
Facilitating Meetings between Young People and Adults

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Implementing a Youth Development approach, or creating youth/adult partnerships, often requires the facilitation of a meeting or group. This is particularly true when creating Youth Advisory Boards or implementing similar youth participation strategies of Consultation or Influence¹. The following information provides some basic guidelines to successfully facilitate such efforts.

Facilitator Responsibilities

Focus on *agreement*

- Leave solutions to the group

Provide information, define parameters and expectations

- Remind the group of bottom lines

Uphold group norms

- Intervene and hold group members accountable to behavioral and procedural expectations

Prevent early evaluation

- Encourage group discussion and brainstorming

Translate to ensure understanding

- Make sure what is said matches group member's developmental level and communication styles

Summarize discussions and ideas

- Restate what the group is saying to ensure shared understanding

Provide final arbitration for moving forward

- State what can or cannot be agreed upon and keep the process moving

Balance 'air time'

- Ensure opportunity for full participation

Pay attention to group members

- Monitor and address needs and energy levels

Keep it light!

- Participants should *enjoy* the process

Role of the Facilitator

1. Create an appropriate group environment

- Conduct the session according to the norms of the group
This may require creating group norms
- Take responsibility for the environment
Pay attention to environmental factors impacting participant's comfort and needs

2. Lead the group to reach its objectives

Keep the session focused:

- The participants and the facilitator must be clear on the objectives
- Use an agenda or a focus point visual, if needed
- There will be times when the participants have important things to say that are not relevant

¹ For more information on the youth participation strategies, read "An Introduction to PYD" available on the homepage of the [InterNetwork for Youth](http://www.in4y.com).

If you feel the discussion getting off track, or that it is not helping to reach the objective, ask the group something like "Is this helping us reach our goal, or do we need to set this aside for the moment?" You can also identify it as an 'off track' issue and set it aside.

3. Encourage participation

Balance involvement. Not everyone will always contribute, but everyone must always have the opportunity to do so.

- If you have someone burning up the 'air time':
 1. Acknowledge the contribution and then involve others: "Those are good insights. What do the rest of you have to add to these ideas?"
 2. Put the person on 'hold': "I'm going to ask you to hold your idea for a moment while I get some other perspectives." Then ask the group or an individual for their thoughts.
 3. Go 'round robin' giving everyone an opportunity to talk.
 4. If there is time, break into pairs for initial brainstorming, then ask each pair to report out.
 5. If you see someone trying to participate, create an opportunity by asking them directly.
 6. Generally, avoid discouraging the talker. Instead, encourage others to participate.

Conducting a Session

1. Before the Session:

- Take charge of the environment
- Be absolutely clear on the objective(s)
- Memorize your opening remarks
 1. If needed, introduce yourself, your colleagues, and participants.
 2. Clarify how and why all are involved in the process.
 3. Review agenda and participant's goals. Ask if there are any concerns. Reach consensus on agenda.
 4. Tell the participants what you will expect from them, and what to expect from you.
 5. Provide important logistical information.

2. During the Session

- Stay on schedule

If you are in danger of running over time, ask the participants what they would like to do (stay later, run another session, speed up, shorten break/meal). USE A CLOCK.
- Stay on task

If you are in danger of not achieving the objective, identify what needs to be done and refocus the group. Use a chart pack/easel or other visual aid to track agenda, ideas, and agreements.
- Value the input of all participants

Create roles for participants, with their agreement. Time keeper? Note taker? Easel recorder?
- **ABOVE ALL:** Treat participants equally

Equal respect, equal accountability -- regardless of position or status *outside* of the group

3. At the end of the Session

- Summarize the group's output and agreements
- Identify next steps
- Thank and congratulate the group for their success

It can be helpful to create a 'sign off' or concluding statement that is used consistently to clarify that the meeting has adjourned. Often people will tend to keep talking and/or processing, and there needs to be a demarcation line between 'in-meeting' and 'post-meeting' discussion. Something simple like: "That's all, folks" "The party's over" or "See you next week, same time, same station" will do.