

# FACILITATION: FUNDAMENTALS OF LEADING MEETINGS

# 3-C



Job Performance  
Situation 3:  
Building Essential Skills  
in Facilitation,  
Decision-Making, and  
Communication

HEAD START  
*MOVING AHEAD*  
COMPETENCY-BASED TRAINING PROGRAM



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## REFERENCE

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This activity develops skill competencies in *facilitation*. Participants will learn how to understand and manage a group process and how to create a shared purpose in a work-based team. They will gain experience in establishing ground rules and operating procedures that promote a productive team atmosphere. They will learn how to model appropriate behavior as part of facilitating. Finally, they will identify and address procedural issues or member behavior that hinders the group and will learn how to help the group to stay on task.

Related skill activities include 3–D, Decision-Making: Building Consensus; 3–E, Communication: Effective Spoken Communication; 3–F, Communication: Active Listening Skills; and 3–G, Communication: Effective Written Communication.

*Sources: Mastering Change: Head Start Phase III Management Institute Trainer's Manual. 1995. Instructor's Guide for Facilitator Training. 1993. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, DC.*

# OVERVIEW

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## Fundamentals of Leading Meetings

**Outcomes.** Participants who complete this activity will be able to

- describe the elements of facilitation
- understand the strategies and skills required for achieving successful meetings
- apply facilitation skills to a Head Start situation

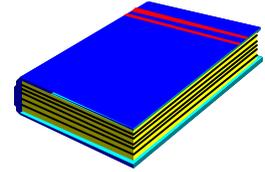
**Materials.** Large sheets of chart paper and markers

## Components

This activity can be done by one person, an informal group, or a formal workshop. We have provided suggested times, but participants and facilitators may wish to adjust these to their own timetables.

Step 1. Background Reading: Understanding Facilitation	10 min.
Step 2. Worksheet: Honing Your Skills	25 min.
Step 3. Background Reading: Strategies for Effective Facilitation	10 min.
Handouts: Sample Agenda Outline, Sample Ground Rules, Facilitation Checklist	15 min.
Step 4. Worksheet: Applying Facilitation Skills	40 min.
Step 5. Summary	10 min.
Suggested total time	1 hr. 50 min.

This activity contains 23 pages.



# STEP 1. BACKGROUND READING: UNDERSTANDING FACILITATION

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Suggested time: 10 min.

Feel free to highlight sections or write comments in the margins throughout these activities.

## I. THE FACILITATOR'S ROLE

Head Start managers and federal staff play a critical role in their team's success. One of their most important responsibilities is facilitating. Whether they facilitate a team meeting or a program review, they must encourage a sense of common purpose and group spirit. Team cohesion increases the quality of information gathering and analysis. If the facilitator constantly assesses the dynamics of the group, takes steps to maximize each member's contributions, and fosters positive interactions, the team is likely to be productive. All meetings are different, depending on their objectives and the players, but the facilitator's role is basically the same.

It is the facilitator's job<sup>1</sup> to

- create a climate in which everyone's viewpoint is welcomed and invited
- encourage candor and participation from everyone on the team
- clearly identify the meeting's objectives and involve the group in meeting them
- keep the team's efforts focused
- intervene if procedural difficulties or problematic behaviors arise
- help the team evaluate its efforts
- bring closure to each agenda time and summarize agreements and next steps

## II. ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE FACILITATION<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Instructor's Guide for Facilitator Training*. 1993. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, DC, pp. 1-4, 1-13.

Communication is key to promoting team effectiveness. Facilitators must know how to listen and how to involve the team in sharing, analyzing, and making decisions. By modeling appropriate behavior, facilitators not only demonstrate the use of facilitation skills, they also encourage the adoption of these skills by others, reducing the need for direct intervention. Here is a list of the skills that facilitators use most frequently.

- Active listening* Knowing how to listen is essential. When you really listen to all the team members, you show that you value their ideas and opinions. At the same time, you are able to synthesize key points and keep the discussion focused and moving. Facilitators indicate that they are listening in a number of ways: through body language, by paraphrasing the speaker's main points, and by asking clarifying questions as needed. ("Are you saying that the program needs to improve its supervision systems?")
- Directing traffic* To make sure everyone's voice is heard, you need to make sure that only one person speaks at a time and that everyone who needs to speak has an opportunity to do so. ("Louise, why don't you make your comment. Then Helen, you can have the floor.")
- Regaining focus* To achieve the meeting's objectives, you need to keep the team focused on the task at hand. You can keep the team on topic by restating the issue, requesting that only one issue be handled at a time, and checking to see that the team knows what the issues are. ("That's an interesting point, but let's think about how this really relates to the topic.")
- Recording in real time* To make sure that all the team members hear the same messages and that all points are heard, appoint a "recorder"—someone who can identify key points, decisions, and actions on newsprint so that everyone can see them and refer to them throughout the meeting.
- Communicating nonverbally* As a facilitator, you communicate not only through words, but through gestures and body language as well. You indicate your interest in people's comments partly through facial expression and posture. Be aware of your body language. Also be alert to what others are saying through their body language. Their gestures, posture, or facial expressions can indicate that they have an issue they want to raise, a question they want to ask, or an agenda item they need clarified. ("Celina, you look puzzled. Is there a question you'd like to ask?")

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

*Encouraging*

As a facilitator, you are in a position to acknowledge contributions of individual team members (“You’ve clarified an important issue, Peggy.”) Also acknowledge the progress of the group as a whole. (“I know this has been frustrating, but we’ve just made an important breakthrough. We’re almost there.”)

*Pushing*

Suggest alternative ways to handle an issue if people appear to be spinning their wheels. Remind team members about priorities and keep them on track in terms of time. (“We’ve spent 30 minutes discussing this issue and the meeting is scheduled to end in an hour. What do you want to do now?”) Push the team to explore underlying issues. (“People keep saying that the structure of our team is an expression of our values. Before we move on, let’s think about what those values are and what we want to communicate to the program.”)

Remember, each facilitator has her own style and strengths. Part of being effective is reflecting on your strengths and on areas where you could improve. You may be adept at hearing people’s ideas and promoting participation, yet have more difficulty in focusing the discussion and pushing team members to complete the task at hand. If this were true, you could work on identifying concrete strategies for keeping the meeting moving. For example, you could prepare an agenda in advance, with allotted times for each topic. You could assign a timekeeper to remind the team when to wrap up topics. Or you could remind team members to share only essential information that is germane to the discussion.<sup>3</sup>

Just as you have your own strengths and skills, so does each team. To run a productive meeting, you need to understand the team, its workings, and the conditions that foster the group’s best work. In other words, to get the best results, you must be insightful, flexible, and skillful.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 1–14, 1–15, 1–31.



## STEP 2. WORKSHEET: HONING YOUR SKILLS

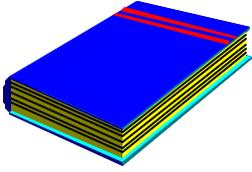
Suggested time: 25 min.

**Purpose:** This exercise will help you reflect on the skills you currently use to facilitate meetings and the steps you can take to strengthen skills where you feel improvement is needed.

**Part I (10 min.)** Write down an example of a time when you demonstrated each skill. Then pick one or two skill areas where you need improvement. Record one or two concrete steps you can take to strengthen your skills in each of these areas.

Skills	Steps You Can Take to Improve Skills
<i>Active listening</i>	
<i>Directing traffic</i>	
<i>Regaining focus</i>	
<i>Recording in real time</i>	
<i>Communicating nonverbally</i>	
<i>Encouraging</i>	
<i>Pushing</i>	

Part II (15 min.) If you are part of a small group, pair with another participant to discuss your responses.



## STEP 3. BACKGROUND READING: STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE FACILITATION

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Suggested time: 10 min.

Feel free to highlight sections or write comments in the margins throughout these activities.

### I. MEETING SUCCESS

Leaders spend much of their time at meetings. Two things need to happen if a meeting is to succeed: work needs to get done, and participants need to feel good about the process.

As facilitators, you may encounter obstacles that prevent you from meeting success. Group members may advocate only for their own preformed positions instead of engaging in genuine inquiry. Too much time may be spent sharing information, schedules, and reports, leaving the group with too little time to focus on the tasks at hand. Some team members may monopolize the conversation while others hold back. The Meeting PACT can help teams overcome these obstacles.<sup>4</sup>

#### What Is the Meeting PACT?

**P** The facilitator needs to communicate a **purpose** for each meeting. Even regularly scheduled meetings should have a purpose, whether to gain input from others about an idea or motivate or energize the team about an idea. If you don't have a clear purpose, don't call a meeting.

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from P. Fahey and C. Lang, *Mastering Change: Head Start Phase III Management Institute Trainer's Manual*. 1995. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, DC.

**A** Each meeting needs to be guided by an **agenda**. This is the road map. The topics should be ordered according to the time they require—announcements and reports first, serious discussion items last. Carefully allot times so that enough time is left for serious discussion items. Some agendas may be prepared ahead of time and distributed to team members in advance. During a federal monitoring review, facilitators will not have time to create a written agenda in advance. In these situations, facilitators should be clear about the meeting’s goals and key topics, then clearly share their thinking with team members when they arrive.

Building a brief socialization period into the beginning of the agenda often helps members transition into the meeting and focus on the business ahead. For new groups, this period gives members a chance to meet and begin to build relationships. For established groups, it lets members catch up on personal and professional news since the last meeting.

**C** The **chair**, or facilitator, is responsible for keeping the team on task. The chair needs to (1) clarify the purpose of the meeting; (2) make sure that all participants have a chance to speak; (3) keep the group on task; (4) summarize agreements to test for consensus; and (5) bring closure to each agenda item.

**T** The group agrees on the **team ground rules** for behavior and follows the **team reflection process** for tough issues.

What are ground rules, and why are they important? According to ACF’s Facilitator’s Guide, “ground rules deal with the behavioral norms team members can expect from each other during their team meetings. Establishing group rules or group norms influences the way the team operates and can contribute to the team’s success.”<sup>5</sup> Creating ground rules is particularly important when a team meets together for the first time, for example, during the federal review process. Team members may have different expectations as a result of their previous experiences with review teams. The facilitator needs to clearly explain expectations and general procedures. Groups can create a set of ground rules together, but if they don’t have time, the facilitator may say, “Here are some ground rules that we have used in the past. Can everyone agree to them? Is there anything you would like to add?”

The purpose of the **team reflection process** is to ensure that all members’ opinions are shared and given a fair hearing. The next section explains this process further.

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from *Instructor’s Guide for Facilitator Training*. 1993. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, pp. 4–5.

## More About the Team Reflection Process

Each team member has knowledge, skills, experiences, and perspectives that are valuable to the team's mission. The team reflection process encourages full participation in the following ways:

- First, the facilitator succinctly states the issue to be resolved and clarifies the goal of the discussion: Are we coming up with recommendations or making a final decision? Do we need to share our recommendations with the Policy Council or the National Office, or can we act without their approval?
- If team members have had too little time to reflect on the issue before the meeting, the facilitator builds 5 minutes of *reflection* time into the agenda.
- The facilitator then begins the *simple sharing* by inviting each team member to take one minute to share her initial thoughts with the group. The facilitator encourages other members to listen thoughtfully and refrain from comment or discussion.
- After everyone has spoken, the facilitator encourages members to *listen* to what the team has said by leading a discussion that identifies common themes, differences, and possible alternative actions. During the discussion, the facilitator needs to balance the natural tendency to advocate for individual views by encouraging members to reflect on what the group as a whole has said. Periods of silence may be healthy.
- Toward the end of the meeting, the facilitator needs to help the group agree on a *choice* or *action*. Those who may not completely agree with the team choice should be asked if they can support the team in its decision. A quick way to test for a consensus is to have everyone indicate whether they agree, disagree or are not enthusiastic with the choice but can live with it. The facilitator also summarizes next steps—reiterating who will take the lead for each and who else will be involved, as well as setting target dates for completion and evaluation. Summarizing key decisions ensures that team members understand their responsibilities and acknowledges what the team has accomplished.
- Finally, the facilitator needs to involve team members in *evaluating the meeting*. If you don't evaluate during the meeting itself, members will evaluate afterward in the parking lot. It is more productive to spend a few minutes at the end of every meeting discussing how it went, when all parties who make a difference are present.

The Meeting PACT also helps the team achieve consensus. For more information about consensus building, see 3–C, Decision-Making: Building Consensus.

## II. A TROUBLESHOOTING GUIDE<sup>6</sup>

### When Team Members Are Reluctant to Participate

Members may be reluctant to participate for a number of reasons. Their silence may indicate that they are uncomfortable with the issue. They may need to think through their ideas or quietly rehearse what they're going to say before they share with the group. They may disagree with the group's decision but feel reluctant to voice a dissenting opinion. Or they may be new to the group and feel unsure about entering the conversation, especially if others are dominating it.

Never assume that a person is silent because she has nothing to say. Rather, try to understand why she is quiet and think about ways to encourage her participation. You might try the following:

- Call on her for opinion or input.
- Encourage her with eye contact or body language.
- Break the large group into smaller groups to promote participation.
- Acknowledge her contribution when she does participate, and explain how her ideas will further the team's efforts.

### When Team Members Dominate the Discussion

Have you ever noticed that some people think aloud? They chatter to themselves as they try to solve a problem, plan an event, or write a report. They talk in order to think, and they often don't know what they're going to say until the words pop out of their mouth. In meetings, these people often dominate, leaving others little room to share their ideas. Of course, there may be other reasons that members dominate the discussion. They may feel strongly about an issue and doggedly try to persuade others to buy into their approach. Or they may have difficulty listening to the ideas of others.

Try to understand why the individual is dominating the discussion and think of ways to redirect her energies. You might try some of the following:

- Encourage her to *briefly* share one essential point or idea.

- Ask her to take notes.
- Refer to the ground rule about giving others a chance to participate.
- Address the group for other ideas.
- Acknowledge her ideas; look for other solutions before the decision-making point; acknowledge her contributions; and move on.
- Advise the group in general that it is unlikely all ideas will be used.

### When Team Members Attack Other Ideas

A heated debate between team members can signal that the meeting is going well—especially when they are immersed in exchanging ideas, analyzing problems, and exploring solutions. However, the intensity of the debate may lead team members to attack others verbally. When individuals begin to attack each other, rather than the issues on the table, intervention is required.

You might try the following:

- Enforce ground rules, particularly the one prohibiting personal attacks.
- Enforce brainstorming rules: ideas first, then evaluation.
- Ask a member who is more neutral to share pertinent facts.
- Think about seating arrangements ahead of time. If you believe that two or three members of the team are likely to end up attacking each other, subtly encourage them to sit side by side. Sitting face to face makes conflict easier and more inviting; sitting side by side makes it more difficult.

# HANDOUT: SAMPLE AGENDA OUTLINE<sup>7</sup>

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Suggested time: 5 min.

Use the following sample agenda from a local Head Start program management team meeting to guide the development of an agenda for a meeting that you facilitate. Feel free to highlight sections or write comments in the margins, and to add agenda items of your own.

## **Hillside Head Start Management Team Meeting August 4, 1998**

- Socialization and/or Focus Time –Be prepared to check in with the team by sharing one positive thing that has happened to you since our last meeting. **15 min.**
  
- Housekeeping items **15 min.**
  - “Information only” items: announcements—
    1. New hires since last meeting
    2. Enrollment status
    3. Date of first Policy Council meeting
    4. Other announcements
  
  - Items requiring yes-no or either-or decisions
  
- Discussion items **1 hr.**
  - Planning for preservice week
  
- Meeting evaluation **10 min.**

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<sup>7</sup> Adapted from *Mastering Change: Head Start Phase III Management Institute Trainer’s Manual*, 1995, p. 34.



## HANDOUT: SAMPLE GROUND RULES<sup>8</sup>

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Suggested time: 5 min.

The following ground rules are frequently used by Head Start teams. Feel free to highlight ones that will work with your team, write comments in the margins, or make up ground rules of your own.

- Make decisions by consensus.
- Share all relevant information.
- Explain the reasons behind your statements, questions, and actions.
- Publicly test assumptions and inferences.
- Make statements, then invite questions.
- Stay focused. Discuss the topic thoroughly so everyone has a common understanding.
- Focus on interests, not positions.
- Be specific. Use examples to illustrate key ideas.
- All members are expected to identify and solve problems.
- Challenge opinions you don't agree with without attacking the individual who expresses them.
- Together, design ways of testing disagreements and solutions.
- Maintain a sense of humor.

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<sup>8</sup> Adapted from *Instructor's Guide for Facilitator Training*, 1993, and from *Mastering Change*, 1995.

# HANDOUT: FACILITATION CHECKLIST

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Suggested time: 5 min.

Use this checklist to help plan and facilitate meetings. Feel free to write comments in the margins and to add some items of your own.

## BEFORE THE MEETING

- \_\_\_ Identify the purpose and objectives of the meeting.
- \_\_\_ Develop an agenda and allot realistic times for each item. If team members do not know one another, allow time for introductions. Try using an entertaining but quick icebreaker to create group rapport (e.g., ask each member to find an item in his or her bag or wallet and tell the story behind it).
- \_\_\_ Think about guiding questions you could ask during the meeting that would
  - promote information sharing (“What did you learn from your observations of the program?”)
  - help members analyze the information they have heard (“You’ve all mentioned areas where the program is having difficulty. From your observations, can you pinpoint the underlying problems? And how do these underlying problems play out in different areas of the program?”)
- \_\_\_ Make sure you have a comfortable space for your meeting. Arrange for any materials you need (easel, newsprint, markers, overhead, etc.). If necessary, rearrange the tables and chairs so that the seating is conducive to sharing (e.g., chairs arranged around a table permit all participants to see one another).
- \_\_\_ Other:

## STARTING THE MEETING

- \_\_\_ Clearly identify the purpose and objectives of the meeting, and review the agenda.

- Ask a team member to record ideas on newsprint. You might ask another member to be the timekeeper—so that the group can be alerted when it is nearly time to move on to the next agenda item.
- Use the team reflection process (see the Step 3 Background Reading) to encourage full participation.
- Remind team members about the ground rules if necessary (if a team member is dominating the conversation, becomes hostile, digresses, etc.).
- During the discussion, be mindful of the meeting’s objectives. Help the team keep on track.
- Always model appropriate behavior (active listening, directing traffic, encouraging, reading body language, etc.).
- Other:

### CONCLUDING THE MEETING

- Help the group agree on a choice or action and the way to implement it.
- Summarize next steps. Reiterate who will take the lead for each step and who else will be involved. Help the team set target dates for completion and evaluation of each step.
- Briefly describe highlights of the meeting and what the group accomplished during their time together.
- Involve the team in evaluating the meeting.
- Other:

# STEP 4. WORKSHEET: APPLYING FACILITATION SKILLS

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Suggested time: 40 min.

**Purpose:** This worksheet will help you use your facilitation skills to find solutions to common problems that occur during meetings.

**Part I (15 min.)** Read each of the following six problem situations. Then, working individually, describe the nature of each problem and identify how you as a facilitator could handle each problem—or could have prevented it from occurring.

## SITUATION 1

During the meeting Kathy tells another team member, “I think you’re wrong. Why do you always just think about your own point of view? You are so inappropriate.”

<b>Nature of the Problem</b>	<b>Steps You Could Take to Handle the Problem</b>	<b>Steps You Could Have Taken to Prevent the Problem</b>

## SITUATION 2

During the meeting Philip is particularly quiet. You don't know what he thinks about the issue at hand or how he thinks the underlying problems could be resolved.

<b>Nature of the Problem</b>	<b>Steps You Could Take to Handle the Problem</b>	<b>Steps You Could Have Taken to Prevent the Problem</b>

## SITUATION 3

During the two-hour meeting, each team member takes 20 minutes to share detailed information about his or her experiences in the program. When you look at your watch, you realize there isn't a lot of time left. You are afraid that the team won't have the time it needs to analyze the information people have heard or make decisions about next steps.

<b>Nature of the Problem</b>	<b>Steps You Could Take to Handle the Problem</b>	<b>Steps You Could Have Taken to Prevent the Problem</b>

#### SITUATION 4

Maria is the most vocal member of the group. During this meeting she dominates the conversation, and others don't have a chance to voice their ideas and opinions.

<b>Nature of the Problem</b>	<b>Steps You Could Take to Handle the Problem</b>	<b>Steps You Could Have Taken to Prevent the Problem</b>

#### SITUATION 5

The group is having a heated debate. With tensions high, everyone is talking at the same time and no one is listening to anyone.

<b>Nature of the Problem</b>	<b>Steps You Could Take to Handle the Problem</b>	<b>Steps You Could Have Taken to Prevent the Problem</b>

## SITUATION 6

You have convened a meeting with people who have never met one another before. You can tell that everyone feels uncomfortable and is reluctant to share ideas.

Nature of the Problem	Steps You Could Take to Handle the Problem	Steps You Could Have Taken to Prevent the Problem

Part II (20 min.)

Discuss your analyses with some of your colleagues.

Part III (5 min.)

Take a few minutes to reflect on a problem situation you encountered when facilitating a meeting.

- What was the nature of the problem?
- What strategies did you apply to the problem?
- What strategies would you use in the future to handle the same type of problem, or to prevent it from occurring?



# STEP 5. SUMMARY

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Suggested time: 10 min.

## Key Points

- The facilitator’s role
- Essential facilitation skills
- Facilitation strategies
- A troubleshooting guide
- Agenda outline
- Ground rules
- Facilitation checklist

## Personal Review

What did you learn from this activity?

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3. \_\_\_\_\_  
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How will you use your new knowledge and skills in your work?

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3. \_\_\_\_\_  
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What else do you think you might need to learn in order to master the skill of facilitating?

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