

Facilitation Tips

Thank you for your interest in improving the preparedness of your organization by being part of the National Capital Region Shelter-in-Place pilot program. Your role in organizing and facilitating discussions with your fellow employees about important emergency preparedness safety actions has the potential to save lives and reduce injury in a crisis event.

Your Role as a Peer Facilitator

In the case of the Shelter-in-Place discussions, as peer facilitator, you are the person who organizes the group discussions and moves the discussions along to completion.

Some things you can do to help build ownership and commitment during the session include:

- ✓ Create a climate in which participants get to know and feel comfortable with each other.
- ✓ Encourage participants to actively contribute their opinions and ideas.
- ✓ Support participants in developing their own solutions rather than prescribing solutions for them.
- ✓ Make sure that all participants actively contribute, and that the discussion isn't dominated by a few.
- ✓ Keep the discussions on track to achieve the meeting's purpose.
- ✓ Step back as discussion leader when participants begin to "own" the process and start facilitating their own discussions.
- ✓ Ensure that your team has a realistic, well-reasoned implementation plan that they are proud of and excited about.

Tips for Facilitating Effective Discussion

- ✓ Maintain a neutral role — prompt others in the meeting to discuss their ideas and suggestions.
- ✓ Maintain a balanced flow of ideas among the attendees — don't let a few attendees dominate the discussion.
- ✓ Ensure that everyone participates.
- ✓ Keep the discussion focused on the topic at hand.
- ✓ Provide the group with processes that help balance and focus the discussion.
- ✓ Summarize points of agreement and agreed-upon next steps.

Seating Arrangements for Optimal Participation

- ✓ Create a seating arrangement that encourages discussion by arranging the chairs in a semi-circle or by placing the chairs around a central table. Many people are more apt to participate if they are facing the other members of the group.

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Encouraging Participation in Meetings

- ✓ Review the discussion objective(s) at the start of the session to orient participants to the nature of the discussion.
- ✓ Establish a ground rule at the start of the session that everyone participates — that it's important to hear everyone's ideas and opinions.
- ✓ Don't offer opinions yourself; instead, draw out participants' ideas and thoughts.
- ✓ Ask participants who are not contributing for their thoughts or opinions (e.g., "Tom, what do you think about this?").
- ✓ Ask people who have not contributed to play "devil's advocate" for an idea that's been presented.
- ✓ Encourage people to generate new ideas or approaches.
- ✓ Encourage a healthy discussion of ideas.
- ✓ Accept opposing points of view.
- ✓ Assign individuals to summarize key discussion points at the end of the session.

Handling Distracting Behaviors

- ✓ Rambling discussions — Return to the discussion objective(s) and ask for cooperation in achieving them or ask how the person's comments relate to the topic at hand.
- ✓ Off-the-point comments or discussions — Indicate that the person's comment is interesting and that there may be others in the group who would like to discuss it on a break. Then return to the topic at hand.
- ✓ Raising topics that will be covered later — Mention that there will be full opportunity to discuss this topic in another session (indicate when).
- ✓ One or a few dominating the discussion — Keep participants from dominating the discussion by directing questions to others (e.g., "Anne, what do you think about this issue?" or "Bill, what has been your experience?").
- ✓ Latecomers — Don't stop the meeting to "catch them up." If you are referring to handouts, ask latecomers to look on with someone else and give them a copy at a break.
- ✓ Arguments or clashes — Restate the essence of each person's point of view. If appropriate, state that the difference cannot be resolved here and that you need to move on with the agenda. If the atmosphere has become tense, call for a short break.
- ✓ Side conversations — Pause without looking directly at those talking. If the conversation continues, ask if they have a question or issue to share with the group.

Content sources:

American Heart Association/American Stroke Association, "Tips for Facilitating Effective Discussion."

Impact Learning Systems International, "Seven Tips for Leading Group Discussions"