

What is a facilitator?

A facilitator is someone who uses their skills in, and knowledge of, group processes to enable a group of people to agree their purpose and plan to achieve it, without taking a particular position in the discussion. The facilitator carries out a set of functions before, during and after a meeting which enable the group to achieve its objectives.

Facilitation is more than just a set of functions. It has underpinning values:

- Groups of people are capable of great creativity and innovation – they can solve their own problems
- Everyone's views and ideas are important
- Everyone should have an equal opportunity to participate in the group, and be respected as a member
- Everyone is entitled to be listened to
- Disagreement is healthy where it is about the content of discussions. Disagreement should not be personalised.
- Decisions arrived at through full exploration and discussion and consensus seeking, will be owned by the group members and are more likely to be implemented.

Facilitation is similar to the process of **running or chairing meetings**. The main difference is that a meeting convenor or chair is given formal authority by the group to control the meeting and to ensure that a decision is reached on each item on the agenda. Chairing meetings tends to involve a detailed agenda, with paperwork for each item. It is often quite a formal process. There are many good sources of information on running and chairing meetings. For example see:

<http://www.dsc.org.uk/> for a wide range of excellent publications aimed at the voluntary sector.

<http://www.meetingwizard.org/meetings/index.cfm> a useful site which links to numerous publications on meetings – from the very formal to the informal.

The arts website [alwayslearning](http://www.alwayslearning.org) has a useful section on meetings:

<http://www.alwayslearning.org.uk/research/effective-networks-and-meetings/>

A facilitator will use a variety of processes. These can be grouped under three main headings¹:

Keeping the group to TASK

- Seeking agreement on the purpose of the group and or meeting
- Seeking agreement on the task(s) to be tackled
- Enabling the group to focus on their task; bringing people back to task
- Clarifying the task
- Seeking or providing information related to the task
- Identifying blocks and barriers to completing the task

Leading the group PROCESS

- Enable the group to agree its rules for the event or meeting – usually called ground rules
- Ensure that the ground rules are applied
- Challenge behaviour that is outside the ground rules, or values of the group
- Make sure everyone can participate so that the experience and skills of every member of the group is used
- Design the processes for before, during and after the event
- Manage the process and flow of the event or meeting with carefully judged interventions. This involves the use of tools and techniques which encourage participation, vary the pace, raise and lower the energy, change the focus of the thinking and style of discussions
- Monitor progress and give feedback on how well (or otherwise) things seem to be going
- Challenge and question participants so as to advance progress towards achieving the task

¹ These are similar to the three elements of Action Centred Leadership – see John Adair

<http://www.johnadair.co.uk/>



Responding to **INDIVIDUAL NEEDS**

- Be aware of individual needs in the group
- Enable individuals to feel safe
- Use carefully judged interventions to manage individual needs, so that they do not block the progress of the group

Facilitation is an art, rather than an exact science. It is a live process in which the facilitator uses their skills, instinct and experience to decide the right intervention at the right time. The good facilitator needs to be well prepared but must work with where he or she feels the group is, not to a pre-planned script. It is the skill of responding to the situation as it develops that can enable a facilitator to transform a feeling of being stuck, or worse, into a breakthrough.

The process is not unlike steering a small sailing boat. The facilitator and the group must be clear where they are trying to get to (purpose or task). The facilitator must respond to the wind, tide, currents, waves, weather and the needs of the group members, as the voyage unfolds. This involves seeing the whole picture, taking action to change course, change the sails, respond to crew members falling overboard, all in real time and whilst appearing calm and in control!

In most cases, the facilitator is not an expert in the subject or issues that are being discussed. The facilitator is present to manage the group process.

A good facilitator with no personal experience of a particular sector, business or organisation can still effectively facilitate their meetings. The group participants bring the content knowledge to the meeting themselves.

There are some situations where the facilitator may have to have a good working knowledge of the content of the meeting in order to facilitate the process. There are also occasions when an expert in the content is asked to facilitate – usually called content facilitation. This material focuses on process facilitation.



When might you need a facilitator?

Much of the time in organisations, events and gatherings, people are able to manage their meetings so that they achieve the results they want. However, there are particular occasions when a group may need to appoint a person to play the role of facilitator. This is usually to create space and safety so that the other participants in the group are free to focus entirely on the content of the discussions. The facilitator takes responsibility for ensuring that the group has a suitable process to achieve its task. At the same time, the facilitator ensures that all the individuals are able to participate and account is taken of their needs.

The facilitator can be appointed from within a group, network or organisation or from outside. Some examples of occasions when a facilitator might be needed are:

- 1) An art-based charity with several branches wants to bring the senior management team from each branch together to a 2 day meeting to agree the business plan for the next 12 months. They want to appoint an independent facilitator to run the two day meeting. They want the facilitator to design a process that enables everyone to be involved and will produce an outline business plan that everyone agrees with. They cannot use an internal facilitator without leading to concerns about hidden agendas and roles within the organisation.

- 2) A museum has three teams which do not work effectively together or interact well with one another. This is causing unnecessary work and stress. The CEO feels there is a need to put in place a number of facilitated meetings for the teams to
 - give them a chance to air the issues as they see them in a structured way
 - gain a better understanding of the bigger picture they are all part of; understand the problems that this dis-jointed working is causing the organisation
 - begin to develop a culture they can all buy in to
 - put in place some practical measures which can improve things.

They appoint an external facilitator for similar reasons to 1) above.



- 3) A network of middle managers in craft organisations has developed to provide them with an informal space in which to share ideas and support each other in their roles. The network agrees that at each meeting they will appoint one of their number to act as a facilitator for the meeting. This person will focus on managing the group process, rather than participating in the content of the meeting. This works provided each person has a sufficient level of skill as a facilitator and time to prepare in advance of each meeting. It can break down if one person ends up facilitating all the meetings, as their role becomes only process facilitation and they are not getting the benefit of being an ordinary group member.
- 4) A theatre wants to look at ways of developing its management. It has six managers at both middle and front-line level. The Artistic Director suggests setting up an action learning set and a number of action learning sessions to help with this. The Artistic Director decides that there is no-one within the organisation who is sufficiently dis-interested to play the role of facilitator. Also the facilitation of action learning is felt to be a skilled task and there is no-one with sufficient skills and experience. The theatre appoints an external facilitator to play this role.

What does a facilitator do?

As described briefly above, the facilitator works with the group to ensure that:

- the purpose of the group's activities is clear and can be achieved
- there is a process that enables every group member to participate
- the needs of individual members in relation to the group task are noticed and responded to

In order to facilitate any group's activity, the facilitator must have core knowledge and skills in relation to understanding groups and their dynamics. There is an extensive literature on this subject. A good starting point can be found at:

<http://www.infed.org/groupwork/index.htm>



Planning

In order to get the group to work, the facilitator needs to plan an appropriate process. This includes the following key areas of preparation:

1. What is the purpose of the group meeting – is it known or not known? Is the point of the meeting to determine the purpose of the group. It is essential that the facilitator is clear about the purpose or how the purpose will become clear. It is also quite common for groups to think they have a clear purpose but in the course of their activities to discover that the purpose was not clear and they need to define a new one. A skilled facilitator will enable them to do this without creating disharmony and blame for the original lack of clarity over the purpose.
2. Who is in the group? The facilitator needs to know who the group members are, how they came to be in the group, what each person's expectations of the group are. This clarification may take place at the beginning of the event or meeting or may be done in advance of the meeting. As the group members talk about what they are expecting from the group, the facilitator may notice that there are divergent views on the purpose which need to be dealt with.
3. Are the mechanics of the meeting clear? – when is it taking place, where is it taking place, what sort of room is available, what sort of seating is available, is there a flipchart, are other aids needed and so on.
4. Is there a clear process for the meeting or event, which takes participants through the time available and takes account of mealtimes, break times, different levels of energy at different times of day and is likely to enable participants to reach a suitable outcome by the time the meeting ends.
5. How will the event be followed up? Does it lead to another meeting or meetings? Will there be notes taken and if so, by whom? Will there be an interactive website or group e-mail to keep people in touch?



Key steps for planning the process of an event or meeting

Once the initial preparation has been done, people will arrive at the event or meeting ready to start. The steps below provide a brief outline to a typical sequence in facilitating a group.

Step 1 – Introductions

The facilitator will need to take control of the event and make sure it starts on time. This is normally done through an introduction in which the facilitator explains who they are, their role and what will happen next.

In most meetings, there is a low tolerance at this formal introduction stage as the members of the group have not yet introduced themselves to each other and therefore have unmet individual needs to be seen and heard by the other members of the group. For this reason, most meetings start with some form of introduction which asks everyone to say something.

Most facilitators will try to combine the introductions with an energiser or warm up activity which gets people thinking or moving and generates energy towards the task. There are a wide variety of techniques or approaches to this warm up phase. There are many websites and publications which list a huge variety of icebreakers. Examples can be found at:

http://adulted.about.com/od/icebreakers/Educational_Icebreakers.htm

<http://www.icebreakers.ws/>

<http://www.eslflow.com/ICEBREAKERSreal.html>

Every facilitator needs to develop approaches to introducing and warming up groups which fit their own style and personality. There is no one way to do this.

Step 2 – Clarify the task and explain the process

Once people are warmed up, the facilitator should make sure that everyone present is clear on the purpose of the meeting or event (the task) and explain to everyone the process that will be used to achieve it.



Step 3 – Activities and processes to enable the group to explore the task, develop their thinking, be creative and share ideas. There is a wide variety of tools and techniques that can be used to take groups through this process. Some examples can be found at:

<http://www.trainingzone.co.uk/> . Training zone is a long established site for trainers and provides a good base for finding resources and ideas on the processes that might be used to solve problems, bring group members together and so on.

<http://www.businessballs.com/> is a large site with lots of ideas for problem solving and good links.

<http://reviewing.co.uk/links.htm>

Step 4 – Activities and processes to bring the thinking from step 3 together so that the group is able to focus and agree clear, specific outcomes and actions. Sometimes these may be to do with a further process of exploration, sometimes they convert into action plans.

Group Cycle

Bruce Tuckman identified back in 1965² that groups go through a consistent sequence or cycle in their development. The cycle has the following phases:

- Forming – a polite and watchful phase in which participants are getting to know each other and are clarifying how they will work together to achieve the tasks.
- Storming – a high energy and often fractious phase in which participants challenge one another, start to adopt different roles within the group and sort out issues of power and control.
- Norming – in this phase the group establishes how it will operate, people adopt roles that are understood and accepted by each other, there is agreement over groundrules and these are kept to.

² Tuckman, Bruce W. (1965) 'Developmental sequence in small groups', *Psychological Bulletin*, 63, 384-399. The article was reprinted in *Group Facilitation: A Research and Applications Journal* - Number 3, Spring 2001



- Performing – the members of the group are able to work together to achieve their tasks.

In many group activities, the group never gets past the forming stage. The members remain polite, guarded and watchful but do not commit themselves to the group. As a consequence, the groups never really form and the benefit of real group activity is never felt. An enormous number of meetings work in this way.

An effective facilitator will try to guide members of a group through the phases of the group development cycle. Clearly, if the time the group spends together is short, it may not be able to fully form as a group. However, the selection of activities and interventions by the facilitator is usually informed by some reference to where the group has reached.

Every time the group's membership changes, it must re-form and to an extent, must go through the cycle again. New members have to understand the processes that have led to the group working in the way that it is now working. They must fit in with these processes but can also challenge them. The existing members may be understandably reluctant to go back to the beginning. However, if this process is not managed, new members cannot fully integrate into the group.

Practical guides to facilitation

There are many guides to facilitation. Some can be accessed directly on the web:

An excellent list of books about facilitation plus other resources can be found on the website of the International Association of Facilitators (IAF) <http://www.iaf-world.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=1>

A number of links, resources and tips can be found on <http://www.facilitate.com/> . This site sells electronic facilitation tools, but supports information about facilitation in general.



Useful books for facilitators include:

Roger Schwarz, Anne Davidson, Peg Carlson, Sue McKinney (2005) *The Skilled Facilitator Fieldbook: Tips, Tools, and Tested Methods for Consultants, Facilitators, Managers, Trainers, and Coaches*. Jossey-Bass Business & Management

Ingrid Bens (2005) *Facilitating with Ease! Core Skills for Facilitators, Team Leaders and Members, Managers, Consultants, and Trainers*. Jossey Bass

Christine Frances Hogan (2003) *Practical Facilitation: A Toolkit of Techniques*. Kogan Page

Finding a Facilitator

If you need to find an independent facilitator for a meeting or event, then you have two sources:

- People working in other organisations who have the skills and are in a position to provide facilitation as part of their work for those organisations. They may be able to do this without charging for their time.
- People who offer specialist facilitation skills as part of their work as consultants. This is how these people make their living and they will charge for their services.

There are some people who offer facilitation as their main professional service but these are few and far between. Most organisational and other consultants, however, will have developed a wide range of facilitation skills in the course of their work and will often offer facilitation as part of their suite of professional services.

The following steps may be helpful, if you need to appoint an independent facilitator.

Step 1 – What do we want?

Clarify what you are looking for. This is usually best written down in a brief. In particular, you should be clear about what the purpose of the facilitation exercise is and what you are hoping to gain from it. If you require any specialist facilitation skills



e.g. graphic facilitation, you should be clear about this from the outset. You should be clear how you will assess the level of skills of the facilitator.

It can be useful to circulate the brief to other members of your team or partners you work with, for comment. In some cases, you may be absolutely clear what you are looking for.

Step 2 – Identifying potential suppliers

a) **Ask your contacts**

Ask colleagues, peers, partner organisations if they can recommend people you might consider; make contact and invite them to come and meet you.

Or

b) **Use directories**

There are a small number of specialist websites which will list consultants, many of whom will have excellent facilitative experience. However the principle of caveat emptor applies – it is up to the purchaser of the services to make sure that they are satisfied with the credentials and track record of the facilitator.

For example see:

The Arts Consultants website hosts a directory of consultants in England and Scotland with experience of arts organisations <http://www.arts-consultants.org.uk/index.asp>

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations hosts a consultants' directory. Consultants go through an accreditation process. <http://www.ncvo-consultants.org.uk/>

The facilitator website has a list of professional facilitators <http://facilitator.org.uk/> The site also has much useful material on facilitation and hiring a facilitator.



The **management development network** has over 90 members who specialise in work with voluntary sector organisations <http://www.mdn.org.uk/>

Or

c) **Formal tender**

This may be necessary if

- it is a large piece of work
- procurement rules suggest it needs to go to tender
- an informal approach contravenes your organisation's approach to equal opportunities

In this case, it will be necessary to produce formal tendering documentation and advertise the work.

Step 3 – Invite the facilitators to meet or talk to you

You need to get in touch with facilitators you feel may be able to help and discuss the purpose and hoped for outcomes from the work and what they might be able to do for you.

Most facilitators will produce a brief written proposal of what they can offer you and what it will cost you. If you are inviting proposals from several with a view to choosing the one you feel best suits your needs, you should be honest with the consultants about this. Some facilitators will not be interested in competitive bidding such as this.

Decide who you want to do the work for you.

How to recognise a good facilitator

The kind of questions they ask. Do they:

- *ask direct questions about who you and others are*
- *ask questions about your expectations of them*
- *gently challenge and explore your assumptions*

The balance of their listening and speaking



- *do they ask open-ended, exploratory questions*
- *do they reflect on what you've said and relate it to their own experiences and knowledge?*
- *are they jointly defining the problem and the plans?*

The statements they make

- *Do they clearly and simply state their expectations of you?*
- *Do they describe their capacity to undertake the work?*
- *Do they say no directly to things you want but can't provide*

The non-verbal communication

- *Do they show good inter-personal skills?*
- *Do they show enthusiasm?*

The attention to the current conversation

- *Do they reflect back their feelings about the current conversation?*
- *Does it feel to you as though the distance between you and them is widening, or closing?*

Step 4 – Contract

It is important that all parties are clear what has been agreed and that the terms of engagement are clearly expressed in writing. This usually takes the form of a contract and a contract should include the following:

Relationship of parties

Contract should clearly state that the facilitator is carrying out the work as a supplier to the organisation and the organisation is not responsible for facilitator's PAYE, NI or VAT.

Clear description of the work

This should clearly state what the facilitator is agreeing to deliver and what the client is undertaking to provide to ensure successful delivery does take place.

It can be difficult to state this clearly in a legal document such as a contract. Proposals and schedules of work are often attached to contracts.



Milestones for work

This should state when the work will take place.

Fees for the work. Some facilitators charge on a per diem basis and some on an outcome basis.

Example

The arts based charity described above wants to recruit a facilitator to run the two day meeting to agree the business plan.

One facilitator quotes a fee of £2000 for this work. This will include reading papers in advance of beginning the contract; meeting the client before the meeting; planning the event; writing agenda and information to go to participants in advance of meeting; facilitating the two days and producing a note afterwards.

*Another facilitator quotes a per diem fee of £400. At first glance, this looks like the more attractive proposition **but** the facilitator is not prepared to commit in advance as to how much time it will take her to prepare for the meeting and produce a note afterwards. When pushed, she says the whole piece of work is likely to take between 5-7 days.*

Basis on which expenses will be charged for the work

Occasionally, facilitators quote “all in” figures for clients. This means that they are agreeing to a set price for their fees and expenses. Usually, however, consultants and facilitators charge expenses on top of fees. They will normally charge out their mileage at c. 40p/mile or second class railfares; accommodation and subsistence. This may seem a fairly minor matter. However, it is worth thinking about during the contracting process.

A facilitator may be charging themselves out at £350 per day and as they know the organisation have agreed to facilitate a one day meeting for just this amount – they are not looking for preparation fees on top. This seems like good value to you. However, this facilitator lives 150 miles away. To ensure they get there in good time for the early start, they will need to stay in a hotel nearby the night before. This is likely to cost c. £100 for the night. They will need an evening meal the night before which will be at least £15 and they will be charging out 300 miles at 40p per mile which works out at £120. Therefore, whilst the fee is only £350, the expenses add up to an additional £235. The whole facilitator cost of the day therefore is nearly £600.



Whether supplier is VAT registered

An organisation can claim back VAT paid to suppliers, as long as they themselves are VAT registered. If the supplier is not VAT registered, they will not be charging VAT, in the first place.

However, if the supplier is VAT registered and the organisation is not, this will automatically add 17.5% to the bill which cannot be re-claimed.

Payment terms

For most facilitators, payment would be due 30 days after client receives invoice.

What fees do facilitators charge?

There is no easy answer to this. Consultant day rates vary enormously. This depends on the skills and experience of the consultant, the sector they work in and whether they have differential rates for different sectors. Some consultants are able to work at greatly reduced rates for some types of organisation. Some subsidise their consultancy work with their income from pensions.

As a general rule a freelance consultant will be able to earn between 120 and 140 fee paying days each year. The rest of the time is taken up with marketing, keeping up to date, business administration etc. This assumes a consultant working to a significant number of projects. If the consultant is working on only 2 or three projects in the year, then the number of fee earning days may be nearer to 200. The fee income is before overheads are deducted (and has to cover insurances, pension, training and development and so on).

Fees can be as low as £250 per day (although occasionally facilitators may work pro bono or at a special low rate for particular types of organisation) and can go up to £2000 + per day. However, it is probably more important for the client to ascertain exactly what the fees quoted cover and what the overall job is likely to cost than get too hung up on the day rate. Many organisations may prefer to contract on an outcome basis and leave the allocation of time to the consultant.

