large group discussions. (Remind participants of the “Step up, step back!” ground rule). Ensure that you create small group discussion spaces to allow participants to share their perspectives in closer settings.
- Watch for power imbalances between individuals and groups of participants—and point them out (for example, if men are overshadowing women in the discussion.)
- Be flexible with your agenda—there may be moments where an activity goes on for too long or that may not be working for the participants. There are many ways to meet different goals, even if you have to cut an activity. The resulting activities will be stronger, especially if you don’t rush through them to fit the whole agenda into the day.
- Do everything possible to ensure that logistics—such as meals, location, etc. are taken care of well before the workshop, so they don’t disrupt the flow of the agenda. If possible, try and find another person who is not facilitating to handle logistics so that you don’t break the flow of the workshop while setting up lunch, for example.
- Challenge discrimination when it happens, without attacking the person.
- Take breaks when needed, or use energizing activities. If you don’t schedule breaks when they are needed, participants will often “take breaks” themselves, either by disengaging in the conversation, or leaving the room for the restroom. Breaks can also be useful in discussions that are particularly tense or have reached an impasse—they can allow participants to relax a bit, and for you to discuss ways with co-facilitators or with specific participants on ways to address the problem.
- Encourage participants to actively engage in the exercises and discussion by

asking open-ended and clarifying questions, creating space for participants to speak up.

- Give everyone the benefit of the doubt, and avoid making assumptions about what participants will say.
- Summarize key points and highlight points of agreement. You can repeat a statement back to a participant to clarify what s/he has said; connect points of agreement between participants to demonstrate a common thread developed by the group, but only after it has been stated by participants.
- Don't fish for the "right answers;" if there are important points that you want to make through a discussion, be sure to state it, instead of trying to lead participants into giving you the right answer. For example, if you would like to draw out the "teaching points" from a discussion, use discussion questions to develop some of the points—and chart out the different points raised by participants on easel paper. After the discussion is finished, highlight the points raised, and if all the teaching points have not been covered, add them to the list.
- If you are charting responses to a discussion on easel paper, be sure to record all statements made by participants—if you are selective about what you record, it implies that their point is not important.
- Allow participants to "pass" on an activity. Some participants may be uncomfortable with certain modes of activity, or may be emotionally triggered by an activity. Giving participants the option to pass conveys a message of respect for participants to choose their level of involvement.
- Expose yourself as a learner, particularly after you have established rapport with a group. Don't be afraid to say "I don't know," but instead, use it as a moment for the group to figure out what new information they need to discover. If a participant raises a point that is new to you, say so; it communicates to participants that what they have to share is valuable and important.
- Take care of yourself: if you are too exhausted or burned out, your capacity as a facilitator will also be affected. Work with a team, and take time out if you need!
- Be forgiving to yourself when you make mistakes. It's human nature, and only presents you with a learning opportunity for the future.
- Expect frustration! Expect joy! They are both elements of education.
- Remember: Good things happen when good people come together!

Many of the points in this list is adapted with permission from the excellent discussion in *Education for Changing Unions*, by Bev Burke, Jojo Geronimo, D'Arcy Martin, Barb Thomas, and Carol Wall, which explores this topic in much greater depth.

## Checklist for training

### Before your workshop....

- Consider your audience. Who will be participating in the workshop? What are their backgrounds? What is their previous experience with the topic of the workshop? What are the organizational goals of conducting this workshop?
- Consider the space. Is the space where you will be holding the workshop accessible to all participants? Is it wheelchair accessible? Is it large enough? Do you need additional equipment (i.e. TV/VCR, easel stand, chairs, tables, etc.)? Can you rearrange the furniture in the room? Are there restrooms nearby?
- Finalize interpretation and translation arrangements. What languages do your participants speak? What interpretation and translation support will you need to provide?
- Refreshments and meals. What are your participants' dietary needs? Can you serve food and refreshments?
- Outreach. Are your outreach tools relevant and in the language of your participants? Are you conducting outreach to participants to ensure diversity and representation of all people in your community?
- Facilitation. Consider co-facilitating your workshop with someone else. Co-facilitation can be an effective way to share the workload, develop new educators, and to ensure diversity within a facilitation team.
- Prepare the workshop content. Spend a few hours before the workshop to familiarize yourself with the training. How much time do you have? What activities are you going to do? Why are you going to do specific activities? Who will facilitate each section?
- Gather materials and equipment; prepare copies of handouts. We've included a list of "materials needed" and "facilitator prep" for each BRIDGE activity.
- Write down an agenda and session objectives on easel paper for your workshop.
- Circulate a "sign-in sheet" to gather contact information of participants. Be sure to ask permission from participants if you can circulate their contact information.

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### After the workshop:

- De-brief with your co-facilitator on the strengths and improvements needed for the workshop.
- Review the evaluations, and consider changes that you can make to the workshop while your memory is still fresh.
- Review any commitments for follow-up made during the workshop, and be sure to follow-up!
- Send participants a summary of the workshop evaluations, a contact list of participants, and any news on follow-up steps.
- Email us! We'd love to know how you have been able to use BRIDGE in your work.