

HOW TO FACILITATE A MEETING

What is a facilitator?

The facilitator is the person who runs a meeting and moves the meeting along. Facilitators make sure participants can share their opinions and stories, discuss topics, and make decisions.

The Facilitator is Responsible for:

- Making sure members agree on the agenda before and during the meeting.
- Ensuring the group keeps to ground rules/community agreements.
- Guiding the discussion and intervening if problems arise.
- Staying neutral, asking questions and suggesting ways to approach agenda items.
- Keeping the group on track and on schedule, particularly when the group goes on a tangent.
- Making sure the group comes to decisions, and dividing work clearly among members.
- Maintaining awareness of the energy level in the room and helping encourage members.
- Making sure everyone participates and no one dominates.
- Creating a safe, positive, and comfortable environment (protecting people from personal attack).

Strategies for Keeping the Meeting Running and Orderly

Checking in and asking GSA members if there is anything they want to add to each meeting's agenda for the GSA to discuss.

- Ex: Are there any topics that you all would like to add to the agenda? (During the beginning of the meeting, possibly after reviewing the agenda for the meeting.)

If someone puts an item on the agenda, ask them to briefly cover important background information and what they want done.

- Ex: Jordan, could you please share a little background information on this topic and what you'd like the GSA to do about it or how you want us to address it?

Give 5 minute warnings when moving on to another agenda item. Have another member be a timekeeper if necessary. If time runs out, ask the group to agree to spend more time on the issue, postpone it until later in the meeting, or put the discussion off until another meeting.

- Ex: Just a heads up, we have 5 minutes left to talk about this topic.
- Ex: We are out of time for this topic and still have some other topics to talk about. Do folks want to make a decision on this now in the next 10 minutes, or do you all want to talk about it more next meeting?

If a comment, question, or topic is off-topic at the moment, create a list (a "parking lot") for items to be discussed at another time.

- Ex: That's a great point / idea / question. Let's put it in the "parking lot" for now so we can finish this topic. We can revisit the parking lot at the end of this meeting or in our next meeting.



Strategies for Encouraging Participation

Encourage full participation - make sure everyone gets to speak.

- Ex: I've noticed a few people have been saying a lot on this topic. Is there anyone who hasn't spoken yet who wants to say something?

Try to notice when someone is holding back. Try different ways of discussing topics if you think it will help, like a "Go Around" or "Pair Share."

- Ex: Some people may not want to talk openly about this topic. But it's important that we hear all different points of view, so I encourage everyone to be honest about their feelings.
- Go Around: "I want everyone to have the chance to share their honest thoughts or feelings on this issue. Let's go around the circle / room and have everyone share what they are thinking. You always have the right to pass."
- Pair Share: "To break the ice, everyone turn to the person next to them or find a partner and talk for a few minutes about what you think. Then we'll come back to the big group and some people can share what they talked about."

Keep track of the list of people who want to speak, and share it out loud so everyone knows the speaking order. Feel free to put people who have not yet spoken first in the list.

- Ex: "Okay, let's have Aleja, Travis, Sanjay, Tran, and then Em for the speaking order."

Strategies for Facilitating Discussion and Decision Making

Help people avoid repeating themselves by summarizing discussion and asking only for comments in areas that haven't been mentioned.

- Ex: So far, I've heard the following concerns about moving forward with the gender neutral bathroom campaign. Some arguments in favor are....I've heard different solutions proposed like....
- Ex: Are there any different arguments against or in favor that haven't been mentioned yet?

If the group has been discussing a topic for a while, move the group towards a decision or agreement.

- Ex: It seems like most people agree that we should talk to the Dean about the harassment that is going on.
- Ex: Seems like there's still a few issues we need to come to agreement on, like.... Let's focus on deciding what to do about those.

Know when the group has reached a decision. Also know when a group cannot reach a decision; suggest postponing a decision when the group needs critical information, the group needs to hear from others, or the group is not prepared.

- Ex: I'd like to propose we postpone this discussion because...

Check briefly for agreement before moving on - make sure everyone understands decisions.

- Ex: Can someone briefly summarize the proposal we are voting on for our Trans Day of Action event?

It helps if the facilitator tries to remain neutral if possible, so as not to abuse your power! If you want to participate actively in the discussion, ask someone else to take over facilitating the meeting. If you have a quick personal comment, let them know and do not take advantage of being facilitator -- try and wait to make sure others have spoken first.

- Ex: Speaking as a GSA member, I think...
- Ex: Okay, I want to make a comment as well, after Darren...

