HOW TO FACILITATE GROUPS

A Quick Reference Handbook On
Active Facilitation Techniques

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The Purpose Of This Handbook

The *How To Facilitate Groups* handbook is intended to help facilitators:

Understand the active facilitation method.

Strengthen facilitation skills, including:

- Opening work sessions.
- Leading group discussions.
- Setting up and working with small groups.
- Flip charting.
- Helping groups reach consensus.
- Resolving conflict.

Understand how to design and prepare for work sessions.

Understand how to evaluate work sessions.

The guidance in this handbook is intended to be useful to facilitators in a wide range of group process applications including facilitating business meetings, team meetings, retreats, or other work sessions.
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Introduction: The Active Facilitation Approach

Organizations in the US today are turning increasingly to participative approaches to get work done better and faster. Everything from strategic planning, to cross-unit problem solving, to actually getting work out of the door is likely to involve the use of groups more than ever before.

With this change toward greater use of groups and teams, has come an increased demand for skilled facilitators who can help groups be their most productive. One approach to facilitation involves the facilitator in a very limited role--serving as the group's timekeeper, "traffic cop" when discussions heat up, and recorder of the group's decisions. The active facilitation approach sees the role of the facilitator somewhat differently, that is, as a temporary group or team leader. This leadership role has a very significant impact on group effectiveness, despite the fact that the facilitator does not get involved in the content of the group's work. The facilitator employing the active facilitation approach enables the group to focus its work on the task at hand knowing an unbiased professional is providing the structure, processes, and the push--this is probably the most distinguishing characteristic of the approach--to help the group get where it is trying to go.

The Role Of The Facilitator In The Active Facilitation Approach

The facilitator in the active facilitation approach has a strong attachment to the group and its task. Unlike conventional facilitation approaches, in this approach, the facilitator shares responsibility with the group for getting their task accomplished. The roles and responsibilities of the facilitator can be summarized as:

Neutral Servant Of The Group--As in all group facilitation, the facilitator in the active facilitation approach has an unbiased service role. He or she is bound to be neutral, that is, to treat all participants and all ideas in the group with the same respect. The facilitator has no interest in what decision is made, but has a strong interest in a decision being made; no preference for one outcome over another, but a strong preference that an outcome be reached; no preference that the ideas of one group member or another be adopted, but a clear interest in all participants' ideas having a chance to be heard.

Process Advocate--The facilitator proposes processes for helping the group get its work done, invites ideas for process alternatives from group members, and ensures that the agreed-upon process is used so long as it is working. The responsibility of the facilitator is not to advocate one particular process, but to advocate whatever process the group has agreed to use. In this way, the facilitator helps the group stay on a productive course.
Progress Advocate--The facilitator is responsible for helping the group establish and maintain forward movement. It is this *push* factor that frequently earns the facilitator using the *active facilitation approach* the undying appreciation of groups. As progress advocate, the facilitator is continually assessing the group's progress toward its objectives and providing the group with feedback.

What The Facilitator Does In The Active Facilitation Approach

Compared to conventional facilitation methods, the facilitator in the *active facilitation approach* has a more extensive role in planning for, facilitating, and following up on a work session. What the facilitator does includes:

**Before The Meeting**

*Learn about the purpose and objectives for the meeting*--The facilitator meets with the meeting initiator(s) to find out what the meeting is expected to accomplish.

*Develop an understanding of the issues impacting the meeting*--Through such means as review of related materials, pre-meetings with a planning team, or advanced surveys or interviews of meeting participants, the facilitator becomes knowledgeable about issues affecting the group and the meeting. In meetings of significant duration and complexity, the facilitator often presents what he or she has learned to the group at the beginning of the meeting to check for accuracy and to be sure the right issues are before the group. Especially important is the role of the facilitator in putting issues before the group that members may be reluctant to bring up themselves in the group setting.

*Design the meeting*--Ideally the facilitator is brought in as soon as a meeting is planned so that he or she can be involved in designing the work session. Without the facilitator's input, meeting planners can develop agendas that do not make the best use of the participants' time and abilities. Whereas planners tend to focus mainly on the *topics* of a meeting, the facilitator, focuses on the *process and task* aspects of the meeting and will be sure to include time for work to be done in the most participative and productive ways.

*Prepare and circulate the agenda*--The facilitator ensures that the agenda contains key information and is circulated before the meeting to all participants. For what goes on an agenda, refer to *Develop a draft agenda*, under *Section 1: How to Design a Work Session*, below.
During The Meeting

**Facilitate the group**--This broad category of activities includes:

- Manage the agenda and progress of the group:
  - Adjust time, tasks, and processes
  - Give the group feedback on progress

- Keep the meeting objectives before the group

- Ensure that all participants and ideas have a chance to be heard.

- Help the group reach consensus and make decisions in other ways.

- Encourage the group

- Help the group resolve differences.

- Track ancillary issues (issues raised at a time when the group can't productively deal with them).

**Help the group plan for follow up**--Ensure that next steps, who's responsible for doing what, and due dates for follow up are clearly established before the meeting ends.

**Help the group evaluate the meeting**--Offer evaluation questions for the participants to answer, usually in writing, and covering both task and process aspects of the meeting.

After The Meeting

**Ensure written minutes are prepared and distributed quickly**--Often the facilitator is the best person to take responsibility for quick preparation and circulation of a record of the meeting, including at a minimum:

- Date.
- Objectives.
- Participants.
- Decisions or outcomes.
- Follow-up assignments.

The ways in which the *active facilitation approach* is carried out and techniques for facilitators to use are described in the sections that follow.
Facilitators work very closely with the meeting initiators or planners throughout the process of designing a meeting. The amount of time and effort that goes into meeting design varies according to the duration, complexity, and size of the meeting. The time invested in careful meeting design has a high payoff: a meeting which enables participants to achieve their objectives, appreciate the outcomes of the meeting, and often, actually enjoy the experience.

Before designing a work session, it is important to understand what makes meetings work. The most important consideration is the needs and interests of the meeting participants, the facilitator's key customers once the meeting is underway. For meetings to be most effective, participants need to have:

- A clear understanding of the objectives and intended outcome.
- A clear understanding of the process(es) to be used and confidence in the facilitator who will manage the process(es).
- A clear understanding of the role of everyone in the room (including themselves).
- Confidence in the utility of the meeting; belief the goal is reachable.
- The opportunity to participate substantively.
- The opportunity to have input to process changes.
- Confidence that follow up will occur and be managed.

Virtually everything a facilitator does in designing and preparing for a meeting is intended to address one or more of these customer standards.

A number of steps and factors are involved in designing a meeting. How elaborate the design phase is depends on how complex a meeting is planned, but the facilitator is always interested in client input, group process and task requirements, and human physiological and psychological needs when designing a meeting.

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1 The terms, work session and meeting, are used interchangeably throughout this handbook. While the term, work session, helps focus on the purpose of the group being convened, the term, meeting, is both efficient and familiar.
Step 1:

**Learn client objectives**--From meetings with the initiator, the planning team, some or all of the participants, or from other sources such as a survey of participants or review of written materials.

Step 2:

**Gather basic information about the meeting and its participants**--Find out, or help the planners decide: how many people are expected to attend the meeting, who they are, how much time is available for the meeting, and when and where the meeting will be held.

Step 3:

**Learn about issues impacting the meeting**--Again, in meetings with the initiator, the planning team, some or all of the participants, or from other sources, focus on such issues as:

- The history of the issue and/or the group.
- Relationships within the group or between the group and others.
- Feelings within the group about the task or the group.

Step 4:

**Consider the complexity of the meeting**--Determining the complexity of the meeting and its facilitation requirements involves analysis of the following considerations:

- Length of the meeting--The longer a meeting is, the more complex the facilitation challenge.

- Nature of relationships among the participants--If, for example, participants have a history with one another that is characterized by personality differences or difficulty reaching agreement, the facilitation requirements for a meeting of the group are greater. If participants know each other and do not have a history of difficulties, the facilitation task is not so complex. The same is true if participants have no past experience with one another; the facilitation challenge is not as complex as for a group with problems in its past.

- Difficulty of the subject matter and the task--Clearly, a meeting to propose a redesign of the agency by a consensus of the participants is more complex than meetings to exchange information on the status of State consolidation efforts. Issues with direct bearing on
participants' work and work lives are higher intensity than meetings on subjects that have less direct impact on participants' well-being. Likewise, meetings in which the task is not too challenging, for example, sharing information or brainstorming ideas are considerably less complex than meetings in which a group is asked to do a more difficult task such as problem solving or reaching consensus agreement.

Any one of these considerations can dramatically affect the complexity of a meeting; for example, if a group has had difficulties working together in the past, even the simplest task may prove a real challenge for group members and for the facilitator who is trying to help them. A multi-day meeting may wear down the tolerance among group members who generally get along well and cause surprising difficulty in accomplishing tasks scheduled for the afternoon of the second day. The facilitator's task is to develop an understanding of the meeting's likely complexity during the preparation phase.

Step 5:

**Review meeting materials**—It is important that you be familiar with any materials that will be presented or discussed at the meeting.

Step 6:

**Develop a draft agenda**—Include not only topics and times, but also processes to be employed. The information to be included on an agenda is:

Date and location of the meeting.

Name(s) of person(s) convening the meeting.

Names of participants expected to take part in the meeting. (With larger groups or groups where participants come from different organizations, a separate roster of participants showing names, offices, and contact information numbers is prepared and distributed to participants along with the agenda.)

Purpose and/or objectives of the meeting.

Planned agenda items.

Estimated times at which items will be handled. (Sometimes facilitators do not show the times for each meeting segment on the agenda, for example, in long and highly interactive meetings or in situations where the facilitator wants to maintain flexibility regarding timeframes. Always show start, stop, and lunch times.)

Person(s) responsible for introducing or presenting each item.
Processes to be used in handling each item (presentation, group discussion, consensus decision, etc.).

Be guided by a number of design considerations as you develop the agenda. There may be unique considerations regarding any particular meeting, but at a minimum, you will produce the best meeting designs if you incorporate as many of the following considerations as apply:

Maximize interaction--this is paramount.

Be sensitive to the organizational or group culture--propose tolerable processes, not too "soft", not too structured, etc.

Put issues and tasks in logical order--the first consideration in ordering topics.

Consider the nature and difficulty of the tasks or processes:

Schedule less interactive segments early in the day, when people can listen with greater efficiency.

Schedule more difficult topics (or whole meetings) early in the day, when people have more patience and energy.

If conflict is anticipated, create opportunities to agree before having the group undertake the tough issue(s), for example, before asking a group to identify problems they are encountering, ask them to summarize the progress they have made up to now; before addressing what's not working well, ask the group to identify what is working well.

Do NOT plan to handle difficult topics by eliminating or reducing time to discuss them.

Remember that interactive processes take longer, so allow enough time:

It takes time to discuss and time to agree.

Small group processes must always include time for reports from small groups about what was discussed.

Provide for review of the content of any pre-readings within the meeting if knowledge of the content is necessary to the group's task (don't count on participants' having read pre-reading material). If more is planned for a meeting than time will allow, try:
Reducing the agenda, for example, by scheduling a second meeting to handle some topics.

Setting and enforcing short time frames for certain meeting elements, for example, presentations of information.

Structuring work on several topics concurrently using small groups; providing small groups with clear time limits and discreet discussion points to keep them on track.

Making the meeting a *planning* session rather than a *working* session, with tasks to be assigned to follow-up sub-teams after the meeting is held.

Do *not* deal with time shortages by eliminating or severely restricting discussion time!

*Always* allow for stretch/bathroom breaks at least every one and 1/2 to two hours!

Step 7:

**Review draft agenda with client**--Depending on the circumstances, review the draft agenda with the meeting planners, and, if time is available, circulate it to participants for comment. Never consider an agenda final until *someone* involved with the meeting besides you has reviewed it. Even so, when the agenda is introduced at the beginning of the meeting, it is often necessary to make changes based on new developments or new participant input. An agenda is essential to a good meeting, but it is important to be flexible about what is says.
Section 2: How To Open A Work Session

Meetings often open with welcoming and other introductory comments by the convener or other significant player in the organization initiating the meeting. Once the meeting is ready to get underway, the facilitator in the active facilitation approach generally assumes the role of meeting leader, and in various ways proceeds to guide the group through its agenda and its various tasks to its desired outcomes.

The facilitator's goal in opening a group session is to begin the process of creating an environment in which participants:

- Know what to expect and what is expected of them.
- Believe the work session is a good investment of their time and energy.
- Develop trust in the facilitator and the other participants.
- Have confidence that a product will result from the meeting.

The facilitator begins addressing these prerequisites to active participation at the very beginning of the work session using the following techniques.

2.1 How To Welcome Participants To The Meeting

Your first words to participants give you a chance to set a positive tone and begin to demonstrate how you will conduct yourself. It's best to be yourself, a difficult goal when you may be a bit nervous about the task ahead of you. Speak informally, in a friendly tone, and in the same way you would speak to colleagues, for example:

Say: "Good morning, everyone. My name is Rebecca Carson, and I'm going to be your facilitator this week. We are about ready to begin the first planning session, so I'd like to start by saying 'welcome' to you all."

2 Throughout this handbook, sample language is offered in italics and quotations marks. This wording is intended to illustrate the points being made in the text and not intended to be used verbatim by facilitators. When you are applying this guidance as a facilitator, you should feel free to use your own words.
2.2 How To Introduce Yourself

If you are certain that everyone in the room knows you, then, of course, introducing yourself is not necessary. But, if there is anyone in the room who does not know you, or does not know you well, it's a good idea to introduce yourself so no one is reluctant to call you by name.

When you introduce yourself, do it before you begin participant introductions. Give your name again, write it on a flip chart, and post the flip chart on the wall. If you are unknown to anyone in the room, explain in two or three sentences your qualifications to be facilitating this meeting, especially your experience in this organization or similar ones and your experience doing this kind of facilitation. Whenever you are the facilitator, explain:

How you will be working with participants—for example, whether you will facilitate the group during the whole meeting or only certain parts of it.

That you will be proposing processes for the group to use in getting its work done, and that you are open to any suggestions participants may have along the way.

(If the meeting is a day or more long) That you can talk with participants outside of the normal meeting hours (and when) if they have questions or comments.

2.3 How To Have Participants Introduce Themselves

If all participants know each other well, then participant introductions are not necessary. If you're not sure how well they know each other, ask one or two of the participants before the meeting begins. If any participants do not know any others, it is best to have at least quick introductions. If participant introductions are needed, there are three recommended ways to conduct them, depending on:

How well participants know one another.

How well participants need to get to know each other, for example, is this the first meeting of a team that needs to develop close relationships? Is this a group of people with adversarial views who need to develop enough personal rapport to be able to work collaboratively? Or, is this a group who will meet just once, with a light task?

How much time participants will be spending together; longer meetings generally have more in-depth interactions and require participants to know each other better from the start.

How much time is available for introductions.
Option 1:

If most participants already know each other or if the meeting is a half-day long or shorter, ask each participant to introduce him or herself by giving:

- Name.
- Organization or office.
- Nature of current work assignments.

This method takes less than one minute per participant.

Option 2:

If most participants do not know each other well, need to get to know each other to a significant degree, and/or have definite or likely adversarial relationships, ask each participant to introduce him- or herself giving:

- Name.
- Organization or office.
- Nature of current work assignments.
- Relationship to the issue being worked on in the meeting (interest in it, experience with it, etc.).

This approach takes about three to five minutes per participant, but is a good investment of time because it helps participants, (a) feel that their expertise and frame of reference is understood in the group, and (b) understand the expertise and viewpoints of the other participants.

Option 3:

If most participants do not know each other well and/or need to develop strong relationships within the work session, for example, a group that is expected to become a team, a more extensive set of introductions is useful. Ask each participant to work with one other person he or she doesn't already know and have each person take five minutes to interview his or her partner to find out:

- Name.
- Organization or office.
Nature of current work assignments.

One interesting or important thing about him or herself NOT related to work.

After the interviews, each person briefly introduces his or her partner to the whole group. This method takes about 15 minutes to instruct and carry out the interviewing step plus about three minutes per participant for the introductions. If each interviewer is asked to create a flip chart about his or her partner, add another few minutes per participant to your calculations.

If the group is small enough, 15 or fewer participants, you may wish to create a flip chart as introductions are made showing each participant's name and office. If you make such a flip chart, post it on the wall as a ready reference for you and the participants.

2.4 How To Introduce A Work Session

Since there is important information to be conveyed about the work session at the beginning, it is helpful to have the key points you want to make on a series of flip charts. There is flexibility regarding the order in which you present this information and the particular information you cover, but, at a minimum, do the following:

Step 1:

**Review the meeting schedule**--Meaning the start and stop times of the meeting, and, if it is more than one day long, the complete daily schedule for each day. Be sure to indicate that lunch and stretch breaks will be taken each day, how long each will be, and about when they will occur. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>1:00 PM to 4:00 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>9:00 AM to 4:00 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday Lunch</td>
<td>12:00 NOON to 1:00 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaks</td>
<td>15-minutes each, in morning and afternoon sessions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you will be meeting with the group only at certain times within a longer meeting schedule, post the specific times each day that you and the group will be working together.
Step 2:

**Explain the purpose of the meeting**--That is, the outcome it is intended to accomplish, in one statement if possible, for example:

"Develop the groundwork for a strategic plan to guide the team's work over the coming year," or,

"Share information about current activities among the various group members' organizations," or,

"Create an outline of the contents of a guide to be developed for local practitioners and a plan for its development."

Step 3:

**Present the objectives for the meeting**--Describe what specifically participants are expected to accomplish, in three or four statements, for example:

"(1) To assess where things currently stand in each key program area.

(2) To develop broad strategies for moving the program forward over the coming year.

(3) To create a plan for continuing the planning process after the meeting is over and everyone is back at work."

Step 4:

**Explain the meeting and facilitation approach**--What participants can expect to happen in the meeting, for example,

"This meeting will have plenary sessions each day in which information and ideas will be presented to the whole group. There will also be daily concurrent breakout sessions in which more specific information will be presented and discussed. And, there will be planning sessions every day in which each team meets with its facilitator to work through the planning process using information gained in the other sessions.

"I will be helping you with your work in the planning sessions. I will open the team meetings, help you stay on track with the planning guidance we've been given, record your ideas and decisions on flip charts, and generally try to ensure that everyone has a chance to be heard and that agreement is reached on key points before you move forward. I'll also keep track of the time and be sure our planning sessions end when you
have agreed they should end. If anyone has any ideas for other ways I could help or ideas for how the process should work along the way, please do not hesitate to offer me any suggestions.”

Step 5:

Review the agenda--What is planned to happen when, and how each agenda item will be handled. Since agendas have to be somewhat flexible, make the following points:

"I may not stop an interesting discussion to take a stretch break precisely on schedule, but if I wait too long, just let me know. Also, the agenda times may change if a topic requires more or less time than originally estimated. I will, however, be sure we break for lunch on time and open and close the meeting on time."

Step 6:

Review administrative information--How meals will be handled, where bathrooms are located, any after-hours events that have been planned, any paperwork requirements of participants, etc.

2.5 How To Gather Participant Expectations

For meetings that are less than three hours long or where the agenda is a straightforward one which participants have had a chance to review or with which they are at least familiar, it is often not necessary to collect participant expectations. In more demanding meeting situations, however, it is very helpful to you as a facilitator to collect participants' expectations so that:

A positive message is conveyed to participants that this is their meeting and that their interests will influence how the meeting goes.

You can tailor the work session to meet their interests and needs to the extent possible.

You can align the occasional expectation that is not in concert with the meeting's objectives or is not realistic given the timeframe or other constraints.

Four ways to collect participant expectations are recommended, depending on the complexity of the meeting.
Option 1:

Whole Group Identification Of Expectations--If the meeting is a half a day or less in length and the subject matter and task not too complex, you can collect expectations in the whole group after you review the agenda, saying something like:

"Given the objectives for the meeting and the planned agenda, what would you like to see come out of this meeting?"

This method takes about five minutes or so, a bit longer if the group is large and participants are comfortable with each other. Capture participants' thoughts on a flip chart.

Option 2:

Expectations Combined With Introductions--If the meeting is a half a day or less in length, and the subject matter or task at least somewhat complex, ask each participant to express one thing he or she would like to get from the meeting at the time participants are introducing themselves. This method takes less than a minute per participants. Write the expectations on a flip chart as they are described.

Option 3:

Expectations Developed In Small Group Discussions--If the meeting is a day or more in length and the subject matter or task is complex, you might ask participants to work in groups of six-to-eight people each to collect their ideas about how to complete the following statements:

"What we would like to see come out of this meeting is..."

"What we don't want to see happen in this meeting is..."

Encourage participants to express both what they do and do not want from the work session. Ask each group to select a recorder to write down their ideas and a reporter to read them to the rest of the group when the discussion is finished. Post "wants" and "don't wants" on a flip chart as participants report them. This method requires about 15 minutes for the small group discussions and about three to five minutes per small group to report out while you record.

Option 4:

Pre-Interviews Of Participants--If the meeting is a day or more in length and/or the subject matter or task is definitely difficult, and the group is small enough (under 20 or so members) you may wish to contact all participants before the meeting date to identify issues and desired
outcomes for the meeting as they see them. The information gathered this way should be presented to the group at the beginning of the session.

If in gathering participant expectations you find that one or some participants want something from the meeting that is not likely to be covered, this is a time to help align expectations with reality. If a participant does not want to have something happen in the work session that is likely to happen, for example, that participants not disagree with each other, you can address the concern at this time as well. If significant numbers of participants want something different from the meeting than what was envisioned, discuss the original objectives with the group, and change them if there is a consensus. Once participant expectations are gathered and aligned, they become additional objectives for the meeting. Post the flip charts on which expectations are recorded and return to them from time to time to be sure all interests that can be addressed are being addressed in the work session.

2.6 How To Establish Groundrules

Groundrules in meetings serve as an informal contract that lays out how things will work and how people will act in the meeting. They are presented after expectations have been gathered. Two kinds of groundrules typically appear on facilitators' lists:

Process groundrules, for example:

- Make decisions by consensus.
- Post decisions on a flip chart.
- Track follow-up or action items as we go.

Behavioral groundrules, including such considerations as:

- Attend all sessions and be on time.
- Treat all ideas with respect.
- Raise differences openly and constructively.

The two kinds of groundrules do not have to be separated when presented to participants; both behavioral and attitudinal groundrules are often intermingled on the same list. If the group is experienced with group process, you might ask the participants to generate a list of groundrules themselves, after you have given them the introductory information (purpose, objectives, meeting approach, agenda).
Section 3: How To Lead Group Discussions

Discussions can be a creative and productive way to develop a shared understanding of a subject within a group and to explore a subject in some depth. Discussions are a critical precursor to a group developing a consensus decision where that is a goal. The reasons for having group discussions in a meeting are several:

- Help participants get interested and involved in a subject.
- Enable participants to fill in information gaps and to clear up misunderstandings.
- Enable participants to review and analyze subject matter that has been presented to the group verbally or in writing.
- Identify areas of agreement and disagreement in the group so that differences can be understood and resolved.

3.1 How To Prepare For A Group Discussion

Think through what your objectives are for a group discussion in advance of the session, and decide the key outcomes you would like to see the discussion produce. With your objectives in mind, develop and write down two or three open-ended questions to help start and guide the discussion. Plan to begin with a very general, open-ended question (one that cannot be answered by, "yes", or, "no"), and follow with more targeted questions.

First ask: "What do you think of this approach?"

Then ask: "What do you consider the most valuable aspects of it? What are the most challenging?"

Then ask: "If the team were to recommend this approach, how do you think local program people can be convinced of its utility?"

Written statements can also be a good way to start a group discussion, for example:

“I think the issue is important because…”

“The director’s decision is seen by employees as…”

You can ask people to complete the statement and explain their thinking or experience, then ask others to join in.
3.2 How To Start A Group Discussion

Introduce the discussion topic and objective(s), and pose the first, general, open-ended question. For example, if you are conducting a group discussion on a proposal to train State teams in surveying techniques:

"Let's take the next 15 minutes or so to discuss the proposal on training State teams. Let's start with the question, 'What do you think of this idea?'"

Be ready to wait for the first response and be patient. Try counting to 15 silently. It often takes time for the first person to organize a thought and decide to express it. If no one comments, try the question in a new way.

"Any thoughts on the idea to provide State teams with training on surveying techniques? Anything you want clarified?", or

"Anything you particularly like about this proposal? Don't like about it?"

Once the first person speaks up, others will generally follow without delay. When comments begin, treat each one with respect. To speak up in a group session involves at least a little bit of risk for participants. If they feel you may dismiss or criticize their comments, they may prefer not to speak up at all.

3.3 How To Encourage Continued Discussion

The first rule for facilitators is to listen carefully to each comment. Restate or paraphrase comments from time to time to show participants that you are listening and subtly reaffirm the value of participants' points. It is very important that the facilitator not evaluate comments either positively or negatively; rather you should acknowledge them supportively, but neutrally. Definitely DO NOT criticize participants or cast their comments in a negative light.

Do say: "I see what you are saying--it will take a lot of resources." (Neutral)

"So, you found that the last training from that contractor was very valuable." (Neutral)

Don't say: "That doesn't sound like a very fair evaluation of the Commissioner's comments." (Judgmental)

"You're probably the only person who would look at this subject that way." (Judgmental)

The facilitator also has a role in reinforcing the group's efforts in the discussion, saying, for example:
"This discussion has brought up some interesting points; I can see that there are a lot of opinions about State teams' role in conducting surveys in this group. Does anyone else have a comment?"

"This topic has proven more complex than it appeared to be; your discussion raises a number of issues about system building. Are there any more ideas?"

It is helpful to the participants for the facilitator to restate the initial topic of the discussion from time to time to help them stay on track, especially if a sub-point or related but different topic has absorbed the group's attention for several minutes.

### 3.4 How To Record The Discussion

Write participants' comments on flip charts. This will encourage further comments, allow you to be sure all comments are considered, and allow participants to review or summarize the discussion as needed. Be sure to:

Write their actual words (not every word--just key words); do NOT change their comments to make a particular point. It's better to introduce your own thoughts directly if needed, rather than change participants' thoughts. (See How To Use Flip charts, below.)

Write down all comments, even those that are not exactly on the subject. If comments seem very unrelated to the subject, you may want to start another page titled "Ideas to Discuss Later". Just be sure to return to the list at a later point.

Write down any action items for follow-up that may come out of a discussion. Start a separate flip chart that can be added to throughout the meeting and reviewed at the end to be sure no follow-up assignments fall between the cracks.

### 3.5 How To Get Lots Of Participants Into The Discussion

Your goal is to ensure that everyone has a chance to participate to enable the group to have the benefit of everyone's thinking and to help the group form a common view of a subject. It is not important that everyone speak up a certain number of times or that all participants contribute at the same rate. Some people naturally talk more, others less. It is desirable for most participants to join in a discussion for it to be of greatest interest and value to the group, but it is most important that everyone knows that he or she can contribute at any point they choose to.
How To Engage Quiet Participants

Welcome comments from quiet participants, but don't call on people by name or be too insistent:

*Do ask:* "Does anyone who hasn't spoken up yet have any thoughts on this?" *(Offering)*

*Don't say:* "What are your thoughts, Anna?" *(Forcing)*

Respond to quiet participants' unspoken, but apparent concerns (a quizzical look, a furrowed brow), but don't try to interpret them. Invite questions or comments in a general way:

*Do ask:* "It looks like there might be a few questions or comments...." *(General and neutral)*

*Don't say:* "You look confused, Ed." *(Specific and interpretive)*

How To Get The Views Of The Whole Group

If you wish to elicit the views of all participants on a topic, you can poll the group, and ask each person to respond briefly. When you poll the group, give people the option to pass and not speak; it's best not to force participants to speak, but rather say something like:

"Will each person please give us your thoughts about the issue of the Federal level's role in helping States build their workforce development systems? Those who don't have a comment at this time may just say, 'I pass'!".

3.6 How To Handle Challenging Behavior Constructively

Your goal is to ensure that the behavior of some people does not reduce the value of the discussion to the whole group. Often non-productive behavior can be avoided if you set the right expectations at the start, with clear groundrules and assurance that everyone will have a chance to participate. If that is not enough, try these techniques:
How To Respond To Challenges

Don't over-react, just acknowledge the points the participant makes. If possible, find merit in what he or she has said, agree with what you can, then move on.

How To Respond To Unanswerable Questions Or Unresolvable Concerns

If a participant asks you a question you cannot answer, check to be sure you understood the point, and if you don't know the answer say so openly and see if any others in the room know the answer or offer to get it:

"I don't have the figures you are asking about Tom; does anyone in the group have them?"

"I don't know the answer to that question, Grace. I'll check on it this evening and give you the answer tomorrow."

If a participant expresses a concern or argument you cannot resolve to his or her satisfaction, ask if someone else in the participant group would like to give it a try. If no one can persuade or reassure the participant adequately, acknowledge the concern, write it on a flip chart if it seems significant, and move on.

"Let's continue with the agenda, Bryan, and if you are still concerned by the time we get to the planning step, we'll revisit your issue then."

"I appreciate your concern, Jim, but we need to go on with the meeting. If you'd like, you and I can talk about this issue some more after the close of the session today."

How To Handle Side Conversations

Do not cause embarrassment to the participants. The best tack is to talk with persistently disruptive people during a break. If you feel you need to do something during the meeting, do it gently, for example, you might try:

Option 1:

If only two people are engaged in a side conversation, you can glance at them, or if that doesn't help, walk toward them (without changing your own behavior--continue making your points or facilitating the discussion); once you get their attention they will usually stop talking on their own.
Option 2:

If two or more side conversations start up, you can refer the group as a whole to the groundrules (assuming you have a germane one), or if no groundrule looks appropriate, you can say something like:

"We need to have just one conversation at a time!"

If the group does not have a groundrule you can use to reduce side conversations, for example one addressing side conversations or one on the importance of listening, you might suggest that the group add one. If your relationship with the group is a close one, this situation can sometimes be dealt with humor.

How To Respond To People Making The Same Point Repeatedly

If a participant brings the same point up over and over, acknowledge it the second time (Yes, I heard you say that...), paraphrase it the next time (It sounds like you are saying you're very concerned about the Legislature's hearings...), and write it down on a flip chart if it's brought up again. If the participant still persists, which would be very unlikely, offer to talk with him or her about it at the next break.

How To Handle Non-Relevant Comments

Sometimes a participant makes a comment that does not appear to be on topic, or that introduces a side track it seems best the group not pursue. If that happens, wait for the point to be made, acknowledge it, write it on the flip chart if you are recording other ideas, integrate it if possible, and restate the intended subject of the discussion before you ask for the next comment from the group.

How To Handle A Person Who Makes Too Many Comments

If one participant seems to speak up too often for others to have a chance to talk, look around for people you can call on who have not yet spoken or not spoken much, and call on them for a while. If needed, give the too-talkative participant a special job, that will give him or her another way to contribute to the session. For example, you can ask a participant to make a brief presentation on an area of his or her special experience with the subject, or ask him or her to assist you by recording others' comments on the flip chart.
3.7 How To Extract Key Points From A Group Discussion

For participants to get the most from group discussions, they need a chance to sort out the key points from the various thoughts that may be brought out. A quick way to do that and not over-control the discussion or interrupt its flow is to summarize key points from time to time and at the end of the discussion using either of the following techniques.

Option 1:

Get Participants To Identify Key Points--Ask the participants to summarize what points stand out to them from the discussion by posing such questions as:

"What key points have emerged so far in this discussion?"

"What are ideas you will take away from this discussion?"

"What should we conclude from this discussion?"

Option 2:

Identify Key Points Yourself--You may wish to suggest additional summary points to those made by participants, or at times, summarize the discussion yourself to ensure that certain points are highlighted. Be sure when you do that you restate the key points as the participants stated them. Refer back to the flip charts for the right language if you have recorded discussion points. It is important not to mischaracterize participants' comments. Check with the group to be sure you have captured their main ideas accurately and completely.

3.8 About Brainstorming, A Form Of Group Discussion

Brainstorming is a tool used to gather information or generate ideas. In a brainstorming session, participants offer as many ideas about a particular issue as they can think of, as quickly as they can. What distinguishes brainstorming from other group discussions is there is no give and take, that is, ideas are put out and not actually discussed, just listed. Because ideas are not challenged, brainstorming promotes openeness and creativity. Because ideas are not discussed, it allows a group to generate a lot of thoughts in a very short time. Facilitators use brainstorming for a number of purposes, including:

To elicit participants' views on a subject about to be dealt with in greater depth, and thus build their interest in the discussion topic, for example: "What are the main problems associated with transition planning?"
To define a problem which is more appropriately defined by participants than by the facilitator, for example: "What does the report suggest about how your programs are viewed by the public?"

To stimulate new or creative thinking, for example, "What are some ways to respond to this problem that have never been considered or tried before?"

To get participants to consider an issue from a new point of view, for example, "How would this issue look to you if you were all working in the Governor's office instead of working in a State agency?"

To enable participants to contribute a great deal to the meeting with a very small investment of time.

3.9 How To Conduct A Brainstorming Session

The main roles for the facilitator in a brainstorming session are: to get it started, to document ideas, and to enforce the groundrules. Otherwise, there is very little direct involvement of the facilitator during brainstorming.

How To Get Brainstorming Started

Explain the process to participants before you start. To ensure that the brainstorming stays on track, start with a brief explanation of the process, a clear question to be responded to, and a few groundrules, for example:

"Let's set some groundrules for brainstorming:

Think of as many ideas as you can.

No debate, discussion or evaluation of ideas.

All ideas have value, however unusual they might seem."

How To Get Diverse Ideas

Encourage participants to toss out ideas spontaneously; ask them not to edit their thoughts. Reassure them that all ideas are welcomed, none is too insignificant or too unusual to bring up. Sometimes very substantial or practical ideas emerge from seemingly trivial or unrealistic ideas.

How To Get Many Ideas
Ask for and encourage participants to offer a lot of ideas. When people are free to give their imaginations a wide range, useful ideas eventually result. Quantity often breeds quality. Restate ideas as they come forward and continually encourage many ideas.

*Say:* "One idea is 'more computer equipment'; o.k., let's get as many ideas as we can on the flip chart."

"So far we have, 'mailings', 'teacher training', and 'joint education/business leadership workshops'; what are some other ideas to change the relationship between schools and businesses?"

### How To Get Ideas Fast

Do not allow evaluation, debate, or discussion of any ideas brought up. If people judge, challenge, or even expand on ideas, two things can happen: (1) participants may become reluctant to speak spontaneously, and (2) the development of ideas will end and a discussion will begin. All commentary should be ruled out so the process can move quickly and remain true brainstorming.

### How To Record Ideas

Write participants' thoughts on a flip chart. It is important not to interpret or change people's ideas; it might cause a meaning to be lost or discourage further participation by giving people the impression their ideas are being edited. Review the recorded ideas quickly for the group if brainstorming slows down; this helps to help generate new ideas.

### How To Manage The Time For A Brainstorming Session

Set a time limit of about five minutes, or set an approximate time limit, for example, a "few minutes". Tell participants when the brainstorming starts and finishes. Stop the group when the time is reached or, if an exact time has not been set, ask the group if it is ready to stop, or ask for the last idea or two as ideas start to come more slowly.

An alternative technique that can be used in brainstorming is the "round robin" technique which is similar to polling the group (see How To Get The Views Of The Whole Group, above).
Section 4: How To Set Up And Facilitate Small Groups

Sometimes the work of a meeting can be best accomplished by the group working as a whole. Other times, it is useful to break the larger group into smaller groups so that:

- Several issues can be worked on concurrently.
- Complex issues can be discussed in greater depth.
- People who are less comfortable bringing points up in a large group have a more comfortable forum in which to express their views.

When using small group discussions in meetings, keep in mind that the ideal size of a small group is from four to eight participants. This size is big enough to generate diverse ideas and yet small enough to enable all participants to be actively engaged in the discussion.

4.1 How To Create Small Groups

Several methods for dividing up the group are available to you as the facilitator. Select the method depending on the circumstances outlined in the options below. In each case, explain to participants how and why the dividing up is taking place.

Option 1:

How To Set Up Small Groups Without A Change In Participant Seating--The facilitator asks participants to work as small groups at the tables where they currently sit. If participants are not sitting at tables, the facilitator can ask them to turn their chairs around to form a circle and suggest the number of people who should be in each circle. This method is useful when:

- It is the first small group activity in the work session, and
- Participants are relatively inexperienced with each other in the meeting context, and
- Specific composition of each small group is not critical to the success of the exercise.

This is also the quickest way to break the whole group up into small groups.
Option 2:

**How To Set Up Small Groups To Mix Participants Randomly**—One technique for creating small groups with random composition is by having participants "count off". This method is a quick way to get participants into new groups which will enable them to interact with people that, (a) they don’t work back on the job, or (b) they may not yet have worked in the meeting. The facilitator instructs one participant to begin and say, 'one'. The next participant follows and says, "two". The counting proceeds around the room until the number of desired groups is reached, after which the next participant begins again with the number one. So, for example, if five groups are desired, the first five participants count out loud from one to five; the sixth participant says, "one", the seventh says, "two" and so on. When each participant has counted, the facilitator instructs all of the "ones" to get together, all of the "two's" to get together and so on.

Another way to create randomly mixed groups is to use a lottery. The facilitator puts slips of paper with numbers written on them in a container and participants draw lots to find out what groups they are in. Make sure you have the same number of slips as you have participants, and that the numbers written on the slips go up to the same number as the number of groups you want to form. So, if you have 20 participants and want to form four groups, place five slips of paper with the number, "1" written on them, five with the number, "2", etc., up to the number, "4".

A way to make random groups in large group settings is to give participants a number or a color or other group designation on name tags or at peoples’ places at the tables.

Option 3:

**How To Have Participants Set Up Their Own Small Groups**—The facilitator can have participants form their own groups, guided by criteria for the small groups' composition provided by the facilitator or generated by the whole group. You say, for example:

"I'm going to ask you to get into five small groups. Each group should have a minimum of four participants. In each group there needs to be at least: one person from the Federal level, one person from State government, and one person from a local program. Take the next few minutes and form the five groups. Then we'll check to see that each group has the right combination of participants in it."

At times, the facilitator can have participants place themselves in a small group based on their interest in the subject to be discussed. If this approach is being used, be sure to advise the group on the how many people should go into each group.
Option 4:

**How To Set Up Small Groups And Control Groups' Composition**--The facilitator assigns participants into small groups in advance of the breakout discussions and posts the groups on a flip chart. This approach is used when some combination of the following considerations is present:

- The participant group is large (over 30 participants or so).
- The breakout discussions require a particular composition of the small groups to work well, for example, representation of different points of view or separation of managers and their direct reports.
- The facilitator wants to ensure that participants work with people they have not worked with previously in the meeting.
- The facilitator wants to save time and reduce chaos in the meeting.

Be sure to explain how the groups were formed:

"You will work in small groups so you can have more in-depth discussions and so everyone has more of a chance to take part in the give and take than would be possible in a whole group discussion. Here are the four groups. Please check to be sure your name is listed in one of the groups. I constructed these groups to include at least: one State person, one association person, one local program representative, and one person from USDOL in Washington. Please check to be sure the groups have the composition I've just described."

Whenever you create small groups which require participants to change locations in the meeting room or to go into breakout rooms, be sure that each group understands where it is to convene. If small groups will work within the room, indicate the area in the room where each group should convene; putting the group number or topic on each table can be helpful. If small groups will be leaving the room to work, write the groups and their locations on a flip chart so they and you know where each group is supposed to go.

### 4.2 How To Give Instructions For Small Group Work

It is important that participants have a clear and complete understanding of what the purpose of a discussion is, what they are expected to do, and how long they have to do it. Therefore:
Step 1:

**Explain the purpose of the small group work**--Start small group discussion instructions by reviewing orally a written statement of the purpose of the discussions.

Step 2:

**Instruct the groups on the task**--Give clear step-by-step instructions for what participants are to do; give instructions both orally and in writing. Most small group discussions are well served by providing participants with clear, written discussion points to help them stay on track.

Step 3:

**Set a time limit**--Tell participants how long the discussions are to last; let them know approximately how much time they should spend on each major part of the discussion if there are several discussion points, and write down the time at which the exercise will be concluded. For example, you might say:

"You have one hour to work in small groups. Try to manage your time so that you have about 20 minutes or so for each of the three discussion questions. Be ready to reconvene at 3:00."

Step 4:

**Instruct groups on roles**--Instruct participants to identify one or more people within each small group to perform any needed roles within the breakout session. For example:

- Who will record the discussion on flip charts.
- Who will keep track of the time.
- Who will report to the rest of the participants on the results of the discussion after it is completed.

Step 5:

**Check for understanding**--Check to be sure the instructions are clear.
To help speed the instruction process and improve the clarity of instructions, list the information in Steps 1 through 4 above on flip charts and review each element verbally. Post the instruction flip charts and leave them posted throughout the work period so participants can refer back to them if needed.
4.3 How To Have Small Groups Report On Their Discussions

Any time small group discussions are used in a meeting, it is important to have reports from the groups so that everyone in the meeting knows the key information or ideas that were exchanged. Some considerations in facilitating report-outs are:

- Allow time in the agenda for reports after each round of small group discussions.

- Give reporters a time limit for reports and make it short! Few reports ever need to go beyond five minutes. Since several groups are generally reporting one after the other, it is critical that each be short enough that other participants who are listening can sustain their interest.

- Advise reporters that they needn't provide background or environment commentary when all participants are familiar with the context. Just focus on the outcomes of the discussion.

- Allow participants listening to reports to respond with questions and comments, so all participants have the benefit of one another's views on the subjects.

After all reports are completed, lead a discussion on the reports and summarize key points.
Section 5: How To Use Flip Charts

Flip charts are an important tool for facilitators. They are used first to help give information to participants, for example, in presenting the purpose, objectives, etc. at the opening of the meeting. Writing on flip charts increases participants' comprehension and retention of the information that is presented. They are even more important to help gather information from participants during the meeting. When a facilitator writes a participant's idea on a flip chart, he or she shows respect for that idea. This has the effect of encouraging participants to put more ideas forward. Perhaps most importantly, using flip charts transforms the individual comments of participants into a group product; once a set of ideas is flip charted, the ideas belong to the group. Participants are generally more willing to deal objectively with ideas that have been listed on a flip chart than they are with ideas at the moment an individual puts them forth. Last, flip charts create a record of the group's work which is very valuable for preparing minutes of key outcomes of the meeting after it is over.

5.1 How To Prepare In Advance To Use Flip Charts

Well before the meeting, be sure the flip chart easels you plan to use are available, in good condition, and have all their parts (some require two bolts at the top to secure the flip chart; others require a separate cross-bar or other mechanism). Also, check the supply of flip chart tablets; at a minimum be sure there is one tablet for each easel you plan to use. Be sure, too, that a supply of markers, enough for you and for the participants if needed, is available in good condition. You will also need masking tape (the kind which will not damage walls, but will stick to walls) so you can hang flip charts on the walls in the meeting room.

5.2 How To Prepare On The Day Of A Work Session To Use Flip Charts

Shortly before the meeting begins, assemble each easel; it can be a complicated process that is difficult to do when under time pressure. Also, before you start the meeting, place the easels where you expect to use them in the meeting room, for example, in the front of the meeting room, in view of all participants or in the breakout rooms where participants will work in small groups.

5.3 How To Use Flip Charts To Help Give Information

Flip charts can be a valuable presentation aid when facilitators present information to participants. Unlike other visual aids, flip charts are uniquely well-suited to group process and its typically informal interaction style. First, the facilitator can easily face the participants and
even walk around the room while presenting information. Second, the facilitator can write on the prepared flip charts to highlight key points or make points more dynamically.

**How To Prepare To Use Flip Charts For Presenting**

The flip charts you plan to present from should be prepared in advance of the work session. If you write the flip charts as you present, your back will be to the meeting participants and your presentation will be slowed down significantly since writing takes longer than talking. Previously prepared flip charts may be left in, or taped into a flip chart tablet for transporting to the meeting room. Alternatively, they may be removed from the tablet, rolled up, and either wrapped with an extra sheet of paper or put into a mailing tube for protection.

**How To Arrange Information On The Flip Chart Page**

Write big enough on the flip chart for everyone in the room to see (1-1/2 inch high letters are best); practice with the markers you plan to use so that you are comfortable with them and can write clearly and evenly on the page. Leave lots of white space on the pages. Put only four or five lines of print, or only one or two images on a sheet. If the page is too crowded, it will be difficult for people to simultaneously follow what you say and read what's on the flip chart.

**How To Give Yourself Reminders Of What You Want To Say**

If you have a number of specific points you want to make regarding an item on the flip chart, or if you have a particular example you want to remember to use, you can write lightly in pencil on the flip chart near the item to prompt yourself. If you do it just right, you will be able to read your reminders as you stand near the flip chart, but the participants will not even notice them!

**How To Use Flip Chart Markers**

Use varied color markers to set off points and keep participants' attention. For words and illustrations use markers that are dark enough to be easily read from the farthest seat in the room: black or dark shades of green, blue, brown, or purple. To highlight points and make the flip charts more visually appealing use underlining, arrows, bullets, etc. on your flip charts. For these purposes you can use lighter and brighter colors, for example, red, yellow, orange, or pink.
5.4 How To Use Flip Charts To Help Gather Information

When facilitators write participants' comments on flip charts, several purposes are served. First, participants feel their points are appreciated. Second, ideas on flip charts can be used later in the meeting to prioritize points, track the flow of a discussion, or summarize key points. Third, the flip charts are a record of the discussion that can be kept for use in follow up to the work session, for example, developing minutes.

How To Capture Participants' Comments On Flip Charts

The most important guidelines for the use of flip charts to gather information from participants are: be legible, be fast, and be accurate. Write big and with dark-colored markers. To help you write fast, don't worry about how your writing looks, and don't try to capture every word, just key words--but be sure it's the participants' own words, don't edit! Unlike flip charts you make to present information, flip charts you make as participants raise ideas need not have a lot of white space. You can fill each page with writing.

How To Post Flip Charts

If you expect to refer to participants' comments during or after a discussion, post flip chart pages on a wall where they are visible to all participants. If there are a lot of flip charts generated, the walls can be "purged" periodically to avoid a chaotic visual environment for participants. Before the discussion starts, tear masking tape into strips to use in posting flip charts so you can hang the flip charts quickly.
Section 6: How To Help A Group Reach Consensus

Consensus decisionmaking is the heart of what makes groups more effective than individuals. Its special value is seen in the quality of decisions reached and the acceptance of and relative ease of implementation of decisions. While the process of reaching consensus varies depending on the complexity of the issue, the composition and size of the group, a few general principles apply to the consensus-forming process:

Consensus reaching takes time--Group members need time to discuss an issue thoroughly, work out their differences, and find areas of common agreement. The process can take less time with the help of a facilitator, but can be counted on to take longer than decisions made alone or between only a few people.

Consensus requires a commitment to decide by consensus--Consensus decisionmaking is difficult if all members of a group are working in good faith toward agreement; it is impossible if one or some members of the group are not committed to the consensus process. Some groups are skilled at consensus reaching, for example, most mature teams have learned how to reach consensus with little difficulty in most situations. However, when the group is inexperienced with consensus decisionmaking, or the composition or history of the group alerts you to likely difficulty in reaching consensus, you may want to consider conducting an exercise to illustrate beyond question the value of consensus before the actual decisionmaking process begins. Many such exercises exist, including the various Survival Exercises (Sub-Arctic, Desert, Cascades, etc.) available commercially from Human Synergistics, Inc. Also, similar exercises are available to subscribers of The Annual Handbook for Facilitators, published by Pfeiffer and Jones, who permit subscribers to reproduce and use exercises without copyright restrictions. The investment of money and the hour or so that such exercises require may be very worthwhile to help you establish a positive climate for consensus reaching.

Each element of the consensus reaching process must be facilitated with great care--From defining consensus, to agreeing on groundrules for consensus-reaching, to laying out the decision to be made and the decisionmaking process, each element of the consensus process must be given attention to improve the prospect of a successful decision. Where the group is small, collaborative and experienced with consensus-reaching, the consensus process may be reviewed quickly as a refresher. But where the group is large, adversarial, or inexperienced with consensus, the up-front preparation for the decisionmaking is critical. For all consensus decisionmaking processes, put all information, definitions, instructions, etc. pertaining to the decision on flip charts to ensure the group is considering precisely the same information at each point along the way.
6.1 How To Define A Consensus Decision

It is important to have a written definition of consensus so that all members of the group understand the task in the same way. A good, workable definition of consensus is:

"A decision in which everyone participates and which everyone can support, publicly."

When reviewing the definition, it is helpful to reinforce the points that everyone participates, and that everyone must be able to support the decision for it to qualify as a consensus.

In defining consensus decisionmaking it helps to distinguish it from other forms of decisionmaking. Explain to the group that what consensus is not includes:

**Voting**--In voting, participation in discussion may be cut short, affecting the quality of the decision, and all members may not support the outcome.

**Trading off**--"You can have your idea included if you include one of mine." Trading off is efficient, but people don't generally support an idea that was included only as part of a bartering process.

**Steamrolling**--Arguing long enough to wear others down and have your idea prevail works in the short run, but discussion is suppressed and people almost certainly don't support an outcome achieved this way.

**Withholding**--It may help keep the peace, but when participants do not speak up, their ideas do not get a hearing, thus full participation of all doesn't occur.

You may also want to remind the group that consensus is not:

**Perfect agreement**--A consensus decision represents the common ground in the group's thinking; it is what each member of the group could support--that is not the same as perfect agreement.

**Easy or fast**--Consensus is difficult and takes time, but is worth the effort for important decisions because it ensures both quality and support of the decision.

6.2 How To Facilitate Consensus-Reaching

Facilitating consensus decisionmaking involves the following steps:
Step 1:

Define consensus and explain the consensus reaching process--Be sure that everyone in the group is operating with the same understanding of consensus. Write the definition of what consensus is and what it is not on a flip chart. Explain the process to be used, for example, lay out the steps described below, and refer participants to the groundrules relevant to consensus reaching. If no such groundrules were established at the beginning of the meeting, suggest some groundrules that will help consensus work, for example:

"Express your experience, opinions and logic openly."

"Be open to others' experience, opinions, and logic."

"Use 'I' statements vs 'You' statements to express differences."

"Express differences in terms of 'concerns' and 'interests'."

"Actively seek agreement--look for common ground."

"When we have agreement, we will stop! (No revisiting a consensus decision unless the whole group decides to.)"

Step 2:

Agree on the issue to be decided--With the help of the group, write the decision task on a flip chart and adjust the wording as needed until everyone understands and agrees on the decision to be made, for example:

"Decision: How the group will approach the task of engaging stakeholders. 'Stakeholders' include the Governor's office, State education and business associations, labor organizations, and local school systems and businesses. For the purpose of this decision, we are not considering Federal staff, Congressional staff or other interested groups and individuals."

Step 3:

Explore the issue--Facilitate an open discussion of the issue to be decided. Participants may comment on such aspects of the issue and the decision as: previous experience with the issue, problems constraining decision options, or information pertaining to the issue. This discussion may be lightly structured with open-ended questions from the facilitator, but should be free-ranging enough to get each participant's information, concerns, and insights before the group. Sometimes it is helpful to ask the group members not to respond to others' observations, but simply to make whatever points they want to in support of their point of view.
Step 4:

Solicit a proposal—Ask participants if anyone would like to make a proposal that integrates key points raised in the discussion and conforms with the criteria that may have been developed. Write the proposal on a flip chart so everyone can consider it exactly as it was proposed. You may yourself be able to make a proposal (based entirely on what participants have said during the discussion and the criteria), but it is usually best for the proposal to come from one or more of the participants. You may wish to take a preliminary poll of the group at this point to see how close they may be to consensus.

Step 5:

Refine the proposal—Ask participants to raise any concerns or ideas they may have about any aspect of the proposal. Explain to participants that the goal of this step is to make adaptations to the proposal so that all participants can support it.

Step 6:

Ask for a show of consensus—It is important in consensus reaching that each participant makes an affirmative statement or gesture showing his or her agreement with the decision. It is NOT adequate to informally check for agreement, for example by saying something like, "Does everyone agree...we'll take no response as implied approval of the proposal." Each person must make a personal commitment to the consensus decision. It is also a good idea to give people a chance to express a range of support for a decision, not just yes or no. Options for ascertaining consensus include:

Option 1: Polling the group, in which each participant describes what he or she thinks about a proposal.

Option 2: Requesting a non-verbal indication of support, for example, thumbs up, thumbs sideways, or thumbs down, in which participants have three options: (1) agree, "I support the proposal as written", (2) agree with reservations, "I can support the proposal as written, these are my concerns...", or (3) disagree "I do not support the proposal as written and here's what it would take for me to support it...."

If the step of refining the proposal has been handled thoroughly by the facilitator and by the group members, consensus is often achievable on the first request for a show of sentiment. However, if one or more participants has continuing reservations and do not support the proposal as written, you might ask, "What would it take for you to support this decision?" Some groups establish a groundrule regarding consensus that anyone who does not support a consensus
supported by others in the group must be ready to offer an adaptation or option that would be supportable. If possible, make the changes necessary in the decision for the whole group to support it. If the group is not close to consensus, go back to step 4, discuss the proposed decision further, then repeat steps 5 and 6.

6.3 How To Help A Large Group Reach Consensus

If the group is too large for discussions to take place fruitfully in the whole group, then the facilitator can use small group process. How large "too large" is depends on the facilitators' skill and the group's readiness to reach consensus. Certainly a group of 20 or more should be broken into small groups for consensus reaching on a subject of any difficulty.

When using small group process to achieve consensus in a large group, use the following guidance:

Do Front-End Preparation With The Whole Group

Steps 1, and 2 should be done in the whole group: explaining the decisionmaking process, and defining the decision to be made. (Discussion, Step 3, takes place in small groups rather than in the whole group.)

Make The Small Groups Representative Of The Whole Group

Be sure that each small group has within it representatives of each of the roles or points of view represented in the large group so a consensus reached in the small group is likely to be supported by the whole group. Refer to options 3 and 4 under 4.1 How To Create Small Groups, above.

Provide Discussion Guidance To The Small Groups

Offer discussion points to the small groups to help guide their discussions along similar paths to increase the likelihood of comparable proposals being developed among the small groups. For example:

"What are constraints bearing on this decision? What will make it difficult to reach the objective the decision addresses?" (In the previous example, "What constrains our ability to involve stakeholders")

"What are supports--resources, opportunities, players--affecting this decision?" ("Our ability to involve stakeholders.")
"What are possible strategies for resolving this issue? Brainstorm options for what could be proposed as a decision on this issue."

"Which of these options best conforms with the guiding principles established for this decision?"

"What option(s) can we all agree on and support?"

Set A Time Limit

Be sure to allow enough time for substantive discussions. Propose a time limit and check with the group to get concurrence. You may offer a time at which you will check with the small groups to see how they are doing, for example, 30 minutes, at which point, based on the input from the small groups, you can determine how much time to give for completion of the task by all groups.

Have Small Groups Report And The Whole Group Seek Consensus

If the small groups are all working on the same decision task, the chances are great that their proposals will have common elements. Usually the whole group can see right away that certain decision ideas were proposed repeatedly and quickly agree on them. If small groups were working on different decisions, the large group will usually accept their proposals with minimal changes, as long as the composition of the small groups reflects the composition of the whole group (that is, as long as small groups contain people with the range of views found in the larger group).

Have A Sub-Group Develop A Consensus Proposal For The Whole Group's Consideration

If a satisfactory or complete consensus is not achieved during the small group report out period, set up a very small but diverse group (representing the range of views of the whole group) to work up a proposal for the whole group to consider. Have the whole group propose the membership of this sub-group so the right, truly representative composition is assured. Ask the small group to work outside of the meeting framework (outside of the room during a session, or outside of session hours). When the whole group is committed to seeking consensus, participants will almost always respond positively to a proposal from representative delegates. This method is also useful when the whole group agrees on elements of a decision but wants to generate a detailed statement, memo, or other precise treatment of the decision.
Conflict is inevitable when people work in groups to develop, explore, expand, and make decisions about subjects that matter to them. It is not only a natural human behavior, but in its positive form (differing, as opposed to arguing) it is also an important part of the creative process. Without the freedom to differ, groups may find themselves limited to only the most conventional, accepted kinds of thinking and problem solving. Furthermore, conflict is essential to critical thinking. Groups in which members do not effectively express their differences can fall into *group think*, a mode of group behavior in which ideas, even ideas which are not well thought through, may prevail despite the individual group members' ability to know the ideas are not useful, or worse, actually harmful to the group's goals.

Conflict is of at least three kinds: based on emotional responses, based on rational differences, or based on a combination of the two. The ideas that follow can help group members understand and work through conflict in a constructive way, regardless of its source(s).

### 7.1 How to Recognize Rational Sources Of Conflict

People differ for many reasons, but the rationally-based conflict generally stems from people operating with:

- Different facts.
- Different experiences.
- Different values.
- Different assumptions.
- Different constraints.

When it becomes apparent to you that a conflict is emerging, these areas are a good place to start in figuring out how to resolve the difference. Check with the differing individuals to see if:

- Facts need to be clarified, *Our product is due at the end of the month, not at the end of this meeting.*

- Experiences need to be compared and sorted out, *It's true that the meeting of the planning team wasn't as productive as it had hoped, but the meetings you had before that were very good; let's give the process one more try in this meeting and see what happens.*
Values need to be aligned, *As you point out, Mary Ann, the group has agreed that open communication will be a guiding principle, but Ray is saying that the value of confidentiality also needs to be considered. Why don't you agree to decide by consensus at the end of the meeting what can be shared with your offices and what should not. That way you can talk freely during the meeting and know that only what everyone agrees to will be shared later. Let's also agree that the bias at that point will be to share as much as possible.*

Assumptions need to be aligned, *If some of you are assuming the Superintendent does not really want a solution and others are assuming she does, we need to agree on how to proceed. Shall we decide that as a group you want to work in good faith, even though some of you have your doubts, or would you like to ask Ms. McConnell to join us and talk to us some more about what she really wants from you?*

Constraints need to be understood, *So the issue is that you only have two staff people and cannot spare anyone for this follow-up team. Perhaps rather than give up the follow-up plan, one of the other programs' representatives could agree to represent your group as well. If that's possible, you could meet with that person and explain your program's interests.*

Conflict deriving from these sources can generally be resolved with discussion, particularly if it is addressed as soon as it appears.

### 7.2 How To Recognize Emotional Sources Of Conflict

It is important to understand the emotional responses that may be called forth in meetings, and to have some ideas about how to respond to them in a positive and supportive way. People remain eminently human at work, and emotions do play a part in people's behavior. Facilitators need effective ways to recognize emotionally-based conflict and to ensure that it can be managed. Most important, facilitators need to learn to resist their *own* emotional responses when participants have reacted emotionally, a reaction that may be expressed toward the facilitator, regardless of the real focus of the participants' frustration.

**Dinosaur Brains**

One model for understanding human emotional responses that can cause conflict and be triggered by the prospect of conflict is described in the book, *Dinosaur Brains*, by Albert J. Bernstein, and is summarized below:

...[I]nside each human brain lurks the brain of a dinosaur -- irrational, emotional, easily enraged -- waiting to take control. . . . [H]umans don't always act like humans. One minute they're normal, rational people; the next, they're little better than reptiles. Trouble comes when they use the
Reptile Response -- their primitive thinking patterns -- instead of the rational part of their brain.

The Construction Of The Human Brain

Put simply, the human brain has three parts. One part is the "new" brain of relatively recent evolution and is the center of thinking and logic. It sits on top of our "old" brain, which controls instincts and emotions. The third part is the limbic system which lies between and connects the two brains, allowing us to move between one brain and the other.

Lizard Logic

When people operate out of their dinosaur brain, they appear, and sometimes are irrational at least temporarily. The problem is that the dinosaur brain is programmed in a very limited way. Like the Dinosaur for which it is named, it acts in accordance with six rules of instinctual response known as "lizard logic":

1. Get it now! (Impulsive)
2. Fight, flee, or freeze (Threatened)
3. Be dominant (Competitive or controlling)
4. Defend the territory (Defensive)
5. If it hurts, hiss! (Complaining)
6. Like me, good; not like me, bad! (Intolerant)

Sometimes--especially in stressful situations--a short-circuit occurs and people have difficulty rechanneling their response from their dinosaur brains to their reasonable brains, and to shift from instinctual, emotional behavior to thoughtful, rational behavior.

It is important that facilitators understand and accept that everyone reacts from his or her dinosaur brains sometimes. Although it is easy for one dinosaur brain to bring forth other dinosaur brains (for one person's emotional reactions to stimulate others' emotional reactions), facilitators must avoid the temptation to respond to impulsive, threatened, defensive, or other emotionally-based behavior in like emotional ways and to respond instead in rational ways.

7.3 How To Manage And Resolve Conflict
Regardless of the source of the conflict, strategies can be employed with groups which will resolve conflicts constructively in almost all instances. They include:

**Use groundrules**--Written, posted groundrules can encourage participants to be tolerant about differences and help you help them resolve conflict when it occurs. The first point of return when the group experiences difficulties, whether of an individual or group nature, is the groundrules. It's a good idea for one of the groundrules to make it o.k. to differ and for another to call for all ideas to be treated with respect. A review of the groundrules may help group members get back into control when emotional behavior arises. If you know in advance that a subject for group discussion or an assignment within the group is likely to prompt emotional reactions, it is useful to discuss that fact ahead of time. Bringing the emotional content of a subject out in the open before the group tries to address the subject may enable the group to avoid emotional conflict before it happens.

**Acknowledge conflicts as they emerge**--If differences of a rational nature arise within a discussion or while working on a task, recognize them openly at the time they occur, before frustration has a chance to grow and create an emotional situation.

**Have group members explain and listen to conflicting views**--When different points of view cannot be readily reconciled, it is helpful for (1) a proponent of each point of view to simply and objectively state the point, while (2) others are asked to listen and vice versa. Remind the speakers to use neutral language in their statements. Often a clear restatement will help the group see that the views are not mutually exclusive and can be accommodated into the group's discussion or decision.

**Look for common ground or compromise**--If differences are not resolved once restated, the individuals or the group then look for commonalities, opportunities for merging different ideas, or ideas for a compromise.

**Identify alternatives**--If differences cannot be accommodated or a compromise cannot be reached by the participants, try to come up with an alternative idea--one that all can agree on which is neither of the contested ideas.

**Review options**--If an alternative cannot be identified, then review the options available to the group. Should neither idea be pursued or considered? Should both? Any other alternatives?

**Postpone the issue**--Sometimes it is useful to allow a cooling off period and postpone dealing with a difficult issue until later in the meeting or until another time. Often a combination of the chance to have positive experiences in the group on other subjects and the passage of time make it easier to deal with a problem area later on.
Help individuals resolve conflict—If conflict between individuals is affecting the group's ability to do its work, you can try to help the people who are in conflict by gently asking them to work out their differences:

Express concerns in terms of the group's need to do its work.

Ask the individuals for ideas to resolve the problem; have them meet in a sidebar (a meeting outside of the meeting) to work it out, alone or with one other person.

Offer alternatives that do not force a loss of face.

Ask the individuals to meet with you or with a volunteer from the group in a mediator capacity outside of the meeting to resolve the conflict.

7.4 How To Use Interest-Based Problem Solving To Prevent Differences From Becoming Conflicts

Consider the three most commonly used options for resolving differences:

1. Determining who has the most POWER: Decided by whoever can coerce the other, for example, which agency is larger or has more funding.

2. Determining whose RIGHTS should be recognized: Decided by a formal standard, such as regulations or an MOU; or by a social standard, such as fairness.

3. Reconciling both sides' INTERESTS: Decided by accommodating what both sides want, need, or care about.

Focusing on interests, not typically a first choice for resolving differences and solving problems, is the approach which works best in groups because it simultaneously preserves relationships and increases prospects for successful implementation of solutions.

The story of the orange helps to illustrate the value of understanding interests. In facilitating, it is important to be able to distinguish, and help the group distinguish, interests and positions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interests</th>
<th>Positions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 The story of the orange is: Five people were in dispute over an orange. If power were used to decide who got the orange, then one person would be satisfied and four would not. If rights were used to settle the dispute, and, say the standard of fairness were applied, then the orange would be divided into five equal parts and some of the disputants would be satisfied, but likely others would not. If interests were explored, however, it might be discovered that all could be satisfied: suppose that one wanted the orange for just a few minutes, to practice juggling; one wanted the peel to decorate a cake; one wanted the pulp to put in a fruit salad; one wanted the juice to drink; and one wanted the seeds to plant in the garden.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focused on broad questions or issues; open as</strong></td>
<td><strong>Focused on specific answers or solutions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to solutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Based on values, principles, or logic</strong></td>
<td><strong>Expressed as authorities, claims, or rights.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Capable of being appreciated by the other side</strong></td>
<td><strong>Based on competitive positioning</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Based on mutual trust and respect</strong></td>
<td><strong>Based on mutual distrust</strong></td>
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</table>

Consider the differences in likely effect of the following examples that were developed by real groups from two different organizations—one a human services agency and the other an employment and training grantee—learning how to cooperate on implementing welfare reform. The examples assume one group has issues it would like to share with the other group. Here is how the issues sound if they are expressed as positions:

*Your intake process won't work with our requirements; you'll have to change it for us to be able to work effectively with you.*

*You should reschedule your team meetings; they are not held at a convenient time for us. The first Tuesday of every month would work better. Otherwise, we won't be able to participate in this collaboration.*

*Our agency doesn't have an equivalent to your agency's "Most Valuable Players Award". We'd like your group to withdraw from that program.*

The same issues expressed in terms of interests—needs, desires, or concerns—sound more like this:

*We have a concern about the intake process; we need to capture certain information before any services are provided or referrals made in order to meet our regulatory requirements, and your intake process encourages immediate selection of services. Can we work something out so that we can both meet our requirements and minimize duplication? This example: explains why the concern; respects the other side's process; and offers open-ended solution pathway.*

*We appreciate your inviting us to participate in your monthly team meetings because we think it's important to do joint planning, but the schedule you propose conflicts with our regular State-wide conference call. Could we talk about how to find time for joint planning and also meet both teams' scheduling needs? This example: expresses value...*
placed on joint planning; offers open-ended solution pathway; and respects the other side's scheduling needs.

*Our staff members need a chance to feel their contribution is being recognized; is there some way we could do something jointly, something like your agency's "Most Valuable Players Award" that could recognize how hard both our groups are working?* This example: explains the need; expresses value placed on recognition; respects other side's program; offers an open-ended solution pathway.

To help a group use interest-based problem solving approaches, the following steps are suggested:

**Step 1:**

**Include interest-based problem solving in groundrules**--For example, if you know ahead of time that interests in a group are likely to be different, you might include a groundrule that reads:

*Express differences in terms of interests--needs, desires, concerns.*

If you did not know ahead of time that such a groundrule would be needed, it can always be added when you see that people in the group have different perspectives and different interests regarding the problem or decision before the group.

**Step 2:**

**Explain interest-based problem solving**--Help the group understand that there is a difference between expressing differences in terms of positions and expressing them in terms of interests. The story of the orange may be a helpful way to show the advantages of exploring interests before moving to solutions when there are differences.

**Step 3:**

**Have group brainstorm interests**--Deal with differences openly; start the problem solving discussion by having everyone involved express his or her interests in the outcome. Put their interests on a flip chart as they state them. Use the rules for brainstorming (see Section 3.9, especially no evaluation of people's comments).

**Step 4:**

**Establish the expressed interests as criteria**--Proceed with the problem solving discussion using the interests as criteria or guiding principles for arriving at and testing solution ideas.
Step 5:

Use a structured problem solving process--Groups can generally do a better job of problem solving when they work from a structure of some sort to help guide their discussions. Such structure helps to ensure that all three elements of problem solving are considered by the group: (1) gathering relevant information, (2) analyzing that information, and (3) selecting a resolution or course of action. One problem solving process to consider is offered below; it is a series of discussion questions--a modified force field analysis approach:

1. **Definition**--How do you define this problem? What's not working? How does this problem evidence itself--what are examples of things that happen or don't happen as they should?

2. **Vision**--What is the realistic optimum that could be achieved if this problem were solved? What are examples of things that would work differently? Happen or not happen? What is the desired result of solving this problem?

3. **Obstacles**--What are obstacles that will make it difficult to achieve the optimum outcomes?

4. **Strategies**--What are strategies for overcoming the obstacles and making the desired outcomes achievable? What strategies will respond to all expressed interests? *(Strategies are general approaches or guiding principles, such as "Establish a joint task force to explore the issue and propose a workplan", or "Involve partners to avoid duplication of effort", not specific actions, such as "Develop a handbook", or "Issue an RFP".)*

5. **Action planning**--*(Optional: If not specified in 4. above, and if the problem cannot be solved on the spot)* Who should do what, by when to solve this problem? How will the efforts to solve this problem be kept on track? How will people working on it be accountable?

6. **Anything else**--Is there anything else you should think and talk about now regarding this problem? (For example, any linkages to other issues you haven't already discussed? Any contingency planning you might need to do? Any resource questions? Any other special considerations?)
Section 8: How To Facilitate Teambuilding

Considerable research shows that people working in teams can be far more productive and produce better quality of work than people working alone. Yet, working in teams is a challenge for most Americans because most of us work in organizations that support and reward individual accomplishment, favor time-oriented measures of efficiency (faster is better), and have a hierarchical view of authority and accountability, especially regarding decisionmaking. So, while Americans generally like the idea of working in teams, the actual experience of it can prove frustrating.

8.1 How To Distinguish Teams From Groups

It is important first to understand the differences between a group of people who happen to be working together or participating in a meeting and a team. Because of these differences, facilitation plays an even more important role in the success of teams than it does in the success of groups. Compared to most groups, teams:

**Work together as a group for a longer time**—Temporary teams generally work together for periods ranging from six months to a year or more; standing teams, whose members perform their jobs in a team configuration, may work together for several years. Both temporary and standing teams generally meet more often than other groups, usually on a regular basis, for example, weekly or monthly.

**Make more decisions by consensus**—To be most effective, all significant decisions made by the team need to be consensus decisions. Consensus decisionmaking in teams requires a lot of patience, open-mindedness, and interpersonal skill. The need to repeatedly confront and resolve differences and the constant pressure to reach agreement on issues and decisions can strain team relationships.

**Work with greater autonomy**—The role of a facilitator working with a team, is subtly different than when working with a group convened once or a few times. If the team is new, the facilitator works to help them develop a charter, which includes goals, groundrules, and operating methods. The expectation is that the team members will internalize the capacity to use these frameworks to manage themselves. Over time, teams develop preferred ways of presenting information and ideas, discussing issues of interest to them, making decisions, and producing work. The facilitator coming into an established team needs to learn how the team operates and adapt to its established processes.

**Feel a more acute responsibility for producing results**—Team meetings have a product-orientation that many regular meetings do not. Teams often have a sense of their
visibility and accountability, and feel the pressure to move forward with greater intensity than most other groups.

**Need to develop and maintain stronger relationships**--A group meeting once or a few times, or even regularly, can tolerate unresolved differences among members and limited personal relationships. Teams need to maintain strong working relationships which involve much more effort to get to know each other personally, to understand each others' orientations and capabilities, and to work out differences among each other.

**Require greater attention to group dynamics and group process**--*Teamwork* is more than just pooling the efforts of several people. In teams, it is often said that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; this is actually true and is responsible for the greater productivity of teams compared to conventional work organizations. Because of the importance of the positive interplay of people's intelligence and experience to team effectiveness, group dynamics and group process play a far greater role in determining team success than they do with more casual groups.

### 8.2 How To Understand Team Formation

As a facilitator, you need a sound understanding of group dynamics in order to be of real help when working with teams. Teams have an especially challenging task in the early stages of their development. Five stages of development have been identified:

**Stage 1: Forming**

In which the members of the team meet one another and begin exploring their roles in the team, their relationship with one another as team members, and ideas about how the team will operate. Even if the team members already know each other, if they are just beginning to work in this team, the forming stage still occurs. This stage is generally characterized by uncertainty: members' tentative sharing of information and ideas, polite exploration of options, and careful scrutiny of other members of the team.

**Stage 2: Storming**

In which members of the team begin to understand their differences, encounter divergent ideas about their task, their roles, and the processes by which they will do their work. This stage is generally characterized by disharmony: competition of individuals, ideas, and approaches; conflict among members about differences; frustration about the lack of cohesion; sectionalizing of the team into differing camps, and threat of the group breaking down.
Stage 3: Norming

In which the members of the team begin to recognize a common interest in the team and its task, develop common goals for the team, clarify roles of individuals within the team, and develop strategies for working together smoothly. This stage is generally characterized by optimism: relationships in the team deepen, tensions ease, members' concerns are resolved, and the team's task and process are clarified, the formation of a team is underway.

Stage 4: Performing

In which the members of the team work productively to achieve their goals and carry out their work. This stage is generally characterized by productivity: a sense of progress and achievement on the part of the team develops, bonds are formed between members, and enthusiasm and creativity for the team's work are high.

Stage 5: Adjourning

In which members of temporarily-established teams, having completed their task, prepare to disband. This stage is generally characterized by reluctance to part: team members review their experiences together, evaluate their accomplishments, and often arrange to keep in touch. For standing teams, especially if they are small, this phase occurs when a member leaves the team.

8.3 How To Help A Team Through The Forming Stage

The facilitator can help a team during the Forming stage by:

**Ensuring team members really get to know one another**--Provide a process for in-depth introductions if team members don't know one another. If they do know each other, but have not worked in this team before, offer a process by which they can begin sharing their values about the work at hand, for example:

"As you introduce yourselves, please explain the reason or reasons why you signed up for this team."

"As you introduce yourselves, please describe what you would like to see come out of this team experience."

"After you have introduced yourselves, please develop a joint statement--a few sentences--about what you will be able to accomplish as a team that might not have been accomplished or accomplished as well if you were doing this work as individuals."
**Develop a team charter**—When you first begin working with a new team, a good way to help members continue to get to know each other and at the same time help them manage the storming stage and move toward the performing stage is to help them develop a team charter by discussing and agreeing on:

- **Team vision**: What is the intended outcome, product, or impact of the team?

- **Team mission**: What, broadly will the team do in order to achieve its vision.

- **Authority**: What decisions is the team expected to or able to make on its own? What are the limits to the team's authority?

- **Scope**: What topics, issues, goals, etc. fall into the team's domain?

- **Boundaries**: What topics, issues, goals, etc. are outside of the team's domain? (For example, what subjects related to the team's work are the responsibility of another team, of management, or of another organization.)

- **Membership**: Is this the right group for the team's task? Are other members needed? How will changes in team membership be handled?

- **Resources**: What financial, space, contract, equipment or other resources are available to the team? What does the team need that it does not now have and could realistically expect to get?

- **Meetings**: How often will the team meet, for how long, and in what format (Face-to-face sessions? Conference calls? Video-conferences?) What is expected of team members in terms of attendance at meetings?

- **Communication**: How often and how will the team communicate between meetings?

- **Accountability**: What will comprise a successful outcome? To whom is the team collectively accountable? How will each member be held individually accountable? How will the team hold itself and its members accountable as work is ongoing?

- **Groundrules**:

  How the team will operate, for example,

  *Rotate facilitator, recorder and timekeeper roles among participants.*
Have one person (rotating) collect agenda items from participants and circulate agenda by two days before meeting.

Have recorder circulate record of decisions made to participants within one week of meeting.

What processes the team will use, for example,

Make decisions by consensus.

Decisions may be delegated to sub-groups of the team or to individual team members.

Distribution of work to sub-groups or team members will be decided by the team as a whole.

How team members agree to behave, for example, to:

Listen to and respect others' experiences, ideas, concerns, insights.

Be candid--put real issues on the table, including areas of disagreement.

Actively seek consensus--look for common ground, be open to compromise, offer consensus proposals.

Deal with issues affecting the team in the team--don't complain about the team outside of the team.

Creating feelings of inclusion--Use non-judgmental, supportive language and behavior, for example:

- Acknowledge and reinforce different thinking and working styles in a positive way vs expecting all team members to adopt a particular, narrow set of beliefs, or practices.

- Respond to challenges in a receptive, non-defensive manner, establishing an open dialogue with all members of the team vs demeaning or closing off discussion of concerns expressed by some members.

- Support each person in the team, especially when outlying views are expressed or special needs or problems emerge vs allowing any individuals to become isolated in the team.
8.4 How To Help A Team Through The Storming Stage

As a facilitator you can help a team during the *Storming* stage by:

**Dealing with differences openly**--Bring differences out into the open; use the groundrules to encourage different points of view being expressed, listened to, and respected.

**Handling issues affecting the team, in the team**--Help the team explore differences in team members' background, so differences in point of view can be understood in context. Involve all team members in resolving issues, for example, when issues about the team's work are raised by one or a few people, encourage the whole team to help define, analyze, and resolve the issues. Encourage the team to work out its issues together, and not to bring up complaints or disagreements outside of the team.

**Having team members work together in mixed and changing sub-groups**--Provide opportunities for team members to work with each other in various combinations, for example regroup them for different activities. This will give everyone a chance to get to know and trust all other members of the team.

8.5 How To Help A Team Through The Norming Stage

You can expedite the team's progress toward and through the *Norming* stage with these approaches:

**Get the team to agree explicitly on what it is trying to achieve**--In addition to the consensus on the team's vision, mission, and other charter elements, teams are helped to norm by having a clear workplan--who is expected to do what, by when. Additionally, at the start of each team meeting or each new task, it is helpful for the team members to discuss what the meeting or task is expected to produce.

**Help the team develop common values**--For example, lead a discussion on the importance of the project at hand, possible positive outgrowths of your efforts, or what would make this project or effort the biggest possible success. The team may also benefit from a discussion of what is a team, so that they can establish common values about themselves as a team.

**Create opportunities for shared experiences**--Provide chances for team members to (a) develop their understanding of issues together, for example, making site visits, or attending expert presentations, etc., (b) perform tasks together, make assignments to sub-groups rather than individuals, or (c) evaluate team progress together.
Offer opportunities to take risks together--For example, if the team is to make a presentation to higher management about the team's work, encourage them to do it together. Or if a particularly difficult project has to be undertaken, have them do it, or at least plan it, together.

Help the team develop self-facilitating skills--Encourage team members to attend facilitator training or to rotate the facilitation function (guided by input from you or another experienced facilitator) until a set of self-facilitation norms and skills are developed. This step will help the team members work more productively whenever they are in a team session or working in sub-groups of the team.
Section 9 How To Evaluate Work Sessions

The purpose of evaluation is to determine the extent to which the meeting achieves the goals established for it so that the facilitator, the meeting planners, and often the participants as well can learn from the experience. The comprehensiveness of an evaluation is determined by a combination of factors such as the duration of the meeting, the number of participants, the urgency of the group's task, the investment made in the meeting, and the consequence of success or failure of the meeting achieving its objectives.

9.1 How To Approach Evaluating A Work Session

Some guidelines for evaluating meetings are:

Ask the participants--You can count on participants to give you honest and useful feedback so long as you ask the right questions. Questions should be simple, clear, and worded objectively. If evaluation of the outcomes or products of the meeting is to be done by others, such as customers or expert reviewers be desired, be sure to include participants' views as well.

Evaluate the minimum--The ideal evaluation instrument captures only the minimum information you need, not all the information you wish you had. Keep in mind that participants will lose patience with overly long evaluation forms or processes, and will likely give you less and less useful feedback.

Evaluate both formatively and summatively--Formative evaluation is intended to yield information to improve the session while it is underway; summative evaluation is intended to assess the effectiveness of the session after it is completed, and may be used to improve future sessions. Formative evaluation often focuses on satisfaction, operation, and quality and may be as simple a process as asking participants for brief oral or written feedback on how things are going at the end of each day of a multi-day meeting. Summative evaluation generally focuses on efficiency and impact and usually involves a more comprehensive written feedback form.

Don't be afraid of "bad" feedback--Negative feedback should be seen as good information. Evaluation results are valuable to you and the meeting planners whether the information tells you that something you tried worked or that it didn't work as you had expected. Only through evaluation can you continue to develop your own capability as a facilitator and the organization's understanding of how to hold effective meetings.

Make evaluation count--Make good use of the results of your evaluation to help you continuously improve as a facilitator and to help the meeting planners design better meetings in the future. If the participants you've been working with will be meeting
again, share the evaluation results with them so they can benefit from their own and their colleagues' assessments as well.

9.2 How To Decide What Evaluation Questions To Ask

Because the effectiveness of meetings depends on a number of attitudinal and objective factors, evaluators are wise to examine the meeting from several vantage points, including:

**Satisfaction**--How people involved in the work session (participants, facilitators, administrators, or others) regarded their experience with it.

**Operation**--The extent to which events associated with the meeting occurred as planned, for example, according to schedule, in the intended sequence, or attended by the intended numbers or kinds of participants.

**Quality**--The extent to which the topics, design, materials, facilitator delivery, and other aspects of the meeting were well designed, well carried out, and otherwise well-handled.

**Efficiency**--How well the resources associated with the meeting were used; for example, the facilitators' and participants' time, the materials, the facility, or any other resources.

**Impact**--The extent to which the work session achieved what it was intended to achieve, for example, produce decisions, elevate understanding of an issue, or move a planning process forward. The product of the meeting can sometimes be evaluated not only by participants, but by customers, stakeholders, or experts. The *ultimate* impact, that is, the extent to which the session made a difference in organizational effectiveness, is difficult and expensive to measure, but certainly not impossible. It can be evaluated through surveys or other methods once participants are back on the job and have had a chance to apply, work with, and live with the outcomes of the meeting.

Your evaluation questions should enable you to capture information on most or all of these evaluation factors. Make the decision about what questions to ask based on what information will help you as a facilitator and what information will help the meeting planners with future meetings of this kind in the organization. If the group will be meeting again, consider what information will help the participants continue to improve their productivity as a group.
9.3 How To Evaluate A Work Session While It Is Underway

Because the best source of information about a meeting's effectiveness is the participants themselves, facilitators can get a good reading about how the meeting is going from daily participant feedback. Such feedback needs to be:

- Actively requested.
- Systematically collected--(a) time set aside in the meeting for participants to respond, (b) in writing, to (c) a clear set of questions.
- Easy for participants to provide and for facilitators to analyze.
- Fed back to participants.
- Responded to and used by the facilitator.

Questions to capture information on what worked well each day and what needs to change can be as simple as:

"What did you particularly appreciate about today?"

"What would you like to see done or done differently tomorrow?"

At the beginning of each day of a multi-day meeting, the facilitator feeds back the key points raised by participants in the previous day's feedback. This process gives the facilitator a chance to reinforce positive elements of the meeting and to clarify points of confusion or frustration. The facilitator also explains what can be changed as a result of the feedback from participants and what cannot be changed and why.

9.4 How To Evaluate A Work Session After It Is Over

At the end of a meeting, it is valuable to collect feedback from participants about the meeting as a whole, even if you have gathered daily feedback on previous days. The objectives of this evaluation are to:

- Determine the extent to which the meeting's objectives were achieved. (*Satisfaction, Effectiveness, Impact*)
- Identify what worked well, so replicable effective elements of the meeting can be considered for future meetings. (*Satisfaction, Quality, Efficiency*)
Identify what worked less well, so ineffective elements of the meeting can be done differently in future meetings to the extent possible. *(Satisfaction, Quality, Efficiency)*

While you may be interested in how participants felt about the room, the timing of the meeting, and other aspects of it, be sure to ask only questions whose answers you can do something about. Lean toward ease and brevity of completion of the questions you ask. If the meeting is a day or more in length, you may want to add a question on the value of the facilitation to participants. This is especially important in your early experiences as a facilitator. Examples of end-of-session evaluation questions are:

"To what extent were the objectives of this meeting achieved?"

"If another meeting like this were held in the future, what should be done the same?"

"If another meeting like this were held in the future, what should be done differently?"

"What feedback do you have for the facilitator(s)?"

"All in all, how satisfied are you with the outcomes of this meeting?"

"Any other feedback?"

Be sure to include an open-ended question such as, "Any other feedback?", to capture any thoughts your other questions may not elicit.

If the group is large, you may want to provide closed-ended questions with scaled response options. Be aware that you will lose some qualitative data in order to gain ease of analysis. In constructing closed-ended questions, be sure your scale is balanced between negative and positive options:

**DO:**

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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td>Somewhat dissatisfied</td>
<td>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</td>
<td>Somewhat satisfied</td>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>Somewhat satisfied</td>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>Extremely satisfied</td>
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With closed-ended questions it is especially important to include one open-ended final question, *Any other feedback?* or its equivalent, to be sure participants have a chance to ‘give you information you may not have elicited with your preceding questions.