Meeting Facilitation & Setting the Agenda

Who is the Facilitator?

A facilitator is not quite the same as a leader or a chairperson. A facilitator helps the group move through the agenda in the time available and to make necessary decisions and plans to get the work done.

A facilitator makes no decisions for the group, but instead suggests ways that will help the group to make plans and decisions. They work so that the people present at the meeting know that they are in charge, that work is getting done, and that each person has a role to play.

Co-Facilitator

It often helps to have two facilitators. Here are some reasons why:

- More information and ideas are available during the planning.
- More energy (physical and emotional) is available to the group—especially during times of conflict or when handling complicated matters.
- If a facilitator becomes personally involved in the discussion, it is easy to hand the job over to the co-facilitator for a period of time.
- Co-facilitation is a way for more people to gain experience and become skilled facilitators.
- It is less exhausting, demanding, and scary.
- It can give people who are still developing their meeting facilitation skills a chance to partner with someone more experienced, and learn from them.

Co-facilitators should clearly divide responsibility for the agenda before the meeting. The person who is not currently “on duty” can be watching the mood of the group, clarifying issues, etc.

Note Taker

At the start of the meeting, or at the end of the previous meeting, ask for a volunteer to be the note taker. Meeting minutes are important for keeping track of decisions made, filling in gardeners who missed the meeting, and reminding the group of what was discussed ahead of the next meeting.

Time Keeper

It can be helpful having a time-keeper separate from the facilitator who can help the group stay on track to get through the agenda. The time keeper can step in and nudge the group along if a decision is taking too long, as well as let the facilitator know how much time they have left.

Adapted from original by Berit Lakey https://trainings.350.org/resource/how-to-facilitate-meetings-the-no-magic-method/
Agenda Planning

An agenda is an overview of what will happen at the meeting.

Planning the agenda:

- At the previous meeting or over email, ask participants for suggestions for agenda items.
- Allow space at the start of the meeting for participants to review and add to the agenda.
- Indicate on the agenda how much time each item should take.

Agenda items to include:

- **Something to gather people** — an icebreaker to help them clear their minds and focus on this meeting, to make them feel connected and aware of each other. Some examples are: singing, brief mention of good things that have happened to people lately, etc.

- **Agenda review** — have the agenda written where everybody can see it. As you move through agenda items, check them off so people can get a sense of the progress of the meeting and see that things are getting done.

- **Community agreements** - shared values and expectations for behavior at the meeting

- **Main items**—if more than one item needs to be done in the meeting it is important to set priorities.
  
  o Start with something that can be dealt with reasonably easily. This will give the group a sense of accomplishment and energy.
  
  o The harder, longer and more urgent items come next. If there are several, plan to have quick breaks between them to restore energy and attention.

  o A big item may be broken into several small items and discussed one at a time to make it easier. For example, a big decision may be several parts: what is the situation, what are some ideas we have, what are some criteria for the decision, and finally which of those ideas do we think we should choose? Or it may be helpful to try presenting the item with background information and clarification, breaking into small groups for idea sharing and making priorities, and then returning to the main group for discussion.

- **Announcements** -- this can include allowing anyone to make announcements relevant to the garden or common interests. For example, someone could announce the dates for an upcoming event or conference they think garden members would be interested in attending.

- **Closing** -- Try to end the meeting the way it started—with a sense of community. Don’t let it just end abruptly. A song, a word of gratitude, some silence, standing in a circle, shaking hands—anything which affirms the groups and gives a feeling of closure is good.
Sample Garden Meeting Agenda

Linden Tree Community Garden
Quarterly Garden Membership Meeting/ Reunión Trimestral de la Membresía del Jardín
Date/Time/ Fecha/Hora: June 30, 2020; 1:30 PM – 3:00 PM
Location/ Local: At the garden

Meeting Agenda/ Agenda para la Reunión:

1. Welcome / Bienvenida (15 minutes/minutos)
   a. Go around and let each person say one good thing that happened to them this week/ Cada persona debe de compartir algo bueno que le haya sucedido esta semana
   b. Ask for volunteers to be the note taker and timekeeper / Solicitar voluntarios para que sea el/la que tome notas y que controle el tiempo

2. Community Agreements / Acuerdos Comunitarios (5 minutes/minutos)

3. Membership Committee reports new members who have joined and proposes new ideas to recruit new members / Comité de membresía comparte sobre nuevos miembros y nuevas ideas para atraer nuevos miembros (20 minutes/minutos)
   a. Facilitator puts things to a vote as needed. /Facilitador/a lleva cosas a votación según sean necesario

4. Facilitator passes around the sign up sheet for Open Hours / Facilitador/a reparte la hoja para registrarse para horas abiertas a la comunidad (5 minutes/ 5 minutos)
   a. The meeting continues while the sheet is being passed around/ La reunión continúa mientras que la hoja se reparte

5. Finance Committee presents Quarterly Finance Report / Comité de Finanzas presenta informe financiero trimestral (5 minutes/minutos)
   a. If anyone wants to propose new grant to apply for or a significant expenditure, do it now. / Si alguien desea proponer nueva beca para solicitar o tiene un gasto grande, hacerlo ahora.
   b. Facilitator puts things to a vote as needed./ Facilitador/a lleva cosas a votación según sean necesario

6. Events Committee presents an update on Summer Cookout Event in August / Comité de Eventos presenta noticias sobre evento de parrilla en agosto (20 minutes/minutos)
   a. In the meeting, pick the date and recruit members for tasks/ En la reunión, elija la fecha y reclutar a miembros para las tareas
   b. Facilitator puts things to a vote as needed./ Facilitador/a lleva cosas a votación según sean necesario

7. Announcements and updates from gardeners / Noticias de jardineros (10 minutes/minutos)

8. Closing plus Next meeting / Conclusion mas la próxima reunión (5 minutes/minutos) - Date/Día: 5/13/19 / Time/Hora: 1:30 - 3:00 pm / Location/Local: At the garden/ en el jardín
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONTH</th>
<th>LEADERSHIP</th>
<th>COMMITTEES</th>
<th>GENERAL MEMBERSHIP</th>
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| JANUARY AND FEBRUARY | Leadership team discusses needs and plans that they will implement for the year or that they will first present to their membership. Good time to review and propose updates to bylaws. Set agenda for annual meeting. | Membership Committee Meeting  
  - Meeting to design a social media campaign to recruit new members; post flyers in the neighborhood; contact old members to see if they wish to return; review plot waiting list  
  Finance/ Events/ Compost Committee Meetings  
  - Discuss plans for the upcoming year and create a schedule of activities to share with other committees or leadership | No meetings |
| MARCH APRIL | As needed | As needed | Annual Meeting  
  - Full membership meeting to discuss the plans designed by Leadership and Committees  
  - Membership makes major decisions for the garden regarding change in bylaws, expenses, events  
  Note: Ideally, annual meetings should occur early in the season  
  New Member Orientation  
  - New members joining the garden receive an application, copy of the Garden Bylaws & Rules, tour of the garden |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>As needed</th>
<th>As needed</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MAY - JULY</td>
<td>As needed</td>
<td>As needed</td>
<td>Quarterly or monthly full membership meetings can take place during these months. See sample meeting agenda. Work days, events, potlucks, and other celebrations should be happening during these months.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEPTEMBER</td>
<td>As needed</td>
<td>As needed</td>
<td>Quarterly or monthly meetings can take place during these months. See sample meeting agenda. End of season works days, volunteer days, and events (such as a Harvest Fair) should be happening during these months.</td>
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<td>NOVEMBER</td>
<td>End of Year Leadership Meeting</td>
<td>End of year Committee Meeting</td>
<td>End of year full membership meeting Reflect on the year and brainstorm some ideas for the next growing season</td>
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Top 10 Techniques

Adapted from the Interactive Method

1. **Have a goal for your meeting**: Why are we having this meeting?

2. **Create an agenda**: Leave room for extra items

3. **Contact the interested players (ex. phone calls, email, post signs)**

4. **Identify roles (facilitator, note-taker, timekeeper, etc.)**

5. **Set up the room**: Arrange seats in a semi-circle or circle so that everyone can participate

6. **Set Ground Rules or Community Agreements**: common guidelines for meeting behavior (ex. “one mic,” start and end on time, silence all cell phones, etc.

7. **Group Memory**: Review past meeting notes

8. **Create a Parking Lot (aka “Bike Rack”)**: a visible writing area (flip chart paper, whiteboard, etc.) where ideas can go that are not relevant to the discussion but can be added to the agenda later

9. **Bring food!**

10. **Follow-up**
Tips to Keep in Mind

● Encourage the different opinion—the more important the decision, the more important it is to have all the information (facts, feelings, and opinions) available.

● Expect differences of opinion—when handled well, they can help the group find creative solutions.

● Be suspicious of agreements reached too easily—test to make sure that people really do agree on important points.

● Don’t let a discussion continue between just two people; ask for comments by others. After all, it is the group that needs to make the decisions and carry them out.

● As much as possible, make people speak for themselves only and be specific when they refer to others. No saying “some people say,” “we all know,” “they would not listen.” This can feel scary if it is unfamiliar, but it gets easier with practice and helps build trust.

● Keep looking for minor points of agreement and say them—it helps people feel hope and move forward.

● Encourage people to think of new solutions and to look for ways compromise.

● In tense situations or when solutions are hard to reach, remember to use humor, affirmation, quick games for energy, change of places, small groups, silence, naming what is happening (for example: “wow—this feels tense” or “the group looks stuck at this moment”) etc.

● When you test for consensus, state in question form everything that you feel people agree on. Be specific: “Do we agree that we’ll meet on Tuesday evenings for the next two months and that a facilitator will be found at each meeting to function for the next one?” Do NOT merely refer to a previous statement: “Do you all agree that we should do it the way it was just suggested?”

● Insist on a response. Here again the participants need to know they are making a decision together—and know what they are agreeing to.

● If you find yourself drawn into the discussion in support of a particular position, it would be preferable to step aside as facilitator until the next agenda item. This can be arranged beforehand if you anticipate a conflict of interest.

● Almost any meeting will benefit from quick breaks in the proceedings—energy injections—provided by short-games/ songs, food, a common stretch, etc.