

The role of a facilitator is to help guide inquiry and discussions, keep conversation on topic, and ensure the discussion space is safe, brave, and inclusive.

A good facilitator will:

- Focus on *procedure* rather than *content*
- Pay attention to how participants are adding to the discussion
- Add clarity and transparency when needed
- Resist the urge to help answer the current question or contribute to the conversation by providing their own answers
- Focus on ensuring that everyone else’s contributions are as clear and transparent as possible.

Facilitating Discussion – Moves and Principles

There are various discussion “moves” that can be made during an inquiry or discussion to help participants think carefully and critically, be creative, and think more openly about contributions made by others in the group.

- Re-Directing
- Distilling
- Paraphrasing
- Locating
- Naming Moves
- Probing Reasoning
- Identifying a Justification

Guiding Principles	
}	Track the inquiry & discussion
}	Work towards reasonable conclusions – multiple answers are ok!
}	Let the inquiry & discussion be participant driven

Explanations and examples of these moves are on the next page!

These tips and moves are well-suited to an inquiry-style facilitation; that is, when you are trying to answer a question as a group. If you would like other resources or training on facilitation, explore the links below:

- [A Facilitator’s Handbook](#)
 - This handbook is a fantastic, comprehensive guide to facilitation!
- [Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations Facilitation Training](#)
- [Basic Facilitation Skills for Non-Profit & Government Organizations, offered by professional facilitators from the Alberta Culture Community Development Unit](#)
- [Liberating Structures](#)

Explanations:

Re-Directing: asks participants to return to important topics that the group has moved away from, and that some participants may still want to discuss.

Facilitator: "Before we move on to the topic of volunteer re-engagement, I just want to make sure we've fully explored what Louis said about volunteer recognition. Does anyone agree or disagree with what they said?"

Note that this move requires a judgment about what constitutes an important contribution or topic. That judgement must be made with the entire discourse in mind (including the objectives of the conversation and the intent of the participants).

Distilling: bringing out or clarifying essential criteria in elaborate/lengthy contributions.

Facilitator: "You said you want to be recognized, but what does recognition mean to you?"

Paraphrasing: summarizing entire contributions into concise accounts.

Facilitator: "What I heard you say is; although you don't volunteer in order to get accolades or a reward, you would still appreciate being recognized for the work you do. Is that right?"

Note that distilling and paraphrasing are very similar on the surface but differ in that distilling asks us to focus on some part of a contribution, while paraphrasing asks us to focus on the whole of the contribution.

Locating: making determinations about the progress that the group has made on answering the main question.

Facilitator: "So far, we've established that recognition isn't necessary for you to volunteer, but it is an important component of re-engagement and retention."

Naming Moves: identifying specific argumentative moves, e.g., objections, (dis)agreement, (counter-)examples.

*Facilitator: "So, are you agreeing with what Ronnie said?"
"That's a good counterexample to what Lisa said."
"Thanks for saying that. It's a good distinction from what John said."*

Probing Reasoning: clarifying contributions or identifying potentially faulty reasoning

*Facilitator: "Why do you believe that?"
"Is that so in all cases?"
"Can anyone think of a reason we shouldn't ask this question on an application form?"
"That sounds different than what's been said already. Is it different?"*

Identifying a Justification: make explicit assumptions or general rules that indicate the relevance of a claim.

*Participant: "If a person has anything come up on their background check, we don't allow them to volunteer, because we don't want our participants to feel unsafe."
Facilitator: "So, if someone has a criminal record, it means they're not a safe person, no matter what?"*

Procedural Tips:

- Establish procedures and expectations of creating and maintaining a safe, brave, and inclusive space at the outset
- Ask the last person who spoke to pick the next person to speak
 - Participants can indicate they'd like to speak by raising their hand, or holding up one finger. Whatever the gesture is, ensure it is not distracting to the group.
- Track the conversation on a whiteboard
 - Label who in the group said what, and draw arrows to connect what has been said to new contributions
- Ask for and prioritize new participants who haven't spoken
- Always allow participants to pass if they would prefer not to speak
- Do not tolerate aggression or disrespect
 - Remind participants of procedures and expectations if participants begin speaking out of turn or in a disrespectful manner
- Ask for agreement or disagreement to what has been said
- Ask if anyone has a different idea than what has been said
- Ask what assumptions are present in what has been said, or questions being asked
- Ask a participant or the group to summarize where you are at in the inquiry or discussion

Here are some skills and abilities of a good facilitator:

- Spontaneity, creativity, and tolerance for the unknown or unpredictable.
- Flexibility to change content or approach, as well as balance open discussion with more controlled discussion.
- Ability to keep discussion moving and participants discussing with one another.
- Ability to end the discussion well by priming participants that discussion is ending by summarizing points.
- Equity and consistency in interactions with participants.
- Intuitiveness: know when to provide guidance, offer encouragement, rephrase a question, or intervene in discussion. This also includes knowing when to be serious or light, confront or support.

Many of these skills are soft skills often associated with emotional intelligence, but that does not mean that they cannot be developed with practice and time. Facilitators are all different and will have different challenges and strengths. Do not be intimidated by the facilitation style of another facilitator with a different approach. It is useful to learn different styles of facilitation, but the more comfortable you are with yourself and your particular style, the more comfortable your participants will be with you. Find out what works for you and go with it.