

A Facilitator's Tool Kit



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Overview

What is facilitation, and why is it important?

The art and science of managing sessions and group processes, facilitation, involves guiding sessions and groups while using a specific set of skills and tools. Facilitators create an environment in which group members share ideas, opinions, experiences, and expertise in order to achieve a common goal. A skilled facilitator smoothes the way for group members to brainstorm options, identify variable solutions, and develop and implement actions plans.

What are good facilitators?

Good facilitators possess a variety of qualities and skills. Some of the qualities spring from such innate personality traits as being able to recognize one's own biases while remaining neutral, enjoying interaction with diverse groups, and inspiring trust. Although some people possess a natural talent for facilitation, most develop the skills through experience and with guidance from experienced facilitators.

What are good facilitation skills?

Listed below are some basic skills that many people use when they facilitate groups. They are organized into five categories based on the evolution of groups from their start to finish.

- Skill #1: Establishing Group Orientation
 - Getting the Group Acquainted
 - Encouraging Group Participation
- Skill #2: Developing Group Structure
 - Determining Group Interactions
 - Managing Group Conflict
- Skill #3: Maintaining Group Agreements
 - Setting Group Norms
 - Building Group Cohesion
- Skill #4: Accomplishing Group Tasks
 - Reaching Group Consensus
 - Meeting Group Objectives
- Skill #5: Providing Group Closure
 - Planning Group Feedback & Next Steps
 - Noting Group Accomplishments & Final Wrap-up

Source: Adapted From - Jason P. Lorber et al. (July 2001) Facilitating meetings a guide for community planning groups. Published by the Academy of Educational Development, Center for Community-Based Health Strategies funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

How Do I Use The Tool Kit?

The tool kit presents facilitation skills in the order in which they most commonly occur during group sessions based upon five activities associated with conducting successful HIV prevention group-level interventions. Study this guide before and/or after a group session with the procedural guidance for your specific intervention to determine ways to do a better job the next time.

If facilitation is new to you, you should read, or at least scan all sections and then go back and concentrate on those you find most useful. Remember that this small Tool Kit offers only an introduction to facilitation. CDC supports technical assistance (TA) and capacity building assistance to help you get more training on both your intervention and the necessary skills to facilitate it effectively with your target population.

If you have experience or training as a facilitator, you may want to flip through the entire kit to go straight to the sections that meet your particular needs.

Part 1 gives an overview of five skills and tools that you will use in most of your group sessions. Part 2 is a set of three facilitator assessment tools to assist you as you prepare for the planning and implementing of your multiple session interventions.

Five Cautions

- One size does not fit all. You will need to tailor your facilitation style to the group-level intervention that you are conducting, your agency, and your intended audience with a unique blend of ground rules, operating procedures, people, history, and circumstances.
- It is important to be familiar with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Procedural Guidance. This document provides the basic framework for planning and implementing all HIV prevention interventions.
- Facilitators are often chosen for their leadership skills and strong rapport with community members, not for their facilitation skills. Leaders develop and inspire a shared vision for the group. Facilitators, in contrast, manage the group process (often from a neutral perspective) to help the group reach prescribed outcomes.
- Don't shoulder the burden alone. Encourage all members to take responsibility for having a productive small group session. Consider asking those with facilitation skills to support and guide your efforts.
- It does not matter how well you facilitate if you do not earn your group members' trust and respect. These are the foundation of an effective HIV prevention intervention.

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SKILL #1: Establishing Group Orientation

A. Getting the Group Acquainted

Most people will not participate fully in a session unless they feel comfortable with other members and believe their opinions will be heard. You, with members' support, must create an environment in which members value the potential contributions of those with different perspectives.

TOOLS TO FACILITATE ORIENTATION

- **Welcome everyone.**

Acknowledge that they are contributing their valuable time to attend this session and thank them for coming.

- **Use positive body language.**

You send messages with your movements as well as your voice, so be aware of what your body language is saying. By using body language to show warmth and acceptance, you encourage others to relax and respond in kind.

- **Consider an icebreaker.**

You may ask people to share their favorite ice cream flavor, their first pet's name, or anything else light and personal but non-threatening as they introduce themselves.

- **Conduct member introductions.**

Orally or on newsprint list the information you would like members to give as they introduce themselves, e.g., name, role, and relevant identifying information (location, agency, at risk populations they represent). Consider asking them to limit the introduction to 10 to 20 seconds.

- **Check in.**

If your group has the time, consider inviting participants to expand their introductions by briefly talking about their expectations for the session. This can help group members clear their minds and focus on the session.

- **Allow brief announcements.**

This is an opportunity to build a sense of community and collaboration and to break the pattern of name, rank, and serial number.

- **Thank participants.**

By thanking group members, you validate and legitimize their comments and contributions.

B. Encouraging Group Participation

Some members are outspoken and energetic. Others are quiet and reserved. As facilitator, you should balance these extremes so that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate.

TOOLS TO CONDUCT ORIENTATION

- **Use visual aids.**

Most people process information better if they see it, so write it on newsprint, an overhead, handout, etc.

- **Set-up a Safe space for discussion**

The seating arrangement and position of the facilitator as well as the building layout have an impact on how comfortable group members will be discussing personal and sometimes intimate details of their lives with each other.

- **Post key points.**

To help members follow the discussion, put key points where they can see them.

- **Ask open-ended questions.**

Ask questions people can't answer with a yes or no. Questions beginning with when, what, or how usually encourage members to provide detailed answers, which can spark additional ideas from other members.

- **Encourage silent members.**

If members are silent and disengaged, catch their eye or ask them (or even an individual) to share their expertise.

- **Divide into small groups.**

Speaking in front of large groups intimidates some members. When feasible, divide the group members into small discussion groups and then have them report to the entire group.

- **Consult the group.**

When a group member addresses a question to you, prompt participation from other members by consulting the group. This is also an effective technique for shifting the focus of discussion from one member to the whole group.

- **Thank members for their contributions.**

People like to feel you and other members' value their input. Nevertheless, don't thank everyone who says something. Members may view repeated or effusive thanks as lip service. Tell the person exactly why you are saying thank you.

SKILL #2: Developing Group Structure

A. Determining Group Interactions

In any group some type of structure must be established to avoid unnecessary conflict among participants. Developing some type of group structure will help organize the group and define how its members interact with other so that you can accomplish the group goals.

TOOLS TO ESTABLISH STRUCTURE

- **Set ground rules.**
Members' agreement on ground rules makes your job easier when conflict arises. Basic ground rules may be that the group will hear all views and no one will make personal attacks.
- **Ask for group support to monitor ground rules.**
Encourage group members to help you monitor and enforce ground rules respectfully with each other. Revisit ground rules each time new members join the group or when violations of them occur. Groups find it helpful to post these rules.
- **Clarify the roles of group members.**
Sometimes it is helpful to remind members of their task for the particular session, the core elements of the intervention emphasized or the overall goal of HIV preventions, to reduce the transmission or acquisition of HIV in our communities, in order to keep duties clear and focused.
- **Delegate a timekeeper.**
It's easy to lose track of time when facilitating a session, so ask someone to help you stay on schedule.
- **Establish a parking lot for additional questions.**
If members bring up important topics or questions unrelated to the current discussion, put these in the "parking lot", which may be a sheet of newsprint taped to a wall. Don't end the session with discussing or otherwise disposing of these topics.

B. Managing Group Conflict

Even with the best structured group conflict can arise. However, one of the best ways to keep conflict at a minimum is to prevent it, though some conflict can be helpful to the group. As a facilitator, you don't want to squash all conflict. Use it to develop new options for the group. Focus your efforts on directing the energy of a conflict toward a positive result. Help the group stay open to different perspectives. But manage it when it become a negative force to the group.

TOOLS TO MAINTAIN STRUCTURE

- **Put prevention before intervention.**

Do what you can before or at the opening of the session to reduce potential challenges. For example, remind members of the group's objectives, roles, decision processes, and ground rules.

- **Prepare for difficult situations and challenging participants.**

Occasionally you will face challenging behaviors and situations as you facilitate your group sessions. Your goals are to promote positive behaviors and encourage full participation in the process.

- **Understand when conflict is good for the group.**

The hallmarks of positive conflict are respectful disagreement and the willingness to consider various options that bring forth new ideas and help you conduct the intervention.

- **Use conflict to improve decisions.**

Conflict can be used to clarify individual points of view and to underscore how strongly people feel. Disputes don't have to mean disrupted sessions.

- **Always look for the positive.**

Usually a person's negativity comes from a deeply felt concern. Everyone wants to stop HIV. Tap into that.

- **Search for agreement.**

Drawing attention to the points that group members agree upon helps create an atmosphere of positive collaboration and forward momentum.

- **Understand when conflict is harmful to the group.**

Negative conflict is marked by anger, disrespect, and a refusal to consider options. This type of conflict will keep the group from completing task that meet your intervention objectives.

- **Go easy.**

Begin with the most subtle and least threatening option because that is less likely to provoke an unnecessary confrontation.

- **Look to the group for support.**

Share responsibility for the group's behavior with the members.

- **Agree to disagree.**

Although you would like to resolve all conflicts, you may not be able to. Urge members to treat each other with respect even when they disagree.

- **Use the 10 steps for managing conflict situations.**

1. Remain calm.
2. Listen for Agreement, before focusing on the conflict.

3. Help people use effective discussion techniques. Make sure that all sides have an opportunity to be heard.
 4. Help people really listen to one another and recognize each others concerns
 5. Recognize the difference between group conflict and individual conflict. Keep discussion focused on the substance rather than the individuals.
 6. Recognize When Emotions are Running Unchecked
 7. Help to clearly define the issues, perhaps by having each side of the debate restate the position of the other side to its satisfaction.
 8. Seek Creative Alternative Solutions Encourage the various sides to meet separately and come back to the full group for further discussion.
 9. Help individuals to save face and be able to change their position.
 10. Resolve conflict as it happens within the session when possible
- **Seek outside assistance.**

For especially difficult situations, you may want to get technical assistance or an outside mediator. Often an objective outsider can help to ease tensions.

SKILL #3: Maintaining Group Agreements

A. Setting Group Norms

It is important to establish the way in which the group will operate at each session. This is especially helpful when you have to encourage group members to follow ground rules, stick to the topic of discussion, and stay with the proposed agenda.

TOOLS TO ESTABLISH AGREEMENTS

- **Formally start each session.**

Some facilitators use a gavel, gong, or other instrument to signify the start of the session. Some begin with a moment of silence. In some way, show that it's important for everyone to come together.

- **Post session objectives and agenda.**

Distribute handouts or post newsprint that lists the session objectives so that members can see these throughout the session. Refer back to these items as necessary with members when and if they stray off topic.

- **Identify additions or changes to the objectives and agenda.**

It's better to know up front if members want to discuss any other issues than to let these percolate as hidden agendas throughout the session. This fosters an open and trustful environment and lessens the chance members will assume you have a hidden agenda.

- **Review ground rules.**

Having ground rules that group members agree with makes your job as facilitator a little easier in any session and may save the day when conflict arises. Review the rules briefly before discussion begins. Elaborate if several new members are present or if you can expect contention. Always post a copy of the rules.

- **Review the roles of group members.**

Sometimes it is helpful to remind members of their task for the particular session, the core elements of the intervention emphasized or the overall goal of HIV prevention, to reduce the transmission or acquisition of HIV in our communities, in order to keep everyone on track.

- **Respect the timekeeper.**

It's easy to lose track of time when facilitating a session, so ask someone to help you stay on schedule.

- **Use a parking lot.**

If members bring up important topics or questions unrelated to the current discussion, put these in the "parking lot", which may be a sheet of newsprint taped to a wall. Don't end the session with discussing or otherwise disposing of these topics.

B. Building Group Cohesion

As it is important to set group norms, it is more important to make sure that they are maintained or the group will not build trust and become a cohesive unit. Throughout a session pay attention to the group collectively and its members individually.

TOOLS FOR MAINTAINING AGREEMENTS

- **Provide team-building activities.**

Help members get to know each other better and develop a better understanding of each other's motivations and intentions. Their rapport lessens tension when conflict does arise and encourages group cohesion.

- **Listen carefully to others.**

Apply the basic skills of active listening during each session and encourage the same among all group members. Truly listen before speaking.

- **Be responsive to participants.**

1. Maintain regular eye contact with members while they are speaking.
2. Nod your head in agreement to encourage members to continue talking.
3. Seek clarification of statements you do not understand.
4. Summarize lengthy comments into focused points that everyone can understand.

- **Restate the questions.**

If the discussion loses focus and drifts on to other topics, summarize key points that members have made and state the question again.

- **Address follow-up items.**

If there were questions at a previous session, acknowledge when and how these are being addressed. Continuity ensures trust in the process.

- **Be fair and consistent with all group members.**

Take great care to be evenhanded in addressing group members. Follow ground rules consistently throughout all sessions, not just those in which you anticipate disagreements. Be non-threatening as you or others correct members and don't embarrass those that have made a mistake.

- **Scan the room regularly.**

While maintaining eye contact with the speaker, note how other members are responding to each other.

- **Allot extra time if needed.**

Don't cut short a valuable discussion or let a conflict fester because the allotted time is up. Ask the group to approve departure from the schedule.

SKILL #4: Accomplishing Group Tasks

A. Reaching Group Consensus

This is the time that the core elements of an intervention must be used as a guiding factor for what tasks are completed during each session of your groups. Core elements are different for every intervention but usually require that the group make quality decisions about how they complete their work together.

TOOLS TO FACILITATE TASKS

- **Poll the group.**
Polling helps when you are attempting to build consensus because it allows the group to assess the amount of support for a proposed decision.
- **Read the group's energy level.**
Assess the tone in members' voices as they speak. Are they energized? Are they tired? What is the group's body language telling you?
- **Check involvement.**
How involved is the group? What are people asking? How are people responding to you as a facilitator? How are people responding to each other?
- **Speed the group up.**
At times, members may prolong a discussion because of their interest rather than new ideas. To help the group come to a decision, summarize the main points.
- **Slow the group down.**
At times, members may be tired or uncomfortable and rush through an issue. As the facilitator it's a good idea to have the group revisit the topic and make a better decision.
- **Give them a break.**
If you sense the group is losing energy or the ability to concentrate, take a stretch break. Use energizers, quick exercises, or games that last no more than five minutes.
- **Provide snacks.**
These can give a slow and steady boost of energy for group members.
- **Always record the decisions of the group.**
Before a session, delegate the responsibility for recording all or particular decisions. If the decisions are complex or controversial, ask members with special expertise to assist the person taking minutes in keeping a detailed record.

To help group members keep track of what they have decided, write summaries of key decisions on newsprint and post these where all can see.

B. Meeting Group Objectives

HIV prevention encompasses many related topics and members sometimes try to discuss all of these at once. As the facilitator, you bear primary responsibility for focusing discussions on accomplishing the objectives of the session.

TOOLS TO ACCOMPLISH TASKS

- **Review objectives for each agenda item.**

Keep group members focused on the task at hand by providing objectives for each presentation, discussion, or other activity on your agenda. Remind members of the objectives as you take up each item.

- **Develop an action plan.**

For each decision, write down when actions steps need to occur and who is responsible for these.

- **Clarify the roles of group members.**

Sometimes it is helpful to remind members of their task for the particular session, the core elements of the intervention emphasized, or the overall goal of HIV prevention, to reduce the transmission or acquisition of HIV in our communities, in order to keep everyone on track.

- **Provide clear instructions for all group tasks**

It is best to provide group members written instructions that you explain during the session. Be patient as you will likely have to repeat and interpret them for participants throughout the session.

- **Keep the group on task**

1. Determine if you have enough time to complete the agenda and closing tasks.
2. Help the group set priorities and decide which remaining agenda items to address in the time remaining.
3. Get permission from the group to extend the session if necessary.

- **Record task outcomes.**

Your group must record tasks and their outcome. While taking minutes is not a task needed in a group session, you can keep track of significant events by writing key accomplishments on newsprint or a chalkboard that members can see.

SKILL #5: Providing Group Closure

A. Planning for Group Feedback & Next Steps

For an intervention to remain effective every group session needs to be evaluated individually and collectively to determine the experience of all of the group sessions. Most group-level interventions have some type of process evaluation system already in to follow. However the looking at the next steps instills a sense of momentum even after the group is completed.

TOOLS TO FACILITATE CLOSURE

- **Visit your parking lot.**

This is your last chance to review the topics you put in the parking lot. If time doesn't allow the group to discuss all these items, propose alternatives - an extra session, on their own, etc.

- **Complete an action plan for next steps.**

Keep a sheet of newsprint on the wall throughout the sessions and add to it whenever the group identifies a "next step." At the end of the group, review the items on the sheet and develop an action plan that specifics what needs to be done, who will take each action, and when each action is to be completed.

- **Do a group evaluation.**

You can do this in many ways, written or oral. One way is to conduct a simple session evaluation with the entire group. Quickly poll the group on the things they liked about the session and the process. Another way to consider is collecting group members' comments on index cards.

- **Make an Events Calendar.**

Announce upcoming events at your agency that group members might attend and reconnect with one another.

B. Noting Group Accomplishments & Final Wrap-up

Before adjourning, take a few minutes to accent the positive.

TOOLS TO ACHEIVE CLOSURE

- Thank participants.

By thanking group members, you validate and legitimize their comments and contributions as well as their perseverance and hard work.

- **Acknowledge accomplishments.**

By clearly recognizing the tasks and developments that the group has made as a whole and individually you ensure members that their time was well spent. This can be accomplished with a party for your program's graduates, certificates of attendance or completion to every one and special awards for those who demonstrated outstanding achievements during the group sessions.

- **Recall remaining agreements & tasks.**

Remind participants of decisions that received strong support and the accomplishments that we achieved collectively. Also remind them of any remain obligations - clean up, completion of individual assessments, duties, etc

- **Make it official.**

Close the session by using a gavel, gong, or other instrument just as you did when you opened the session.

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Pre-Session Assessment Tool

Below are 5 groups of tasks that a facilitator should complete before a group session. Mark the corresponding box of each group of tasks that you complete.

Agenda Preparation

Does the group's agenda have...

- Clear objectives for the session
- What you want to accomplish
- Enough time for each agenda item
- Enough session breaks scheduled (roughly one every 90 minutes)

Member Preparation

Have all members received ...

- Notification of session time, location, agenda, and objectives
- Maps and directions (especially important for new members)
- Public notification of the session (in accordance with public disclosure laws)
- The materials they need to review with adequate time for reading

Rules/Operating Procedures

Has your group established...

- Ground rules and other operating procedures
- Methods to enforce ground rules that are non-threatening/not embarrassing

Facilitator Preparation:

Has the facilitator...

- Spent adequate time preparing for the session to review the core elements and key characteristics of the intervention
- Reviewed all of the information that will be presented at the session
- Identified someone to assist with facilitation, if necessary
- Anticipated the responses and questions that members may raise

Session Logistics:

Has the group arranged for...

- A comfortable session location
- Enough chairs, pens, note paper, newsprint, overhead projectors, white boards, markers and copies of handouts
- Refreshments
- Access to bathrooms
- Wheelchair accessibility and language interpretation (sign, Spanish, etc.) as necessary

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Group Session Assessment Tool

Below is a quick reference sheet of facilitator tasks that you will engage at each of your sessions for a group-level HIV prevention intervention. Mark the corresponding box of each task you complete.

The Opening

- Welcome participants
- Introduce participants and yourself
- Set the tone and pace
- Go over and approve session objectives and agenda
- Review minutes

The Discussions, Decisions, and Tasks

- Keep the group on task
- Assess the group's concentration and engagement
- Clarify confusing discussions
- Provide feedback to the group
- Enforce ground rules

The Conclusion

- Identify next steps
- Evaluate the session
- Adjourn on a positive note

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Facilitator Self-Assessment Tool

Below is a list of facilitator skills and tools to use in assessing yourself, perhaps during a break. Mark each box as you accomplish each item.

Facilitation Skills: Are you...

- Making everyone feel comfortable and valued
- Encouraging participation
- Preventing conflict before it occurs
- Managing conflict when it occurs
- Listening and observing
- Guiding the group
- Ensuring quality decisions related to Tasks
- Ensuring outcome-based sessions
- Providing opportunities for feedback & next steps
- Acknowledging accomplishments & wrapping up loose ends

Communication Skills: Are you...

- Projecting your voice
- Breathing deeply (but not directly into the microphone) so that you can get enough air to project your voice
- Varying and pitch and pace of your words
- Minimizing your "uhs"

Member participation: Are members...

- Equally engaged in the discussion
- Staying united, rather than splitting into factions
- Energized and enthusiastic
- Sending you any non-verbal signals

Facilitation Tools: Are you...

- Using body language
- Thanking participants
- Encouraging silent members
- Using open-ended questions
- Dividing into small groups
- Consulting the group
- Using visual aids
- Using team-building activities
- Setting ground rules
- Searching for agreement
- Using conflict to improve decisions
- Agreeing to disagree
- Listening actively
- Scanning the room
- Delegating a timekeeper
- Reminding the group about the objectives and agenda
- Straying from the agenda when necessary
- Using a parking lot
- Reviewing the decision-making process
- Reviewing objectives for each agenda item
- Recording decisions
- Developing an action plan

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How Tabono Can Help.

Tabono provides capacity building assistance (CBA) in order to strengthen your HIV prevention interventions and strategies. We can help you with group facilitation as follows:

- A. Information Transfer - Tabono can provide you with current information about group facilitation skills.
- B. Skills Building - Tabono can develop for you a workshop or training on group facilitation skills.
- C. Technical Consultation - Tabono can connect you to experts that can help you assess the group facilitation skills of your staff.
- D. Technical Services - Tabono can help you develop group facilitation skills criteria to monitor and/or evaluate staff. This CBA tool is one such example.
- E. Technology Transfer - Tabono can provide you with access to the latest information, skills and resources related to group facilitation skills.

How To Get Assistance

- A. Contact Your Project Officer First to discuss your CBA needs and name the Tabono Project as a potential provider.
- B. Go to the CBA Request Information System (CRIS) and submit your request.
- C. Contact Robert Terrance, CBA Specialist for more information.

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