

**Chesapeake Bay Program**  
**DRAFT General Facilitation Tips for Coordinators, Staffers and Chairs**

**Know Your Role**

A facilitator is in charge of the process and helps group move through this process. The facilitator's role is to:

- Assist the group in having their best thinking, allowing everyone to participate and be understood.
- Remain neutral and not act as a technical expert or offer unsolicited opinions.
- Shape the agenda to help the group meet the meeting objectives, applies facilitation techniques to have the best results, and prepares questions in advance to elicit the desired outcomes.

**Making Effective Meetings**

1. Set meeting objectives. When designing a meeting, think about what it is you hope to accomplish and make sure that your workgroup or GIT is fully aware of the objectives. Does the group need to make a decision/action? Do they need to generate ideas and solutions? Do they need to provide status updates? Is something being communicated? Is training being provided?
2. Design your agenda. The agenda should be designed to effectively meet these objectives. Every agenda should include an opening (welcoming comments, roll call, and administration (such as going over the meeting objects, agenda, ground rules, etc.)) and a closing (includes reviewing action items, parking lot items, and identifying the next meeting date.) Ensure that the schedule allows for the appropriate amount of time to have discussions and clarifying questions. If the schedule seems very tight, you may consider dropping an agenda item.
3. Identify facilitation techniques to effectively meet the meeting objectives. (See Facilitation Techniques document prepared by GDIT.)
4. Know who is coming and prepare them. Having the right participation at the meetings is critical to having the conversations and decisions you need. Send them relevant pre-meeting materials that will prepare them for the meeting.
5. Be on schedule. Ensure the meeting starts and ends on time, which means being respectful of others time. If time runs out, you may need to ask the group if we can move an agenda item to the next meeting.
6. Follow up. Following the meeting, assess what went well and what could be improved upon. Get input from meeting participants. Consider feedback in preparing for the next meeting.

**Building Momentum and Energy**

In setting the agenda, design the meeting to maintain energy and flow. During the meeting, consider the following tips to maintain good energy:

- The facilitator should read the energy of the audience and change the process or techniques if warranted.
- If there is good momentum for a specific agenda topic, the facilitator should consider if going over the allotted time is warranted. If time can be made up later, or if the group gives permission to continue, allow the dialogue to continue further, but be mindful of making up time later in the agenda.
- If energy is low, consider: taking a quick break, applying a different technique, setting a time limit for concentrated discussion and then move to the next item, asking a set of different questions, ask persons to offer a story, example, case study or testimony to illustrate the topic at hand.

- The facilitator should check in with the members to see if the discussion at hand is relevant to meeting the objectives or if there is another way to raise the issue.

### **Utilizing a Parking Lot**

The parking lot is a technique that the facilitator can use to capture topics that are not planned for, but come up during group discussion, that can be followed up at a later time to prevent the agenda from slipping or being hijacked. Here are important things to consider:

- The facilitator may capture these items on a flip chart or white board.
- The parking lot may be included in the ground rules in the opening of the meeting.
- It is important to bring attention or resolution to topics in the parking lot so that it is not seen as a method to keep persons quiet.
- The parking lot should be reviewed at the end of the meeting. If time allows, participants may select an item(s) to discuss with the available time. Otherwise, participants may select the topics for a future meeting.

### **Keeping Meetings Positive and Fun**

The facilitator sets the tone and energy for the meeting. Emulate the attitude you want your participants to bring to the meeting. Show appreciation and respect for all participants, and correct the group dynamic if things get heated. Here are simple design elements of your meeting that can increase the energy of your group:

- Most of the time, participants are sitting. Are there opportunities for people to stand – such as brainstorming around a white board?
- Change the pace of the meeting (i.e., use of Mentimeter)
- Small working groups to have interactive participation
- Build in breaks
- Celebrate accomplishments
- Visually represent the conversation – helps to show progress you made as a team, use post its or Menti, which forces persons to distill their thoughts into simple and short sentences
- Change things up from time to time, for example, run through initial roll call, and then consider an ice breaker to get the group engaged. Or when energy is low, add in an activity to get folks engaged.

### **Engaging Participants and Drawing Persons into the Conversation**

The facilitator can draw the quieter participants into the conversation in various ways. Here are a few examples:

- Ask he or she a more general question, like “what do you think?”, or “what are we forgetting to add?”
- You can also divide into smaller teams for discussion, then have the teams report back in plenary.
- A round robin technique can be applied, where the facilitator goes around the room and asks everyone for their input.
- If you know that a person is quiet going into a meeting, consider getting that person to open up earlier in the agenda, thus making he or she more comfortable to provide input later in the agenda. In the same light, having persons introduce themselves during roll call gives them more confidence to speak later in the agenda.

### **Guiding the Conversation**

Active listening is a key action of the facilitator. This requires that the facilitator listens fully to each person while making eye contact. Your participants want to make sure that they are being

heard, and having your attention helps them feel comfortable and engaged. Here are other considerations:

- Offer feedback and affirmation by paraphrasing what they have said so that everyone understands the key message. And then get confirmation from the participant that what you have said is accurate.
- If there are multiple persons that want to speak at the same time, record their names and go down the list until everyone that wants to speak was able to.
- If time on the agenda runs out, you can offer to have one more speaker present information that has not already been said.
- If someone veers the conversation off topic, you can put that topic on the parking lot list.

#### **Off Topic Discussions or Tangential Discussions**

- If there is group interest or energy towards an off-topic discussion, the facilitator can place this in the “parking lot” by thanking the member for raising the topic and recommending we revisit it towards the end of the meeting or consider making it an agenda topic for the next meeting. Then the facilitator can move to the next agenda item.
- If members raise off topic items multiple times, the facilitator should recognize that this is happening and determine the conversation needs to be had in order to move on or have more fruitful conversations that will benefit the meeting agenda. The facilitator may ask for permission to add this so that there is buy in to this change, but recognizes the importance of the current agenda.

#### **Managing Difficult Personalities**

Workgroups include a variety of personalities that add color to any group. But there are certain behaviors that may prohibit the meeting’s success if not managed by the facilitator. The facilitator has the authority to correct behaviors through the use of the ground rules, agenda, and questioning. Correcting behavior early is helpful to make the meeting more comfortable for all.

- Dominators: If there is a dominator in the meeting that voices strong feelings about a topic, shutting them down may make them push back or feel alienated. Thank them for his or her insight on this topic, record their point either on the parking lot or a “gaps and issues” flipchart, or ensure it was captured in the notes and move on. However if the dominator continues to speak, walking towards the person signals that you are giving them attention but that it is time to wrap up. You can also point to the ground rules and the agenda.
- Non-engaged: Persons that have not made any contributions to the conversation should be given opportunities to engage, or they have been multitasking during the meeting. You can simply call on them, use a round robin technique, or split into small groups for discussions and report backs.
- Long-winded: For persons that are long winded in their responses, the facilitator can step in and paraphrase what has been said and get buy in, then you can say “for the sake of time”, or to “to be mindful of the agenda and schedule”, or “let’s hear another perspective.”

#### **Finishing on a High**

Every facilitator wants to have the meeting end on a high note. Doing so means that your meeting met the goals, had great participation, made everyone feel that positive things were accomplished and that the meeting was worth their time and participation and there was good energy throughout. Here are few tips on being successful:

- End your meeting on time. If a conversation is dragging on, you can politely say “I want to be mindful of ending on time, so let’s table this current conversation and make sure we quickly go through our last item.”

- Be thankful. Participants want to feel appreciated for their contributions. Thank your members for their time, energy and focus. Take time to point out a few accomplishments made during the meeting and how you felt it met the objectives.
- Recognize the honest conversations. If there were strong emotions during the meeting, note that you appreciated the honest conversations and that some topics are difficult to work through. Recognize that it takes having conversations like this to move forward.
- Give an opportunity to those not heard. If there are a few minutes at the end, give members that didn't have a chance to speak a moment to provide comments to ensure that everyone had the opportunity to speak.
- End with action items and closing comments. Close out the meeting by reviewing the action items and giving the floor for closing comments to the meeting leader.