

The Role of the Facilitator

What is a facilitator, and why have one?

The facilitators' job is to **support everyone to do their best thinking**. S/he encourages full participation; s/he promotes mutual understanding; s/he fosters inclusive solutions, and s/he cultivates shared responsibility.

First Function: The facilitator encourages full participation

Effective facilitators have the temperament and the skills to draw people out and help everyone feel heard. They know how to make it safe for people to ask their questions without the fear of others shutting them down. They know how to make room for quiet members. In sum, facilitators know how to build a respectful, supportive atmosphere that encourages people to keep thinking instead of shutting down.

Second Function: The facilitator promotes mutual understanding

A group cannot do its best thinking if the members don't understand one another. But most people find it difficult to detach from their fixed positions enough to actually listen to what others are saying. Instead, they get caught up in amplifying and defending their own perspectives.

A facilitator helps the group realize that sustainable agreements are built on a foundation of mutual understanding. S/he helps members see that thinking from each other's points of view is invaluable.

Third Function: The facilitator fosters inclusive solutions

An experienced facilitator knows how to help a group search for innovative ideas that incorporate everyone's points of view. This can be a challenging task- the facilitator is often the only person in the room who has even considered the possibility that inclusive alternatives may exist.

When a facilitator introduces a group to the values and methods that foster inclusive solutions, the impact is profound. Many people dismiss the very suggestion that a group can find meaningful solutions to difficult problems. As they discover the validity of this new way of thinking, they often become more hopeful about their group's potential effectiveness.

Fourth Function: The facilitator cultivates shared responsibility

Creating a culture of shared responsibility requires serious effort. The group's leader has to endorse the value of shared responsibility, and both the leader and the members have to develop the procedures and acquire the skills to make participatory decision-making work.