Meeting Facilitation Tips

Moving the meeting along/running out of time
- Set the ground rule that members must adhere to their allocated time frame.
- Advise group, I see that we have X minutes left for the meeting and we have the following items XXX to discuss. Are we ready to move along?
- If the topic is important, request group’s permission to go over the allocated time.
- If an item is scheduled to take 20 minutes, remind participants at the 10 minute mark that they have 10 minutes to achieve the desired outcome (be that an action item or to simply complete an update) – this will help keep group members on track.
- Are there items which can be handled outside of or prior to, or post the meeting?

A meeting participant is dominating the discussion
- Thank them for their contribution and let them know you would like everybody to have an opportunity to share ideas and opinions, ask questions, etc.
- If the behavior becomes chronic, call a break and speak to the participant in private, asking them to jot down their comments on a piece of paper and discuss them with you at the end of the meeting.

A meeting participant interrupts
- State Please let X finish his/her remarks. Then, you’ll have an opportunity to speak.
- Ask participant(s) to write down ideas that they wish to make after a person is done speaking.

“Tabling” the discussion
- Summarize for the group that you are hearing a need for further research to be done and/or additional time to discuss the matter beyond the current meeting.
- Clarify that ‘tabling’ a matter means to take a pause and continue at an agreed upon time, i.e., next meeting.

The group gets stuck on a particular agenda item
- Refer back to the agenda and to the desired outcome.
- Ask the group if they need additional information. It might be necessary to do additional background work to effectively address the issue in a subsequent meeting.

The meeting is going off track/the meeting isn’t productive
- Be clear about the purpose of the meeting.
- Establish outcomes for each agenda item ahead of time. Be clear is the outcome discussion, feedback, information gathering, decision making.
- Do your agenda items fit into the purpose of the meeting? If not, they should be covered elsewhere.
- You can address items which don’t apply to all members at the end, allowing those members to leave to whom the topic doesn’t apply.

The group is losing focus/not sticking to the agenda
- Refer back to the agenda and to the desired outcome.
- Refer back to the ground rules/norms.

The group keeps repeating the points made
- Refer back to the agenda, underlining the time allocated for the item and the desired outcome.
- Keep track of ideas of a flip chart. Refer back to flip chart if a point is being repeated.
- Confirm your understanding of the idea by paraphrasing and summarizing.

There is no or little group participation – group falls silent
- Let the group be silent for a moment – they may need time to reflect/absorb a previous point.
- Address meeting participation during the setting the ground rules phase – establish the expectation that members participate.
- Break the group into smaller sub-groups to discuss the item at hand (many people are uncomfortable sharing their thoughts in a large group, but less so in a smaller group).

Several people speak at once
- Acknowledge each speaker either verbally or with a nod of the head or eye contact, and then identify and tell the group who will speak in which order.
- Remind everyone that they will be heard.

Multiple conversations occur at same time
- Ask everyone to come together as one and focus on one conversation.

If conflict arises
- Reaffirm norms.
- Focus on the substance of the ideas or opinions – not personal style.
- Encourage participants to keep comments positive and constructive and see all sides.
- Ask questions to learn more and uncover issues and perspectives.

Meeting Roles

Facilitator
Guides the group through the discussion, problem-solving, and decision-making phases of the meeting. May be responsible for pre- and post-meeting logistics.

Scribe
Captures the key points, ideas, and decisions that result from the meeting; distribute minutes or post-meeting notes.

Timer
Keeps track of time allocated and time expended. Alerts the group to the amount of time passed and time remaining for each topic as necessary.