

FACILITATION

Facilitation refers to any activity that makes tasks easier for others. In the field of technical assistance and implementation it typically involves the coordination and running of groups. Competent facilitation is a key factor that influences team and group effectiveness.

Facilitation in Technical Assistance

Within the deaf-blind TA network, facilitation typically occurs in three contexts:

1. Systems change or other large projects that require consensus building, goal setting, and collaborative work.
2. Provision of TA to a single team centered around a specific child (or multiple children at the same site). (Also see [Teaming Factsheet](#).)
3. Online settings such as webinars, forums, and shared work spaces.

Role of the Facilitator

The role of the facilitator is not easily defined, as it tends to be situation specific. However, common activities include:

- Leading group processes, often guided by a specific framework
- Managing group discussion and dynamics and encouraging positive and collaborative interactions in pursuit of goals
- Supporting group members in building and maintaining relationships; assisting in conflict resolution
- Performing group organization functions such as recruiting and selecting participants, maintaining communication with and among the group, creating schedules for meetings and work, defining group structures and procedures, and developing and following up on action plans

Group Facilitation Strategies

Whether the setting is a team meeting for a specific student, a needs assessment group to define an issue, a work group for product development, or a webinar for peer-to-peer TA, a

facilitator can use the following strategies to encourage engagement and participation and keep the group on track.

Consolidating themes and bringing group members together

- Summarizing - Repeating and grouping ideas participants have raised to allow them to see how their contributions fit together. It can also be used to bring the current topic to a close and move on to the next portion of the meeting.
- Prioritizing - Helping a group make decisions about the relative importance of ideas that have been discussed in order to move forward and draw conclusions.
- Contextualizing - Eliciting or providing context for information or a comment offered by a participant so that others will understand how it fits into the overall conversation.
- Connecting ideas - Pointing out and organizing related ideas.
- Focusing - Making a conversation more specific by identifying themes. This involves asking participants to focus on key ideas and identify points of agreement on which they can move forward.
- Ideal vision/future casting - Asking for a vision of what participants hope to attain in order to generate ideas.
- Best alternative - Asking participants to reflect on which of several available options would be the best alternative.
- Humor - Using jokes or gentle humor to put people at ease. This can be effective even when the humor is not particularly funny, as it humanizes the facilitator.

Ensuring important ideas don't get overlooked

- Highlighting - Bringing attention to a specific idea that has merit and might otherwise be missed by the group.
- Countering - Offering or asking for an alternative point of view or opposing opinion to help clarify the strengths and weaknesses of an idea.
- Pointing to evidence - Bringing in or asking for evidence to strengthen an idea or set of priorities being discussed.
- Identifying a proposal - Recognizing and calling attention to a compromise offered by a participant during a disagreement in order to move the group toward a productive solution.

Encouraging meaningful participation and conversation

There are times in a meeting when conversation gets stuck, emerging conflict negatively impacts the group dynamic, or someone is not participating and you want to pull them in (silence typically does not mean agreement). The following strategies can get the conversation moving in a positive direction.

- Distributing participation/managing turn taking - Using strategies such as a round robin (with the right to pass) to equalize opportunities for participation in a group when a few people are dominating the conversation. This can also be done in written form, which is more palatable to some, as it allows for a degree of anonymity.
- Lifting up - Identifying an important idea raised by a participant. This focuses attention on the participant and is a way to bring quiet group members into more active conversation by offering affirmation and recognition.
- Reflecting - Repeating back what someone has said to ensure that the group has absorbed it and the individual feels he or she has been heard. It can be stated, "So I want to make sure I heard what you said..." or can be a simple reflection if a situation is tense. Using the exact language that the person used is most effective.
- Validating - Agreeing with what a participant has said so that he or she feels supported (may be used in conjunction with reflecting).
- Normalizing - Identifying with a participant's comment to make him or her feel more comfortable (some people may be hesitant about putting forward ideas due to fear of judgment).
- Clarifying - Encouraging a participant to explain an idea so others can understand and relate to it.
- Identifying commonalities - Pointing out what participants' positions or ideas have in common (useful when the group is having difficulty coming to agreement).
- Role reversal - Asking participants to identify with another person's situation to move them toward deeper understanding ("If you were in that situation, what would you do?").
- Acting dumb - Pretending you don't understand (even if you do) in order to increase engagement ("Could you tell me more about...").
- Stroking - Highlighting the positive or sympathizing with the negative.

Structured Processes

Many processes and models have been developed that facilitators can use to move a group toward its goals. Here are a few examples:

- *Brainstorming Toolkit* (includes a number of specific techniques for generating ideas in groups): <https://www.heftfaculty.co.uk/sites/default/files/BrainstormingToolkit.pdf>
- Creative Problem Solving (a four-step model—Clarify, Ideate, Develop, Implement): <http://www.creativeeducationfoundation.org/creative-problem-solving/the-cps-process/>
- Delphi Technique (using a series of questionnaires to build consensus among participants who are not together in person)
 - Short factsheet: <http://www.communitydevelopment.uiuc.edu/sp/Step6/Delphi%20Technique.pdf>
 - Scholarly article: <http://pareonline.net/pdf/v12n10.pdf>

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