

The Art of Facilitation

Facilitation is truly an art. It forces those involved in the process to become experts while the lead facilitator guides the discussion.

The following information is provided from *Like Minded People*, a corporate training form based out of Indianapolis.

Some Basic Premises of Facilitation:

1. The facilitator leads discussion but does not dominate.
2. The facilitator is knowledgeable enough about a topic to be able to provide guiding questions.
3. The facilitator is not an answer provider, but rather a tour guide who brings the group to find the answer themselves.
4. The facilitator promotes the concept of “safe space”. Opinions, particularly based on more “sensitive” topics could vary. It is important to remember that opinions are not “right” or “wrong”. The facilitator may find that she/he needs to assist group participants in determining their opinions. With this in mind, probing questions become more important.
5. It is vital that you have some “probing questions” ready in the case that the participants are less than vocal. Asking them questions may get their thoughts going more around a topic. Coming into the facilitation session with this questions in your mind or on paper can be helpful in making sure that discussion happens.

Facilitation requires an understanding of the following:

Community – what are the guiding norms of the community with whom you are facilitating a discussion? Facilitation creates the time and space that honors the voices of individuals as people and members of a group.

Observation – The facilitator becomes a guide on the journey with the group. By observing and reflecting while facilitating a discussion, the facilitator can support the group and notice what contributions she or he may need to make to assist participants in arriving at a turning point.

Flexibility – Facilitators must be ready for non-linear discussion. People may go around and around. They may sit back and relax, but then all of a sudden become incredibly engaged. When facilitators are flexible, they can best guide discussion.

Imagination – Facilitators permit participants to use their imagination to brainstorm. However, they fill an important role of grounding conversation when ideas become too abstract or when time is of the essence. Permit your

participants to share information and imagine the possibilities, but remember that you have a set amount of time to thoroughly explore a topic.

Patience – one of the most frustrating parts of facilitating a conversation, particularly when you are knowledgeable about a topic, is that you have to be patient and understand that it may take others longer to arrive at a conclusion. Facilitators cannot lose their cool or make quick judgments. They need to be patient.

Balance – Effective facilitation balances the challenging and supporting of others. The voices of the individual and organization are heard and respected. Some other balances you may recognize: community vs. chapter; detail orientation vs. imagination.

Affirmation – Good facilitators affirm individuals and recognize the ideas of others. When participants let their barriers down and become themselves, this is an important step to affirm. You must also affirm yourself as a facilitator that you must be true.

Silence – Arguably the hardest thing for a facilitator is to permit silence. It is not your job to fill “dead air”. Silence is not always to be interpreted as such. In fact, within the minds of participants, the thoughts may be quite loud. Good facilitators make sure that all that are participating are INVOLVED. Those who are frequently silent need to be asked what their opinion is, while maintaining respect for their silence.

Challenge – Facilitation, very literally, means “making things easier”, however, facilitators must challenge their participants to think differently and explore other options. This is not confrontational, but rather it provides alternative options to the participant. Participants in the process of group discussion accept the challenge of owning the process. They are responsible for the discussion and must have ownership in making sure that all participants have a comfortable experience.

Connections – As the facilitator connects with others and helps them connect with themselves, meaning begins to emerge. On particularly difficult topics, the connection may take longer for some. Facilitators will learn to recognize when participants begin to “get it”. They will make the connection in partnership with the participant.

Discussion points for being involved

What are the benefits to being involved?

How do you get involved?

How do you take the skills you learn in your fraternity or sorority and apply them to involvement in other groups?

Is employment at a bar considered campus involvement?

Is it possible to balance Greek involvement, campus involvement and academic involvement?

What types of things do you want to get involved in?

Facilitator Training Icebreaker

Name Alliteration

Objective: Getting to know you, creating comfort level, removing cool cap

Participants should be in a circle. They are to think of the name that they want to be referred to as (i.e. Daniel or Dan, Tim or Timothy).

They will then be directed to think of a word that best describes themselves that starts with the same letter as their name (i.e. Dynamic Dan, Terrific Tim). Go around the circle and do it once. Each person will repeat the name(s) of the person(s) before him or her. The last person goes around the circle.

THEN they will be instructed to think of a movement that they will tie in with their new name. Demonstrate for Dynamic Dan.

Then the facilitator starts with her/himself and does her/his movement and then do another name. (i.e. Dynamic Dan does his movements and then does the movement for Lively Lisa. Then Lively Lisa does her movement and then does Marvelous Mark. Then Marvelous Mark does his movement and then does Wonderful William and so on.)

Facilitation time depends on the number of people in the group, however the actual activity should never exceed 15 minutes with five minutes for debriefing.

Debriefing questions:

What was the purpose of this game?

Possible answers: getting to know people, break the ice, eliminate the wearing of cool caps.

What are some of the challenges to playing the game?

Possible answers: not knowing people, low comfort level, cool caps still on (so people are afraid to not look cool)

How does this relate to Greek Life?

Possible answers: we don't know each other, but when we let our guards down and become comfortable with who we are and what we bring to the table, then we should feel like we can come together and accomplish things.

Thanks to University of Illinois, Office of Greek Affairs for this resource.