Chapter 2
Phases of the Facilitation Process

The work of facilitation can be divided into three phases: Contracting and Preparation, Working with the Group, and Follow-up Activities.

The first step to planning a facilitation is to contract with the group. Contracting is an agreement that reflects clear expectations about how the facilitator and group will work together. It is a way of agreeing about who is responsible for what and what are the desired outcomes of the activity. A written contract is preferable to a verbal contract. Use Work Sheet 1: Logistics and Arrangements to help with this contracting phase.

One of the biggest mistakes a facilitator can make is to come to a meeting without assessing the needs of the group or preparing design notes for the session. Before facilitating any meeting, be aware of the specific stages involved to ensure proper planning and implementation.

— Ingrid Bens

The Basics of Contracting

Be sure the contract includes the following:\n
• State the scope of the work, including the services you will provide and any measurable outcomes you will achieve.
• Outline how the work will be conducted, by whom, and for how long.
• Be clear about what you will need from the group, including what are the expectations and needed participation.

---

• State what resources are available, including financial as well as capital. Clearly state who will provide what, and who will pay the bills or how the expenses will be covered.

• Create a reasonable timeline with starting and ending dates for your involvement. Be sure to include any deliverables and by who and by when.

Equally as important as contracting is assessing the group and gaining as much information about its past, structure, power, and a whole lot more. Use Work Sheet 2: Assessing the Group for Clearer Understanding to assist in gaining more information and to select the facilitation model to use.

Worksheet 3: Stakeholder Map is a tool that can be used to ensure that all the players are considered and those that need to be included in the process are included.

**Working with the Group – Anatomy of a Facilitation**

The common perception is that a good facilitator spontaneously makes the right things happen. In reality, the best facilitators have done a good deal of planning. The spontaneity comes in deciding, when the unexpected occurs, whether to stick to the plan, or to deviate to meet a group’s needs, or deal with new information, etc. A good plan is the foundation of a successful session. Use Worksheet 4: Meeting Organizer to aide in the planning process.

The pieces of a facilitated process are:

• Opening
• Clarifying Objectives
• Clarifying the Role of the Facilitator
• Overview of Process
• Developing Working Agreements
• The Body
• Recap Outcomes
• Confirmation of Consensus and Next Steps

**Opening**

The opening is the first few words that the facilitator says. They do not have to be profound or witty, but should be planned to set the tone of the meeting and to develop a rapport with the group. A good opening gets the group’s attention, begins to develop the facilitator’s credibility with the group and, very importantly, builds the facilitator’s confidence. Consider the purpose of the meeting and the personality of the group in deciding your opening comments.

**Clarifying Objectives**

Always present a brief statement of the objectives, preferably in written form on an overhead, easel, or flip chart. Post the objectives and refer to them often during the meeting as a process check. For example: “Let’s remind ourselves of our objectives. Are we on track?” “Is what we are discussing relevant and meeting our objectives?”

---

**Clarifying the Role of the Facilitator**

Clarifying your role helps ensure that participants have realistic and appropriate expectations of you. It is important to describe what you are there to do and what you are not there to do. For example, “I am not here as a content expert. My task is to help ensure that you successfully achieve your objectives by working together in a highly effective way.”

In addition to describing your role in general, this is an opportunity to prepare the group for the interventions you might use. For example, “if the discussion wanders away from the agreed upon objectives, I will pull you back on track” or “If someone is talking a great deal and others have not had the opportunity to be heard, I will ask that comments be abbreviated and invite others to participate.” You might add that you will attempt to be sensitive and flexible.

Facilitators often worry about participants’ reaction to their intervening, particularly when facilitating a group of peers or a group in which more senior members of the organization are participating. Stating what participants can expect from you up front will allow you to intervene more confidently.

**Overview of Process**

Present an overview of the steps in the process. This ensures that everyone knows what to expect. They understand not only the destination (objectives) but also how the group will get there (process).

While thorough preparation is absolutely essential, experienced facilitators will tell you that most meetings rarely run exactly as planned. Some discussions will inevitably take longer than planned or it may become evident that discussion items need to be addressed in a different order. Any number of things can result in the need to adjust the design mid-stream. In fact, making adjustments on the fly is an art that all facilitators need to master.

**Developing Working Agreements**

Working agreements are guidelines developed by the group dictating how they must work together to create a positive, productive environment. Working agreements describe positive behaviors that often are not automatically demonstrated in group processes. For example, an agreement might be “We all agree to participate fully,” or “All opinions are valued and must be honored.” Working agreements are the facilitator’s power too. The group empowers the facilitator to lead them accordingly and hold them accountable for their behaviors. Like the objective, working agreements should be posted for easy reference during the process.

**The Body**

The body is “the meat” part of the process in which the group tackles its task. The body includes group discussion, problem solving and decision-making. Most of the meeting time will be spent in the body, and it is here that the facilitator will apply most of the tools and techniques learned.

**Recap Outcomes**

Following the meeting, recap outcomes briefly but with sufficient details to ensure common understanding. Capture commitments to action on a flip chart or an overhead.
Confirmation of Consensus and Next Steps

Be concise but include sufficient detail to ensure common understanding. You have recapped the outcomes and now will check again for consensus. You will already have checked for consensus in the body. The recap occasionally brings misunderstandings of the decision to light; therefore, reconfirming consensus is important. Also confirm next steps — “Where do we go from here?”

Meeting Arrangements

Learning and working will be at their best when everyone is comfortable and relaxed. Participants should feel that the time they have spent at the meeting is worthwhile. Although no one can guarantee that all meetings will be regarded as meaningful, the facilitator can take some steps to make the meeting as effective as possible by carefully arranging for facilities and materials as well as a comfortable social environment.

Physical Setting

Participants in meetings will contribute more and get more out of the meeting if the physical setting is comfortable and the atmosphere is informal, supportive and relaxed. Desirable physical arrangements will vary depending on the size of the group and the purpose for which the meeting has been called. Informal room arrangements are recommended to make everyone feel reasonable comfortable and equal in the group.

If at all possible, check the meeting room in advance. Some rooms just are not suitable. They might make an undesirable impression on the group members or require exceptional arrangements.

Choose a location that is perceived by all participants to be neutral or “safe.” Stereotypes or bad experiences at certain locations may make it uncomfortable for certain members to attend. For example, if there is a strong division between religious groups, asking a town to come together to discuss a seemingly benign topic in one of the town’s churches may result in town members not attending. Likewise, pay attention to other physical and material needs. Use Work Sheet 5: Effective Meeting Planning Sheet as a check list to ensure you have all you need to conduct the meeting.

Follow-up Activities

Giving the Work Back to the Group

Lack of closure is a common problem for many meetings. Items are discussed, but there is no clear path forward or accountability of who will complete the work. One of the facilitator’s key contributions is to ensure that decisions are reached and detailed action steps are in place before moving on to the next topic on the agenda or the meeting is adjourned. Work sheet 6: Action Plan Worksheet for Strategy Development can be used to plan the next steps of the group or process.

---

3 Public Issues Facilitation Workshop Training Manual. Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy, Kansas State University. Manhattan, KS. March 4-6, 2013. Pg 27
Following is a check-list of items to complete to help bring effective closure to a meeting:

- Provide summary statements of what has been decided and record these on a flip chart or electronic board.
- Verify that each action item includes a detailed action plan and is assigned to be completed by a member(s) of the group.
- Address all undiscussed items and help members decide the best course of action for each.
- Decide on a means of follow-up reporting (ie. written reports, verbal reports, etc.)
- Use the previous information to begin to create an agenda for the next meeting.
- Verify who will transcribe and distribute meeting notes.
- Take pictures of all flip-chart notes as a precautionary back-up.
- Post an exit survey to get member views about the session.
- Provide a written evaluation so that group members can provide more detailed comments about the session and offer their feedback on your work.
- Thank the participants for the opportunity to facilitate.

**Evaluations and Soliciting Feedback About Your Work**

As a final step to the process and as a way to improve one’s own performance and skills, it is a good idea to solicit feedback from the group leader or from those with whom you made the contract. This can be either a written process or a verbal one. Following are a few suggested questions to ask:

- What do you think went well?
- Was this what the group was expecting?
- How did my role in the process go from your point of view?
- What did I do well?
- What did I not do so well?
- In what instance could I have done something differently?
- What are the next steps for the group as you see them?

---

Worksheet 1

Logistics and Arrangements

Initial contact person(s)

Group/organization

Brief description of the request/issue

Stakeholders (Participants in the facilitation and those potentially impacted by the process)

Primary planning committee (name, email, phone)

   1.
   2.
   3.
   4.

Steps in the process (including a timetable)

   Step 1.
   Step 2.
   Step 3.
   Step 4.
   Step 5.

Responsibilities

a. Contacting participants?

b. Facility/room arrangements?

c. Recording discussion, summarizing, and follow-up with participants?

d. Media involvement (if any)?

e. Anticipated expenses?

f. Other items or issues?
Worksheet 2

Assessing the Group for Clearer Understanding

Following are a few questions to ask when assessing the group:

1. What is the history of this group?
2. Why is your group/organization looking at this issue now?
3. Are there clear goals or objectives for this activity?
4. What do you personally hope will happen?
5. Who are the people that will be involved?
6. How would you describe the group atmosphere?
7. How does the group handle any conflicts?
8. Have you tried other approaches to address this issue?
9. Why do they need external facilitation support? Is there any opposition to this?
10. Who holds the power?
11. How will you make changes that the participants decide on during this process?
12. What types of report or summaries are you planning to share with participants and others affected by the outcomes?
### Stakeholder Map

**Worksheet 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Power</th>
<th>Connections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To start the project</td>
<td>Who influences them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To maintain the project</td>
<td>Whom they influence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective or values that motivate their attitude</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude about the project or idea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The table aims to map stakeholders based on their power, connections, and objectives or values that motivate their attitude towards a project. Each stakeholder is assessed for their attitude and the project or idea they are involved in. The table also tracks who influences them and whom they influence, along with their objectives or values that motivate their attitude. This mapping helps in understanding the dynamics and dependencies within a project or initiative.
Worksheet 4
Meeting Organizer

Meeting title __________________________________________________________

Date ___________________________ Time Start ________________________

End ___________________________

Meeting location ______________________________________________________

Group contact

Name __________________________ Phone __________________________

Meeting purpose

Desired outcome

Participants

Who needs to attend

Interest represented
Materials/equipment needed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Person responsible for providing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Meeting outcomes

For next meeting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Action required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Follow-up

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What’s next</th>
<th>Person responsible for task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Facilitator’s notes
# Worksheet 5

## Effective Meeting Planning Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting title</th>
<th>______________________________________________________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>_______________  Time _____________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting location</td>
<td>____________________________________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting purpose</td>
<td>____________________________________________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Committee(s) involved**  
**Chair(s) of committee**

**Members**

**Facilitator**  
**Tasks**  
**Specifics**  
Who will do it?  
By when?
Facilities (check the following)

[ ] Central location
[ ] Large room (so small groups can meet at the same time)
[ ] Can walls be used to post newsprint?
[ ] Can temperature and ventilation be controlled?
[ ] Can lighting be controlled?
[ ] Are enough tables and chairs available?
[ ] Can the furniture be moved around freely?

Access

[ ] Keys available to all areas that will be used?
[ ] Restrooms are accessible
[ ] Adequate parking is available
[ ] Can individuals with disabilities attend?

Materials

[ ] Microphone set up and working
[ ] Enough easels/white boards are available
[ ] Markers/pens/pencils
[ ] Newsprint and tape
[ ] Other needed technology (LCD projector, TV monitor, audio speakers etc.)

Publicity/promotion

[ ] Distribute brochures and fliers to public places
[ ] Distribute news release to local newspaper and media
[ ] Media contact with reporters
[ ] Arrange for pictures or media coverage

Registration

[ ] Directions and map sent in advance
[ ] Parking permits available
[ ] Attendance lists available at front door for sign-in
[ ] Name tags for all
[ ] Tent signage for panel speakers

Food/refreshments

[ ]

Transportation (if need)

[ ]

Budget/finances

[ ]

Agendas/programs

[ ] Select and contact speakers and other resource people
[ ] Handouts, questionaires, notebook information
[ ] Paper, pencils, pens etc.

Follow up

[ ] Evaluations
[ ] Thank yous

Other tasks

[ ] Parking
[ ] Exhibits
[ ] Door prizes
[ ] Speaker gifts

Set-up

Clean-up
# Worksheet 6

## Action Plan Worksheet for Strategy Development

### Action plan strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Action Steps</th>
<th>By whom?</th>
<th>By when?</th>
<th>Resources and support</th>
<th>Potential barrier or resistance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What needs to be done?</td>
<td>Who will take the action?</td>
<td>By what date will the action step be done?</td>
<td>Resources available</td>
<td>Resources needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>