



TIPSHEET:

KEY POINTS FOR FACILITATING COMMUNITY BOARDS OF PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

- **Meeting Facilitators:** Staff and/or board members
- **Meeting Attendees:** Community board/panel members (e.g., community advisory boards, community member panels)

Being a facilitator in environments where people have lived expertise can be challenging, and it is arguably one of the most important tasks when trying to build relationships and have productive conversations with groups of individuals with varying life experiences and perspectives. How the conversation flows, what decisions are made, and how long the discussions last are up to the facilitator. As the facilitator, it is important that you are prepared to handle the various situations that may arise, keep the conversation going, summarize key points, and show attendees they are being heard. Below is a list of items to keep in mind when preparing to facilitate.

- 1) Be **neutral** in all discussions.
- 2) Expect possible distractions and know how to **guide the conversation**.
- 3) Appreciate silence.
- 4) Be organized and prepared.
- 5) **Know your identity** and how it relates and does not relate to the topic.
- 6) Be ready to address challenging topics.

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BE NEUTRAL IN ALL DISCUSSIONS



The position of facilitator holds a lot of power - how you choose to use it directly impacts attendee engagement and group dynamics. When you state your opinions on a topic, it is likely to change the minds of the meeting attendees and how they decide to engage with the rest of the group. It is essential to make sure that everyone feels comfortable stating their honest opinions. Here are some tips to help that happen:

- Become aware of any personal opinions you may hold and leave them out of the conversation.
- Continually remind attendees that **all opinions are welcome**.
- Tell attendees that differing opinions or thoughts are valuable and may lead to advances in finding solutions to problems. Diversity is our strength!
- Don't initially explain your point of view or opinion; have attendees state their own.
- Invite everyone in the group to share their opinions.
- Give reminders that **no one is right or wrong**; they are either on-topic or off-topic.
 - An example might be: "I heard what you are saying and want to write that point down because I think it is relevant to another question we have."

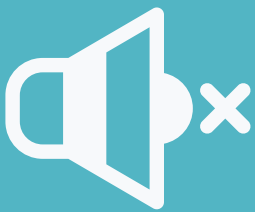
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EXPECT POSSIBLE DISTRACTIONS & KNOW HOW TO GUIDE THE CONVERSATION



As a facilitator, you may find that conversations veer off track or that certain attendees will take up more speaking time than others. It is important to have tools to ensure that everyone stays on track and gives space for differing opinions. Don't be afraid to gently remind attendees of the conversation topic. Let them know their thoughts are valuable, but that you need to return to the initial subject to avoid running out of time. Here are some ways to help guide conversations back to the topic:

- Keep an **"idea board"** where you can place off-topic ideas that attendees bring up. Say: *"Hey Kyle, thank you for sharing that. It's a great idea, but it's a little off-topic. I'm going to write this down, and if we have time, I will come back to it."*
- If you know the point is related to a later topic, it is even better to say: *"Thank you for sharing about [xxxx]. That's actually directly related to a later question and topic we have - I'd like to return to that later this meeting, if that's okay?"*
- **Assign tasks** to certain people (those that are having trouble allowing others to speak, those that repeat their opinions, etc.). This could include asking them to take notes during the meeting or asking them to be the timekeeper.
- At the start of the meeting, **set expectations** by stating that you are responsible for keeping track of timing; ask attendees not to take offense if you must move along.
- **Give warnings** when sections of the meeting are coming to an end. **This is a great time to encourage people that have not stated their opinions to do so.**



APPRECIATE SILENCE

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Discussions do not need to be filled with constant chatter. Many people need time to gather their thoughts before they speak; **give them that opportunity.**

- If you ask a question and no one answers, that is not necessarily a signal for you to rephrase the question or to change topics. **Sit in the silence** for a minute.
 - Although a moment of silence might feel awkward or uncomfortable at first, it gives people time to think about the question and tends to bring out the voices you have yet to hear from.
 - Put questions in the chat. Many people are **visual learners** and need to read questions while they think through their responses.
- Encourage attendees to spend more time thinking about their answers if they would like.
- If everyone answers, feel free to take a few seconds and ask something along the lines of *"What other ideas/opinions/thoughts do you all have?"* and then wait a few more seconds. If there are no more answers, then it is probably a good time to move on.

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BE ORGANIZED & PREPARED

Facilitating conversations is a lot of work and can be unpredictable. It is extremely important that you anticipate how long discussions are going to take. Here are some tips that can help:

- If there are readings that attendees were supposed to be prepared to discuss, make sure you have a **brief overview** and know how long it will take to describe. It is not uncommon that people won't have time to review materials in depth beforehand. It is **your responsibility** to give an overview so everyone understands the material.
- Before the meeting, practice ways to handle different types of attendees (see below).

For those who do not speak:

- Share a friendly reminder to the entire group on participatory conversations: *"All of you are experts in your own personal lived experiences, and the success of our group depends on your unique perspectives being represented in today's conversation."*
- Try various **facilitation techniques**, such as a round-robin (i.e., attendees share their thoughts and then call on someone else to go after them), icebreaker questions, and small group exercises to help strengthen trust among attendees.
- Have **one-on-one meetings** with individuals to ask for feedback on ways to make them feel more comfortable sharing during group meetings.

For those who are overly talkative:

- Remind the group of any ground rules that were put in place beforehand (i.e., sharing airtime).
 - **Acknowledge their viewpoint** and then say a phrase such as: *"We haven't heard from a few other people in our group yet. What's on your minds?"*
- Make sure you get a final decision on necessary topics.
 - Reserve about **5 minutes** for the attendees to get final decisions and action items before going on break or moving on to the next topic.
 - Decide on action items and deadlines:
 - *Who is going to do what? When?*
 - *Who is going to send out notes? When?*
 - *Who is going to reach out to that person?*
 - Keep track of time and plan when to end each section of the meeting.



KNOW YOUR IDENTITY & HOW IT RELATES & DOES NOT RELATE TO THE TOPIC AT HAND

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It is not imperative that you have merging identities or lived experience with the topic that you are facilitating. What is important is that you know where your identity intersects with the topic at hand and where you may be ignorant in certain points of view (attendees explaining their views can be a way for them to relate to each other by helping you understand certain topics).

- Expressing where you may not understand a topic *“is a sacrifice well worth making in the interest of trust-building and facilitator credibility. Far from an admission of weakness, this kind of disclosure suggests the facilitator is comfortable in their own skin – confident in their abilities, not afraid of their limitations, and willing to expose themselves to challenges in the interest of creating the potential for greater group buy-in.”* - [Berkman and Egol \(2020\)](#)
- Don't be afraid to say that you lack understanding. This is a perfect time to reassure attendees that the meeting is about their opinions and expertise.

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BE READY TO ADDRESS CHALLENGING TOPICS



Oftentimes challenging conversations are where the most growth comes from. Don't be afraid of differing opinions! That is diversity, and **diversity is our strength**. It is important to recognize and express that to meeting attendees. In many instances, people will not share their opinion if it differs from the group. It is your job to make attendees feel comfortable sharing those differing opinions. Below is a list of resources and ideas for you to consider in responding to challenging conversations:

- **Move toward the conflict.** Rather than shying away, addressing the issues that arise and the concerns people have is probably the most important thing to do as a facilitator.
 - *“I noticed that there is a difference in opinions here. Let's talk about that.”*
 - **Validate everyone's opinions and feelings.** *“Thank you for sharing your perspective. This is great feedback to know that there is not a one-size-fits-all solution. These topics are complicated and we want to hold space for all perspectives.”*
 - Anticipate potential conflicts by speaking with other facilitators for more guidance and to help you feel prepared when these moments present themselves.



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- Be clear about the issue at hand and don't assume you know what the problem is. Ask people if you understand them correctly.
 - When an issue comes up, express how you view the problem, what you think is the main issue to be resolved, and why you think that.
 - This will provide space for people to explain themselves more and potentially reach a solution.
- Remind attendees that we don't need to come to a consensus on any issues/topics; the most important thing is that **everyone is heard**.
- Have scripts in your own words ready and **practice them**.
 - *"This is really great, because we have a difference of opinion, and it's wonderful that everyone feels comfortable enough to share their true opinion! This is how trust is built."*
 - *"I'm so glad we don't have to come to consensus. There are a number of important opinions and I want to make sure we can capture them all here because they are all valid."*
- Continue to **build rapport** (i.e., icebreakers and other fun activities for relationship-building) within the group when appropriate, especially in meetings leading to a potentially lively or heated discussion.

Helpful Resources

- [How to Lead Tough Conversations | Adar Cohen | TEDxKeene](#) (YouTube video)
- [Facilitator Tips - Challenging Meetings](#) (PDF)
- [How to Facilitate Difficult Conversations](#) (Article)

Disclaimer

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References

Berkamn, T., & Egol, D. (2020, October 27). "Who are you and why do you get to run the meeting?" *Reflections on facilitator identity and the management of complex public disputes*. Consensus Building Institute. <https://www.cbi.org/article/who-are-you-and-why-do-you-get-to-run-the-meeting/>