

Ten Top Tips for Facilitating Groups

Group facilitation is an important management skill that can really help a team achieve their goals in the most effective and constructive manner.

Hence the role of the facilitator is to help the group make progress and find their own solution in the easiest and most effective way.

Here are ten tips that will help you enhance your effectiveness at facilitating groups:

1. *Mentally and physically prepare yourself as the facilitator.*

Mental and physical preparation is essential to get the best out of any group facilitation you undertake. First of all, take time to familiarise yourself with some useful [group facilitation techniques](#).

Then, on the day, make sure you are well rested and focus on creating a positive state of mind, for a successful outcome. In addition, take along your [facilitator toolkit](#) with everything you are likely need for the group. This will ensure you are prepared for any unexpected change in working methodology.

2. *Create the right environment.*

We recommend plenty of space, informal seating, natural day light and tables at the side of the room for small group working, where needed. Also ensure that sufficient time has been arranged with the participants to achieve their goals. Our [facilitator toolkit](#) will help you identify the items you may want to take with you, to achieve the most appropriate environment on the day.

3. *Ensure the expected outcome/s or objectives are clear:*

Review objectives with the group at the beginning of the meeting, if these have been established in advance of the meeting. Alternatively, agree them with the group at the time.

4. *Establish expectations:*

Ask about the expectations the participants have of you and each other. Then ask them to list their hopes and concerns of the meeting. If necessary, help them to set their own 'ground rules' whilst working together I.E. acceptable behaviours.

5. *Energise the group throughout the meeting:*

First of all, run through initial introductions and then consider using an ice breaker to get the group engaged, as well as an energiser when energy levels get low. Another useful tip is to regularly change the activity, or change participant roles.

Also consider moving participants around the room, where physically able. In addition, focus their discussion with questions, statements, summaries and reflections of what you have heard or observed from the group, whilst remaining neutral.

You may find our tips on [managing participant energy in meetings](#) helpful.

6. *Manage participation:*

Participant's communication styles may vary, along with their quantity of verbal contributions. Draw out the quieter participants through small group work. Try asking a 'safe' question or establishing their opinion, once the topic has been initially debated.

In addition, consider allocating different roles to the high frequency or noisy contributors such as minute taker, time keeper, or writing on the flipchart. Ensure group work has a balance of participants with different communication styles.

7. *Adjust your facilitation style:*

The facilitation style needs to meet the needs of the group at different development stages. For example, a directive style of facilitation works well at the beginning of a meeting. This is because participants typically prefer someone to initially take charge and take them in the right direction - particularly in new group meetings. However, after time when the group has settled down working effectively together, a more suggestive or consultative facilitation style would be more appropriate.

Need help? Try our [group facilitation training](#), (available in the UK).

8. *Provide a variety of group working methods:*

This helps to maintain the levels of engagement within the group, and to support different learning and communication styles. It also assists the group achieve the best results from the meeting. Group working methods could include:

- Brainstorming
- Meta-planning (individual note pads on a flipchart, placed into similar categories by the participants) to generate ideas
- Decision making techniques (for example: explore options, select the best solutions and make decisions)
- Action planning
- Capturing information on the flipchart or white board
- Small group activities
- Holding a group review to check progress

For more information see [group working techniques](#).

9. *Recognise and reinforce supportive behaviours and responses:*

Recognition helps the group to build on each other's ideas and suggestions through your comments, questions and reflections of the group dynamics. Hence, it's important to challenge any repetitive negative statements or behaviours observed during the meeting.

You can do this by using one or more of these simple techniques:

- Move the focus away from the person
- Change activities (to change their mental 'state')
- Reflect their statement back to them as a question e.g. "it always happens?"
- Ask the group for their view on the situation and then move the group on.

You may find our tips on [dealing with difficult behaviour](#) helpful.

10. Evaluate the group's success:

Evaluate success either by using individual or group feedback, to review and draw out responsibility for the action points. Initial evaluation is always helpful at the end of the meeting, followed up with a review of how the group has progressed after an agreed period of time.

To facilitate effectively, the facilitator needs to focus all of their energy and commitment to the group. In addition, they need to help the group in the most appropriate and relevant way. This could involve challenging some of the group thinking, or what is not being said through supportive questioning.

Above all, the most effective facilitator is one who quickly establishes and builds trust with the group, through their honesty and transparency in their communications. Importantly, they don't necessarily have the answer for the group they are facilitating, but they hold the belief that the answer lies within the group (or their network). Consequently, they use group working methods to bring these answers and solutions out.

You may find some of our other tips helpful such as:

- [Tips for chairing meetings](#)
- [Managing participant energy in meetings](#)
- [Meeting preparation checklist](#)
- [High performance teams](#)
- [Managing project teams](#)
- [How to delegate work](#)
- [Group facilitation techniques and methods](#)
- [Dealing with difficult behaviour](#)

At KSL Training we design tailored facilitated events and deliver a one-day [facilitation skills course](#) across the UK.

About the Author

Written by [Kim Larkins](#).