

**SPH Peer to Peer Lunch Learning Session, Wednesday, March 13, 2020 via Zoom
Virtual and Real Time Meeting Facilitation, or How to Create Conversations that Matter**

--Nancy Donovan, MA, presenter

What we think we get from meetings:

- A chance for people to come together and discuss important issues.

What we often *actually* get:

- A chance for some people to demonstrate their status and power.
- A chance for most people to take notes and seek to avoid responsibility.

Solution? Create a facilitated conversation instead. In a conversation, you need to listen to the other person. If you don't, you won't know what to say when it's your turn to talk. Conversations reset the meeting power dynamic, enabling everyone to be heard.

Conversations generate their own interest, because after you speak your piece, you're likely focused on what someone is going to say in response.

Meeting facilitation tools

Start with brief participant self-introductions, perhaps using a prompt relating to the meeting topic. For a meeting about meeting facilitation, ask people to provide an example of a meeting issue that they'd like help solving. "My name is Nancy Donovan, I work at Berkeley Law. During our time today talking about meeting facilitation, I'd like some ideas for preventing people from talking over each other during meetings." Check in's and self-introductions help participants center and focus on the work that's about to be done.

Set up Community Agreements. Community agreements are rules and norms for interactions within your group. If you are working with a group of people on an ongoing basis and have regular meetings, these agreements can be set up at the start of each semester and then updated as needed. Community agreements help build trust and create structure for meaningful work in teams. Examples of community agreements include **respect for time** (the meeting will start and end on time); **only one person speaks at a time; confidentiality** (what is said in the room stays in the room); **step up / step back** (if you are the person likely not to speak up, push yourself to do so, if you're the person likely to chime in regularly, invite yourself to step back and let others talk); **be curious, open and respectful, participate! Assume positive regard for all participants.**

Have a meeting agenda: Expert meeting facilitators will design and pre-circulate a meeting agenda. Agendas are neutralizers and non-personal, identifying the "why" of the meeting. Is the meeting about information sharing or decision-making? If it's about

decision-making, how are decisions made - by consensus or fiat? Is the meeting to advance thinking and build community? Obtain input?

Agenda items can be timed (i.e. check in from 2:05-2:10 pm, community agreements from 2:10-2:15 pm.) And, If you can collaborate on an agenda before your meeting (send it 48 hours in advance of the meeting and let participants provide feedback) you will have more engaged participation. An agenda is a road map and lets participants know that the meeting facilitator will respect their time, seek to accomplish the work outlined in the agenda and provide steps to keep the work moving forward.

During the meeting the facilitator is the “keeper of the flame” keeping the discussion focused, making sure that participants have “air time” to express themselves and that the meeting creates a space for fair and open processes.

Other meeting facilitation tools:

Chart writing - if you have a co-facilitator and a white board, writing agenda items and any brainstorming and/or to do's is helpful.

Paraphrasing as a tool to keep a meeting on track - Paraphrasing what a meeting attendee has just said is a non-judgmental and validating way to let people know that their ideas have been heard, are respected and legitimate. Paraphrasing is the tool of choice for supporting people to think out loud and brainstorm. A skilled meeting facilitator can paraphrase a contribution and then redirect the conversation back to the agenda item being discussed.

A simple trick to keep people from talking over each other - during an in person meeting, the facilitator can use a numbering technique when Sam, Julie & Eve are all talking at once. “Julie, you're #1, Sam, #2 and Eve, #3” The facilitator is in charge and people know that they will get their chance to speak. On Zoom meetings? The skills for this kind of meeting facilitation are evolving! I think there's a “raise hand” function on Zoom. Learning to be continued!

End the meeting (on time):

In a meeting designed to impart information, ask participants to briefly answer a question. “What's one new thing you learned about meeting facilitation today?” “Is there something you would like us to cover next time?”

Define next steps, action items and due dates. Clarify who is responsible for the meeting action items and scheduling the next meeting, if needed.

Post-event meeting evaluations are helpful when you're working with a team on an ongoing process and will meet again with the same group of people. A quick survey

monkey document can provide meaningful feedback on the meeting that just occurred, let participants know that you value their opinions, and provide topics for future meetings.

The Rules of Engagement in the age of Covid-19 and Zoom meetings are different, too! This work from home time is an opportunity to do a deep dive into personal learning. Meeting facilitation tools are also communication tools that are helpful within your family or any group setting.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or comments on the training held on March 13 via Zoom or anything about meeting facilitation:

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Thanks for the opportunity to present to your group!

Bibliography: Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making by Sam Kaner with Lenny Lind, Catherine Toldi, Sarah Fisk and Duane Berger

Break out rooms/ice breakers: come up with five things you have in common