STUDENT GOVERNMENT FACILITATION

An extensive guide to facilitating meetings in your school’s student government
About this Guide

Who is this Guide for?

This Guide is for educators and students who think leadership and civic education in their school could and should be better. It first explains the role of Facilitator, and then it guides you through all the important things you can do before, during, and after a meeting to make it a great experience for everyone. This Guide is also filled with different activities, tools, and ideas for you to experiment with as you hone your Facilitator skills and improve student government meetings!

Who created this Guide?

This Guide was created for Democracy In Practice by Emily Hackerson. Democracy In Practice is a small non-profit dedicated to democratic experimentation, innovation, and capacity building. We have worked in high schools and elementary schools in Bolivia, experimenting with and developing innovative approaches to leadership and civic education, like the one highlighted in the Guide. Everything we share here comes from years of work directly with students and teachers.

Learn more about us and find more resources on our website, connect with us on social media, and let us know about your experience using this Guide!

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Introduction

Why use this Guide?

We've all been in a poorly-run and badly planned meeting before. Whether we meet as a team, a community, a student council, a union, it looks something like this: the meeting starts late and goes on forever; you’re not sure what is being achieved or what you're supposed to do next; some people feel their questions or comments are dismissed or never answered; others spend more time looking at their phones or dozing off than contributing to the issue at hand. Bad meetings are like throwing time, energy, and opportunity into a black hole.

Fortunately, meetings don't have to feel like a waste! To the contrary, a democratically-run meeting can: start on time and end early; answer people’s questions and inspire more; make people laugh; make people feel their opinion was heard and valued; outline clear goals; advance objectives; make you appreciate those around you and their unique experiences; be engaging and energizing.
One of the biggest differences between bad meetings and really great meetings is the Facilitator. Facilitators have the complex task of bringing a group of individuals together to achieve a common goal (or set of goals) while ensuring everyone feels included and respected. The type of *democratic* facilitation we focus on in this Guide also requires that Facilitators empower each individual to participate on equal footing with the rest of the group. The Facilitator is further tasked with helping a group choose and evaluate ideas and proposals and make wise collective decisions.

Doing this job well can be extremely rewarding, but also challenging. The good news: anyone can become an effective Facilitator with practice. You don’t need to be an ‘expert’ that has all the answers, but you do need to use the right structures, develop a few important skills, practice different techniques, and evaluate and improve as you go.

This Guide is designed to help you and those around you become great Facilitators so you can help your group achieve its goals while encouraging different members of your group to grow, both individually and as a team. We’ve pulled together facilitation tools from expert sources and our own on-the-ground experiences experimenting with innovative approaches to democracy. This Guide should give you confidence if you are a first-time Facilitator, add a few more tools and insights if you already have experience, and provide a quick reference when you need it most.

**What does this Guide cover?**

This Guide and the tools it presents will help answer questions like:

- What is my role and what should my mindset be?
- What should I do before the meeting starts? (i.e. how to set up the meeting)
- What should I be doing during the meeting? (break out those skills, baby!)
- What techniques/tools can I use in special situations? (i.e. when we need to generate ideas, or agree on a decision, or form diverse breakout groups – situations that do not necessarily come up in every meeting)
- What should I do when wrapping up the meeting? (i.e. to improve for next time)
The Facilitator role is both challenging and rewarding. But lucky for all of us, a talented Facilitator doesn’t need to have all the answers, they just need to know how to ask the right questions! In this chapter we’ll share some important things to keep in mind when it’s your turn to step into this exciting role, or if you are teaching others.

Photo: Student (with hand raised) facilitating a contentious student assembly.
You're not the teacher, nor the boss

Often when thinking of facilitation, we imagine the role of a teacher. And why wouldn't we? The teacher is an authority figure that almost all of us have experienced, and they are often leading groups towards desired learning goals. They also (hopefully) have our best interests at heart. While there are many teachers out there skilled at facilitation, there is an important distinction between the teacher and Facilitator role.

In most contexts, the teacher is in charge of the learning environment, and often plans learning through a fixed curriculum or course of study. A teacher follows a set of objectives that determines what students learn each day, and evaluation often comes in the form of tests.¹ In some countries, the teacher is seen as the authority or expert on a given subject, and students are mostly expected to listen.

When imagining a “Facilitator,” we may also think of a boss or manager. After all, many workplace meetings are run by bosses who decide the topic at hand, set the agenda, and may only call on others in the room when they have a specific question they want answered.

Facilitators, by contrast, are not authority figures like teachers and bosses nor are they experts on the topic; rather they are a part of the organic learning process of the group. Facilitators combine tools like agendas and breakout groups with skills like active listening and time management, to help move a group towards a common set of goals (don't worry if these tools and skills are unfamiliar, they will be explained later on).

“Leading is about learning to be a facilitator.”

-Ashif Shaikh
Your mindset matters

Facilitators often set the tone for a group. In democratic meetings, participants will take their cues from you as to what type of behavior is acceptable, so it helps to model the concepts you’re learning about here from the very beginning (you can also establish ground rules for the group, which we will cover later on).

**Focus on process.** When learning about facilitation, “process” and “content” are common terms that appear. You may hear or read that a Facilitator should focus on the *process* and not the *content* of a meeting, but what does this really mean? “Content” is the substance of a discussion. Think of the specific comments people might make or the arguments they might have when discussing their favorite sports teams, or what restaurant to go to for dinner. In meetings, the content is typically focused on specific projects that a group has underway and it often consumes most of the meeting's time, leaving little room for thinking or talking about the “process.”

*Process* is the structure behind a group’s dialogue. Whereas content is what we talk about, process is how we talk about it. Do we all shout over each other as we talk sports? Or, do we agree to talk one-at-a-time? Are we all involved in picking a restaurant? Or, do some people's opinions hold more weight? And who makes the final decision regarding where we have dinner?

Some processes for having discussions and making decisions are more effective and more democratic than others. It is important to use processes that are designed to give the participants the best possible shot at making good decisions together and reaching their goals. As Facilitator, you shouldn't be contributing much to the content of the conversation, but instead thinking about process and how to most effectively guide the discussion towards successful outcomes.  

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2 Footnote: [Insert note number and content here for completeness.]
**Embrace silence and discomfort.** For new Facilitators especially, embracing the inevitable silences in group discussions can be daunting. Imagine you just launched an open-ended question to the group and instead of a clamoring of responses, you could hear a pin drop. Every second can feel like minutes, but wait! Resist the temptation to fill the silence with another question or to move on.

Every time you ask an open-ended question you’re calling on participants to reflect and respond. Sometimes this takes time. If you rush out of the silence, you’re cutting off the potential for thoughtful responses. Likewise, if participants know you will ‘save’ them from silence, they will be less likely to work through tough questions. A good Facilitator knows that beautiful things can come out of some initially uncomfortable discussions, and can even use discomfort to produce better conversations.

**Practice non-judgment.** It’s hard for people in a group to participate fully if they are afraid they’re being judged for what they say or do. If you want to have a truly democratic process, rooted in intentional dialogue and decision-making (what we at Democracy In Practice often call a “deliberative” approach), start by limiting the judgments you may want to pass on the words or actions of others, and instead focus more on how you can guide those thoughts or actions in a positive direction.
Prioritize listening. As a Facilitator, you may occasionally feel the group you're working with looks to you for answers. Sometimes group members are not familiar with the Facilitator role either, and they expect you to be calling the shots. Whenever you can, prioritize listening. Your job is to elicit ideas and actions from those around you, not to produce them yourself. Asking open-ended, non-yes-or-no questions can help shift the focus back on to the group and the participants’ own thoughts. The more you listen to others, the more they will listen to each other, and ultimately more questions and potential solutions will emerge.

Go with the flow. This Guide is proof that there are tangible and important ways you can prepare as a Facilitator and experience well-run meetings. However, no matter how much you prepare, facilitation always requires flexibility. Because we're not teachers following a set curriculum or bosses calling the shots with limited input from employees, group dynamics often lead us to unexpected places, some of which are really beneficial, others a tad off-course. As Facilitator, be ready for unexpected questions or reactions - sometimes they are an opportunity! While you can't predict exactly what will happen, you can arm yourself with some of the tools in this Guide so that you're able to adapt quickly when needed.

Great Facilitators also work hard to be: genuine; respectful; positive; encouraging; observant; responsive; and aware of barriers to learning and participating (cultural, linguistic, learning style, power dynamics).
What’s the first step in setting yourself up for a successful meeting? Take a deep breath! Remember, you don’t have to have all the answers, but by following some of the organizational tools in this chapter you will be able to enter the role of Facilitator knowing you’re prepared for meeting.

Photo: Student helping his student government collaboratively set an agenda for the meeting.
A. Make an agenda

An agenda is a list of the topics that will be discussed during a meeting. It's an important way to keep the group on track and create structure for discussions. Often times, the agenda is distributed in advance of a meeting so that participants have time to better prepare for what they might be expected to contribute.

Tips for making a great agenda:

• **Start early.** Prepare the agenda in advance, or take a few minutes in the beginning of the meeting to brainstorm with participants the topics that should be covered

• **Have clear goals.** Write down the main goal(s) for the meeting - the reason you're gathering, and what you hope to achieve by the end

• **Include important details.** If the agenda is prepared and sent out in advance, write down the date, time, and meeting location at the top of the agenda for future reference

• **List topics to be discussed.** Write the different topics that need to be discussed in the meeting in bullet points.

  _Pro Tip: Writing the topics as questions can get people more excited to dive into each item!_

• **Order the topics.** The order is important! Make sure you assess with participants the agenda items that are most important or time sensitive, and perhaps those get discussed first to ensure there is enough time. Or maybe there are a few quick, less important items that the group might want to get out of the way at the beginning of the meeting. Either way, build and number your agenda with intention. You might also want to assign different people to lead different sections of the agenda to ensure maximum participation.
• Add “Other”/“Misc.” to the end. Add an item after all the other topics on the agenda labeled “Other” or “Miscellaneous” to discuss any unforeseen topics that come up during the meeting. This will help you as Facilitator keep the group on topic, because when someone raises an important point that is off topic you can suggest it be talked about in the appropriate time slot at the end of the meeting.

  Pro Tip: If the group is focused on a single project or initiative, it can also be helpful at the end of the agenda to give a space for "Next Steps," where you can have a brief discussion about what needs to happen after the meeting ends. Alternatively, if the group is working on several projects, it might help to discuss “Next Steps” when wrapping up each agenda item.

• Add “Evaluation” to the end. At the very bottom of the agenda it can be great to add “Evaluation,” in which you take time (even 5 minutes) to evaluate as a group how the meeting went. Doing so will help the group discuss what it's doing well, or could improve upon regarding process, before the next meeting (no one wants to repeat the same mistakes twice!). Evaluation helps clear-up dysfunctional habits before they can progress and also helps a group understand what makes them most effective. We will discuss detailed ways to evaluate your meetings in the last chapter, Wrapping up: Improving through evaluation, on page 50.

• Add times for each topic. The meeting should have an agreed upon length. Based on that, put the amount of time you want to talk about each agenda topic next to the item. You can ask the participants who suggested particular topics to give you a sense of how much time those topics will require.

• Have others agree on the agenda. Make sure everyone is in agreement on the agenda before beginning. This is a good way to ensure nothing gets overlooked.

• Give copies to all attendees. Make sure everyone has a copy of the agenda and/or it's written in a place where everyone can see it throughout the meeting.
Here's a sample agenda, based on the previous tips, to get you started. Keep in mind that this agenda is best-suited for meetings in which a group is working toward one determined goal. For groups that meet weekly and have multiple projects in the works, we've included a separate sample agenda on page 61 in the Extra Resources! chapter, to keep your team's many moving parts well organized.

AGENDA

What: Soccer field fundraiser meeting
Where: Wilkesboro High School
When: Tuesday, May 16, 2017 (4pm – 5:30pm)
Who: Planning Team
Purpose: The goal of this meeting is to start planning our fundraiser for a new soccer field
Objective: By the end of the meeting we will have decided on the top 3 best ways to raise money and create a to do list so people know who is responsible for what

1. Welcome everyone! 5 - 10 min – led by Eva
   • Briefly review top items from the previous meeting notes
   • Have group review the agenda
   • Ask if all are in agreement with agenda/if they have anything to add

2. Starter question: 5 min
   "Why is a new soccer field important for our school?"— led by Camila

3. What are ways we could raise money? Brainstorm: 25 min – led by Erick

4. Discuss ideas generated in brainstorm and prioritize best options: 20 min – led by Grace

5. Other 10 min

6. Generate Next Steps 10 min – led by Richard
   • Whole group generates list of to-do items based on 3 best fundraising options
   • Prioritize list of to-do items and assign tasks

7. Questions & Set next meeting date: 5 -10 min -- led by Joel

8. Evaluation: 5min
B. Assign roles

There can be a lot of moving parts in a meeting, and the Facilitator shouldn't have to do it all. *Role Setting* defines who will be in charge of a few important meeting tasks:

**Note taker**
Captures the main points of the meeting on a piece of paper or on a computer, to be shared with the group later (tips on good note taking can be found on page 62). This person is sometimes called the ‘scribe’. Meeting notes are sometimes called ‘minutes.’

**Time-keeper**
Makes sure the meeting stays on time! People love to talk and brainstorm, so this person is essential for bringing the group back to focus and reminding everyone of how much time is left for a certain discussion topic. With larger groups, the time-keeper could also support the Facilitator by keeping track of the order in which people rose a hand to speak, ensuring everyone who wants to participate is eventually heard.

**Greeter**
As is often the case in large meetings, some participants will arrive late or continue to trickle in after the meeting has started. To help orient those arriving late without distracting the rest of the group, a Greeter is particularly helpful. The Greeter participates fully in the meeting but is seated near the entrance and is the first point of contact for folks coming in once the meeting is underway. The Greeter discreetly welcomes them and gives an update on where the group is in the agenda, ensuring latecomers can participate and the meeting continues without disruption.
C. Set up a democratic space

The way a room is configured may seem inconsequential, but it can greatly impact how a meeting feels. You might not have much control over the meeting space, or maybe even what's in it, but you can influence how it's set up. It helps to begin by thinking about your objectives for the meeting. Does someone need to be able to take notes and write comfortably? Do you have audio-visual materials that need to be displayed to everyone? Will the meeting involve sensitive conversation? Do you plan to break people up into smaller groups? Space can help facilitate these things. You should feel free to experiment with room arrangement as you go along to see what works for your group and its goals.

For example, in democratic meetings, you want to avoid tables and chairs being arranged in such a way as to make some appear more important or powerful than others. As the Facilitator, you shouldn't be sitting at the front of the room looking out at the group. One of the most effective ways to democratically arrange meeting space is to gather chairs or tables in a circle, giving all participants a clear view of each other and their surroundings, with no clear position of power. Other options for room arrangement depend on the objective of the meeting. Some examples to consider include those listed below, or from the document, *Meeting Room Configurations* in section 4 of the appendix.

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**Where should I be?**

Speaking of seating arrangements! What about you as a Facilitator? Every space and seating arrangement is different, but we generally recommend sitting near the middle of a group and avoid the head of the table or the front of the room. This will make it easier for you to hear and interact with everyone, and will avoid participants feeling like you are going to do the talking and they should just listen.

Another thing that can reduce participation is if you are standing while everyone else is seated. Even if certain parts of the meeting require you to stand, try sitting down when others are speaking and see how it changes the dynamic!
What it’s good for: This design promotes a sense of equal space, as everyone has the same view of the room and of other participants. It’s also ideal for meetings that include audio-visual components, as the open side of the U can host the projector or other materials, clearly visible to all.

Number of participants: Medium groups (no more than 50 people)

How to: In this popular configuration, rectangular tables are set up in the shape of a “U” and chairs are place around the outside of the tables.

Keep in mind: Chairs can be placed along the inside of the U as well, but this will definitely change the dynamic!

Team Tables/Clusters

What it’s good for: As the name suggests, this configuration is ideal for when a large group will break up into smaller teams for brainstorming or other project work that involves discussion and/or collaboration.

Number of participants: Medium to large groups

How to: In this setup, tables are pushed together (if rectangular, along the length of the table) to create a larger square, around which typically 8 people can sit comfortably. Depending on the number of tables available, you will end up with a series of table “clusters.” These can be spaced about the room as desired, but are typically oriented so groups can easily resume focus towards the front of the room if needed.
D. Establish ground rules

Maybe someone in the group is scared to speak up in front of everyone, or maybe there's a participant that won't let anyone else get a word in. Establishing meeting ground rules (also called norms or agreements) is a collaborative process that let's everyone know the expectations for behavior during meetings, and thus makes it easier to maintain respect and order.⁵

6 Steps for making ground rules

1. **Brainstorm**
   At the very first meeting, introduce the concept of setting ground rules and explain why it's important. Brainstorm with the group a list of potential meeting rules. These are things that are important to participants, such as: not talking while someone else is speaking; arriving to meetings on time; not interrupting; being respectful; being positive; silencing cell phones; etc.

2. **List**
   The note-taker should write down all the brainstormed items where everyone can see them.

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**Meeting Ground Rules**
- Show up on time
- Don't interrupt
- Listen with an open mind
- Let everyone participate
- Have a sense of humor!
Vote
When the brainstorm is over, have all group members discuss the proposed rules and vote on the those they believe are most important. Try to keep the final list to 5 – 7 rules; each one will carry more weight with the group than if there were 20, and they will be easier to write out, keep near, and remember during meetings.

Display
Write the final meeting rules down where they are always clearly visible during meetings.

Reference
If at some point someone is breaking one of the established meeting rules, it's helpful as Facilitator to reference back to the ground rules the group set in the beginning. While this should be the responsibility of all participants, it may help to create a role with this as its core responsibility.

Revisit
Have the group agree to regularly revisit the ground rules they created. Some groups choose to start a meeting by briefly acknowledging them, while other groups may choose to do so when new members come on board, etc. It's good practice to revisit ground rules at least every 6 months (if the project or group has that long a timeline).
In the Moment: what you should be doing during the meeting

Your work as Facilitator requires understanding the needs and actions of people, so this chapter explores essential “people skills” that will help you out, such as active listening and intervening. If you really want to improve as a Facilitator, pick a few and practice, practice, practice!

Photo: Student facilitating a meeting involving other students, staff, and parents. Notice the ‘U-Shape’ seating we explained on page 17.
A. Actively listen

We all know how affirming it feels when someone really listens to and thinks about what we’re saying. However, active listening is more than having an "open ear" to group members. Active listening is exactly that - active - and requires an ability to deploy a number of skills throughout the same meeting. When engaging with a group, work on these:

**Be encouraging**

It’s not easy to speak up in a group, as we often fear judgment of our words or level of subject knowledge. Encouragement is important, as it keeps conversation flowing and helps set the tone of the meeting as one that is respectful and based on a genuine interest in the experiences and thoughts of others.

*Language to try:* "I see," "tell me more about...,” "Interesting," or "Mmhmm" (Body language goes a long way as well. Try nodding to show you understand, and keep good eye-contact)

**Restate what you hear**

To demonstrate how focused you are on the speaker and the question at hand, try to restate the general idea of what someone said, but in your own words. This shows you’re paying attention, but also gives the speaker a chance to correct you if you misunderstood, and a chance for them to reflect on the message they’re trying to make and better grasp the bigger picture.

*Language to try:* "If I understand correctly, your experience was..." or "So you decided that because..."
Clarify where needed

We’re not always clear when we speak - especially if we’re nervous or engaging with new concepts. An adept Facilitator knows how to probe a little deeper into a comment, or ask for clarification on a point that doesn't seem clear or fully developed. Clarifying gives the speaker time to elaborate where needed, but also gives the Facilitator and other participants more information with which to evaluate the accuracy or relevance of a statement made in the meeting.

Language to try: "Help me understand that better" "Do you mean that...?" or "What do you mean by...?"

Listen to understand and to connect

In a democratic meeting, listening becomes a true art. Sometimes as Facilitator it's easy to think you're listening, when you're actually thinking about what you want to say next or how to transition to a new activity, and that's when you miss a critical point that someone is making.

Listening to understand means investing in the person speaking, not assuming you know all the answers nor that you know right away the point someone is trying to make. Listening to connect means actively trying to see how someone else's perspective or point fits into the discussion or the group’s broader goals. This kind of listening better positions you to control the meeting process and guide dialogue most effectively, it makes people feel heard, and it will help you learn new things, too!
B. Read the group

It's natural for a group to have moments of high and low energy over the course of a meeting. As Facilitator, your task is to try, as best you can, to be sensitive to group dynamics and have a set of tools ready to respond to the needs of the group.

But before you can respond with the appropriate tool, your first defense is understanding what the group needs at an emotional level. For example, if it's the beginning of a session, you might sense nervous energy or uncertainty, which would call for a facilitation tool designed to help participants feel more connected to one another and build trust. Or, after an hour of intense collaborative work, you may sense folks are wearing down or getting tired. That would be a great moment to either take a short break or bring out an energizing activity. We've added examples of such tools further on in this Guide and in the accompanying appendix.

Be prepared to experience a full range of emotions and moods in a group - we're human, after all. However, learning to gauge the energy of the group, whether it's excited, reluctant, tired, or curious, helps you choose appropriate activities that lead the group towards productive outcomes.
C. Intervene when necessary

Managing conflict and disruptive behavior in a group setting can be one of the most challenging aspects of facilitating. While we can't avoid conflict, there are a number of ways to diffuse it, or direct it so that it moves the whole group forward. We've referenced below some of the more common challenging group dynamics you may encounter, with suggestions for how you can respond to keep meetings productive and democratic. Remember, each conflict is a chance to flex your Facilitator muscles and learn lessons that will help you the next time.

The table on the following page outlines several challenges that often come up in group discussions and ways you can respond as the Facilitator.8
## Facilitator Interventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Possible Interventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant(s) Talk(s) Too Much</strong>&lt;br&gt;This is when one or several group members dominate meeting dialogue and do not give space for others to contribute.</td>
<td>• Acknowledge response and bring others in the room into the discussion, &quot;Thanks for your thoughts, let's hear from some others on this point who haven't said much yet&quot;&lt;br&gt;• Go around the room with a question and intentionally ask for everybody's input&lt;br&gt;• Refer to ground rules, if necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Silent One</strong>&lt;br&gt;This is the participant that you can't seem to engage. They may appear bored, nervous, or disconnected.</td>
<td>• Check their body language to assess their reason for silence (Fear of speaking? Boredom? Resentment?)&lt;br&gt;• Direct an easy, non-threatening question to them&lt;br&gt;• Call them by their name&lt;br&gt;• Find ways to make the participant feel valued&lt;br&gt;• Talk to them after the group session, one-on-one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Off-Topic Comments &amp; Interruptions</strong>&lt;br&gt;Whether intentional or not, this is the 'distraction dynamic,' where one or more participants' actions keeps the group from focusing or staying on task.</td>
<td>• State the obvious: “I think we are off the topic” “I notice we are having quite a few interruptions”&lt;br&gt;• Refocus the group by restating the purpose of the session or reminding them of the agenda&lt;br&gt;• Remind group of established ground rules regarding interruptions&lt;br&gt;• Ask a question to bring the group back to the topic&lt;br&gt;• Speak with the member(s) individually after the meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inaccurate Information</strong>&lt;br&gt;This addresses participants who contribute misinformation in the group, detracting from group goals. This can be intentional or due to lack of understanding of the issue at hand.</td>
<td>• Summarize what you heard and ask for group input: “What do the rest of you think about that?” “Have others heard of this?”&lt;br&gt;• Ask member to recheck their source&lt;br&gt;• Ask the note taker to check the notes if the misinformation relates to something at a prior meeting&lt;br&gt;• Check your resources after the meeting and clarify at the next session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demands &quot;The&quot; Answer</strong>&lt;br&gt;A participant demands specific details and answers, is skeptical of the process or challenges the Facilitator's knowledge of a topic.</td>
<td>• Remind the group that Facilitators don't have all the answers, and that that is not their role&lt;br&gt;• Invite other group members to share their opinions on the matter at hand&lt;br&gt;• Generalize, reiterate that there might be multiple answers or truths</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
D. Guide the group toward concrete outcomes

An Action Step is simply something that needs to be worked on or completed before the next meeting. There are always a few of those! An Action Steps sheet or board details what the task is, who is in charge of accomplishing it, who else might be collaborating with or helping the person in charge, and when it will be finished.\(^9\)

Accountability is key to moving projects along. Using an "Action Steps" sheet or board, or recording Action Steps in meeting notes, helps keep everyone on the team aware of their individual and group responsibilities from meeting to meeting, and helps a team track their progress over time. It's a simple and effective tool.

4 Steps for using Action Steps

1. **Clarify tasks**
   Before the end of a meeting, or before moving on from each agenda item, make sure everyone in the group understands what needs to be accomplished prior to the next meeting.

2. **Write down who and when**
   Have the group choose who will be in charge of doing each task on the list and when they will have it done. Have the note-taker write it down and post these in a place everyone can see (or take with them).

3. **Check-in**
   At the beginning of the next meeting, perhaps prior to finalizing the agenda, check in on the progress of the Action Items.

4. **Keep track**
   Mark on the sheet when Action Steps are completed, or leave a space for notes so that a record of progress - or barriers to progress - is clear to all participants.
Here is an example of one way to write down Action Steps to determine who is responsible for what follow-up action within the group, and by when:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Items:</th>
<th>Person Responsible:</th>
<th>Due by:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jaclyn will reserve school conference room for next meeting</td>
<td>Jaclyn</td>
<td>June 2, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard will send top three brainstormed fundraising ideas to members of the group that were absent from the meeting to ask for their written input.</td>
<td>Richard (help from Kate and Raffi)</td>
<td>June 2, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leila will call all 3 venue locations to get pricing information on renting space for fundraising events,</td>
<td>Leila (support from Diana)</td>
<td>June 15th, 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
E. Carefully manage time

It's easy to get lost in the moment, especially if you're actively listening to your group members and thinking about your next transition, but keeping an eye on timing is essential to facilitating. Good timekeeping ensures a group can move along in its process and achieve its stated goals. It also keeps discussions from dragging on and causing boredom and frustration. Make sure you have a good plan for how long each activity or meeting should take before you begin, and state it to the group. Don't be afraid to remind the group of how long they have when starting a certain activity or agenda item, and how long they have left as time passes.

While we want to stay on schedule, you should also be prepared to adjust your plans based on the continuous assessments you're making of group energy levels. Maybe you planned 20 minutes for group discussion, but you realize the conversation has strayed and you're running well over the time allotted. Or, maybe you realize the conversation is becoming really exciting right at the 20-minute mark, and you think the group might be close to a breakthrough. These are moments when it is best to politely remind the group of the schedule you set in the beginning and to either extend the time for that item or transition to a new activity. Keep in mind that you may have to shorten another activity later in the meeting in order to finish on time.

It often helps to ask someone from the group to volunteer to be a co-timekeeper at the beginning of the meeting, giving you back-up if you lose track, or to designate this role entirely to someone else. Alternatively, you can set alarm clocks that sound when time is up. One of the most important things to avoid is letting a meeting go too long; we want to be respectful of one another's time and leave everyone feeling excited to continue the work at a later date.
This chapter focuses on specific tools and practices Facilitators use in different situations. It will help you answer the "how do I...?" questions that come up when facilitating. These tools also provide great opportunities to practice the people skills from the previous chapter. By combing them you can become one impressive Facilitator!

Photo: Brainstorming activity in small groups facilitated by students.
F. Icebreaking

More often than not, when we start a new team initiative, we're all coming to the table with a lot to learn about ourselves and the people we're working with. Feeling comfortable with your new team doesn't have to be brutal, it just takes some intentionality. "Icebreakers" are simple tools designed to relieve tension or awkwardness between people, creating a shared opportunity to start a conversation or make a connection. They are typically fun, active, and short.

Icebreakers are most commonly used at the outset of a group meeting. This is when folks need an extra push to get them acquainted, or to break up nervous energy. If you have access to the Internet, there are many websites with countless icebreaker ideas. See page 66 in the Extra Resources! chapter for some great links. We've detailed one of our favorite icebreakers on the next page to give you an idea. Feel free to use this example as a starting point for designing your own. There's no right or wrong icebreaker if it excites people to share with one another and builds energy and familiarity. Just keep it fun and doable for all.

Left: Younger students playing a game to break the ice

Most games that are quick, fun, and easy to learn can be made into great icebreakers. Can you think of any games or activities you know that would help strangers feel more comfortable with one another?
Story Connection

This is one of many great activities found at www.icebreakers.ws

What it's good for: Story Connection is a get-to-know-you game that helps members of a group find unexpected connections and shared experiences in a fun way. It gets conversation flowing on day-one of a new group's meetings.

Number of participants: Groups of any size but medium and larger groups should be broken up as this activity works best in small groups of 6-8 people.

Materials required: Small pieces of paper and pens.

How to:

1. If you're working with a large group, have everyone divide into small groups of 6-8 people (or 4 - 6). Ensure each group has a supply of small paper slips and pens.

2. Ask a volunteer from the group (or each group) to begin by sharing an interesting memory or experience that they have. For example, one player can say: “One time, I was biking with no hands, fell, and knocked out my front tooth.”

3. Invite any other person in the group to tell a related story that has similar themes or elements to the previous story. For example, the next person can say, “I hate going to the dentist so much, that whenever I have an appointment, the night before I always dream about losing all my teeth!” Any person can then add to the story again, by saying something like, “I had braces for 6 years.”
Encourage players to draw from their real experiences, be they fun or more serious. Also encourage everyone to share at least once. The longer the chain of items that can be created, the better!

Have someone in the group (or in each group) write down each new addition to the mini-story to keep track of the narrative.

At the end of the game, the group with the longest connected chain of stories is the winner. You may ask the group to share their entire story with everyone.
G. Team building

Team building can be similar to icebreaking – it is used to get people interacting in ways that build connection and trust. Team building, however, often goes a step further than an icebreaker in developing cooperation and motivation amongst a group of people that already knows each other a little bit, or maybe even really well. They can range in length and intensity, but all seek to build goodwill and understanding in a team. Check out the example here and see page 66 of the Extra Resources! chapter for recommendations on where to find more team building exercises.¹¹

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**Unique & Shared**

This is one of many great activities found at www.icebreakers.ws¹²

**What it's good for:** This team-building exercise helps new team members get to know each other while also building a sense for individual and team strengths. Unique and Shared is a great team-building activity, as it draws out commonalities between team members, but also helps players become aware of their own unique characteristics and how they can use these to offer something unique and powerful to the group.

**Number of participants:** Ideal for medium to large groups but participants should be split into subgroups of about five people

**Materials required:** sheets of paper and writing utensils
How to:

1. Tell participants they are going to form groups of five people by counting off in numbers from 1 - 5 (can be adjusted based on size of your groups). To do this, assign each person a number “1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 1, 2, 3…” and then send all the 1s to one corner, the 2s to another, and so on.

   Pro tip: Keeping the groups random pushes participants out of their usual friend circle and helps them meet someone new.

2. Pass out sheets of paper and a writing utensil to each group.

3. Instruct each group to create a list of the common traits or qualities that its members share, with one member of each group writing down the list. Avoid identifying things that are obvious (e.g. don’t write down something like “everyone has hair”). The goal is for everyone to dig deeper than the superficial. (5 minutes)

4. Ask a spokesperson from each group to read their list. If there are too many groups, ask for a few volunteers to read their list or randomly select a few groups to share (we will talk more in-depth about randomness and how to use it as a Facilitator on page 47).

5. Now, ask the same groups to use the second sheet of paper to record all their unique traits and qualities; that is, items that only apply to one person in the group. Instruct the group to find at least two unique qualities and strengths per person. (8 minutes)
When time is up, share the unique qualities in one of the following ways:

1. Each person shares one of their unique qualities themselves
2. Each person reads the qualities of the person to their right
3. A spokesperson reads a quality one at a time, and the other groups guess who in the group has that quality

More info: www.icebreakers.ws/get-to-know-you
H. Energy boosting

Remember when we talked about ‘gauging the energy of the group?’ Inevitably, a group you're facilitating will hit a point of low energy during a meeting. This doesn’t mean you've done a poor job keeping people engaged, but it does mean you might want to adjust course and throw in a surprise energy-boosting activity. These are also similar to icebreakers, only they don't necessarily have to help people learn about one another, and more serve to momentarily jolt a group into a new headspace so they can return to the task at hand feeling more awake and excited.

Energizer activities are typically good for a really early morning meeting, when some folks might still prefer to be in bed, or right after lunch, when people tend to be moving more slowly. Energizer activities can be used any time, though, when you sense the group needs to perk up a bit. We encourage you to create your own energizers as you get more comfortable - just keep them brief (no more than 10 min, typically) and make sure you're taking into account the mobility of everyone in the group if your activity calls for a lot of physical movement. Here is one energy booster you can try, and then see if you can come up with some fun ones yourself!
What it's good for: When the energy in the room has plummeted, pull this one out! It's a fun way to get everyone up and moving while learning a bit about each other in the process.

Number of participants: This is good for medium-size groups.

Materials required: Enough chairs for everyone in the group.

How to:

1. Arrange the chairs in a circle, leaving little space between each. Remove one of the chairs, leaving one less chair than participants.

2. Invite or randomly select one team member to be the first leader in the center of the circle.

3. The person in the center will then call out to the rest of the group "Move if" and then complete the sentence with something that she/he has done or experienced or a quality she/he has. For example, the center caller could say: "Move if you speak more than one language."

4. All the members in the group who speak more than one language then have to get up and move chairs - at least 2 spots from where they were sitting originally! The individual who is left without a chair at the end of the round must be next to call out a Move if statement from the center of the circle. Play this for about 7 minutes or until the group is energized.
I. Brainstorming

There are many occasions when a group needs help arriving at a solution that isn't defined yet. When your group needs a new idea or way of solving a problem, you try brainstorming. Brainstorming takes various forms, but is used to generate the free flow of imaginative, out-of-the-box thinking around an issue, using the brainpower of the whole group.

*Keep in mind:* Avoid brainstorming in large groups where possible (teams of 5 - 8 are ideal). If you do have a large group, try breaking up into smaller teams and join together at the end for a report-back on the ideas generated.

When done well, brainstorming can be an exhilarating experience for all, as it provides a sanctioned space for folks to bring their creativity to the fore and helps team members feel they have contributed their individual perspectives to whatever decision is reached. However, brainstorming can be intimidating for some who feel pressure to ‘come up with an idea,’ or perhaps feel judged for an idea that seems unusual to others. Your job as Facilitator is to set the tone for the brainstorming experience and closely guide the process so participants don't feel their ideas are being judged or dismissed, which could inhibit creativity.

*Pro tip:* Try starting out with an icebreaker activity to loosen people up, then jump into the brainstorming activity.
This activity is one of many found on Mindtools.com

**What it's good for:** Basic brainstorming helps generate new ideas and approaches to an issue or challenge. Use it when the group isn’t sure how to proceed, or if you need to inspire the group to think creatively and critically about a topic or task.

**Number of participants:** Small groups of 5 - 7 people are ideal. If you have a larger group, try breaking them into smaller teams.

**Materials required:** Paper and pen for each participant, whiteboard or large poster-paper and marker.

**How to:**

1. Set the tone for the group. Introduce the brainstorming activity and set ground rules for the group. We suggest stating:

   - There are no "right" or "wrong" answers or ideas during the brainstorm
   - The point isn't to be exact or even practical, but to generate as many ideas as possible
   - The best ideas will come when each participant contributes their unique perspectives

2. Clearly state the goal/issue being brainstormed.
3. Give participants time at the beginning of the brainstorming session to think through ideas silently, on their own, jotting them down on a piece of paper.

4. Open up a dialogue on the ideas written individually; have participants share freely from their lists (try a round-robin technique, going in a circle and asking each participant to share one or two ideas from their list that have not yet been shared). The Facilitator (you), the note taker, or a volunteer should capture the ideas and comments on a large piece of paper or a whiteboard, ideally visible to all participants. Don't try to write everything word-for-word, rather capture the essence of a comment and move on, writing as many as possible.

5. Once the group has shared a good number of preliminary ideas, guide discussion as different ideas are reviewed and further developed. Encourage team members to expand on the ideas of others. You may choose to have a group vote at the end on the ideas to move forward with (which we'll talk about next), but sometimes a group gets lucky and the brainstorming process reveals the most salient options such that everyone is in agreement.

There are many different brainstorming activities designed for specific goals. See the Extra Resources! chapter on page 67 for ideas on where to find more tools.
J. Decision making

Brainstorming is meant to generate lots of creative ideas, so almost anything goes! When it comes time to make a decision, however, a group needs to carefully evaluate the different options and make wise choices. The Facilitator can help the group narrow their options by asking if there are any that can be crossed off for being impossible or impractical. They can then ask people to speak for or against particular options, and ask the group about the tradeoffs each option presents.

Sooner or later, after adequate discussion, the group will have to make a decision. You might think, ok, then – just take a vote! But it’s important to think about the many different processes a group can use to make a decision when voting, and many different voting methods. It’s best to know the basic pros and cons of each so you can best guide your group.
Decision-making processes

**Majority**
This is the process you might think of first: a group votes on an issue and the majority ‘wins.’ This is often the quickest and simplest way to make a group decision. Just be aware that if all you need is a majority, nearly half the group could be unhappy with certain decisions.

**Supermajority**
Supermajority decision making takes majority voting up a notch. This is used when the group wants a higher level of agreement, so for a decision to be made, at least two-thirds or three-quarters of people must be in favor (or some other fraction above one-half!). This creates more buy-in for the issue at hand than majority decision making does, but still does little to address the frustrations of those who ‘lose’ a vote. Why should we care if just one-quarter or one-third of group members are dissatisfied? It helps a group’s success if everyone feels connected and committed to decisions. If you ignore the “no” votes, resentment may build that can derail progress down the line.

**Consensus**
This approach seeks to create broad support and agreement in a group and does so through participation and collaboration. The basic process involves the group working together to 1) propose a solution to an issue and 2) ask all group members to voice any frustrations or concerns with the proposal and/or propose alternatives, and then 3) take the necessary time to modify the proposal in order to reach the greatest possible agreement – ideally unanimous – but at the very least something everyone can live with.\(^{14}\) While consensus can build group unity and result in well thought-out decisions, just be aware that it can take a lot of time and may be vulnerable to groupthink, which is when the pressure for everyone in a group to agree results in a unanimous but *bad* decision.
Each decision-making approach has strengths and weaknesses, so it may be most important to evaluate which approach would work best for your group. This can vary depending on how much time you have, how critical a decision is, how many people are in the group, and how often people in the group tend to disagree.

Voting methods

Luckily, as a Facilitator, there is a range of voting methods you can use for different kinds of decisions. For the most part, these different voting methods can be used whether your group makes decisions by majority, supermajority, or consensus. At Democracy In Practice we have taught students to make decisions using the following simple methods:

**Show of hands**
This is a quick and easy method we often use with student governments. In this method, a proposal is put up for a vote and participants raise a hand for or against. Alternatively, multiple competing proposals can be voted on and participants raise their hand for the proposal they desire. It's a silent method that gives a clear visual majority, but is susceptible to group pressures and not a great option for important and contentious decisions. It can also be difficult to be accurate with the count of the raised hands in large groups.

**Secret ballot**
This is the best option for ensuring participants are able to express their true feelings about a decision without being subject to group pressures or judgment. In this method, each participant is supplied with a slip of paper and asked to write their vote down and submit it to the facilitator, who will then tally all responses without revealing the individual votes of each participant. While this method protects each person’s independence and is accurate in large groups, it can be time consuming.
**Dots/stickers**

This is great for helping participants choose amongst many options. All the options up for vote are listed on a board or large piece of paper. Each person is then invited to place a sticker or draw a dot next to their preferred option. It is usually good to give each person multiple sticker/dot votes that they can place next to multiple options or use to give extra weight to a single option. The student governments we work with use this method to select 2 or 3 projects to work on when there are many project ideas.

**‘Quick Check’**

You can save a lot of time as a Facilitator doing a ‘quick check’, also called a ‘temperature check’, before going into a deep discussion about 2 or more options/proposals. Give the group a brief explanation of the different options and check with a show of hands if the group already agrees on a particular option. If everyone is in agreement you can move on without lengthy discussion. If even a couple of people are not in agreement, however, allow for deeper discussion before calling a formal vote.
K. Maintaining momentum

As we've mentioned before, teams can tire out. Whether it's the first meeting in a series or the last, participants want to feel like they're making progress and their collaborative work is heading somewhere. As Facilitator, maintaining momentum in a group involves keeping a pulse on the team's motivation levels and how invested participants feel in the process at hand. The work of a democratic meeting can be hard, and groups tend to benefit from consistent reminders of their successes. To boost motivation, try the following:

**Reiterate goals**
A group can sometimes get stuck in the deep muck of details, and it helps from time to time for the Facilitator to remind everyone why they are all there and working so hard in the first place. It's hard to stay excited about something that's vague, so make sure you help participants stay connected to the goal of their work – the "why."

**Celebrate small victories**
During a longer process that requires a series of meetings, or maybe even during one long meeting, one important way to maintain momentum is to recognize when small advances have been made. For example, point out how far a group has come in working collaboratively, despite the fact that a lot of people didn't know each other to begin with. Or if a small but concrete goal has been achieved, make sure you take a moment at the next meeting to recognize the success of the event.

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*Keep in mind:* You can even create a way to publicly recognize small victories, like bringing a bell to each meeting and leaving it in a place so that any time a participant feels that something worth celebrating has occurred, they can ring the bell and share their enthusiasm with the group.

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Group member recognition

As Facilitator, you don't have to be the one always celebrating the group or individuals; you can create opportunities for participants to recognize one another for their achievements, either publicly or privately. Perhaps start a meeting by having each person in the room state one thing they're excited about for that meeting. Or take a few minutes during a break and have each person write down a quality they admire in one or more of their team members and then share those out loud.
L. Randomizing

When you need to select people, assign roles, or form groups in a democratic space, sometimes the best approach is to use randomness. For example, randomly forming breakout groups for activities typically results in more mixed and diverse groups than when you allow participants to group themselves.

This makes icebreakers and team building exercises much more fun and effective. It also makes for more creative brainstorming activities, since the people in each group don’t all think alike. Randomly forming breakout groups also avoids troublesome dynamics related to popularity, power, status, etc. that might be present in the room. This means that shyer, less popular, and newer participants don’t have to worry about trying to find a group or being excluded from one. Lastly, randomly forming breakout groups can also be quicker and less chaotic than asking participants to form their own groups.

Randomness can additionally be handy when you need to distribute something fairly, but there isn’t enough of it for everyone in the group. For example, one student government that we worked with was only able to send 3 of its 12 members to pick out the trees to reforest a part of their school grounds. Since everyone wanted to go, they decided the fairest approach was to pick 3 names out of a hat. This is also a fair and effective way to assign a necessary task that no one wants to do, like cleaning up the meeting space after a meeting.
Randomness can even be used to select people for important positions. The ancient Athenians randomly selected groups of citizens to decide laws and to hold public office for close to 200 years, as a way of increasing participation and preventing corruption. At Democracy In Practice, we use lotteries in schools to randomly select representatives and form student governments, a process that is much more inclusive, representative, and fun than traditional student elections.

We have also used randomness in student government meetings to decide who would set the agenda, who would facilitate, and who would take notes, as a way of preventing those tasks from being continuously assigned to the same students. This helps ensure everyone in the group learns the related skill sets. Once, the students we work with even used randomness to make an important decision. They had voted several times and half of the group continued to support one proposal and the other half continued to support another, so they all agreed to flip a coin!
Random selection methods

There are countless ways to randomly select people, options, tasks, positions, etc. Here are a few we have used, with more found on page 70 in the Extra Resources!

**Rocks, Paper, Scissors**
This is a common children’s hand game, but can be a fun and effective method for random selection. If you're not familiar with the game, there are many tutorials available online, especially YouTube.

**Spin the bottle**
When you need to quickly select from a group of people, have them stand or sit in a circle and have someone spin a bottle in the middle. When the bottle stops spinning, the person it points toward is selected. Just make sure the group forms a good circle and you spin the bottle hard enough to make it random! And no kissing!

**Count off**
Decide how many groups you want to form - lets say we have 20 people and we want to form 5 groups of 4 - then have each participant count off in order, the first saying “one”, the second “two,” etc. and after the fourth person says “four”, the next person starts back at “one.” Have all the ‘one’s group themselves together in one area, all the ‘two’s in another, etc. If you want to mix up the groups again, you can avoid confusion by switching to letters, the days of the week, or months. If you know in advance you will have people break into groups, you can also save time by assigning each person a number as they arrive.

**Apps**
There are many great free phone apps for randomly selecting people or options, including ‘Random UX’ for Android phones and ‘Random: All Things Generator’ for iPhones.
Wrapping Up: Improving through evaluation

How you’re doing as a Facilitator? Are people showing up on time and staying engaged? Do the group’s goals still make sense? Evaluation will give you answers to these kinds of important questions. This chapter will provide you with great evaluation methods and some tips on how to respond to different problems your evaluations might uncover.

Photo: Students evaluating their meetings and voting on possible improvements.
A. Evaluation methods

There are many effective ways to evaluate your facilitation skills and your group as you move through your meetings, projects, etc. Some are quick, simple methods, while others take longer and delve into deeper dynamics of the group. Evaluation – on any scale – can clear-up dysfunctional habits before they can progress, while also highlighting what the team does well and should continue doing.

Quick evaluations

Keep/Change

Ask participants to respond to questions about their meeting experience in a more creative way that encourages candidness. Draw a line down the middle of a white board, chalk board, or large piece of paper (whatever you've got). On one side of the line, write “keep,” and on the other side write, “change.” Ask participants to say out loud the things they think the group should “keep” or “change” for the next meeting, based on the experience of the meeting they just had.

Two Highs and a Low

A simple but effective exercise, in Two highs and a low each participant – going around in a circle – shares two highlights from the meeting and one “low,” or a thing that didn't go so well.

Ex: 2 highs: the meeting started and ended on time; the whole group was present. 1 low: We didn't get to spend enough time talking about item 3 on the agenda.
Written Feedback
This is similar to the Keep/Change activity, but is done in quiet and without group discussion immediately following the meeting. This activity is good for capturing feedback from participants about the meeting – or broader group dynamics – in a way that feels safer to some. You may be able to capture deeper insight from participants that tend to be shy when sharing in front of a group.

As Facilitator, prepare a few questions in advance of the meeting to either 1) write on a board or piece of paper visible to all, or 2) on slips of paper that you can pass out to group members. Have everyone take 5 - 10min to write their responses to the questions. Gather all responses and write them all up and assess the issues that need to be addressed in the next meeting or when you have more time as a group to digest the feedback together.

This assessment can also be done with the whole group, and people can be encouraged to provide their feedback anonymously if it will help them answer more openly and honestly.

Online Survey
There are a number of online (free!) survey services that allow you to have participants’ follow up after the meeting on their own time, with the survey responses conveniently delivered to one place online. While this method might encourage group members to be more forthcoming in their reflections, it’s not always a guarantee you will get everyone to take the time to fill out the survey once they’re out of the room. We recommend trying the survey platform Survey Monkey: https://www.surveymonkey.com/
Deeper evaluations

At times, quick evaluations at the end of a meeting do not uncover deeper frustrations and concerns that group members have. In those instances, it may be helpful to dedicate a large part of a meeting to a deeper evaluation of the group and its dynamics. You may have to be creative to get the group into these more challenging but important discussions. Here are a couple of activities you can try:

The Circle Exercise

**What it's good for:** We developed this tool inspired by one used to evaluate suffering in healthcare, to help open a reflective conversation about the level of involvement of each member in the group. It helps participants evaluate their own, and their peers’ participation and accountability, and offers space to dialogue where group or individual changes might be needed.

**Materials required:** A large piece of paper or whiteboard; markers; open wall for placing the paper

**How to:**

1. Draw a large circle in the middle of a large piece of paper or whiteboard, visible to everyone. Explain that the Circle represents their team or group

2. Invite each person to go one-by-one with a marker and place a dot where they feel they are with respect to the group, and to write their name next to the dot. Explain that participants can place their dot wherever on the sheet or whiteboard feels appropriate (including outside of the circle).
After someone places and labels their dot, ask them to explain to the group why they chose that spot (different people have different ways of using the circle & dot symbolism, and that’s ok).

Once everyone has placed themselves on the paper and explained their decision-making process, ask everyone to take a different colored marker and invite people to go up and suggest a different location for one or more of the other people with respect to the Circle.

Just like in the first round, ask them to explain their reasoning. For example, participant A might have placed herself on the edge of the circle, feeling she isn't as active in the group. In the second round, participant B may go up and place a different colored dot with participant A's name further inside the circle and explain that he did so because he feels participant A had been quite actively involved in completing task x and task y. Often participants will suggest that someone should be placed farther outside the Circle, which opens up room to discuss frustrations and conflicts.

Allow participants to discuss differences of opinion and reflect on their group.
Red light, yellow light, green light

**What it's good for:** This is a more conventional exercise that is simple but prompts reflection *and* action. Participants are asked to reflect on what is and isn't working, but to also bring solutions for the group to, ideally, act upon as they move forward.

**How to:** Each participant is expected to come to the meeting with a list of: 1) one thing they would like the group or another participant to stop doing (red light), 2) one thing they want to see continue (yellow light), and 3) one thing they want to see start (green light). Each participant shares and is encouraged to explain their reasoning to the group.
B. Ways to respond

Before a behavior in the group becomes a challenge, it's possible to assess and respond to certain group dynamics that might lead to problems down the road. It's not unusual for teams to stray from the norms or goals they set at the beginning. But sometimes the difference between success and frustration is how well a Facilitator can help a group identify why participants might be less engaged or accountable than before.

“A coach [and a Facilitator!] is someone who can give correction without causing resentment.”
– John Wooden

One way to help assess how the dynamics of a team are affecting its ability to achieve outcomes is by using the 5 Dysfunctions of a Team model, developed by The Table Group. For each dynamic below – drawn from The Table Group model – we've included potential ways you can respond as Facilitator to move your group forward.
## 5 Dysfunctions of a Team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DYNAMIC</th>
<th>FACILITATOR RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ABSENCE OF TRUST</strong></td>
<td>The fear of being vulnerable with team members prevents the building of trust within the team. For trust to work, Facilitators must be willing to show and practice vulnerability with the group. It's also important to show that vulnerability won't be negatively received by the Facilitator or the group. Setting this as one of the &quot;Ground Rules&quot; or norms in the beginning of an initiative may help set the standard for a more trusting environment, as would utilizing several of the team building exercises in this guide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FEAR OF CONFLICT</strong></td>
<td>Some people don't want to bring up a topic or start a discussion that might cause any kind of conflict. This keeps the group from growing and learning from differences and disagreements. As a Facilitator you can help the group define what positive conflict is and acknowledge that it is an expected, healthy, and productive thing to embrace. Simply having a discussion around embracing conflict can help bring buried disagreements to the surface where they can be worked through. It can also be helpful to do a round-robin where each person is asked to share something about the group that bothers them. This can open people up to broaching difficult subjects because it avoids the awkwardness of bringing up a touchy issue on their own, seemingly out of nowhere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LACK OF COMMITMENT</strong></td>
<td>A lack of clarity or understanding of why a project is important prevents team members from making decisions they will stick to. As a Facilitator, it's good to hear all input, but encourage the group to settle on one course of action. As a team, try to minimize assumptions and ambiguity about what the group's main goal is and the tasks needed to achieve it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AVOIDANCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY</strong></td>
<td>Not wanting to have potentially uncomfortable conversations with fellow team members keeps participants from holding one another accountable. One of the greatest contributing factors to a lack of accountability is ambiguity. As a Facilitator, do your best to work with your team to establish clear goals and expectations for behavior and outcomes. Try creating &quot;Action Steps,&quot; as discussed earlier in this Guide, to make goals, actions, the people responsible for those actions, and timelines clear from day one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LOSING FOCUS ON END GOALS</strong></td>
<td>When individual team members aren't held accountable for their work, it's easy for personal goals or interests to become more important than the collective success of the team. A participant may focus more on their own objectives than those of the group, making it more difficult to achieve team goals. As a Facilitator, help to clearly define with your team what success looks like. How will everyone know if they are on track or not? It might help to start a conversation with your team around what they believe it takes for the group to be successful, and why it takes every individual's efforts to get there. If possible, brainstorm with your group ways to make visual the progress made towards the final goal, or for keeping each other accountable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The anti-conclusion

You’ve learned here about setting up a productive meeting, how to energize a group, manage conflict, and build your own toolbox of Facilitator skills. So here’s where the “conclusion” might typically arrive. But we know there’s no real “conclusion” to facilitation. From day 1 to year 20, being a Facilitator is an ever-evolving skill that you will continue to practice and hone. Along the way, you will probably discover and develop techniques that work even better for you as a Facilitator in your unique contexts than those offered in this Guide.

So instead of a conclusion, we invite you to take some of the basics from this Guide and begin to experiment with them in the work you’re doing now, or will do in the future. Borrow from the samples here and take full advantage of the links and additional techniques in the following Extra Resources chapter. Build your skills, craft your own style, and support your passion for guiding the process of projects, ideas, and groups that are important to you. You’re well on your way to creating positive change in your school and community!

We want to hear about the ways you’re using and improving upon this Guide!

Connect with us at info@democracyinpractice.org to share your questions, successes, and lessons learned. We look forward to hearing about the things you accomplish!
Didn’t get enough?
This bonus chapter has some more tools and links to lots of great sites where you can find more and continue your learning!

Photo: One of our teammates, Raúl, teaching new student government members how to take meeting notes
Chapter 1 - Your role as Facilitator

C. You're not the teacher, nor the boss

Because it is easy to confuse *facilitating* with *teaching*, we've included this table from the FBS Facilitators Training Program of the United Nations\(^{16}\) to help clarify the differences between the two and explain why a teacher’s role and a Facilitator’s role have separate approaches, though they may share similar goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEACHING</th>
<th>FACILITATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching begins from teacher’s own knowledge</td>
<td>Facilitators start by assessing and building from the knowledge of the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching follows a pre-set curriculum that students do not help create</td>
<td>Facilitators addresses issues identified by the group or their community and adapt to the ideas, culture, and needs of the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers deliver lectures to a group of students - usually from the front of the room.</td>
<td>Facilitators use practical, participatory methods, e.g. group discussions and activities which encourage participation from all members of the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are the main source of knowledge, with information flowing from teacher to student</td>
<td>Information flows in many different directions between the Facilitator and individual group members, with everyone contributing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are concerned with students understanding the right answer</td>
<td>Facilitators are not concerned with arriving at a specific, or 'correct' answer; they encourage and value different views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers maintain a more formal, or hierarchical relationship with students based on their role as leader of a classroom</td>
<td>Facilitators are considered as an equal, and develop relationships based on trust and respect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 2 - Before you begin: How to set yourself up for a great meeting

A. Make an agenda

Sample agenda for groups that meet regularly and work on many different projects:

**Weekly Meeting Agenda**

**Date/Time:** Friday, May 19, 2017 (3pm – 3:50pm)

**Location:** Baker High School, Room 203

Facilitator: Kim

Note Taker: Bryan

Time Keeper: Ahmad

1. Review last meeting’s notes (3 min)
2. Decide destination for field trip (10 min)
3. Discuss broken windows (5 min)
4. Plan raffle fundraiser (20 min)
5. Other (7 min)
6. Evaluation (5 min)
Meeting agenda templates

There is a range of free meeting agenda templates available online. We recommend trying some of the options from SmartSheet, which are formatted for Word Docs and give you a range of template options based on your meeting type.

*Web address:* [https://www.smartsheet.com/free-meeting-agenda-templates-word](https://www.smartsheet.com/free-meeting-agenda-templates-word)

**B. Assign roles**

**Tips on good note taking**

Similar to writing Action Steps, an important element of staying organized in a meeting and as a group is proper note taking. Here are some simple pointers for making sure your notes are top-notch:

- Basic note taking is similar to the process for creating an effective narrative, and it helps to reference the 5W's – the foundational questions often used in crafting a good story: ‘who?’, ‘what?’, ‘when?’, ‘why?’ and ‘where?’ Good note takers capture these fundamental questions, without going overboard with detail that no one will need.

- Create a structure that works for you when writing notes. Sometimes a conversation calls for recalling a series of ideas or short answers - so maybe try bulleted lists. For capturing the summary of an event or experience, it may be best to try writing in short, narrative paragraphs.

- Keep the meeting agenda close, as it’s often helpful to write notes under the agenda items they correspond to, using the agenda as a marker to track important information.

- Don't try to capture every word. Instead, focus on the 5Ws and things that sound like decisions, specifications, or action steps. This might take practice, but you will eventually develop a style that feels good for you and works for your group.
• It is often useful to record the names of the Facilitator and other participants who had meeting roles. As well, it might help the group to document who showed up on time, who showed up late, and who was absent.

• If you were the assigned note taker for the group, make sure you take a few moments after the meeting to review your notes. Do they make sense? Do you need to ask a clarifying question before ending the meeting? Before everyone leaves, share your notes with someone else in the group to be sure they meet group norms and requirements. If everything looks good, type up your notes (if possible) and send them out to group members for their records.

• Don’t forget to put your name on your notes so people know who to contact if something is missing or incorrect, and so people know it was you who did such a great job!
Meeting Notes: Winter School Dance Planning  
September 22, 2017  
Note-taker: Alex  
Facilitator: Michelle

Bulleted list style:

Winter Dance Planning

- Dance date will be December 16, 2017 in school gymnasium
- Padma and Adam will send song playlist recommendations to planning group by October 10th
- Planning group will review playlist during October 15th meeting
- Juan will create and distribute sign-up sheet for volunteer teacher-chaperones by October 1, 2017
- Juan will report to group on chaperone sign-ups at October 15th meeting

Narrative style:

Winter Dance Evaluation

December dance was well attended by 240+ students. Venue was a good size, should be used again despite small problem with speaker system - though Principal Nguyen was able to fix it. Planning committee recommends buying more snacks for next year’s dance since several items ran out before the end of the dance. Many attendees asked for song requests, so next year planning committee should consider the costs of hiring a professional DJ that can play song requests.
Chapter 3 - In the moment: What you should be doing during the meeting

A. Actively listen

Check out further resources on active listening from the Conflict Research Consortium at the University of Colorado, USA. They provide helpful links to examples of active listening, related approaches, and related problems. While it is outside the scope of this guide, they even provide resources on using active listening as a technique to help clarify misunderstandings and facilitate better communication in cross-cultural settings.

Conflict Research Consortium: http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/treatment/activel.htm

Cross-cultural communication resource: http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/example/will5746.htm
**Chapter 4 - Tricks of the trade: Special techniques for special situations**

A. Icebreaking

Many great icebreaker activities can be found online, such as the "Get to Know You" games found at icebreakers.ws. There are also many books filled with different icebreaker ideas that you can find at libraries or online. Make sure you experiment with making your own icebreakers once you get the hang of it, or challenge one of the participants to choose and lead an icebreaker.

*“Get to Know You” Games:* [http://www.icebreakers.ws/get-to-know-you](http://www.icebreakers.ws/get-to-know-you)

B. Team building

Check out this online resource - *Venture Team Building* - with over 65 team-building exercises, completely free. They are arranged by amount of time your group has and the skills you want your team to work on. For example:

*Back-to-Back Drawing:* Working in pairs, one person must describe a shape without naming it, whilst their partner must try to draw the shape they are describing to try and get as close to the original shape as possible. This activity focuses heavily on verbal communication and listening skills.

*Venture Team Building:* [http://www.ventureteambuilding.co.uk/team-building-activities/](http://www.ventureteambuilding.co.uk/team-building-activities/)

For more off-the-beaten-path Team Building exercises, check out this quirky online list, *“Ultimate Guide to Team Building Activities that Don’t Suck”*

*Web address:* [https://www.wrike.com/blog/ultimate-guide-team-building-activities/](https://www.wrike.com/blog/ultimate-guide-team-building-activities/)
If you have access to the Internet, many universities and colleges have free, online resources for Team Building exercises. Find two such articles chock-full of Team Building Activities and Icebreakers at Lehigh University:

Web address: https://studentaffairs.lehigh.edu/content/teambuildersactivities

D. Brainstorming

If you're looking for diversified ways to help your group brainstorm, take a look at the online resources of Mindtools. They cover a range of brainstorming approaches that broaden your team's ability to think big and creatively. Some of the activities require a membership to Mindtools, but most are common techniques that can be found elsewhere on the internet given a general search. Take a look at:

The Stepladder Technique: encourages input from quieter participants.
(https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_89.htm)

Crawford's Slip Writing Approach: gathers insight from all members, and shows the popularity of each idea.
(https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newCT_95.htm)

Rolestorming: Help participants get beyond their nerves by roleplaying the identity of someone else while brainstorming.
(https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/rolestorming.htm)
Advanced prompts for inclusion and engagement

Often in groups and meetings we recycle conventional approaches for working together. While some of these approaches might be good for staying organized, they don't always inspire the kind of engagement and creativity we all crave. *Liberating Structures* is a collection of activities used to increase engagement, sense of inclusion, and innovation within group work. There are 35 activities in the Liberating Structures library. Some of them may be for more advanced groups, but here's 1 of the more dynamic exercises that is doable for most groups and is easy to incorporate into other activities:

**Number of participants:** Can be used with small or medium-size groups

**Materials required:** Space for participants to work face-to-face in pairs and foursomes, and paper/pens for participants to record observations and insights

**What it's good for:** Good for getting a group to self-generate discussion and feedback on a specific topic, especially if they tend to be shy or look to the facilitator to do all the talking. It can also help move along a specific conversation in the group if it has become problematic or “stuck.” (Takes 15 - 25min)
How to:

1. Start by asking a question(s) that relates to an issue the group might be experiencing, or about a proposal one of the participants put forward. Examples could be: “What options do you see for making progress on this challenge?” or “How would you handle this situation?” and “What ideas or actions do you recommend?”

2. First, ask all participants to answer the determined question(s) on their own, writing their thoughts down. (2 min)

3. Then, ask participant to find a partner and generate responses to the posed question(s) in pairs, building on ideas from their independent reflections (3 min)

4. Ask each couple to now find another pair to join up with. Ask the new group to share and develop the respective ideas from each couple in the foursomes, noting similarities and differences (4 min)

5. Ask the group at large: “What is one idea that stood out in your conversation?” Allow each group to share one important idea with everyone in the room. (5 min)

6. Repeat this cycle as needed

G. Randomizing

Here are a few more ways to randomize things. Add them to your Facilitator toolbox!

**Flip a coin**
*Quick and easy for 2 people.* Heads or tails?

**‘1-2-3’**
*Quick and fun for 3 people.* The 3 people line up side by side and each places a hand behind their back. On the count of 3, they all bring their hand to the front either palm up or palm down. The person whose hand is turned in a different direction from the other two is selected (e.g. the person whose palm is turned down when the other two have their palms upward). If all three people have their palms facing the same way, repeat until there is a ‘winner.’

**Roll dice**
*Quick and fun for 6 people.* Assign each person/option a number 1-6 and you roll a die to select. This can also be done with 5 people by re-rolling if it lands on 6, or 4 people by re-rolling if it lands on 6 or 5.

**Names from a hat**
When you need to select from a group or a larger set of options, you can write the names/options down on equally sized pieces of paper, fold each paper in the same manner so as to hide what is written, mix them up in a hat, box, or other container, and then select. Just be sure that no one can tell what is written on the papers!
**Pick a card**

*Quick and fun for 2-13 people.* If you have a deck of cards on hand, select the 13 cards from one suit, shuffle them well, and place each card face down on the table. The person who picks the highest card wins (or, if it is to assign a task no one wants, the person who picks the lowest card!).

**Picking objects**

*Great for selecting multiple winners from a group* - the students we work with use similarly sized purple and green fava beans as the objects to be picked. If they want to select 6 new student government representatives and 40 students want to enter student government, they place 6 purple beans in the pot and 34 green beans. They cover the lid of the pot with a cloth, shake the beans, and have each of the 40 students reach in and pick out a bean. Those that select a purple bean enter the student government, while those that select a green bean do not.

The students make sure each of the 40 picks a bean (even if toward the end the 6 purple ones have already been selected) to ensure that the pot had the correct number, otherwise the lottery must be redone. They also make sure each person shows that their hands are empty and looks away from the pot when reaching in to prevent cheating! You can do this method using a box, bag, or pot and any objects of about the same size, shape, weight, and texture but that come in at least two different colors.

**Raffle tickets**

Raffle tickets are specifically designed to randomly select winners, so don't forget them as another good option, especially in large groups. Just watch out for people acquiring more than one ticket or trading tickets!
Line up

*Slow but fun for medium to large groups.* Have the group line up in alphabetical order of their first names. Then, simply bunch the people standing next to each other into groups according to the number of groups you want. If you want to mix up the groups again, have them line up according to their middle or last names, or birthdays. This approach takes time but it gets people moving around and interacting with one another.

Assigned seats

*Efficient for groups of all sizes.* If each person in the group has name placards, shuffle the placards well before placing them. You can repeat this process each time the group takes a break or each meeting to make sure that people sit in different places and get to know different participants.

Feel free to devise your own creative ways to randomly select! Just make sure they are transparent and fair!
Chapter 5 - Wrapping up: Improving through evaluation

**SWOT analysis:** This is a common evaluation tool used by organizations to identify their internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as their external opportunities and threats (SWOT stands for Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats). You would typically use it when:

- You’re needing to adjust your group's plans halfway through a project and want to understand the strengths and weaknesses of a different path
- Your group wants to make a decision about the best course of action for its initiative
- You want to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of your group dynamic or the context your group is operating in

There are many templates available online, but we recommend checking out this version by [Community Tool Box](https://communitytoolbox.com). This site also has countless other resources for Facilitators that are worth exploring in depth.

**Participatory evaluation:** We recommend checking out this free PDF online for the "[Facilitator’s Guide for Participatory Evaluation with Young People](https://facilitatorsguide.org)." While the Guide is designed for working with young people, anyone could benefit from the questions it helps answer around participatory evaluation, including:

- What is Participatory Evaluation?
- What Does Evaluation Mean to You?
- Why Evaluate?
Other related Guides

While the focus in this Guide is on Student Government Facilitation, we typically combine these facilitation skills and tools with other innovations: lotteries, rotation, and horizontal teamwork. On the ‘Resources’ Page of our website, we have shorter step-by-step guides and how-to videos for incorporating these and other innovations into student government: www.democracyinpractice.org/resources/

Sharing this Guide

Please feel free to share this Guide, any other resources we provide, and the ideas they contain. After all, we want to get the word out! We only ask that you credit our work.

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Bibliography

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12. “Getting To Know You Icebreaker Games”, *Icebreakers, Icebreaker Ideas, Games, Activities!


