

Getting started with facilitation

Local Trust have launched a new set of 'facilitation tools' that aim to help Big Local partnerships understand and address issues they might be facing. In order to use the tools, partnership members may need to have some experience of running group activities, or an interest to learn! The skill of running group activities is called facilitation, and like any other skill, facilitation can be learnt.

What is facilitation?

Facilitation is a way of working that can be used to guide and direct groups of people to help them work together more effectively. Facilitation skills and methods can be used in a variety of ways, for example to help people have more in depth discussion about a topic or as part of Big Local partnership meetings and events.

Facilitation is different from chairing a meeting as it focuses on *how* people participate in the discussion not just on *what* gets achieved.

Mind Tools offer a really simple breakdown of what a facilitator should do to lead a workshop/activity. <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/RoleofAFacilitator.htm>

What are the benefits of facilitation?

- It can help with your planning and decision making
- It helps a meeting stay focused on the main aim and not become diverted or distracted
- People will feel their ideas and thoughts are valued
- May increase people's confidence to take on responsibility and ownership of ideas they put forward
- It allows everyone to have a say and be involved
- It can be an effective way of discussing difficult subjects in a group setting

Top tips for facilitation

The key role of the facilitator is to not give your opinion, but to draw out the opinions or ideas of others. In order to practice these, it helps think about the following things when facilitating:

- Creating a space for the event that means everyone feels comfortable
- Ensuring everyone has a clear understanding of the aims of the meeting
- Focusing on making sure that everyone has a chance to speak and contribute in the room
- Understanding that you are not in control of the outcomes, but to help make the discussion as useful as possible
- Making sure that dominant people do not take all the space all of the time
- Remaining neutral and not taking sides in the discussion
- Looking for body language that says someone is uncomfortable or becoming disinterested
- Encouraging quieter people to contribute to the discussion (if they want to)
- Making sure that everyone's ideas are heard respectfully and not criticising anyone for what they have said

The more you know about how to shape and run a good facilitation session, the more your members will feel empowered about their own ideas and participation, stay invested in the partnership, take on responsibility and ownership, and the better your meetings will be.

Where to look for training

- Ask your rep as many have some experience of using facilitation skills
- The Directory of Social Change. They can offer training on facilitation which we cover of the cost for. You can find out more about this offer and how to access it at https://localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Bespoke_training_offer.pdf.
- Local voluntary action organisations or equivalent often run free or low-cost training in facilitation skills