



TRAINING LEVEL: Beginner

TRAINING TOPIC

Throughout the participatory process, you will need to organize participatory meetings and workshops with the public and stakeholders. In order to obtain the necessary information from these meetings, e.g. to get feedback on a particular document, gather ideas and comments on a particular topic or agenda, or co-create proposals and recommendations, you need an experienced facilitator who knows how to work with a group, mitigate conflicts and keep discussion and group work on topic. This training explains the basic concepts and principles that every facilitator should follow and provides examples of facilitation methods.

TRAINING OBJECTIVES

In this document you will learn:

- What facilitation is and what are the characteristics of a good facilitator
- How to set up rules for facilitated meetings
- Multiple facilitation methods for different situations
- How to prepare for facilitation of meetings and workshops
- The advantages and disadvantages of online and offline facilitation and how to prepare for both formats

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1. KEY TERMS DEFINITION

Facilitation

Conducting and leading a group meeting and discussion to obtain specific outputs, data and information needed for a participatory project or process. The facilitation is led by a facilitator who ensures that all participants are equally involved and given space to express themselves.

Facilitator

An impartial person, who guides and facilitates the discussion, but does not contribute their opinion or knowledge. The facilitator ensures that the discussion stays on the set topic and that within the given time limit the meeting achieves the desired goals, i.e. brings the necessary information.

Facilitation is often confused with the terms to mediate and to host/moderate. However, these terms represent slightly different activities:

- To mediate: dispute resolution being led by a neutral expert (= mediator)
- To host/moderate: similar to facilitation, but with a lower level of participant involvement and the host/moderator brings their views into the discussion

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD FACILITATOR

A good facilitator should adhere to the following rules:

- **Impartiality** - is objective, has an impartial stance towards the discussed issue, does not express their opinions, listens to all parties involved.
- **Safe environment** - creates a welcoming environment so that all participants feel safe to express themselves; supports the group in generating ideas, thoughts and solutions; promotes teamwork.

- **Time management** - adheres to the time schedule of the meeting/workshop, is able to stop participants if they speak for too long or out of context.
- **Balanced engagement of all participants** - gives the floor to everyone and gently encourages participation in the discussion, does not let strong personalities dominate the discussion and ensures that the same people do not speak all the time.
- **Rules** - can establish discussion rules that all participants agree and adhere to, brings the discussion back to the topic of the meeting.
- **Conflict mitigation** - resolves conflicts immediately and approaches conflict situations head on to prevent escalation.

3. HOW TO APPROACH FACILITATION OF PARTICIPATORY MEETINGS

3.1 Have a clear goal of the meeting

- Determine the purpose of the meeting: Is it to obtain certain information and data from the participants, an extensive deliberation among the participants or to co-create a certain document?
- Be clear about what data or information you need to obtain from the meeting.
- Consider how the meeting fits into the whole of the participatory process and what is the next step.
- Define how the final report summarizing the meeting's outputs will look like.

3.2 Get to know the target group(s) of the meeting

- Think about how to communicate with the group so that the participants feel comfortable during the meeting and the discussion brings you the information you need.
- If you are also responsible for organization of the meeting, including sending invitations and securing the venue, think about what communication channels to use to get information about the meeting to the target group. Select a meeting venue where the participants will feel comfortable, or one that is located in the project implementation area and will be within walking distance for the participants.

3.3 Select the right civic tech tools

- The use of civic tech tools can help you collect the needed information during facilitation of in-person or online meetings. They can be used for quick brainstorming, collecting ideas or prioritizing and voting.
- For online facilitation, you need to select a suitable platform on which the meeting will take place. Before choosing, consider what features you require from a given platform and the level of computer literacy of your target audience.

All tools require:

- Try them out, familiarize yourself with all the features and identify any problems that participants may encounter while using them and provide solutions.
- Have a plan for what purpose the tools will be used for.

Keep in mind:

- *Digital tools can make facilitation of meetings a lot easier, but also more complicated. The use of each tool should therefore have a clear reason. Better to avoid combining multiple tools in one meeting.*
- *Consider the level of computer literacy of your target group and plan the use of digital tools accordingly.*

3.4 Think about what information you need to communicate to the participants prior to the meeting and how

- A participatory meeting can be open to the entire public, focused on members of a certain community or socio-demographic group, or only by invitation for specific people. Select the communication method of the invitation so that the information about the meeting reach your target group.

Invitation to a participatory meeting should include the following information:

- Subject and purpose of the meeting
- Meeting time and venue address
- Expected duration of the meeting
- What to bring (if necessary)

Meeting registration:

- If you want to keep track of who came to the participatory meeting, fill out the attendance sheet with the participants upon their arrival. A simple contact form is also useful, where interested parties can leave their contact details so that you

can subsequently provide them with meeting minutes or other information about the project.

- Especially for online meetings, it is advisable that the participants register first (e.g. via Google forms or another online form). You can then send the link to the meeting only to those who have registered.

3.5 Prepare a detailed meeting script

- Prepare a meeting schedule with allocated time for each activity. Plan ahead which facilitation methods you intend to use.
- Prepare questions that can help spark the discussion.
- Make sure you follow the scenario/script.
- Do not hesitate to jump in if the discussion drifts off topic or revolves around one issue for too long.

3.6 Prepare a presentation or other type of visual aid

- A powerpoint presentation is suitable if you are discussing a topic for which you need to show visualizations (e.g. street revitalization, construction of a new park) that will help the participants imagine where the implementation area is and how the intended project looks like.
- For topics where visualization is not necessary, a presentation can distract from the verbal message. However, a visual aid with the topic of the meeting and, possibly, a website, where the participants can follow news about the project and/or a contact they can turn to, is advantageous.

3.7 Collect data in a usable form

- Regardless of the purpose of the meeting - whether it is gathering ideas, feedback or recommendations - it is advisable to have a written record of the information that came out of the meeting (= meeting minutes). Think in advance of how such a report should look like and how the information are going to be recorded during the meeting.

Keep in mind:

- *Arrange for a note taker to record important information during the meeting for the final output. The facilitator should not be the one taking the notes. It is better if he/she can fully concentrate on facilitating the discussion.*
- *Send the final output to meeting participants. It is a strong psychological element that helps build participants' trust in the participatory process.*

3.8 Establish the rules

- Rules help ensure a peaceful course of the meeting, minimize potential conflicts and create a safe environment for all participants. Prepare the rules in advance, introduce them at the beginning of the meeting and get the participants to agree on them. More on rules in the following section.

4. RULES

At the beginning of every participatory meeting, it is essential to set clear rules that will be followed by all participants and the facilitator. The facilitator can either propose the rules and have the participants agree on them, or have the participants suggest changes or propose the rules themselves. The important thing is that everyone agrees and adheres to them.

Why are meeting rules necessary?

- Everyone will understand what is acceptable behavior.
- They provide a frame of reference for constructive discussion.
- They help the group reach a consensus on what is important.

How to set up the rules:

- If there is enough time (e.g. you are facilitating a longer, all-day or several day workshop), a good practice is to give the participants space to design the rules themselves. Being directly involved in making the rules ensures that everyone buys into and follows them. This will help the participants feel closer to the whole process and that they are part of it.
- If time is short (less than a day), the facilitator should draft the rules at the beginning of the meeting and have them agreed upon. Alternatively, just familiarize the participants with the rules. A visual aid with keywords that summarizes the basic rules is helpful.
- The rules must be specific and practical, but set in such a way as not to stifle the group's creativity.

Examples of typical rules:

- The meeting starts and ends on time according to the schedule.
- Focus on established priorities: participants stick to the topic of discussion.
- Everyone participates and gets involved.
- All opinions and ideas have their place in the discussion.
- No interrupting or jumping into speech /conversation.

- The facilitator can intervene if the discussion goes off topic or if it is necessary to move on to the next point of the program.
- No talking that does not involve the whole group and/or is not related to the topic.

5. ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR FACILITATING PARTICIPATORY MEETINGS

- Shorter is often better (golden rule: 90 min).
- It is useful to have a team member (not a participant) record the discussion: the facilitator does not have time for this.
- Choose a suitable venue: avoid venues where there is a stage and an auditorium, as it creates a “you and us” feeling. A good facilitator aims to create a sense of belonging and a space that encourages discussion. This is easier to achieve when everyone, including the facilitator, stands or sits on the same level. Participants can sit at multiple tables spread around the room, around one large round table, tables arranged in a U shape, etc. The table arrangement depends on the number of participants and the chosen facilitation method.
- Put yourself in the role of participants, assess how demanding the content is on concentration, and arrange the program accordingly.
- Balance how much information to convey and how much space to give to questions and input from participants.
- Attendance list - collect contact details and confirmation that participants agree to audiovisual recording and data processing according to GDPR.

6. FACILITATION METHODS

There are a variety of facilitation methods for meetings and workshops that help the facilitator set up the right dynamics and obtain the outputs your institution needs. However, to select the right method or combination of methods, you must first clarify the objectives of the meeting. / the meeting must have clear objectives

Consider the following aspects before selecting a facilitation method:

- Budget for the event
- Venue: how big and how to organize it, physical space or online platform? / in-person or online?
- Time: how much time do you have for the meeting?
- Number of participants: a small group of up to 10 people? Medium size of about 20-30 people? Or a large one exceeding 50 or 100 participants?

- Type of participants: general public, experts, students, supporters or opponents, etc.
- Objectives of the meeting: generate ideas, summarize opinions and perceptions of a certain situation, propose solutions, agree on solutions, etc.
- What outputs are needed: list of words, numbers, drawn on a map, visuals, etc.

Below we list several categories of facilitation methods and their examples.

6.1 ICEBREAKERS

Purpose:

- “Warm up” at the beginning of a meeting.
- Initiate interaction between participants at the beginning of a meeting.
- Ignite the spirit of cooperation among the participants.
- Contribute to a sense of belonging and inclusion in the meeting for every participant.

Principles:

- Fun and actively engage participants
- Short and simple

Examples:

1. Name game

Participants say their name and something about it (how they were given their name, an interesting thing about their name, fun stories related to their name, etc.).

2. Information people won't guess

Participants share something about themselves that other participants do not know about them. It can be something unique (“I was a rodeo star as a kid”) or something simpler (“I love beer from local breweries and I like to travel to new cities to discover them”).

Participants should not repeat similar information after other participants. In groups where people know each other, other participants may reject a story if they already know it and the participant has to come up with something new.

This icebreaker is especially useful for meetings that require a lot of communication or discussion about a complex topic and a friendly atmosphere in the group is necessary.

3. New or good

Participants will talk about something that is new or good (or both) in their lives.

A more informal and flexible icebreaker, especially suitable for groups that know each other and are trying to improve mutual communication and performance.

4. Common ground

Participants form pairs and find 4 things they have in common within 3 minutes. They cannot use basic physical characteristics (age, gender, eye color) or anything obvious (e.g. if the meeting is held within one organization, they cannot use that they both work there). Subsequently, the two pairs form a group of four and discover 3 things in common within the group. Continue like this until the whole group comes together and have them find 1 thing they all have in common.

Suitable for groups focused on improving workplace relationships or for teams working to define their mission.

6.2 ENERGISERS

Purpose:

- Get the energy flowing in the group.
 - e.g. when a meeting takes a long time and the participants' concentration has dropped.
- Actively engage all participants.

Impact:

- Change or improve the mood in the room.
- Increase the feeling of belonging to the team.
- Get to know each other better.
- Improve cooperation within the team.

Types:

- Movement oriented
- Verbal

Principles:

- Fun and encouraging
- Short (5 min)
- Plenty of space - for personal meetings
- Beware of possible safety risks / obstacles (e.g. chairs, sharp objects, etc.)
- Physically easy so everyone can participate

Examples:

1. Two truths and a lie, or a truth and a lie

Everyone tells two true and one false information about themselves. Then the other participants vote on what they think is true and what is false. You can propose an award for the most creative lies or the best liar.

2. Congratulations!

Each participant writes down their greatest achievements (professional or personal) over the past 3 to 6 months and explains them to their neighbor. Then the neighbor presents their achievements to the group and applause follows.

3. Speed Dating

Participants form pairs and find out as many common things as possible within 3 minutes. Then everyone switches partners and repeats. In this way, people learn a lot of new things about each other and find common topics.

4. Fun Fact

Participants anonymously write funny facts about themselves and then the group tries to match the participant to the fact.

6.3 RETROSPECTIVE

Purpose:

- Evaluate a specific period of time, often in terms of work done or the success of the project.
- Find out what participants consider successful and where they see problems.
- Give all participants (or team members) an opportunity to express their opinion
- Discuss the challenges mentioned by participants.
- Subsequently, if necessary, adjust the work process, map problem areas, draw up a plan for further development.

How to proceed:

1. Divide the flipchart/board into two halves.
2. Each participant anonymously writes on post-it notes what they think went well (pluses) and what did not and should be improved (minuses). What is a plus and what is a minus can be indicated by drawing plus and minus signs on the top of the note or can be distinguished by different colored notes. Always one piece of information per note. There is no limit to how many notes anyone can write.
3. The facilitator collects all the notes and sticks them on the board - pluses on the plus side, minuses on the minus side. At the same time, he/she tries to group the contributions thematically. As a result, there are several thematic groups on the plus and minus side, each group containing several notes.
4. The facilitator determines how many votes the participants can allocate. Normally, the number of votes per participant is set as half the number of thematic groups: e.g. there are 10 thematic groups on the plus side, so participants can allocate 5 plus votes. There are 8 thematic groups on the minus side, so participants can assign 4 minus votes.
5. All participants will assign votes to the thematic groups that they consider the most important. With 5 plus votes, each participant can decide if they want to allocate them to 5 different groups, or if they want to give more votes to one of the groups. The same is true on the minus side.
6. After the voting, the facilitator counts all the votes and the thematic groups with the highest number of votes are selected as the highest priority groups.
7. A discussion should follow to get participants' feedback on the results of the retrospective and to identify action steps to respond to the main challenges that emerged from the retrospective.

6.4 BRAINSTORMING**Purpose:**

- Generate ideas
- Come up with creative solutions
- Helps to move forward in the process using creative problem solving

Principles:

- Be open to all ideas: avoid criticizing, judging or analyzing participants' ideas or favoring one idea over others
- All participants are fully engaged
- Evaluate ideas and thoughts at the end of the meeting

Recommendation:

- A diverse group (in terms of demographics, educational background, occupation, etc.) will generate more creative and diverse ideas.

Examples:

1. Classic brainstorming

Have every participant write down their thoughts - one thought per post-it note. Then collect everyone's notes, stick them on the board and read all the ideas out loud. Furthermore, the facilitator can stimulate discussion based on these ideas.

2. Inverse brainstorming

Look at the problem “upside down” - come up with the opposite of what you want as an outcome (usually something negative), then reverse those outcomes into positive ones and develop them further.

3. Round - Robin brainstorming

Each participant silently writes their idea on a card/paper. All participants pass their card to the person next to them. Participants use their neighbor's idea as inspiration to come up with a new idea, which they write on the card. They then send their card again to the person next to them. Keep sending cards until you have enough ideas.

6.5 VOTING, PRIORITIZATION

Purpose:

- Prioritizing topics for announcing results, losers or TOP 3 most important things.
- It is essential to select the right voting method.
- There is no universal voting method.

Recommendation:

- Select a user-friendly method for both the participants and the facilitator.

7. ONLINE VS. IN-PERSON FACILITATION

In recent years, online facilitation has become a viable alternative to in-person meetings and workshops. Both online and in-person meeting facilitation formats have advantages and disadvantages that are important to keep in mind and consider when planning a participatory meeting.

Each format is suitable for slightly different groups of participants. The online format appeals more to people who have longer working hours, parents with children who do not have babysitters, etc. The in-person format appeals more to seniors and people who prefer personal contact and are able to come in person. If your project's target audience is the general public and you would like to get input from as diverse a group as possible, consider holding participatory meetings in both formats. However, we recommend avoiding the so-called hybrid model, combining in-person and online formats in one meeting, unless necessary. The hybrid model is relatively expensive, risking more technical problems, and it will be more difficult to engage all participants (connected online and present in-person) to the same extent.

The table below summarizes the main advantages and disadvantages of the online and in-person format:

In-person		Online	
+	-	+	-
Meeting face-to-face and personal connection	Time consuming	Time efficient	Impersonal
Easier to foster a sense of belonging and a friendly atmosphere	Costs of refreshments, venue rental, etc.	Cost saving	Technology (IT problems, lack of computer literacy of participants, etc.)
		Ability to reach a broader and more diverse audience	Excluding certain groups (non-tech savvy)
			Shorter attention span (need for more interactive elements)

8. CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflicts can always occur in a participatory meeting - whether between several participants or one participant challenging the process. Here are some recommendations for approaching conflict as a facilitator:

- Maintain mutual respect between the parties involved and do not try to determine winners or who is right (do not pit participants against each other as opponents).
- Do not put blame on anyone, but look for the root cause of the conflict (e.g. lack of information, misunderstanding, loss of information in retelling, etc.).
- Have the participants name their emotions: do you feel angry, disappointed - this will help you find the root cause of the conflict.
- Work with the opposing party to resolve the conflict.
- Keep the conversation focused on goals.
- If possible, resolve the conflict face-to-face (rather than via email, etc.).
- Focus on behavior, not personality.
- Communicate the takeaways and lessons learned for next time.
- Create space for conversation, be open to the possibility of conflict, and proactively seek solutions to avoid or mitigate conflict.