Facilitating Effective Community System Development Meetings

A HANDBOOK FOR COLLABORATION LEADERS

illinois action for children

Acknowledgments

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CS3 FACILITATION HANDBOOK FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD COLLABORATION LEADERS

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HANDBOOK OVERVIEW

Purpose and Intended Audience

Effective meeting facilitation is a fundamental capacity for community system development (CSD) efforts. This handbook is designed to support leaders of early childhood collaborations who seek to strengthen their meeting facilitation capacity. The aim of this handbook is to meet you exactly where you are in your facilitation skill-building journey through its scaffolded design and content. So, whether you're relatively new to meeting facilitation or want to build upon your existing facilitation skillfulness, this handbook can help.

We will focus on building universal facilitation competence that is relevant for face-to-face or virtual settings. While specific direction on facilitating virtually is beyond the scope of this text, you will find that most of the content is relevant to virtual facilitation.

How to Use this Handbook

We hope this guidance will help you practice and grow your facilitation expertise. Building facilitation capacity is a lifelong endeavor. With a learning mindset, each of us can grow in our facilitator skillfulness. While we wrote this handbook with the beginning facilitator in mind, reviewers told us that facilitators at any level could benefit.

Some people with less facilitation experience may want to read the chapters sequentially as the content builds from the basics into more complex facilitation concepts and practices. At the same time, we hope that the tables, charts, and graphics will make this handbook a quick-reference guide for facilitators at any skill level.

One thing is for sure. Practice helps us become more competent facilitators. So, wherever you are on your facilitation learning journey, show up and use the skills you have. Then use this handbook to try new facilitation skills, tools, and techniques.

Chapter Overview

CHAPTER	1	**Core Facilitation Concepts** introduces facilitation fundamentals, models to support meeting design and facilitation, and meeting effectiveness. Whether you are a new or experienced facilitator, we recommend that you start with this section to ground (or reground) in basic concepts and models that will be referenced in other chapters.
CHAPTER	2	**Centering Equity in Facilitation** acknowledges that for real change to happen in community systems development work, we need to bring a focus on equity into our facilitation. In this chapter, we define what it means to center equity in CSD work, provide support for the inner work of centering equity, and describe how facilitation can be a tool for centering equity.
CHAPTER	3	**Essential Facilitation Skills** provides a quick reference to five sets of foundational facilitation skills. Whether you are new or familiar with these skills, the quick-reference format will help you learn about the skill, when to use it, and how to do it when you need it.
CHAPTER	4	**Facilitation Core Tasks and Techniques** spells out the foundational tasks that facilitators do during meetings. Beyond concrete skills, this chapter will help you be clear about what facilitators do. For each task, we describe which facilitation skill sets are most helpful and share a few related facilitation techniques.
CHAPTER	5	**Supporting Productive Group Dynamics** will help you know how to build a foundation for effective collaboration, support productive meeting behaviors, recognize and intervene in disruptive behaviors, and deal with interpersonal conflict during meetings. This chapter may also help you facilitate courageous conversations about equity.
CHAPTER	6	**Facilitating Small Group Conversations** focuses on small group conversations whether they are stand-alone conversations or embedded within a larger CSD collaboration meeting. The chapter begins by describing the characteristics and purposes of small group conversations. We then share two approaches to facilitating conversations: open conversation, where the facilitation support is light, and planned conversation, where the facilitator supports the group to reach a particular meeting outcome.

Chapter Overview

CHAPTER	7	**Facilitating Equity-Focused Conversations** provides guidance on facilitating planned and impromptu equity conversations. We explore what equity-focused conversations are and explain how to prepare for and facilitate them. We close the chapter with guidance on how to hold space for equity-focused conversations.
CHAPTER	8	**Planning Collaboration Meetings** will help you plan a CSD collaboration meeting by first considering some of the unique characteristics of large group CSD efforts and what that means for meeting facilitation. Then you will learn about the basic components of a meeting agenda and how to determine the full meeting agenda, develop a facilitation plan for each major agenda item, and prepare for an upcoming meeting.
CHAPTER	9	**Facilitating Collaboration Meetings** provides specific guidance for facilitating more formal, large group, collaboration meetings. Three specific topics are covered: centering equity during meetings, making inclusive and sustainable decisions, and using action learning to continuously improve the collaboration's results.
CHAPTER	10	**Supporting Action Between Collaboration Meetings** focuses on what you can do to support collaboration action between meetings as well as reflect upon and continuously improve the effectiveness of CSD meetings and your facilitation. We also make suggestions for how to overcome common facilitation challenges.
APPENDIX	A	**Chapter Summaries** highlights the most important ideas in each chapter. Use this appendix to remember and find chapters that may be the most helpful.
APPENDIX	B	**Facilitation Methods, Techniques, and Tools** is a quick reference table to help you select appropriate facilitation methods, techniques, and tools. All the methods, techniques, and tools mentioned throughout the handbook are included in the table. Chapter and section numbers are also included so you can find earlier references in the handbook.

HANDBOOK BACKGROUND

IAFC and the Community Systems Statewide Supports Project

In February 2018, Illinois Action for Children (IAFC) was awarded a five-year grant through the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to build the capacity of community collaborations to use a community systems development (CSD) approach to improving early childhood services and systems. IAFC builds this capacity through training and coaching.

Referred to as Community System Statewide Supports (CS3), this project provides foundational and targeted supports to collaborations on how to use a CSD approach to strengthen and improve early childhood services and systems in their communities. More specifically, the CS3 project aims to support communities to develop and implement community-wide, aligned strategies to ensure more children, ages birth-to-five, enroll in and regularly attend high-quality early learning programs.

Through this project, community collaborations and early childhood leaders have access to statewide training opportunities, coaching supports, web-based resources, and numerous tools to advance their local early childhood systems work. This handbook is one of those resources.

Community Systems Development and Family Engagement

Family engagement is central to community systems development efforts. IAFC believes community collaborations can better address systemic problems when they engage, listen to, and prioritize parents' voices. More than another perspective at the table, family engagement is about making sure families influence and drive the collaboration's CSD efforts.[1]

Community systems development (CSD) is a process by which a community takes collective responsibility for its young children by building an aligned, high-quality, accessible early learning system that supports all children in becoming successful.

Community Systems Statewide Supports (CS3) Family Engagement Definition

Family engagement in early childhood collaborations is how early childhood stakeholders build effective authentic partnerships with families. It requires an intentional effort by early childhood stakeholders to provide families with the opportunities and supports needed to participate, inform, and influence community systems. Shared responsibility, decision-making power, and expertise is essential to community systems development work.

Family engagement results in an early childhood system that is co-created and co-maintained by families and collaboration members to provide equitable, high-quality, accessible services to all children and families.

[1]Partner Plan Act. "Centering Parent Engagement."

The CS3 team has developed many resources and supports on parent engagement including a theory of change, the *Handbook for Community Engagement: Engaging Parents in Early Childhood Collaborations*, an on-demand learning course, and individualized consultation. While family engagement is not the focus of this handbook, we strongly encourage you to always center family voice as you plan and facilitate CSD meetings. Visit the PartnerPlanAct website for more details on centering family engagement.

Community Systems Development and Racial Equity

The pursuit of racial equity is at the heart of the CSD approach. CS3 defines racial equity as an outcome and a process (see below). As such, an equity lens is applied throughout all CS3 supports including in this handbook. This lens allows us to view our local early childhood systems in a different way by uncovering system structures, policies, and behaviors that contribute to inequitable outcomes for young children.

Community Systems Statewide Supports (CS3) Racial Equity Definition

Racial equity in early childhood collaborations is both a **process** and **an outcome**.

As an outcome – We achieve racial equity when race no longer determines how one fares in society; when everyone has what they need to thrive, no matter where they live.

As a process – Racial equity reforms the practices and policies of structural and systemic racism by 1) prioritizing services for those most impacted by racism; 2) assessing and addressing the advantages and disparities produced by unjust systems and practices; and 3) engaging those most impacted as experts in their own experiences, strategists in co-creating solutions, and evaluators of success.

When we achieve racial equity:

- People, including people of color, have what they need to be owners, planners, and decision-makers in the systems that govern their lives.
- Resources, opportunities, rewards, and burdens are fairly distributed across groups and communities so that those with the greatest challenges are adequately supported and not further disadvantaged.
- Past and current inequities are acknowledged and accounted for, and all people, particularly those most impacted by racial inequities, are provided the infrastructure needed to thrive and participate.
- Systems and policies that affect children and families are consciously designed, reframed, or eliminated in a robust and dynamic process to promote greater justice.
- Everyone benefits from a more just, equitable system.

Facilitation itself is a tool for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Facilitators can bring this lens and center equity in everything they do. In this handbook, you will find concepts, practical tips, and tools to help you build your skills for centering equity in your facilitation and in CSD efforts (see *Chapter 2: Centering Equity in Facilitation;* section *4.8: Centering Equity and Inclusion; Chapter 6: Facilitating Equity-Focused Conversations;* and section *9.1: Centering Equity in CSD Meetings).*

CHAPTER 1

Core Facilitation Concepts

In this chapter, we dive into important facilitation concepts that can help you design and facilitate effective community system development (CSD) conversations and meetings. We build on these concepts throughout the handbook and show you how to apply these concepts in your facilitation. This chapter is divided into three main sections: Facilitation Fundamentals, Models to Support Meeting Design and Facilitation, and Meeting Effectiveness.

1.1 FACILITATION FUNDAMENTALS

Becoming a skillful facilitator includes a solid grounding in both knowledge and skills. In this section, we define facilitation and introduce facilitator roles and responsibilities. We also clarify how facilitation is different from other roles you likely hold as a collaboration leader and provide suggestions for how to manage them. After examining facilitator competencies and qualities, we'll explore the idea of facilitator neutrality and the value co-facilitation provides.

1.1.1 Facilitation Defined

Facilitation can mean different things in different contexts. Generally, facilitation is the act of making something easier.[1] In this handbook, we are interested in the facilitation of conversations and meetings that focus on helping groups think and work well together to improve local early childhood systems. To underscore that facilitation should support equitable engagement of all members, we offer the following definition:[2]

FACILITATION

The act of carefully designing and guiding a meeting process so that it is productive, engaging, and easier for all team members to be involved.

Interestingly, in the world of neurophysiology, facilitation is defined as "*phenomenon that occurs when two or more neural impulses that alone are not enough to trigger a response in a neuron combine to trigger an action potential.*"[3] In many ways, this definition parallels both community systems development and meeting facilitation.

Your role as a collaboration meeting facilitator is to support individuals to work together in a way that creates a synergistic result, such as new understanding, commitment to action, etc. The following quote captures this well:

> ***"Every meeting or process that is facilitated has an impact on the individuals and the groups of which they are a part. Good facilitation can change the way people think and act, and ultimately support them to positively change the world around them."***[4]

The primary function of most collaboration meetings is to get work done related to a shared purpose, agenda, or goal.[5] Supporting healthy relationships and interpersonal dynamics is equally important. Without deeply engaging people, the work does not get done. *"If people do not participate in and 'own' the solution to problems or agree to the decision, implementation will be half-hearted at best, probably misunderstood, and more likely than not, fail."* [6]

Facilitators need to be skillful at managing group processes and dynamics to achieve a shared purpose, create a sense of "we are in this together", and engage people deeply in thinking and acting together.

1.1.2 Facilitator Role and Responsibilities

The primary facilitator role is to support the group to do their best thinking both individually and collectively.[7] This requires facilitating a productive group process that helps the group get to their desired result. It is the group's role and responsibility to resolve issues, make decisions, and act.[8] This means facilitators focus their attention on the **process** (e.g., climate, group dynamics, methods) and leave the **content** (e.g., discussion topics, goals, decisions) to participants.[9]

The main purpose of your role as facilitator is to strengthen the effectiveness of the group who shows up to get work done.[10] Below are a few examples of facilitator responsibilities (note how they overlap).[11]

Create a positive climate

- Welcoming people
- Establishing and supporting effective group norms
- Building trust among group members
- Supporting the group to manage their dynamics

Encourage deep engagement

- Helping everyone contribute their best thinking
- Making sure all voices are heard
- Keeping people engaged in the process
- Connecting people to each other

Support productive group dynamics and behavior

- Supporting effective communication
- Creating conditions for effective collaboration
- Calling attention to and addressing dysfunctional behavior and dynamics
- Managing conflict

Manage the process

- Helping the group achieve their goals through their group process
- Designing and facilitating appropriate group methods and techniques
- Regulating the flow of the conversation
- Providing feedback to the group about their group dynamics and process
- Supporting the group to measure their progress and adjust if needed

Promote shared understanding

- Explaining how shared understanding is critical to get to sustainable decisions
- Helping the group understand and think from each other's point of view
- Supporting both/and rather than either/or thinking

Foster inclusive solutions

- Supporting the group to discover ideas that incorporate multiple points of view
- Helping the group stay engaged through the conversation, including the messy middle

1.1.3 Collaboration Leader Role Distinctions

As a leader of early childhood collaboration efforts, you most likely fulfill many roles each of which have different responsibilities and expectations. When it comes to facilitating collaboration meetings, it is helpful to understand the differences among these roles.

COLLABORATION LEADER

Directing the initiative

In this role, you are likely responsible for supporting the group to create a shared vision or goals, solve complex problems, make decisions, and align collective action. You are also most likely the one who is holding the big picture of all these efforts. As a result, you are intimately familiar with the group's efforts. You may even be in a position where you are held accountable in some way for the collaboration's results.

MANAGER

Coordinating action

You are also most likely the one who coordinates most of the collaboration's work, e.g., committee or work groups or following up with collaboration members' actions between meetings. This often involves many administrative responsibilities and tasks like recordkeeping, reporting, and more.

CONTENT EXPERT

Providing information and expertise

You may also be a subject matter expert, for example in child development, maternal health, or community assessment and planning. This understanding helps you lead the collaboration and inform strategic action. Sometimes you also need to share that knowledge and experience with the collaboration to advance the work.

FACILITATOR

Guiding group process

Often the collaboration leader is responsible for facilitating collaboration meetings. As the facilitator, the focus is on managing the group dynamics and supporting the group to reach the defined meeting outcomes. This is a very important role that has an impact on member engagement, which in turn impacts the collaboration's ability to achieve its goals.

1.1.4 Managing your Various Roles

It can be challenging to wear all these hats. When you are facilitating conversations or meetings, it is important to be aware of and communicate which role you hold at any point in time. Since it is generally accepted that facilitators should be neutral (see section *1.1.7: Facilitator Neutrality)*, how you bring in your collaboration leader perspective or subject matter expertise can affect group engagement and meeting effectiveness.

For the group to trust you as the facilitator, they need to know that you are not deliberately or unconsciously manipulating the conversation or meeting towards a particular result.[12] Below are a few tips for ways to manage these different roles while facilitating.

Tips for Managing your Various Roles

Announce when speaking from another role.

Sometimes it might be helpful to offer your perspective from one of your other roles. For example, as a context expert in analyzing data, you might be able to help with interpretation. If you do this, remind the group that you have expertise in this area and are speaking from this role. Let them know when you step back fully into the facilitator role.

Co-facilitate with another person.

Co-facilitation can be a very effective way to run a meeting. Typically, one facilitator focuses on the meeting content while the other focuses on the meeting process. Both facilitators work closely to ensure the process supports the topic's meeting outcome, e.g., to brainstorm ideas or understand a problem. When both roles are engaged, you can decide if its best to contribute content or guide the process. Make sure to share which role each person is taking, especially if that changes during the conversation.

Rotate facilitation responsibilities among members.

Give collaboration members an opportunity to facilitate or co-facilitate with you. Depending on how you do this, it can allow you to show up in one of your other roles. This promotes shared responsibility for meeting facilitation and enables the group to experience different facilitation styles and techniques. It is a great way to build the facilitation capacity of collaboration partners and respect for the facilitation role. This could be combined with co-facilitation where one facilitator is ongoing, and the other's responsibilities rotate among members.

Bring in an outside facilitator.

Sometimes it may be best to work with an outside facilitator. Consider this when you know you need to be fully in one of your other roles, there is conflict that could best be addressed by someone who is truly neutral, and/or when the conversation could benefit from outside facilitation support.

Remember: Always let the group know what role you are playing, especially if it is different from normal.

1.1.5 Facilitator Competencies

Facilitator competencies include the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors that promote effective facilitation. Facilitators use a variety of skills and techniques to effectively execute these competencies. As you grow in these competencies, you will become a more competent facilitator.

Commit to developing your facilitation competencies over time. Review the table below to identify a competency area (or aspect) you want to focus on currently. Then use this handbook to learn more.

The competencies in the following table are relevant to facilitating small group conversations and collaboration meetings.[13]

FACILITATOR COMPETENCIES	
Competency	**Actions**
Demonstrating personal effectiveness	• Being a role model • Demonstrating emotional and social intelligence • Engaging with others respectfully and effectively • Gaining commitment of others by understanding what is meaningful to them • Upholding values of inclusion and equity
Communicating effectively	• Using effective interpersonal communication to engage others and build relationships • Reading and understanding nonverbal communication and responding appropriately • Using nonverbal communication techniques • Making effective verbal and visual presentations • Demonstrating active listening and effective questioning techniques to engage others
Creating a positive and inclusive climate	• Helping people feel welcome and part of the group • Getting to know the group and adapting your facilitation to meet their needs and goals • Creating the conditions for everyone to contribute their best thinking • Paying attention to the group's collective energy and mood
Using questions effectively	• Knowing the different types of questions and when to use each • Using appropriate questions for the situation • Knowing the characteristics of a good question • Developing powerful questions • Asking powerful questions in effective ways
Inviting broad and balanced participation	• Supporting everyone to contribute their best thinking • Using a variety of techniques to support the conversational flow • Helping people stay in the conversations even when it gets messy • Assuring equitable airspace for all
Maintaining focus and managing the process	• Keeping the group moving in their desired direction. Setting up the room to accommodate the group and the facilitation processes you plan to use • Planning and monitoring your facilitation to ensure efficient and effective use of time • Using effective meeting strategies • Recognizing and adapting facilitation plans and efforts when needed • Engaging others in key meeting roles to support good process
Managing group dynamics	• Creating the conditions to support collaboration • Helping the group engage in positive, productive group behaviors • Dealing with disruptive individual behaviors that take the group off track • Supporting the group to overcome conflicts
Centering equity and inclusion	• Helping people feel welcome and included in the group • Creating conditions for everyone to be seen, heard, and valued for their contribution • Paying attention to group participation and needs • Using inclusive practices to support and encourage participation • Holding accountable space for conversations

Throughout this handbook, and particularly in *Chapter 3: Essential Facilitation Skills and Chapter 4: Facilitation Core Tasks and Techniques*, you will learn skills and techniques to help you strengthen these competences.

1.1.6 Facilitator Qualities

Facilitator qualities also have an influence on facilitation effectiveness. The table that follows describes some important facilitator qualities and how they translate into facilitator behaviors.[14]

Checklist of Facilitator Qualities

✓ **Positive attitude**

- Demonstrates open-mindedness
- Expects the group will be successful in achieving their purpose

✓ **Enthusiastic**

- Has an upbeat and appropriate level of energy
- Uses a strong voice
- Demonstrates a desire to be facilitating the meeting

✓ **Confident**

- Trusts and believes in the group's ability to collaborate
- Brings competence and confidence in their facilitation ability
- Establishes trustworthiness with the group

✓ **Organized**

- Plans and prepares adequately for the meeting
- Uses space, time, and facilitation tools effectively
- Maintains order during the meeting

✓ **Respectful**

- Shows genuine interest in what everyone contributes
- Believes in and supports the potential of group process

✓ **Effective listener**

- Gives full attention to the meeting
- Responds effectively to what happens
- Asks appropriate questions to support collective understanding

✓ **Action-oriented**

- Clarifies and supports the group to achieve their purpose, intention, or desired outcome
- Keeps the group moving at an appropriate pace
- Knows how to intervene when the group needs support to address conflict or move to action
- Demonstrates flexibility in attending to the group's needs or changes in direction

1.1.7 Facilitator Neutrality

You have probably heard that facilitators should be neutral. This is half right. Facilitator neutrality is a two-sided coin. There are times when being neutral is appropriate. It is also true that there are times when you should not be neutral. Neutrality can be difficult when you play multiple roles.

When to Be Neutral

In most cases, facilitators are expected to provide objectivity as they support the group process, e.g., making sure all voices are heard, managing group conflict, and using appropriate methods to help the group to achieve their goal.[15]

Providing objectivity in this case means withholding personal views about the subject matter. *"The facilitator sets aside personal opinions about the data from the group, being careful not to react negatively to people's insights, and maintaining detachment from the group-generated data. This same neutral universe contains the capacity to buffer criticism, anger, and frustration with a non-defensive stance whenever the group energy overheats."* [16]

Your personal integrity is a vital part of maintaining this type of neutrality. It means showing up authentically while managing your own social and emotional reactions to the group, its process, and the conversation. Your ability to be self-aware and manage your own emotions while facilitating are key personal skills. Self-care and a commitment to your own learning and growth lays the foundation for maintaining your personal integrity while facilitating (see sections *3.1: Emotional and Social Intelligence; 4.1: Demonstrating Personal Effectiveness;* and *7.4: Holding Space*).

For a group to believe you are being neutral, they must believe that your opinions about the subject will not affect how you facilitate the group process. For this to happen, you too must believe you will be able to keep your views from showing up in your facilitation.

The challenge is that no one is unbiased. As a human being, you have opinions and your own set of values. We all have conscious and unconscious beliefs, values, experiences, etc. that shape our opinions and judgments. Strengthening your self-awareness can help you recognize when your biases start to surface.

When Not to Be Neutral

As facilitators we strive to model neutrality when it comes to the content of the collaboration's work. However, it's best for an effective facilitator to set aside neutrality regarding group process, interpersonal dynamics, and standing up for respect, equity, and inclusion. We must demonstrate and advocate for respect, equity, and inclusion[17]; dialogue and consensus; and values and competencies that are needed to improve group effectiveness and to address challenges. We can practice this by:

- Co-creating shared agreements that demonstrate shared values for respect and inclusion (see sections *4.5.4: Creating Shared Agreements; 4.8.4: Using Shared Agreements;* and *7.3.2: Using Courageous Conversation Agreements*).
- Creating accountable space for courageous conversations (see section *7.3.1: Creating Accountable Space*).
- Intervening when group agreements have been violated or when group dynamics become disruptive (see section *5.3: Recognizing and Intervening Disruptive Behaviors*).
- Encouraging courageous conversations that challenge biases, assumptions, and inequities (see section *7.1: Understanding Equity-Focused Conversations*).
- Supporting the group to challenge the status quo – the way things have always been done (see equity choice points and equity pauses in section *9.1: Centering Equity in CSD Meetings*).
- Using techniques and tools to reach consensus and decision points (see section *9.2: Making Inclusive and Sustainable Decisions*).

What to Do About Neutrality When You Have Multiple Roles

Given the many roles you likely hold, it can be tricky to be a "neutral" facilitator and keep your contributions focused on the process and interpersonal dynamics. At the same time, you know that making sure power stays with the group can support *their* collective sense of responsibility for the work.

Remaining neutral can also be challenging because you likely have many significant relationships with collaboration members. In this case, you will need to remain vigilant in balancing perspectives, ideas, and actions throughout the process without biasing some perspectives over others. This is essential to creating trust among group members and with you.

As a "neutral" facilitator, rarely would you direct the group or make decisions for the group without the group's consent. Consider the following tips for maintaining neutrality.

TIPS FOR MAINTAINING FACILITATOR NEUTRALITY

During a meeting when you are the only facilitator:

Wait to see if someone else in the group expresses the same idea or information. If that does not happen, let the group know that you're stepping out of your neutral role as facilitator to share a personal perspective on the matter. If you have a lot to say, you may want to ask someone else to assume the facilitation role.

During the meeting when you have a co-facilitator:

- Ask your co-facilitator to take the lead on the process so you can contribute to the content of the topic.
- Let the group know if you are changing roles momentarily.

Before the meeting when you know you have a significant perspective to share:

- Consider sharing it with someone before the meeting and asking them to bring it into the conversation on your behalf.
- Engage someone else to facilitate the meeting so you can contribute to the conversation.

1.1.8 Co-Facilitation

Most of us are accustomed to facilitating solo. However, in many cases, it may be more helpful to have at least two facilitators, e.g., when the topic is complex, or a more complicated group process method is needed. Before jumping into co-facilitation, carefully consider the pros and cons.[20]

PROS

- ✓ **Shares the responsibility**
- ✓ **Uses different experiences and skills**
- ✓ **Enables less experienced facilitators an opportunity to practice**
- ✓ **Draws upon a wider set of facilitation skills and experience**

CONS

- More time is needed to plan and get on the same page X
- Unclear division of responsibilities can cause problems between co-facilitators X
- Differing philosophies and approaches can upset the group's process X
- It takes practice to co-facilitate well X

Here are some considerations to determine if co-facilitation is a good option.[21]

Questions to Consider for Co-Facilitation

- Why are you considering co-facilitation?
- How might the group benefit from co-facilitation?
- What is the co-facilitator bringing to the process? How does that compliment what you bring?
- How well do you know one another and each other's facilitation style? How are they complementary?
- Building upon each other's strengths, how might the facilitation role and responsibilities be divided?
- What is important to each of you about how you co-facilitate?
- How will you communicate to one another during a meeting to make decisions about the process?
- Can you each dedicate extra time to planning, facilitating, and debriefing your co-facilitation?
- How and when will you make time for working together?

An effective way to co-facilitate is to have one person be responsible for the **content** (what the group is talking about) while the other manages the **process** (how the group engages in the conversation). While responsibilities are divided, co-facilitators work together very closely. The following table describes these roles, why each can be helpful, and when they are important.

ROLE	TASKS	WHY	WHEN
Process facilitator	• Leads how the conversation takes place • Manages the meeting structure, e.g., agenda, techniques, and tools used • Considers how conversations and participant engagement will take place • Provides a roadmap to reach desired results • Considers how tools and materials are used • Considers the arrangement of the physical environment	• Helps keep the group and collaboration process on track • Supports effective group dynamics	• Almost always • Especially helpful when managing problem solving, making decisions, implementing action, monitoring progress
Content facilitator	• Considers the subject matter, content, and issues the group will address • Provides information/data to support problem solving, analysis, and recommendations • Facilitates knowledge sharing • Considers tools and materials group will use	• Helps the group to build understanding and knowledge of issues • Supports group to accomplish the meeting outcome for the topic	• Anytime • Especially helpful when there are gaps in knowledge and/or understanding

1.1.9 Other Meeting Roles

There are more ways members can contribute to a well-managed meeting by taking on other meeting roles and tasks. Engaging others in these roles is a smart facilitation decision as it is difficult for any one person to manage all these tasks at the same time. These roles create significant opportunities to engage members in sharing responsibility for the quality of the meeting. Working together to support the meeting can improve not only the meeting process but also the results.

Some additional roles which can be delegated to others include timekeeper, visual harvester, notetaker, process observer, host, coordinator, and participant. These are in addition to the process and content facilitator roles (see section *1.1.8: Co-facilitation*). These roles can be helpful during small and large group meetings.[22]

ROLE	TASKS	WHY	WHEN
Timekeeper	• Keeps track of time • Manages pace of meeting activities and conversations	• Helps to keep the meeting and group on track with the meeting agenda	• Almost always • Especially helpful when managing group process
Visual harvester	• Captures important points during the meeting in a way that everyone can see	• Helps the entire group track the conversation and notice if there are gaps in shared understanding • Keeps the process moving along and allows facilitator to stay focused on managing the process	• Anytime • Especially helpful when visioning, brainstorming, discussing complex problems, etc.
Notetaker	• Captures key discussion points, decisions, and next steps • May or may not be the one responsible for dissemination of notes • Can ask for clarification of speaker, if needed	• Generates an accurate report of the meeting • Can provide summaries of the conversation during the meeting, if needed • Can call out missing details or decisions that are needed to move to action	• Almost always
Process observer	• Pays attention to the group's engagement, energy, emotional response, and the effect it has on the meeting process and outcome • Calls attention to the observation when needed	• Supports member engagement • Can help spot signs of misunderstanding, conflict, or harm	• Anytime • Especially good when discussing topics that may elicit emotional responses
Host	• Welcomes and supports people who may be new to the group and/or join the meeting late	• Makes sure everyone feels welcome • Introduces new members to others • Greets and updates late meeting participants without disruption	• Anytime • When new meeting members are joining the meeting • When you need to start right on time
Coordinator	• Attends to venue-related matters, technology, refreshments, and other meeting logistics	• Allows the facilitator to stay focused on the group process • Can attend to behind-the-scenes tasks while the meeting is in process	• Especially helpful for large meetings with lots of logistics
Participant	• Contributes their perspectives, ideas, and talents to the conversation • Can make process suggestions	• There is no meeting without participants	• Always

See section *4.6.3: Assigning Meeting Roles.*

1.2 MODELS TO SUPPORT MEETING DESIGN AND FACILITATION

In this section, we look at models and frameworks that can inform your meeting design and facilitation. This includes the five facilitation focuses, spectrum of collaboration, engagement continuum, stages of group development, divergent and convergent thinking, generative potential of conversation, and the Diamond of Participatory Decision-Making.

1.2.1 Five Facilitation Focuses

There are four well-recognized areas of focus for every facilitated conversation. These include people, content, process, and group dynamics. In this handbook, we are adding equity as a fifth focus. We will look at how to facilitate these five elements throughout this handbook.

PEOPLE

Conversations and meetings involve people. Each person brings their own perspectives, values, biases, agendas, etc. Additionally, each person has a unique personality and set of personal and interpersonal skills that impact the conversation process, outcome, and group dynamics. Building and supporting strong interpersonal relationships is critical for helping a group build trust, work well together, and commit to shared goals and an aligned effort. People's diverse perspectives and their engagement are critical to understanding and solving complex system problems.

CONTENT

Content refers to "what" the group focuses on. It is the topics or problems that are discussed. Most meetings include one or more topics. The topic may be predetermined, and sometimes a topic emerges as the group interacts.

PROCESS

The way in which the group has the conversation is referred to as the process. It is "how" the conversation takes place. The process may range from being free flowing and spontaneous or more facilitated and deliberate by design. A good facilitator knows how to provide just enough support to help the group take responsibility for the conversation and achieve their purpose without being overbearing.

GROUP DYNAMICS

When a group of people come together their individual attitudes, behaviors, and skills influence their interactions with one another. In other words, there is a psychological and behavioral process that occurs between members of the group. This process is different from the process methods the facilitator may use to help the group achieve their purpose, e.g., a brainstorming process to develop strategy ideas. Group dynamics can either help or hinder the group in reaching their goals.

EQUITY

Since equity is a central focus of CSD work, we are adding it as the fifth major area of facilitation focus for CSD conversations and meetings. This includes if and how topics of racial equity are addressed during meetings and among people. It also includes how a facilitator manages who gets airtime, whose voice gets centered, and who is involved in making decisions.

Whether you are the group facilitator or a group participant, pay attention to these five elements of the conversation. Notice how each influences the group experience and the outcome of the conversation. We revisit these five areas throughout the handbook.

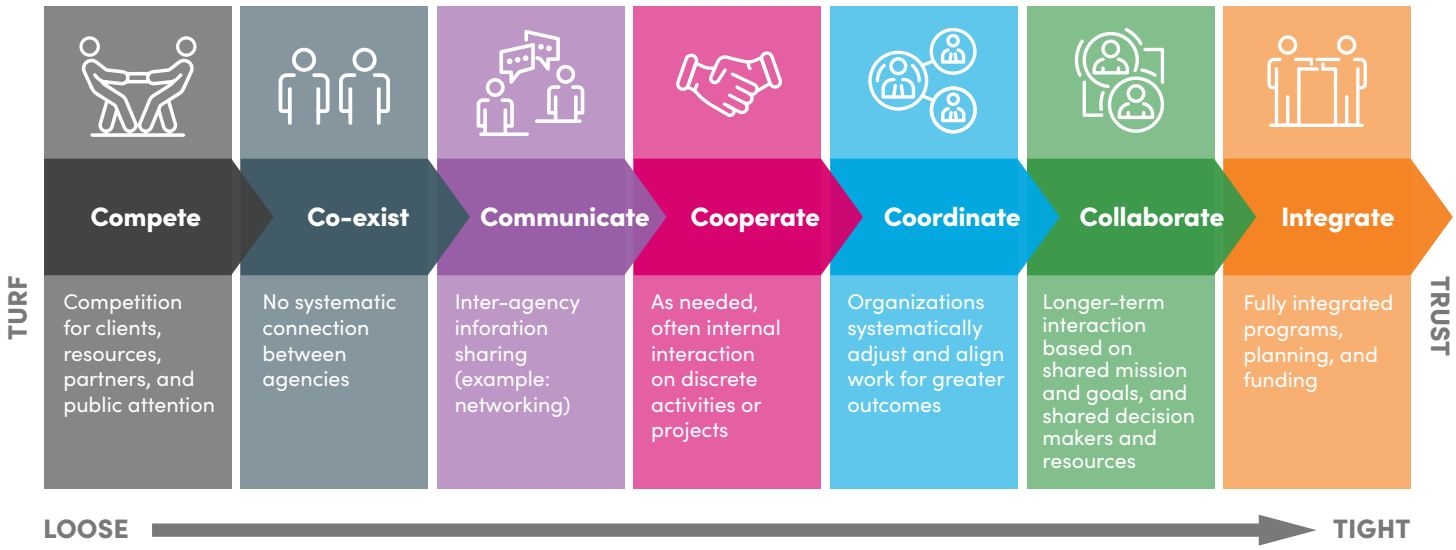
1.2.2 Spectrum of Collaboration

Community systems development is accomplished through collaboration efforts. **Collaboration** refers to both the group of people and their effort to work together. However, the act of collaboration can be understood as a conceptual continuum or spectrum from competitive at one end to fully integrated efforts at the other end. Collaboration structure and function varies along this spectrum from non-existent to highly organized.

Where your collaboration falls on the spectrum is an important consideration when designing and facilitating CSD conversations and meetings because it influences the level of action the group is ready to take. The importance and application of this model is highlighted below.

RELEVANCE	APPLICATION
Collaboration can be best understood as a conceptual continuum from low to more formal levels of organization and capacity. This is important to understand because you can only facilitate action at the current level of collaboration capacity.	Consider the collaboration's current level of collaboration and capacity when designing agendas and supporting the group to move to action.

THE COLLABORATION SPECTRUM



Tamarack Institute developed this spectrum to help collaboration members understand the collaborative context of their shared work.[23]

As a collaboration seeks to do more impactful community systems development work, the formality of the collaboration's structure and function and the depth of their collective capacity will need to expand to match the needs of their work.

To create impactful systems change, collaboration members will need to develop their collective capacity, which includes high levels of trust. This means more formal relationships, documented commitments to shared goals, a greater degree of information sharing, more formal governance structures and processes, deeper levels of engagement, designated leadership roles, and increased shared responsibility and accountability for results.[24]

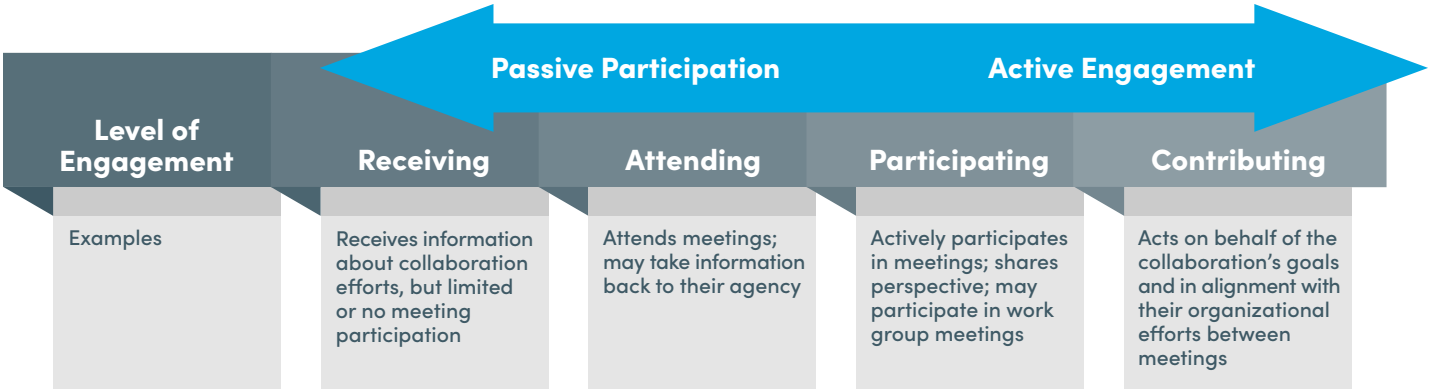
It is important to understand where your collaboration is functioning along this spectrum since it influences what the collaboration can accomplish. For example, it may be challenging or nearly impossible to effectively facilitate a conversation about moving the group to collective action if the collaboration is accustomed to networking as their primary reason for coming together. Knowing where the collaboration is on the spectrum will also help you understand the collaboration capacity and structure that is needed to support the level of action and impact the collaboration desires.

1.2.3 Engagement Continuum

Just as there is a spectrum of collaboration, there is also a continuum of engagement. The importance of this continuum and its application is described below.

RELEVANCE	APPLICATION
Collaboration members need to actively engage in collaboration meetings and efforts to create impactful and sustainable change in early childhood systems.	**Choose appropriate facilitation methods and techniques to promote members' active engagement, achieve meeting outcomes, and reach collaboration goals.**

Individual collaboration members will engage in collaboration efforts in differing ways and levels of engagement. The graphic below is one way to think about levels of engagement. Just like the collaboration continuum, there are no clear delineations or hard and fast examples. While this graphic over generalizes distinctions, it can still be helpful to think about the level of engagement that is happening in your meetings. Then consider if that level of engagement matches what you need to meet your collaboration's goals.



This continuum offers a way to think more intentionally about what we mean by engagement in this handbook. It is not meant to be a label to assign to individual collaboration members. Use this continuum to clarify the level of engagement that is needed to achieve your collaboration and meeting goals.

As the facilitator, you can dramatically improve meeting engagement through well-designed and facilitated meetings. This handbook will help you create the conditions for members' active engagement – exemplified by their contributions to conversations and their commitment for action outside of meetings.

1.2.4 Stages of Group Development

Just like people, groups go through stages of development. Understanding these stages help us explain (and potentially predict) group behavior and dynamics. The importance of understanding and using the stages of group development is highlighted in the table below.

RELEVANCE	APPLICATION
The group development model is a helpful way to understand group dynamics. Since all groups go through these stages it can be a helpful way to understand and work with group behavior.	**Understanding these stages can help you facilitate a more effective group process. It can also help you plan your meetings and intervene empathetically and appropriately when certain emotions and behaviors arise.**

One of the most referenced team development models is Bruce Tuckman's *Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing*. The table below will help you get a sense of these four stages. However, unlike human development, groups can move back and forth between the stages as the people and circumstances around them change. Getting to and staying in the performing stage requires consistent attention and effort. So, keep the following things in mind as you learn more about these phases. Groups may:

- Manifest behaviors from several stages at once
- Ebb and flow back and forth between stages
- Get stuck in a stage

STAGE	FEELINGS	BEHAVIOR THAT MAY OCCUR	GROUP DEVELOPMENT TASKS
Forming Coming together	• Excited to be part of team and work ahead • Anxious about fitting in and their contribution	• Asks lots of questions about the work and how it will get done	• Get clear about the group's purpose and goals, members' expectations, and how the group will work together
Storming Working through conflict	• Frustration or anger from concerns about achieving goals	• Expresses frustrations • Competes for power • Forms subgroup alliances may form • May argue • May resist against leader or structure	• Develop group process skills • Build conflict management skills
Norming Settling into productive ways of working together	• Comfortable sharing perspectives and values • Sense of responsibility to the group	• Listens to and respects diverse opinions and experiences as beneficial • Confronts issues, not people • Focuses on work at hand	• Be productive together • Resolve group problems
Performing Being effective together	• Sense of belongingness and collective confidence • Satisfaction about team's effectiveness	• Resolves process or progress problems • Welcomes and affirms diversity • Engages in fluid team roles	• Make significant progress toward team goals • Continue to develop individual and collective capacities

See section *5.1.2: Facilitating through the Stages of Group Development.*

1.2.5 Divergent and Convergent Thinking

Throughout this handbook, we reference divergent and convergent thinking. Both represent different ways of thinking. Both are needed. The trick is knowing when to support each type of thinking. This video describes these two ways of thinking.

Divergent thinking is helpful when we want to gather diverse perspectives, generate ideas, or understand a problem. Divergent thinking embraces diverse perspectives, non-judgment of ideas or perspectives, and generativity. Dialogue is more appropriate for divergent thinking (see the next section).

Convergent thinking is helpful when it is time to narrow, develop, and decide on an option. This involves more analytical and logical thinking. Discussion works well when this type of thinking is needed (see the next section).

	DIVERGENT THINKING	CONVERGENT THINKING
When to use	• Gathering diverse perspectives • Generating ideas without judgment • Understanding a problem or opportunity	• Analyzing options • Narrowing options • Deciding upon an option
Form of conversation	**Dialogue**	**Discussion**

1.2.6 Generative Potential of Conversation

Have you ever considered the generative potential of conversation – the new insights or ideas that result from bringing together diverse perspectives? Conversation is how groups think together. When groups do this well, they can generate greater insight, shared understanding, and more inclusive decisions. This is important and applicable to CSD facilitation.

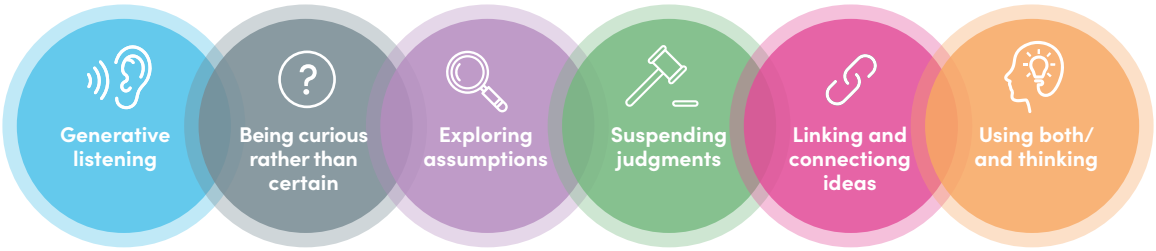
RELEVANCE	APPLICATION
Conversation is how groups think together. When conversations are generative, groups can strengthen relationships and get to greater shared understanding and sustainable decisions.	**Pay attention to the quality of the group's conversations. Help the group listen to understand each other, the whole of the conversation, and what emerges to get to more inclusive and sustainable decisions.**

Conversation is the way a group thinks together. This happens primarily through an exchange of perspectives and ideas. This exchange is essential to effective community systems development efforts as it is the only way we can begin to understand the complexity of community systems. No one person, agency, or sector can understand the whole system. That is why it is so critical that we seek out diverse perspectives, including the families we serve and especially those who are experiencing the most disparities.

Like the parable of the blind men and the elephant, it is easy to fall into a trap of thinking one's perspective is an accurate interpretation of reality. In the parable each blind man touches a different part of the elephant resulting in very different understandings of what an elephant is. This can happen in collaboration conversations since each person has a different experience of the early childhood system. Consequentially, conversations can easily fall into discussions or debates about who is right and who is wrong. When this happens, our listening becomes defensive rather than open to new information and understanding. And it greatly diminishes the potential for collaboration.

Essential Dialogue Skills

Instead, we want to facilitate conversations in ways that help us see the "whole elephant" – or in our case the whole early childhood system. Sometimes we may only be looking at a particular aspect of the system but we always want to do that from diverse vantage points. This starts with listening in more expansive ways. Beyond perspective taking or listening with empathy, we need to listen to the whole conversation and what is emerging from the exchange (generative listening). This requires that we are curious rather than certain, and that we explore our assumptions and withhold judgment momentarily. By linking and connecting ideas we can shift into both/and (rather than either/or) thinking.



By using these dialogue skills, all contributions to the conversation can result in something much more than the sum of the parts. It is this type of generative conversation that leads to shared understanding, new insights, and innovative ideas. Through diverse perspectives we can learn to see the whole elephant.

If you develop and use these skills, you can support the group to have more generative conversations – even if the group is inexperienced with these skills!

When to Use Dialogue Versus Discussion

Dialogue and discussion are both helpful forms of conversation. To facilitate an effective conversation, it is helpful to know when to use each form. Understanding the differences between the two is the first step. The table below contrasts characteristics of each form of conversation.

Discussion	Dialogue
Win/lose	Win/win
Being right	Being in relationship
Content	Process
Either/or thinking	Both/and thinking
Listening to defend	Listening to understand
Persuading, selling, telling	Inquiring and learning
Making distinctions	Seeing connections
Convergent thinking	Divergent thinking

Most of us are familiar with discussion as it is the default way of talking in groups. Often in **discussion** people advocate for the idea or perspective they believe is right. This advocacy invites either/or thinking where there are winning and losing ideas. Either/or thinking leads to defensive listening where people listen to defend their point of view more than really listen to understand others' ideas. Making distinctions (rather than connections) among ideas is characteristic of discussions. There is a time and place for discussion and that is when convergent thinking, i.e., analysis and decision-making, is needed.

Dialogue, on the other hand, promotes win/win solutions, emphasizes care for relationships among people, and values how the conversation happens as much as the topic. Dialogue encourages both/and thinking by listening to understand others' points of view, being genuinely curious with an intention to learn from others, and looking for connection points in the conversation. Dialogue supports divergent thinking and generative thinking (i.e., seeing new possibilities that arise from the conversation).

While it is important to listen to understand and respect perspectives and ideas, it is also critical to acknowledge when white dominate culture finds its way into a conversation and creates harm (see section *7.4.3: Supporting When Harm Happens*). This can happen because culture is pervasive and mostly unconscious. It shows up in how people think, the language they use, etc. There may be times to call out white dominant culture and shift to an alternative way of dialoguing and interacting that is respectful of cultural differences and leans toward inclusivity.

Here is a tool that highlights characteristics of white dominant culture and gives alternatives to these cultural ways of being.

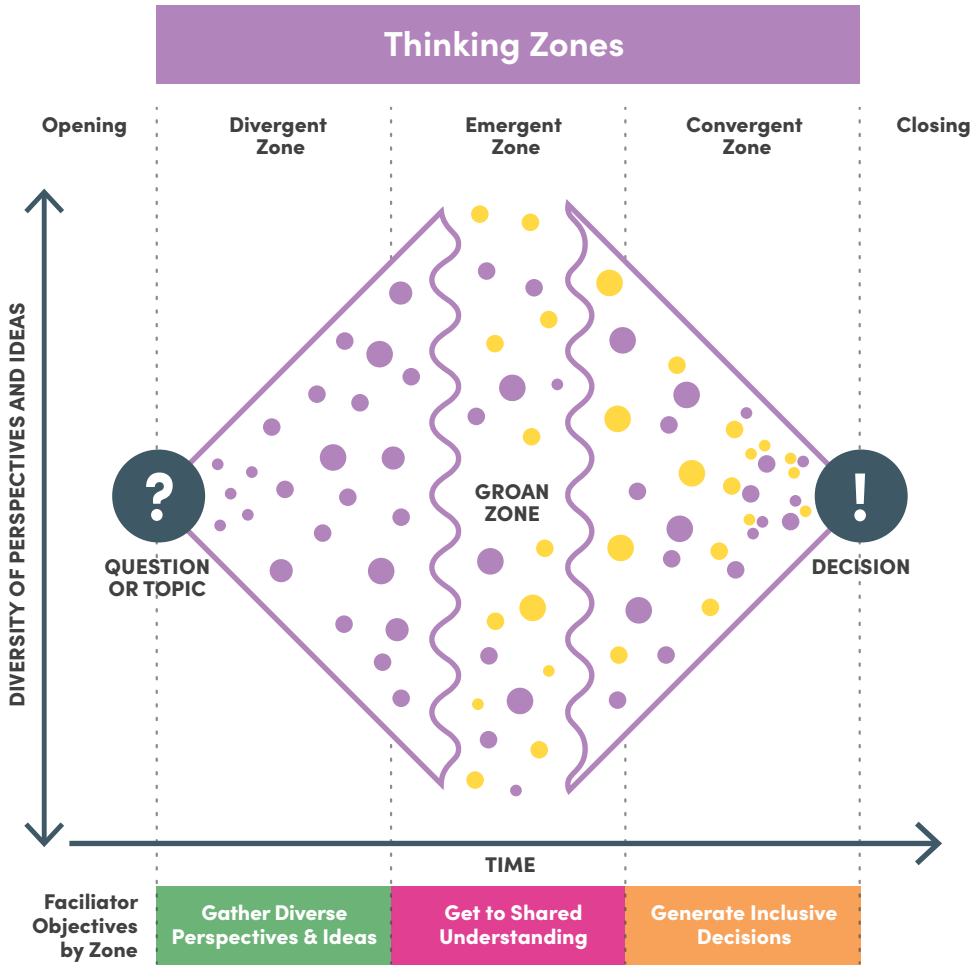
1.2.7 Diamond of Participatory Decision-Making

Another helpful framework to understand and work with group dynamics is the **Diamond of Participatory Decision-Making (Diamond)** by Sam Kaner and his colleagues. The Diamond is a powerful framework for getting to shared understanding and better decisions that everyone upholds. It also provides a framework for structuring conversations based on three thinking zones: divergent, emergent, and convergent. Its importance and use are highlighted in the table below.

RELEVANCE	APPLICATION
This is a powerful framework for understanding group process, strengthening group engagement, and reaching consensus on decisions. It also explains the messy middle of some more complex conversations. Overall, it will help you support shared understanding, buy-in, and decision-making.	**Use this framework to inform your meeting design and facilitation. It will help you know what facilitation skills and methods will work best in each part of the conversation. It will help the group get to inclusive and sustainable decisions.**

Kaner and his colleagues shed light on the false assumption that decision-making is simply a matter of using divergent thinking to generate ideas and convergent thinking to analyze and make a decision (see section *1.2.5 Divergent and Convergent Thinking*).[26]

This framework helps us understand what we have all experienced – the messy middle of a group process where there is confusion, conflict, and other challenges that result from trying to make sense of diverse perspectives. Kaner refers to this as the **groan zone**. The groan zone becomes **emergent** (a positive) when the group stays in the process long enough for the confusion to shift to new understanding or possibilities.[27] After successfully moving through the groan zone, the group usually has a sense of shared understanding or possibility.



The Diamond of Participatory Decision-Making by Sam Kaner et al. is a powerful framework for getting to decisions that everyone can support.[28]

This framework also illustrates the five parts of a conversation, especially those that involve any level of decision-making. Successful group decision-making opens with the introduction of a topic or question and closes with the decision. In between are three thinking zones – **divergent, groan/emergent**, and **convergent** – each of which has a purpose and unique group dynamics.[29]

Divergent Zone: In this zone, the group uses divergent thinking to start exploring the topic. The purpose of this zone is to engage diverse perspectives and surface a wide variety of ideas – including opposing ideas. Initially, groups tend to put forward familiar or obvious options. Wanting to get to action, groups can push to make a quick decision. Your job is to hold the conversation open long enough so that the group can share more diverse perspectives and ideas. With this diversity of perspective, the group will start to enter the next critical zone.

Groan (Emergent) Zone: This zone is named to describe what it can feel like as the group works to make sense of all the new and differing perspectives and ideas produced in the divergent zone. While this zone is usually messy, it is critical to helping the group get beyond familiar ideas to shared understanding and commitment to a decision that is inclusive (i.e., one that everyone can agree to).

Your job is two-fold. First, keep the group engaged despite the discomfort, conflict, and/or frustration that may arise.

Second, help the group see the whole conversation and the new ideas or options that are emerging out of the process. This is why we also refer to this zone as the **emergent** zone. It is very helpful to use dialogue in this zone to support generative listening and both/and thinking. Dialogue skills will help the group begin to integrate ideas and get to new and more innovative ideas and shared understanding.

Convergent Zone: You know you are moving into the convergent zone when the group is starting to see many new and original ideas that excite them – new possibilities emerge. In this zone, your job is to develop a few good ideas that everyone can support. Then the work is to narrow the options to help move the group to a decision point. This zone ends when a decision is made using their decision rule.

How to Use the Zones

You can use your understanding of these zones to inform your meeting design and facilitation. For some CSD meeting topics, you may move through all three zones in one meeting. For other more complex topics, you may work through these zones over several meetings. Either way, be intentional about facilitating group conversations or meetings, whether formal or informal, through all three zones for the best results.

TIP

Learn to work with these thinking zones to understand and promote effective group dynamics and generate better group decisions.

The table that follows summarizes core facilitator objectives and tasks for each zone of the Diamond framework.[30]

FACILITATOR OBJECTIVES AND TASKS BY ZONE			
	Divergent Zone	**Groan/Emergent Zone**	**Convergent Zone**
Overall Objective	**Gather diverse perspectives & ideas**	**Get to shared understanding**	**Generate inclusive decisions**
Facilitator Tasks	• Amplify diverse perspectives • Generate ideas • Suspend judgement • Encourage full and honest engagement	• Understand others' perspectives • Help people stay engaged • Strengthening interpersonal communication and dynamics • Listen to the whole of the conversation and what is emerging	• Strengthen good ideas • Narrow possibilities • Get to inclusive and sustainable agreements

There are also specific skills and techniques that work best in each zone, which we will share in later chapters (see sections *6.3: Facilitating Planned Conversations; 8.3.2: Developing a Facilitation Plan for Major Agenda Items*; and *9.2: Making Inclusive and Sustainable Decisions).*

1.3 MEETING EFFECTIVENESS

In this section, we describe what makes a meeting effective and some general strategies and tips to support meeting effectiveness. CSD conversations and meetings range in size, format, and formality. The considerations and practices for facilitating effective meetings apply to all types of meetings.

1.3.1 Characteristics of Effective Meetings

Meetings can be fun, promote relationship-building, and even inspire people. The primary function of most collaboration meetings is to bring people together to get work done around a shared purpose. These types of meetings promote decision-making, strategic thinking, planning action steps, and progress monitoring. Collaboration meetings are effective when members of the collaboration:

1. Get work done by sharing information, reaching decisions, and moving forward with tasks and actions[32]
2. Are involved, supported, and empowered participants[33]
3. Build a sense of community, connection, and enthusiasm for achieving shared goals[34]

It is important not to over-focus on tasks at the expense of maintaining the group community. Collaborations get more work done in the long run when people, relationships, and group dynamics are prioritized.[35] Skillful facilitators pay attention and balance the need to advance the collaboration's work while also paying attention to the interactions among people.

1.3.2 Benefits of Effective Meetings

How meetings are managed is one of the biggest "risk factors" for members' participation and investment in the collaboration. Every aspect of your meeting is important – the planning, logistics, roles, and facilitation techniques. All these things impact meeting participation and engagement. Effectively facilitated meetings can help the collaboration to:

- Build a sense of community
- Encourage participation and engagement
- Develop and support a shared vision and goals
- Create a space for inclusivity, creativity, learning, and growth
- Understand and solve complex problems
- Encourage people to act
- Reach shared and agreed upon CSD and equity goals
- Develop a strong and willing team to sustain CSD work

1.3.3. Considerations for Designing and Facilitating Effective Meetings

To design an effective meeting, you will want to consider the:

- Purpose of the meeting
- Desired outcomes
- Agenda
- Meeting roles

You are supporting the group to connect and collaborate for some common purpose. Providing a strong structure and culture for meetings is important for orienting members to the collaboration process.[37] This starts with understanding roles, expectations, values, and the collaboration's shared agenda. It also includes a meeting format and process that supports participation, decision-making, and feedback.

A clear, consistent meeting structure and culture will help members to participate and contribute more effectively and will allow new members to catch up and join in more quickly. At the same time, be flexible where needed and adapt for the changing needs of the group. Consider the checklist for effective meetings to the right:[38]

See section *10.2.1: Evaluating Meeting Effectiveness* for suggestions on how to measure meeting effectiveness.

Checklist for Effective Meetings

Effective meetings have:

- ✓ Clear purpose and goals
- ✓ Clearly defined objectives and outcomes
- ✓ Diverse perspectives at the table
- ✓ Shared understanding of meeting purpose, goals, and intended outcomes
- ✓ Clear roles and expectations for members
- ✓ Shared agreements for how the group will work together
- ✓ Planned agendas designed with consideration for diverse participants
- ✓ Meeting outcomes that moves toward action
- ✓ Methods, activities, and discussions that support the meeting purpose and goals
- ✓ Effective room set up and seating
- ✓ People who listen, participate, and take responsibility for action
- ✓ Action steps that are clearly defined, including roles, responsibilities, timelines, and measures of success
- ✓ Progress that's tracked, monitored, and communicated
- ✓ Feedback opportunities to improve future meetings and ongoing group work

Additional Resources: Meeting Effectiveness

- Conducting Effective Meetings Checklist, by the Community Tool Box
- Good Meeting Facilitation: Checklist, by Dr. Steven Rogelberg
- Meeting Quality Assessment Tool, by Dr. Steven Rogelberg

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[27]Art of Hosting Conversations that Matter Community of Practice.

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[30]Adapted from Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[31]Seeds for Change. "Facilitating Meetings." 2019.

[32]Seeds for Change. "Facilitating Meetings." 2019.

[33]Seeds for Change. "Facilitating Meetings." 2019.

[34]Seeds for Change. "Facilitating Meetings." 2019.

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CHAPTER 2

Centering Equity in Facilitation

In this chapter, we start by making the case for centering equity in CSD work. Then we turn to the inner work that is necessary to center equity followed by how CSD facilitation is a tool for centering equity. Equity is at the heart of community systems development work. Real change, transformation, and improvement within community systems come from a deep commitment to creating a more equitable society and building our will and capacity to do so individually and collectively.

2.1 CENTERING EQUITY IN CSD WORK

CS3 is ready to support you and others toward creating a racially equitable society where race no longer determines how one fares. The goal of CS3 is to work together to build the will, skill, knowledge, and capacity of the CSD community to both act toward equity and take steps to address inequity.

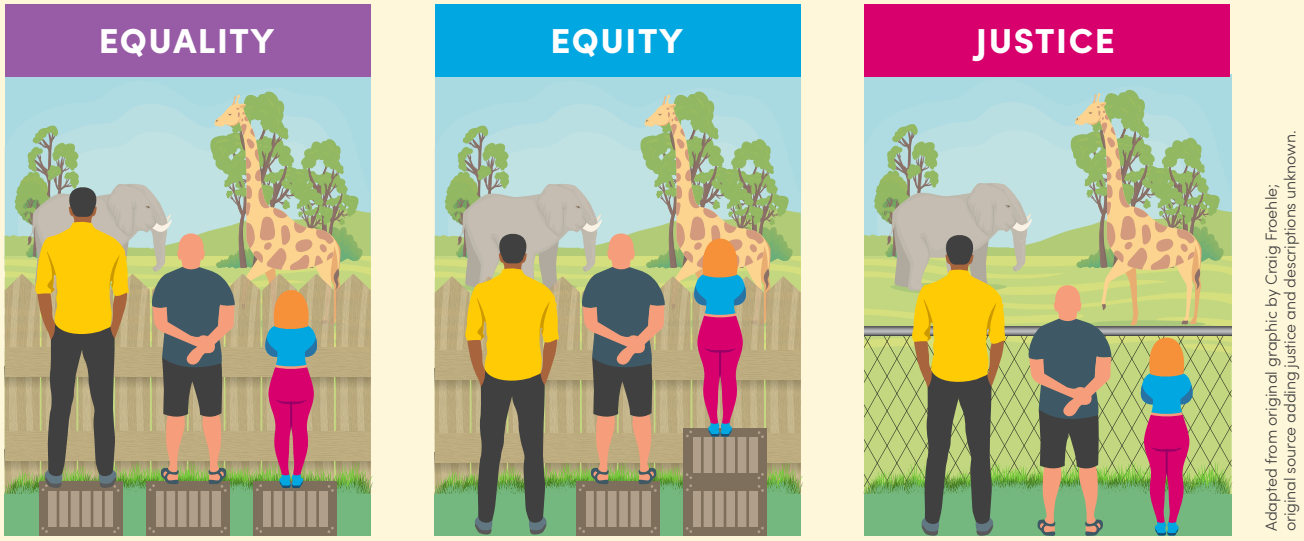
CS3 recognizes that there are many types of inequities and disparities within communities. For instance, along with race and ethnicity, individuals and groups may face discrimination, barriers, or inequity across various social circumstances, such as age, gender, sexual orientation, language, immigration status, place of origin, education, learning ability, income, disabilities, geographic location, housing arrangement, spiritual belief, and family background. Therefore, it is beneficial to bring a lens of equity to all communities.

2.1.1 The Case for Racial Equity

Any effort or conversation about racial inequity begins with understanding the differences between equity and equality. Race Forward provides helpful definitions which are worth reviewing. Basically, **equality** is about sameness in that everyone gets the same thing without consideration for the historical ways in which some people have been excluded or have limited power. If we provide the same resources or strategies for everyone, those who are differently situated are not likely to get the same outcomes.

Equity focuses on creating improved outcomes for marginalized groups which in the end improves outcomes for all. While the goal of diversity is a part of what needs to be addressed, it does not mean equity. For example, you may have diverse children within your community's early care centers. However, it's inequitable if only the predominately white side of the town's centers get access to additional family support.

CSD efforts create **justice** by addressing the root causes of systemic barriers that cause inequities. The graphic below illustrates the distinctions among equality, equity, and justice.



The assumption is that **everyone benefits from the same supports**. This is equal treatment.

Everyone gets the supports they need (this is the concept of "affirmative action"), thus producting equity.

All 3 can see the game without supports or accommodations because **the cause(s) of the inequity was addressed**. The systemic barrier has been removed.

Adapted from original graphic by Craig Froehle; original source adding justice and descriptions unknown.

According to the Illinois Early Learning Council *"a racially equitable society values and embraces all racial and ethnic identities. In such a society, one's racial/ethnic identity (particularly Black, Latino, Indigenous, and Asian) is not a factor in an individual's ability to prosper."*[3] It's important to center our CSD efforts on race and racial equity because:[4]

- **Racial disparities are deep and pervasive**. We know that racism is deeply embedded in institutions and creates racialized impacts. When we disaggregate data by race, we can see racial inequities in every metric.
- **Race is not the same thing as class**. Race and class are often conflated, but they are not the same thing. While it may be easier to talk about class, socioeconomic status, or income, it does not address the root cause of racial inequity.
- **Colorblindness**[5] **(also known as being race-neutral) does not work.** We need to be explicit about race and racism to name the root causes of the problem and confront historical racial inequities in our country, systems, and structures.
- **Being intentional helps impact processes and outcomes.** If racial equity is not intentionally embedded into decision-making processes from the start, then we will not achieve the intended outcomes to create change in institutions or structures in the long term.
- **There needs to be focus.** To achieve equitable outcomes in society, we need to address racism explicitly but not exclusively, e.g., race and health. Focusing on racial equity gives us a framework and tools that can be applied to other marginalized groups.

The CSD subcommittee of the Early Learning Council recommends steps for community collaborations to begin or continue their efforts toward creating a racially equitable community (see section *2.1.3: Using a Racial Equity Lens* later in this chapter). Adopting and embedding racial equity into your collaboration work is an important part of your facilitation role.

This handbook provides basic guidance, resources, and tools to support racial equity. Please note that what is included in this handbook is not an exhaustive resource for racial equity but rather a supporting tool for your CSD facilitation process and practices. The following resources further support the rationale for pursuing racial inequities:

Additional Resources: Why Racial Equity?

- Why Start with Racial Equity? by C4 Innovations
- What Does it Take to Embed a Racial Equity and Inclusive Lens? by Living Cities

Engaging in racial equity work is often difficult, yet necessary. Remember that pursuing racial equity is a journey and a daily practice within your facilitation role and collaboration efforts. Below are some starting points to consider as you center your collaboration efforts around racial equity in the early childhood system.[6]

Getting Started Tips: Adopting and Embedding Racial Equity

- Give self-permission to engage in racial equity work imperfectly.
- Create group agreements for how your collaboration will engage in discussions around racial equity together.
- Ensure racial equity work is about process as well as outcomes. Center and elevate those who have historically been underserved and/or excluded from the decision-making process.
- Continue to learn about racial equity and move towards action.
- Acknowledge that there is no such thing as colorblindness (race neutrality). This is because colorblindness/race neutrality is often promoted by those who dismiss the importance of race to proclaim the end of racism, and this inherently leads to inequitable outcomes.
- Use an asset-based language and approach rather than a deficit-based approach.
- Do not place racialized people in the role of educating white people and leading all racial equity work.
- Do not conflate race with class.

There are equity assessment tools to better understand where collaborations (or organizations) are on their equity journey, which can inform where to focus your efforts.

Additional Resources: Equity Self-Assessment

- Organizational Assessment Tools and Resources, by Racial Equity Tools
- Implicit Association Tests, by Harvard, Project Implicit
- Equity Organizational Self-Assessment, by ABLe Change
- Tool for Organizational Self-Assessment Related to Racial Equity, by Coalition for Communities of Color
- Race Matters: Organizational Self-Assessment, by the Annie E. Casey Foundation

2.1.2 Understanding Race and Racism

Race is a *"social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly color), ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, and racial classification to suit the social and economic interests of the dominant group at the time."*[8] Racial designations have changed over time according to the U.S. census, with the white or socially dominant group staying constant throughout.

This work requires that we look intentionally at the values and norms of behavior that perpetuate white dominant culture[9] (or the systemic, institutionalized centering of whiteness) within nonprofits that prevent people of color, and those from other under-represented groups, from feeling they belong or that their full talents and experiences are valued. This is a helpful tool for understanding white dominant culture.

By acknowledging, identifying, and calling out our own and other's racism, we can work towards creating anti-racist structures within our organizations, collaborations, and communities. Anti-racism requires that we change oppressive systems, structures, policies, practices, and attitudes.

RACISM

A system that provides privileges to those who are in the dominant group over those in the non-dominant group based on race. These privileges result in increased power and are reinforced through racial prejudice.[10]

ANTI-RACISM

The identification and elimination of racism by changing oppressive systems, structures, policies, practices, and attitudes so that historic, current, and future harm can be eliminated for people of color.[11]

It is important to know that there are different levels of racism operating and interacting at any given time. The Lens of Systemic Oppression is a way to intentionally focus on how any form of oppression, e.g., race, class, sexual orientation, may be negatively affecting people's ability to achieve what is important to them.[12]

DIFFERENT LEVELS OF RACISM FRAMEWORK[13]

Individual-Level Racism

Internalized Racism lies *within individuals.*

These are our private beliefs and biases about race and racism, influenced by our culture.

Interpersonal Racism occurs *between individuals.*

These are biases that occur when individuals interact with others and their private racial beliefs affect their public interactions.

Systemic-Level Racism

Institutional Racism occurs *within institutions and systems of power.*

It is the unfair policies and discriminatory practices of some institutions that routinely produce racially inequitable outcomes for people of color and advantages for white people.

Structural Racism is racial bias *among institutions and across society.*

It involves the cumulative and compounding effects of various societal factors including the history, culture, ideology, and interactions of institutions and policies that systemically privilege white people and disadvantage people of color.

We can use this lens to distinguish between individual and systemic levels of racism in our CSD work. Working on the individual level helps us to focus our attention, analysis, and strategies toward institutional and structural racism at the systemic level. Supporting the collaboration to address racism at any of these levels starts with your commitment to your racial consciousness as a facilitator (see section *2.2: Inner Work of Centering Equity*).

Investing our attention and strategies at the institutional and structural change levels is how we work towards racial justice. In doing so, we work toward *"the transformation of society to eliminate racial hierarchies and advance collective liberation where Black, Indigenous, Latino, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders, in particular, have the dignity, resources, power, and self-determination to fully thrive."* [14]

2.1.3 Using a Racial Equity Lens

Using a racial equity lens allows us to uncover the structures, policies, and behaviors that create and sustain inequitable outcomes for children and families.[15] Simply put, this lens is for thinking critically with inclusion and equity in mind, which is essential for our CSD work.

A **racial equity lens** is a critical thinking approach that allows us to be intentional and focus on equity in both processes and outcomes. A racial equity lens is like a pair of glasses that helps you see things from a different perspective. It gives us a clearer focus and more complete view. Unlike glasses that you can take off, a racial equity lens is something that we use continuously as facilitators and within our collaboration work.

Using this lens ensures we are asking the right questions and focusing on equity in process and outcomes as we build more equitable and inclusive systems. A racial equity lens is *"explicit in drawing attention to the inclusion of marginalized populations, typically communities of color, and can be adapted to focus on other communities."* [16]

See section *9.1: Centering Equity in CSD Meetings* to learn about how to use centering equity techniques in your CSD meeting facilitation.

2.1.4 Evolving to Center Equity

Centering equity means we bring an equity lens to everything we say, everything we do, every decision we make.

- As individuals, this means doing the inner work of self-reflection, awareness building, learning, and continuously understanding who we are and how we show up as we evolve on our personal equity journeys.
- As a facilitator, this means using our facilitation skills and techniques to center and better support inclusive processes in meeting design, conversation, and decision-making.
- As a collaboration, this starts with collective learning and capacity-building that supports an equity mindset and practice. It also means having a vision, goals, priorities, and plans that move the community and community systems to a mindset, policies, practices, and processes to ensure equitable outcomes.

To support your evolving focus and efforts to center equity, see section *2.2: Inner Work of Centering Equity*; section *2.3: CSD Facilitation as a Tool for Centering Equity; Chapter 7: Facilitating Equity-Focused Conversations;* and section *9.1: Centering Equity in CSD Meetings.*

2.2 INNER WORK OF CENTERING EQUITY

Before considering how you will bring equity and inclusion into your facilitation, do some reflection on equity, personal work, and preparation.

2.2.1 Your Equity Learning Journey

Each of us come to CSD work from differing sets of identities, social circumstances, backgrounds, and experiences. As a result, we each have different experiences with race and racism as well as our own biases. Therefore, anyone who facilitates equity-focused conversations should also reflect on their own equity learning journey.

Equity begins as an inside job. To embody equity and center it within our work, collaborations, and communities, we must be willing to do the inner work. There are two important aspects of this inner work: personal reflection and learning as well as digging deeper into understanding how history creates and perpetuates systemic racism.

Equity work requires a lifelong journey of inward exploration, learning, and evolution[17] Inner work involves exploring oneself, recognizing areas for learning and growth, and moving toward action for self and others. Spending time on our internal world before delving into equity-focused conversations is critical to our role, work, and communities. Some general points of self-reflection might include:

- Personal identity
- Personal background and social circumstances
- Personal equity journey
- Personal beliefs, ideas, experiences, and actions (conscious or unconscious, internalized or externalized)
- Personal history
- Personal position and privilege when it comes to inequity
- Personal patterns, assumptions, and biases
- Personal social and professional networks

Along with inner reflection, it is important to consider how historical policies, systems, and structures have created racially disparate conditions and outcomes in communities. Policies, practices, and systems affect us and our communities and the work we are doing, and it is important to understand how. Here are a few resources to consider:

Additional Resources: History and Structural Racism

- History of Racism and Movements: Laws and Policies, by Racial Equity Tools
- Structural Racism Explainer Collection, by Urban Institute
- Systemic and Structural Racism: Definitions, Examples, Health Damages, and Approaches to Dismantling, by Health Affairs
- How Structural Racism Works – Racist Policies as a Root Cause of U.S. Racial Health Inequities, by The New England Journal of Medicine

There are many resources that can support you in your inner work.

Additional Resources: Inner Work

- The Racial Healing Handbook: Practical Activities to Help you Challenge Privilege, Confront Systemic Racism & Engage in Collective Healing, by Anneliese A. Singh, PhD., LPC
- Illinois Early Childhood Racial Equity Efforts & Resources, Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development
- Say the Right Thing: How to Talk about Identity, Diversity, and Justice, by Kenji Yoshino and David Glasgow: This is a practical guide for navigating conversations across our differences.
- The Inner Work of Racial Justice: Healing Ourselves and Transforming Our Communities Through Mindfulness, by Rhonda V. Magee: An Insightful book about healing from injustices and dissolving our personal barriers to connection incorporates mindfulness and research for a more peaceful world.
- Mindful of Race: Transforming Racism from Inside Out, by Ruth King: This book discusses how we have been conditioned to think and react is at the root of both racial distress and racial healing; it allows readers of all backgrounds to examine the complexity of racial identity and the dynamics of oppression.
- Race Equity Toolkit, by FSG and the Collective Impact Forum: This tool invites you to reflect on your equity journey, history, patterns and biases, and social networks.
- Learning for Justice, by the Southern Poverty Law Center: This platform includes professional development resources on a variety of topics related to equity, race, and justice.
- Code Switch Podcast, by NPR: This podcast is hosted by journalists of color to tackle topics of race and how race affects every part of society.

2.2.2 Equity Conversation Comfort Self-Reflection

Sometimes we avoid talking about inequities, race, or racism because it is uncomfortable, or it may lead to conflict.[18] We also may feel that we are ill-prepared, underqualified, or lack the skills needed to tackle such subjects.[19] Often this avoidance comes from the fear of getting it wrong or unintentionally doing harm.[20] Part of supporting collaboration members in discussing inequities and disparities related to race or other social circumstances is about assessing and addressing our own fears. Consider the following adapted self-assessment exercise from Learning for Justice:

CONVERSATION COMFORT LEVEL SELF-REFLECTION[21]

1. Consider the following statements and select how you feel:

a.) I would rather not talk about inequities, race, and/or racism.

b.) I am very uncomfortable talking about inequities, race, and/or racism.

c.) I am sometimes uncomfortable talking about inequities, race, and/or racism.

d.) I am usually comfortable talking about inequities, race, and/or racism.

e.) I am very comfortable talking about inequities, race, and/or racism.

2. Complete the following statements:

a.) The difficult part of talking about inequities, race, and/or racism is...

b.) The beneficial part of talking about inequities, race, and/or racism is...

3. After reflecting on your comfort level, think about how to stay engaged when the topic of inequities, race, and/or racism arises.

a.) Do you feel ill-prepared to talk about inequities, race, and/or racism? What additional learning will help you facilitate equity-focused conversations, e.g., literature, podcasts, films, workshops, events, conferences, training, community of practice?

b.) Do you divert conversation when you sense discomfort about inequities, race, and/or racism? What facilitation skills and methods can support you and the group to stay with discomfort?

c.) Do you feel isolated in facilitating on topics of inequities, race, and/or racism? Who can you co-plan, co-facilitate, or debrief with?

d.) Do you feel concerned about your ability to answer participant questions about inequities, race, and/or racism? How can you respond to support shared and collective learning, e.g., accepting we do not have all the answers and embracing an opportunity to learn and evolve together?

2.3 CSD FACILITATION AS A TOOL FOR CENTERING EQUITY

Facilitation itself is a tool for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Facilitators can center diversity, equity, and inclusion into everything they do – from designing powerful questions to facilitating courageous conversations to designing and managing meetings, and more.

2.3.1 Centering Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Facilitation

Throughout this handbook, there are practical tips and ideas to help you build your equity facilitation skills (see section *4.8: Centering Equity and Inclusion; Chapter 7: Facilitating Equity-Focused Conversations;* and section *9.1: Centering Equity in CSD Meetings*). The table on the following page provides a few high-level considerations for centering diversity, equity, and inclusion in your facilitation.[22]

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CENTERING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

1. Ensure that your meetings are diverse and include those most impacted by racial inequity.

How this works in practice:

- Review local demographics and disparities data to understand who is being affected and whether they are engaged in understanding local level needs, barriers, and challenges.
- Aim to build a collaboration whose members proportionally represent the demographic breakdown of the community at a population level.
- Explore different types of perspectives to include in your meetings and processes (e.g., those experiencing the problem, those providing services, those supporting at the local level, those deciding on changes or how resources are used).[23]
- Recruit for diverse involvement by inviting many **sectors**, e.g., healthcare, childcare, schools, human services; different **organizational units**, e.g., divisions, departments, programs; and various **roles**, e.g., director, coordinator, administrator, teacher, childcare worker, in-home care worker, field staff, parents to your meetings.[24]
- Explore differences across community residents to include in your meetings, e.g., geography, race and ethnicity, income levels, type of household, gender, gender identity, age, current connection to services.[25]
- Include those most impacted by structural racial inequity and ensure that diverse participants are involved in meaningful ways in the creation and implementation of institutional policies and practices.

2. Design meeting activities so that collaboration members interact with and learn from diverse perspectives.

How this works in practice:

- Use activities that get people working with a variety of people.
- Form groups randomly by counting off or putting group numbers on blank name tags.
- Use an ice breaker to mix up partners and groups, e.g., *"Find someone who is wearing the same color as you."*
- Encourage people to connect with others they do not know, e.g., *"We can learn a lot from interacting with a wide range of people, so during the meeting please introduce yourself to someone new or speak with someone you don't know well."*

3. Encourage, acknowledge, and engage participation from a range of collaboration members.

How this works in practice:

- Notice the imbalance of participation and use a broad range of tools to encourage a broad range of voices. This could sound like:
  - *"I'd like to hear from someone who has not shared yet."*
  - *"Who else has something to add?"*
  - *"I'd like to open space for anyone who has not had a chance to share."*
  - *"Anyone have something different to say on this topic?"*
  - *"I am curious, what do* [e.g., early childcare workers, center directors, those new to the collaboration, parents] *think about this issue?*
- Use activities like:
  - **Pair and share:** Each member shares ideas, reactions, feelings, etc. with another and then reports back to the full group.
  - **Stations:** Divide into groups and members rotate between 4–6 topics at tables with chart paper to share their ideas and input. Then rotate and ask the group to give feedback or star ideas they like. Bring everyone together for a conversation.
  - **Individual think time:** Give members time to think and/or write their ideas individually. Then collect and read anonymously or do a gallery walk around the room.
- Be fully present. Respond intentionally and equitably to all participants by giving the same degree of attention and respect to all. This is an important way to check our own unconscious biases.

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CONSIDERATIONS FOR CENTERING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

4. Pay attention to the content of conversations and pause to invite diverse perspectives.

How this works in practice:

- Track the conversation and notice which issues of diversity, inclusion, and equity are not being discussed. This might include:
  - Broadening the conversation by saying, *"What topics of diversity have we discussed?"* or *"What other issues of difference might we notice?"*
  - Consider when topics of inclusion get addressed and which tend to not get on the table for discussion.
  - Invite participants to consider different backgrounds and social circumstances by asking, *"What about groups from different backgrounds or social circumstances? Are we considering them in our discussion / planning / outreach / strategy, etc.?"*
- Notice when a group avoids or moves away from certain topics. Raise awareness of this pattern. This might sound like:
  - *"I am noticing that every time we talk about race, someone changes the conversation back to socioeconomic status. Has anyone else noticed this? What do you think is happening?"*
  - *"I am noticing we only talk about issues of gender and sexism when a woman brings it up. Is anyone else tracking this? Why might this be happening?"*

5. Be aware of group dynamics and re-establish an accountable space for learning and sharing.

How this works in practice:

- Consistently create and maintain a learning space where all members are treated with respect.
  - Notice disruptive behaviors from group members, e.g., interruptions, talking over others, ignoring ideas/input of others, often first to speak, dismissing ideas/feelings of others, belittling or judging others, talking down to others.
  - Re-establish safety, connectedness, and respect, e.g., refer to your shared agreements or courageous conversation agreements to ground the group.
  - Intervene during a conversation or meeting to ensure all participants feel respected, heard, valued, and included. This might mean **calling in**, i.e., inviting people into the conversation. Sometimes it means **calling out**, i.e., bringing attention to a harmful or disrespectful comment. See sections *4.8.8: Calling In and Calling Out* and *7.4.4: Navigating the Conversation.*

See section *7.3.1: Creating Accountable Space* for more on safe, brave, and accountable space.

[1]Race Forward. "What is Racial Equity?"

[2]Race Forward. "What is Racial Equity?"

[3]Racial Equity Workgroup. Community Systems Development Subcommittee Integration and Alignment Committee, Illinois Early Learning Council. "Adopting and Embedding a Racial Equity Lens in Community Systems Development." June 2021.

[4]Adapted from the Racial Equity Workgroup. Community Systems Development Subcommittee Integration and Alignment Committee, Illinois Early Learning Council. "Adopting and Embedding." June 2021.

[5]Race Forward. "Race Reporting Guide." 2015.

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[7]Race Forward. "Race Reporting Guide." 2015.

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[9]White Supremacy Culture. "Divorcing White Supremacy Culture."

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[11]Crossroads Antiracism Organizing and Training.

[12]National Equity Process. "The Lens of Systemic Oppression."

[13]Adapted from Race Forward. "What is Racial Equity?"

[14]Race Forward. "What is Racial Equity?"

[15]National Equity Project. Coaching for Equity Course.

[16]Center for Nonprofit Advancement. "What is an Equity Lens?"

[17]Dominique Samari, JD, and Paul Schmitz. FSG. "Racial Equity Toolkit: A Reflection and Resource Guide for Collective Impact Backbone Staff and Partners." February 2023.

[18]Southern Poverty Law Center. Teaching Tolerance. "Let's Talk! Discussing Race, Racism, and other Difficult Topics with Students."

[19]Southern Poverty Law Center. Teaching Tolerance. "Let's Talk!"

[20]Southern Poverty Law Center. Teaching Tolerance. "Let's Talk!"

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[23]Drs. Erin Watson and Pennie Foster-Fishman. Michigan State University. "ABLe Pocket Guide."

[24]Drs. Erin Watson and Pennie Foster-Fishman. Michigan State University. "ABLe Pocket Guide."

[25]Drs. Erin Watson and Pennie Foster-Fishman. Michigan State University. "ABLe Pocket Guide."

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CHAPTER 3

Essential Facilitation Skills

In this chapter, we describe the most foundational skills needed for facilitating small and large group meetings dedicated to community systems development (CSD). Here we describe five essential facilitation skill sets and related sample skills, why you would use each skill, and how to practice it. The five skill sets are emotional and social intelligence, asking powerful questions, active listening, encouraging participation, and organizing the conversation flow.

3.1 EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

Good facilitation starts with one's personal skills. Here we focus on what Daniel Goleman refers to as emotional and social intelligence. Goleman popularized the importance of these intelligences for leadership.[1] Early learning and care centers and K-12 schools refer to this as social and emotional learning (SEL).[2]

Regardless of the name, both include the same four core competencies each of which includes a wide variety of specific skills: **self-awareness, self-management, social awareness**, and **relationship skills**. School-based SEL includes responsible decision-making as a fifth competency.[3]

These skills help you to:

- Recognize and regulate your emotions in moments of tension or conflict
- Express empathy and understanding of others
- Improve relationships with and between collaboration members
- Create a culture of collaboration
- Motivate and support others
- Resolve conflicts
- Hold accountable space during conversations on diversity, equity, and inclusion (see section *7.3.1: Creating Accountable Space*)

The emotional and social intelligence of the facilitator and the group drives behavior and impacts people positively or negatively.[4] Your commitment to continually deepening your emotional and social intelligence can have a tremendous impact on the group and group process. You can help others develop their emotional and social intelligence through your ability to use these skills to support effective group processes.

Learn about the four primary dimensions of emotional and social intelligence:
1) self-awareness, 2) self-management, 3) social awareness, and 4) relationship management in the table below.[5]

SEL Competency	Why Use It	How to Practice It
3.1.1 Self-awareness Knowing and paying attention to one's internal state and impulses, including the ability to tune into your thoughts, feelings, and actions	• To understand yourself, your goals, intentions, responses, behavior, and feelings • To build confidence in yourself and your skills • To be aware of biases	• Be present • Recognize and acknowledge your thoughts and feelings • Regularly check in with yourself • Reflect daily
3.1.2 Self-management Managing one's internal state and impulses	• To manage yourself, your responses, behavior, and feelings • To be centered and grounded	• Pause then respond constructively rather than reactively • Practice self-awareness • Take breaths or relax your face and body to help you respond calmly
3.1.3 Social awareness Paying attention to others' feelings, needs, and perspectives	• To recognize the emotions of others • To be able to convey empathy • To be inclusive • To understand things from multiple perspectives • To support the development of others	• Stay present in the moment • Pay attention to nonverbal behavior, such as body language, gestures, and facial expressions • Invite others to share their feelings, needs, and perspectives • Validate other's worries, fears, or concerns
3.1.4 Relationship skills Managing relationships with and among others	• To build healthy relationships and teams • To inspire others, manage conflicts, and foster teamwork to move people forward	• Set clear group expectations • Establish ground rules • Build a culture of listening with full attention and minimizing distractions • Value relationships

For more detailed descriptions of the specific skills related to each of these SEL competencies, refer to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning's Interactive CASEL Wheel.

3.2 ASKING POWERFUL QUESTIONS

Asking powerful questions is one of the most important facilitation skills. A question is powerful when it is purposeful, well-constructed, clear, concise, focused, and delivered in a timely way. In section *4.4: Using Questions Effectively* we go into more detail about what makes questions powerful and how to use them.

Asking powerful questions allows you and the collaboration to:

- Gain insight into different perspectives
- Build a shared understanding and collective knowledge
- Think critically about problems and opportunities
- Uncover misunderstandings
- Drive quality and inclusive dialogue
- Support group process, decision-making, and problem-solving[6]

When you effectively ask powerful questions, you use skills from all the other essential skill areas. Below are some question types, why you might use them, and some example questions.[7]

Type of Question	Why Use It	Examples
3.2.1 Open-ended A question that cannot be answered with a binary response like "yes" or "no" and requires a more thoughtful response. These questions often start with "what," "why," or "how."	• To stimulate thinking • To encourage deeper thinking and discussion • To discourage definitive positions	• *What do you think about...?* • *What ideas do you have for...?* • *What happens if...?"* • *How does this problem impact..."* • *Why are families experiencing...?*
3.2.2 Close-ended A question that can only be answered with a limited number of responses, e.g., "yes" or "no" or multiple choice ("strongly agree," "agree")	• To limit answers to focus on a particular point • To gain clarity • To make distinctions • To gain consensus on something • To eliminate ambiguity	• *Would everyone agree that we decided to...?* • *Do we have consensus to move forward with...?* • *How many people vote for moving this to action?*
3.2.3 Probing A question that requires more detail or clarification. They often start with "what/why exactly..." or "what specifically..." or "can you tell me more about..."	• To explore an issue in greater detail • To encourage deeper thinking about an issue • To gather more information or details • To gain clarification on a topic • To draw out more information from people	• *Can you tell me more about...?* • *Can you describe...?* • *Can you give me some background or context about...?* • *Can you explain...?* • *Why exactly do you think that's happening?* • *What specifically do you experience when...?*

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Type of Question	Why Use It	Examples
3.2.4 Clarifying A question used to clarify information. They often use words like "how much," "how many," "what specifically," or "who specifically."	• To determine facts • To deepen or broaden understanding	• *How many children...?* • *How much do partners...?* • *Who is involved in...?* • *What I think you're saying is... am I right?*
3.2.5 Redirecting A question used to turn the question back to the rest of the group.	• To open the conversation to others • To generate additional thoughts or ideas • To honor the group's perspective rather than the facilitators	• *What do others think about...?* • *How does this relate to what [group member] said?* • *Who else has experience with this that is willing to share?*
3.2.6 Reflective A question used to restate or summarize	• To check or confirm understanding • To bring closure to a discussion • To validate feelings	• *What I am hearing is...? Am I understanding you correctly?* • *So, you are feeling... is that right?* • *Where do we have agreement?* • *Can someone summarize our position? Conclusion? Next steps?*
3.2.7 Visioning A question used to envision the future or consider new ideas	• To envision a future scenario, outcome, or world • To consider new ideas	• *What would this look like in an ideal world or scenario?* • *If we solved the problem and fulfilled our purpose, what would the world look like and feel like?* • *What will it take to....?* • *If we could design a perfect outcome for..., what would it look like?* • *How might we...?*
3.2.8 Equity questions A question that gets us to pause and consider the equity impacts *Note: Each of the question types above can also be equity-focused*	• To build awareness of inequities • To question biases and assumptions • To examine unintended consequences • To consider the equity impacts	• *What are our blind spots and biases?* • *Who may be burdened or disadvantaged?* • *How could we create more equity, inclusion, and belonging?* • *How are we moving towards more and/or improved equity and inclusion practices?* • *What changes can we make to ensure more equitable results?*

See also section *4.4: Using Questions Effectively* for additional information and techniques for asking powerful questions.

3.3 ACTIVE LISTENING

Active listening is an essential part of effective communication. Essentially, it is the ability to focus deeply on a speaker, understand their message, comprehend information, and respond thoughtfully. There are several benefits of active listening, for you and your collaboration, including to:

- Build connections and collaboration
- Build trust, empathy, and understanding
- Increase knowledge and understanding of topics
- Avoid missing critical information
- Identify and solve problems[8, 9, 10]

Overall, this skill will help you guide groups to make better collaborative decisions and plans that take everyone's perspectives and needs into account (referred to as **inclusive decisions** in this handbook). A few active listening skills are shared in the table below:[11]

Skill	Why Use It	How to Practice It
3.3.1 Paying attention Listening closely to what someone is saying with the goal of understanding rather than responding	• To focus on and understand what someone is saying • To increase trust and empathy	• Minimize distractions such as noise or interruptions • Pay close attention to what someone is saying • Show the speaker that you are listening by making eye contact, nodding, smiling, turning your body towards a person, or making small listening noises like *"mmm"* or *"uh huh."* • Refocus when you notice you are thinking about a response or your next facilitative move while the speaker is talking
3.3.2 Mirroring Matching or repeating back exactly what the speaker says	• To show you are trying to understand the speaker's thoughts and feelings exactly • To allow the speaker to hear their words and clarify, if necessary	• Use the speaker's words or some of their words and tone to mirror back what they are saying. • Avoid overusing this skill as it could be distracting and annoying
3.3.3 Paraphrasing Restating the same information, using slightly different words, to concisely reflect what the speaker is saying	• To test your understanding of what you heard • To allow the speaker to hear and focus on their own thoughts or ideas	• Use different words than the speaker that concisely summarize what the speaker said • Use synonyms • Change from active to passive voice

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Skill	Why Use It	How to Practice It
3.3.4 Reflecting Responding to the speaker by reflecting the thoughts and feelings you heard based on their words, tone of voice, body posture, and/or gestures	• To acknowledge and validate what someone is saying or feeling • To confirm understanding of what they said and how they feel about it	• Reflect by saying: – *"So, you feel..."* – *"It sounds like..."* – *"For you, it's like..."* – *"You're wondering if..."* – *"So, what I am hearing is..."*
3.3.5 Questioning Using questions to better understand someone's idea or help them clarify their ideas See also section *3.2: Asking Powerful Questions*	• To help someone elaborate on and/or clarify their idea • To clarify comments that may be misinterpreted • To further check understanding of any idea	• Use an open-ended question when more information is needed: – *"Can you say more about..."* – *"How does everyone feel about..."* • Use a close-ended question to zero in on something specific: – *"Will you please share an example of what you mean by...?"* – *"When you say ____, do you mean ____?"*
3.3.6 Listening for logic and understanding[12] Listening for the logic of the speaker's reasoning and assessing whether the group understands it	• To offset the tendency of the group to dismiss constructive criticism of an idea • To support the person making the critique to share her/his thoughts	• Watch for signs of logical analysis: – Challenges an assertion – Identifies a bias – Seeks to clarify – Calls attention to an assumption – Points out a contradiction • Pay attention to how the group responds: – If positive, stay out of the way – If speaker's reasoning is dismissed: paraphrase it, draw out the speaker (see next section), then ask the group for reactions
3.3.7 Summarizing a speaker's point of view Checking your and the group's understanding of a speaker's point	• To help a speaker feel heard • To check for understanding • To keep everyone focused and on track	• Verbally share back what you heard the speaker say • Ask if your summary is accurate • Optional: Ask the group if they have questions about what was shared

See section *4.2: Communicating Effectively* for how to support the group's active listening.

3.4 ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION

There are some key skills to create an inclusive, participatory, and positive environment.[13] Here are some reasons why it is important to encourage participation in conversations and meetings:

- To ensure participants feel their attendance and contributions are valued
- To ensure balanced participation and inclusivity
- To promote collaboration and teamwork
- To improve group process and problem-solving

Skill	Why Use It	How to Practice It
3.4.1 Asking powerful questions Using questions that are appropriate for their intended use, focused on appropriate content, constructed well, clear, and bias-free	• To stimulate individual and collective thinking • To invite broader participation in the conversation • To expand or narrow the conversation	• See sections *3.4: Asking Powerful Questions* and *4.4: Using Questions Effectively* for more on how to practice asking powerful questions
3.4.2 Drawing people out Helping people clarify, develop, or refine their ideas in a non-directive, supportive manner	• To help people think more deeply and share their ideas with the group • To build connections between ideas • To create an inclusive environment	• Use probing or clarifying questions. • Ask for concrete examples. • Invite further elaboration by saying: *"Tell me more."*
3.4.3 Making space Creating a no-pressure opportunity for a *person* to join the conversation	• To support an individual who may need help getting into the conversation • To create an inclusive environment • To encourage differing viewpoint	• Pay attention to facial and body language that might indicate someone has something to add. Ask: *"___, you look as if you might have something to add?"* • If someone nods or appears to be thinking and it feels right, ask: *"Is there something you'd like to share?*
3.4.4 Encouraging Creating an opening for *people* to participate without putting anyone on the spot	• To provide a subtle way for more people to find a way into the conversation • To help others connect to or focus on the subject • To engage more people in the conversation • To create an inclusive environment	• Pause and allow others time to enter the conversation. • Ask questions such as: – "Who else has something to add?" – "What do others think?" – "Can anyone give an example of what ____ just described?" – "Would someone from table two share what came up in your conversation?" • Ask those with relevant expertise, technical skills, or specific roles to share. • Vary your methods to encourage interaction and active sharing of ideas.

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Skill	Why Use It	How to Practice It
3.4.5 Balancing Helping the group broaden the conversation by including other perspectives that have not yet been shared	• To make room for diverse perspectives, not just a dominant few • To create accountable space for sharing • To maintain control of the group and environment • To create space for democratic decision-making	• Ask vocal people to wait and invite others to share their perspectives: – *"Who else has something to add?"* – *"We've heard how many people think about ___. What are some other ways to think about this?"* • Say: *"Let's hear from someone that has not spoken."*
3.4.6 Empathizing Understanding and sharing what another person is feeling	• To imagine what it is like to feel what another person is feeling	• Say what you think the person is feeling: *"I guess it is a big disappointment not to receive the grant."* • Identify feelings that might be hard to communicate to others: *"This seems to be a hard topic to talk about with this group."*
3.4.7 Validating Legitimizing and accepting another person's perspective or feelings without agreeing that it is correct	• To acknowledge how someone is feeling or thinking without taking sides • To support divergent thoughts and feelings • To value multiple perspectives and ways of thinking and being	• Paraphrase or draw out the person's perspective or how they are feeling. • Determine if this person needs support. • If they do, acknowledge what was said without agreeing: – *"I understand what you're saying."* – *"Now I understand where you're coming from."* – *"I know how that feels."*

While encouraging participation and validating perspectives are essential skills for facilitation, it is also important to know when to "**call in"** and when to "**call out**" to bring attention to the potential harm caused by bias or discrimination. See section *4.8.8: Calling In and Calling Out*. See also section *4.5: Inviting Broad and Balanced Participation* for participation techniques.

White dominate culture can also be baked into our thinking, speaking, and communicating. There may be times to shift from a white dominant culture toward an alternative way of dialoguing, conversing, and interacting that respects cultural differences and leans toward inclusivity. Here is a tool for alternatives to white dominate culture.

3.5 ORGANIZING CONVERSATION FLOW

Organizing the conversation flow refers to your skills and actions that help the group have a conversation.[14] More specifically, this includes how the facilitator manages the conversation when multiple people want to contribute to the conversation at the same time, keeping track of various lines of thought, helping people connect their contributions to the main topic, identifying key themes in the conversation, and periodically summarizing the main points to check for shared understanding or bring a conversation to a close.

Skill	Why Use It	How to Practice It
3.5.1 Gathering ideas	• To help a group quickly generate lots of ideas	• Concisely state the task or question and the allotted time. • Encourage lots of ideas. • Ask for no judging or discussing of ideas. • Use more mirroring rather than paraphrasing as people share. • Visually capture the ideas so all can see.
3.5.2 Stacking Determining who will speak in what order when multiple people want to speak	• To establish a speaking sequence so that everyone knows when they will have a turn to speak • To help people listen to one another	• Watch for raised hands. • Respond by saying people's names in the order in which they will speak. • Summarize the stack order periodically, if needed. • Encourage participants not to interrupt until it is their turn to speak.
3.5.3 Tracking Keeping track of the various lines of thought that are happening at the same time within a conversation	• To keep track of different aspects of a conversation • To help people see the broader conversation rather than focus on a single aspect	• Pause the conversation and share that you want to summarize what is being discussed so far. • Briefly state each part of the conversation. • Check if you are correct or if anything is missing. • Resume the conversation.
3.5.4 Asking for themes Asking the group to identify the themes within their conversation	• To understand the many ways the group is understanding a problem or issue • To engage the group in identifying the various ways of thinking	• Point out that there are several issues or aspects of the issue being discussed at the same time. • Invite them to pause the conversation and identify the themes. • Record their themes on a visual chart. • Determine whether they want to return to the broader conversation or focus on a particular theme.
3.5.5 Summarizing the conversation Recapping the main ideas or points of a conversation	• To help a group review where they are in a conversation • To check for understanding of major points or perspectives • To move the conversation to closure	• Repeat the above step for the remaining themes. • Depending on your purpose for summarizing, ask if: – You've missed anything – There is agreement on themes or points – They are ready to close the conversation

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Skill	Why Use It	How to Practice It
3.5.6 Linking ideas Inviting speakers to explain the relevance of what they said to the broader conversation	• To help the group understand how someone's point, which may seem off topic, connects to the topic being discussed • To illuminate a possible breakthrough idea	• Paraphrase what the speaker said. • Ask them to connect their point to the topic of discussion. • Validate it by paraphrasing what they said. • Decide what to do next: – Ask the speaker to share more – Invite reactions from the group – Ask for other ideas or reactions and start a stack, if necessary – Start or add to a parking lot if off topic
3.5.7 Listening for common ground Summarizing where a group agrees and disagrees	• To move beyond polarized positions • To instill hope by focusing on common ground	• Say that you are hearing both similarities and differences. • Summarize the group's differences. • Summarize the group's common ground. • Ask if you have it right.

Learn more about when to use these skills throughout the handbook, especially in *Chapter 4: Facilitation Core Tasks and Techniques* and *Chapter 6: Facilitating Small Group Conversations*.

[1]Daniel Goleman. "Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More than IQ, Daniel Goleman." 1996. Daniel Goleman. "Working with Emotional Intelligence." 1998. Daniel Goleman. "Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships." 2006.

[2]Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. "Fundamentals of SEL."

[3]Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. "Fundamentals of SEL."

[4]Institute for Health and Human Potential. "What is Emotional Intelligence?" 2019.

[5]Excellence in Public Service. "Facilitation Skills," 2010.

[6]National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, Office for Coastal Management. "Planning and Facilitating Effective Meetings." October 2016.

[7]Adapted from Excellence in Public Service. "Facilitation Skills." 2010. Public Design for Equity. "Equity Pause Questions." National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, Office for Coastal Management. "Planning and Facilitating." October 2016.

[8]National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Department of Commerce, Office for Coastal Management. "Planning and Facilitating." October 2016. "Facilitation Techniques." 2010.

[9]Patricia Prendiville. Combat Poverty Agency. "Developing Facilitation Skills: A Handbook for Group Facilitators." 1995.

[10]Seeds for Change. "Active Listening." 2021.

[11]Adapted from: Seeds for Change. "Active Listening." 2021. "Facilitating Meetings." 2019. Excellence in Public Service. "Facilitation Skills." 2010. Indeed Editorial Team. "Active Listening Skills for Successful Communication." December 8, 2021. Sam Kaner, Lenny Lind, Catherine Toldi, Susan Fisk, and Duane Berger. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making." 2014.

[12]Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[13]Adapted from: Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making." 2014. Excellence in Public Service. "Facilitation Skills." 2010. Patricia Prendiville. Combat Poverty Agency. "Developing Facilitation Skills: A Handbook for Group Facilitators." 1995.

[14]Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making." 2014. Seeds for Change. "Facilitation Tools for Meetings and Workshops," 2019. Patricia Prendiville. Combat Poverty Agency. "Developing Facilitation Skills." 1995.

CHAPTER 4

Facilitation Core Tasks and Techniques

In this chapter, we outline what facilitators do on the most basic level by breaking it into eight core facilitation tasks. For each task, we describe it, note related facilitation skills (from chapter three), and share techniques you can use to perform the task. These tasks align with the core facilitator competencies described in section *1.1.5: Facilitator Competencies* and are relevant for both small and large group meetings.

The core tasks include:

- Demonstrating personal effectiveness
- Communicating effectively
- Creating a positive and inclusive climate
- Using questions effectively
- Inviting broad and balanced participation
- Maintaining focus and managing the process
- Managing group dynamics
- Centering equity and inclusion

4.1 DEMONSTRATING PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS

At the foundation of skillful facilitation is our personal effectiveness. For this reason, demonstrating personal effectiveness is the first core task we address. Demonstrating personal effectiveness is fundamentally about being a role model by demonstrating your emotional and social intelligence, engaging respectfully with others, gaining others' commitment, and upholding values of inclusion and equity.

The following callout highlights these actions, related facilitation skill areas, and several techniques to guide your facilitation.

This Competency is About:

- Being a role model
- Demonstrating emotional and social intelligence
- Engaging with others respectfully and effectively
- Gaining commitment of others by understanding what is meaningful to them
- Upholding values of inclusion and equity

Skill Sets

- Emotional and Social Intelligence
- Asking Powerful Questions
- Active Listening

Techniques

- Know Yourself
- Be Organized
- Prepare Yourself
- Be Authentic
- Be Mindful

4.1.1 Facilitation Skills for Demonstrating Personal Effectiveness

At the core of personal effectiveness is our emotional and social intelligence. There are four main skill sets that we can develop to enhance our personal effectiveness: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills (see section *3.1: Emotional and Social Intelligence*).

Asking powerful questions and active listening are an outward expression of our personal effectiveness. Our skillfulness in these areas builds upon our emotional and social intelligence. Being self-aware and able to manage our personal thoughts and feelings while listening to others with deep empathy allow us to ask powerful questions. Active listening and asking powerful questions are dependent upon, and a result of, our personal effectiveness.

4.1.2 Know Yourself

Knowing yourself is about practicing self-awareness. The more we develop our self-awareness the more conscious we can be of how our values, mindsets, feelings, goals, experiences, culture, and more influence our facilitation. By developing our self-knowledge, we become more aware of our personal mental states, biases, behavioral tendencies, and personality traits. Our self-knowledge helps us be more conscious in the moment. This in turn helps us to be aware when our biases and preferences enter our facilitation.

4.1.3 Be Organized

Being organized before, during, and after the meeting pays off both in how people experience the meeting and its outcome. Before the conversation or meeting, take time to design a good agenda, prepare materials, set up for facilitation methods you plan to use, etc. During the meeting, being organized includes having the room set up properly to accommodate meeting processes, materials and resources being ready to go, technology set up, etc. Being organized creates a more seamless experience for meeting participants, which allows them to stay focused on the meeting content and their relationships with each other.

After the meeting, share meeting notes in a timely and effective way, follow up on action items and start to develop the next agenda. This will allow for continuity and flow from one meeting to the next.

4.1.4 Prepare Yourself

An often-overlooked part of effective facilitation is the way you show up. You have most likely noticed the difference between facilitating when you were deeply present, well-prepared, and regulated – versus when you showed up rushed, unprepared, and nervous about the meeting. Taking a few minutes for yourself before people arrive may be one of the most important things you can do to facilitate a good conversation or meeting.

Self-Preparation Checklist

- ✓ Be diligent about developing a well-designed meeting plan.
- ✓ Arrive at the meeting space with plenty of time to set up and collect yourself before you expect meeting participants to arrive.
- ✓ Pause and check-in with yourself before the meeting starts. This could be a few slow, conscious breaths, a quick body scan, or other practice that helps you feel grounded and centered.
- ✓ Greet people as they arrive with your full attention to strengthen your connection with them.
- ✓ Release any concerns you have about the meeting. Envision the outcome you desire.

4.1.5 Be Authentic

To be authentic is to show up as yourself.[1] It makes you more relatable and trustworthy. While facilitating calls us to create a good plan, you can bring your own personality and style to the way you execute it. Instead of rigidly following your plan, e.g., reading a script you prepared, execute it in a way that is flexible and natural to how you would normally interact with a group. The group will trust you more, and you will be more effective, because you are fully present in the process with the group.

4.1.6 Be Mindful

This is another way of saying "be present and use your self-awareness."[2] Being present means you are fully focused on what is happening with the group. You are not distracted by other things that may be happening outside the meeting or your self-talk. Use your self-awareness to notice when your mind starts to wander from the group.

4.2 COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

Effective communication is another foundational facilitator competency. This includes reading, understanding, and responding to verbal and non-verbal cues, which can help us engage others and build relationships. Communicating effectively allows us to engage with others, build relationships among group members, address group dynamics, and support the group to reach their goals. The following call out describes the actions associated with this task, related facilitation skill areas, and several techniques to guide your facilitation.

This Competency is About:

- Making effective verbal and visual presentations
- Demonstrating active listening and effective questioning techniques to engage others
- Reading, understanding, and responding appropriately to nonverbal communication
- Using nonverbal communication techniques

Skill Sets

- Emotional and Social Intelligence
- Asking Powerful Questions
- Active Listening

Techniques

- Speaking Clearly
- Paying Attention to Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication
- Being Familiar with Personality Styles and Communication Preferences
- Responding to Participants' Contributions
- Supporting the Group's Active Listening

4.2.1 Facilitation Skills for Communicating Effectively

Communicating effectively is connected to the same three skill sets as demonstrating personal effectiveness: emotional and social intelligence, asking powerful questions, and active listening. Communication, like personal effectiveness, is a foundational competency that helps us interact well with others.

Our skillfulness with the four core competencies of emotional and social intelligence positively increases our capacity to communicate effectively. We cannot communicate effectively with others without the ability to notice and understand our and others' feelings.[3] Effective communication is enhanced through active listening (see sections *3.3: Active Listening and 3.2: Asking Powerful Questions*).

4.2.2 Speaking Clearly

Speaking clearly means you say what you mean in clear and concise language. As a facilitator less is more when it comes to communication. We want to say what we need to say without taking up a lot of airtime (referred to as **brevity of expression**).[4]

Remember, our primary responsibility is to create the conditions for an effective conversation and group process. For example, as we initiate a conversation, we clearly communicate the topic and its purpose, provide appropriate framing and explain how the conversation will happen. As we do this, it is important to choose our words carefully and use brevity of expression.

Speaking clearly also means we are aware of the words we use. This includes using accessible, bias-free language and being careful not to use acronyms or unfamiliar terminology. Use your self-awareness and management skills ongoing to monitor, and adjust, if necessary, the clarity and conciseness of your speech.

4.2.3 Paying Attention to Verbal and Non-Verbal Facilitation Communication

A facilitator's verbal and non-verbal communication has a profound effect on the group. When verbal and non-verbal communication is inconsistent, it can lead to confusion and even distrust.[5] Tone of voice, volume, and pitch influence how a group interprets a message and how they respond.[6] For example, a request for additional thoughts can yield little response if the facilitator asks in an unenthusiastic manner.

The language that you use also matters.[7] Avoid jargon and acronyms and consider your pace and pronunciation if there are people in the room who speak a primary language that is different from the rest of the group. Non-verbal communication includes body language, e.g., whether you stand or sit to match the group, your position in the room relative to the group.

VERBAL MESSAGES

- Pay attention to your tone of voice, volume, and pitch
- Be aware of the language you use, e.g., avoid abbreviations and acronyms
- Know and accommodate the primary languages group members speak
- Slow your pace and use clear pronunciation if some people's primary language is different from the rest of the group

NON-VERBAL MESSAGES

- Be aware of how you hold your body and the message it conveys
- Stand or sit to match the group and promote equality
- Pay attention to other possible influences on communication, e.g., gender, social class, race and ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, how you dress[8]

4.2.4 Being Familiar with Personality Traits and Communication Preferences[9]

People prefer to communicate in different ways depending on whether they tend to be more extroverted or introverted. Most groups include a mix of introverts and extroverts. There are different facilitation techniques that work best for each type. So, it's good to use a mix of facilitation techniques that work for each type. It also helps to know whether the group is dominated by one type.

Personality Trait	Characteristics	Facilitator Techniques
Extroverts	• Think out loud; respond and share information quickly • Talk more than listen • Change topics and opinions frequently as discussion progresses	• Provide lively group discussions that allow people to contribute freely • Create space for others to find a way into the discussion
Introverts	• Process information internally • Listen more than talk • Share thoughtful ideas • Prefer to reflect before commenting or asking question	• Monitor the conversation pace • Make space for introverts to enter the conversation

4.2.5 Responding to Participants' Contributions

When a participant contributes to the conversation, we want to acknowledge their effort. A simple *"Thank you"* is a good starting place for most comments, assuming they are respectful and appropriate. We want to be careful of making evaluative comments, like *"That's great."* Even if it is great, our first response is always to acknowledge and thank the person for contributing to the conversation.

The challenge with using evaluative comments is that you may not always be able to say, *"That's great."* The group may begin to think you are taking sides rather than being neutral. Either way, we almost always want to acknowledge efforts to contribute to the conversation.

Sometimes, however, we need to provide feedback if a comment was unclear, incomplete, or disrespectful. In these cases, you may need to give the speaker some feedback. Provide feedback thoughtfully for it to be well-received and effective. Consider the following guidance on providing feedback:[10]

Feedback Characteristic	What to Do
Specific and descriptive	Notice the specific behavior, then describe it without judgment
Helpful and balanced	Share positive and constructive feedback in a fair way
Receiver's needs	Consider what you know about the receiver, how your feedback may impact them, and whether private feedback might be better
Impact and consequences	Share the effect of the behavior on others, the work, and process
Well-timed	Determine when is the best time to provide feedback, e.g., in the moment or outside of the meeting.

Your feedback does not need to follow all these considerations. Use them to guide what is appropriate for each situation and the people involved.

See the table below for examples of how you might respond to specific types of contributions.

Type of Contribution	Facilitator Response
A response that contributes to the current conversation	*"Thank you for sharing."*
A vague or unclear contribution	*"Thank you for sharing. Please share more about..."*
An off-topic contribution	• *"Thank you for sharing. I hear what you are saying, and it seems to me that it is more about..."* • *"Thank you for sharing that point. Since that is more about ____, let's put that in the **parking lot** for later."*
An inappropriate contribution	• *"I want to remind us of our group agreements about XYZ."* • *"I feel uncomfortable with the use of the word XYZ and wonder how we might reframe that idea... any suggestions?"* • *"Let's take a pause and see what the group feels about that idea..."* • *"Can you clarify what you mean by XYZ? I want to make sure I understand."* • *"I heard you say XYZ, is that what you meant?"* Repeating their words can help the speaker rethink their word choice. • *"Let's consider this from a different perspective to check our bias..."* See section *4.8.8: Calling in and Calling out* to bring attention to harm, bias, or discrimination.

4.2.6 Supporting the Group's Active Listening

Consider this: *"We only **hear half** of what is said to us, **understand** only **half** of that, **believe** only **half** of that, and **remember** only **half** of that!"*[11] In other words, the responsibility for good communication falls upon the speaker *and* the listener. This is where active listening is needed. Facilitators must be excellent listeners. Through our active listening we can help speakers make their points and help the group listen to understand them. Then we can make space for their responses.

Over time and through our facilitation, we can support the group to become better listeners and be more responsible for their own listening. Better listening supports more trust, encourages more sharing and participation, and creates a space for democratic decision-making.

Techniques to Support the Group's Active Listening	
Helping People Listen to Each Other	Hold the space and support people to listen, hear, and understand each other. Consider setting a ground rule for not interrupting each other. Encourage the group to acknowledge the message and speaker by saying *"Thanks for sharing."* or *"What I am hearing is..."*
Go-round	Pose a question then invite each person to share their response while everyone else listens. During a go-round there is no conversation. Everyone who wants to respond does so one at a time without any comment. You can structure the order or popcorn it, i.e., let people speak as they feel ready. Encourage everyone to take a slight pause between each speaker.[12]
Listen in Pairs or Triads	Put people into pairs or triads and give each person a fixed time to talk about a topic or respond to a question. This is a great way to give speakers the time and space to share their thoughts while encouraging others to listen rather than think about their responses. When time is up, the listeners can offer summaries of what they heard, share responses, or ask follow-up questions. Then rotate the speaker role.[13]
Reflective Pause	After group members share new information or strong emotions, invite them to take a silent pause to process their own thoughts and emotions. The facilitator or group members can encourage reflective pauses.[14]

4.3 CREATING A POSITIVE AND INCLUSIVE CLIMATE

Creating a positive and inclusive climate is about creating the conditions for relationship-building, respect, trust, communication, and collaboration. This includes welcoming people and creating a sense of belonging to the group. It also involves meeting the group's needs and preferences, managing group energy, and creating a participatory space that makes room for everyone to contribute their best thinking. The following call out highlights these actions, related facilitation skill areas, and several techniques to guide your facilitation.

This Competency is About:

- Helping people feel welcome and part of the group
- Getting to know the group and adapting your facilitation to meet their needs and goals
- Creating the conditions for everyone to contribute their best thinking
- Paying attention to the group's collective energy and mood

Skill Sets

- Emotional and Social Intelligence
- Asking Powerful Questions
- Active Listening
- Encouraging Participation
- Organizing the Conversation Flow

Techniques

- Check-ins and Check-outs
- Icebreakers and Energizers
- Team Building Activities
- Debriefing with What? So What? Now What?
- Working with Group Energy

4.3.1 Facilitation Skills for Creating a Positive and Inclusive Climate

All the core facilitation skill sets described in *Chapter 3: Essential Facilitation Skills* are important for creating a positive and inclusive climate. Each skill set supports group members to feel seen, heard, and invited into the conversation and process. When you use these skills, you can balance individual and group needs in a way that leads to an effective group process and a positive outcome for their collective efforts (see *Chapter 2: Essential Facilitation Skills*).

4.3.2 Check-ins and Check-outs

Check-ins and check-outs are a simple, yet effective way to open and close conversations and meetings. As an opener, check-ins allow everyone an opportunity to become fully present, shift focus to the meeting, share their voice, and practice empathetic listening. Check-outs provide opportunities for reflection on the meeting process or takeaways, comments about personal meeting experience, or final thoughts before the meeting ends.

Check-ins and check-outs are often in the form of a question. For example, you might ask a question that is related to the meeting, e.g., "*What do you think is the most important objective to accomplish at today's meeting?"* A check-in can also be more personal, e.g., *"What is something you are especially proud of this week?"* Check-ins can be more playful. You may show graphics of different types of weather, e.g., sunny skies, an overcast sky, thunderstorm, and then ask, *"Which of these weather graphics are most like for your work this past week?"* [15]

A quick search on the internet will generate a wide variety of options for questions or other short activities that can serve the same purpose. See this resource for example questions. Here we will focus on check-ins and check-outs using questions. As you consider what kind of check-in or check-out you want to use, consider the following questions:

Considerations for Developing a Check-In Question	
What is the purpose of doing a check-in?	• Do you simply want to help people get present? • Is it important to use this time to build relationships? • Would it be a good use of time to use the check-in to prepare the group for a specific conversation? • Could the group benefit from a little fun together?
What are the group's needs?	• How well does the group know each other? Do not push people too far out of their comfort zone with the check-in question. This is an opportunity for everyone to share so make it inviting to do so. • Is this a time to have a little fun or be functional by tying the question to the conversation or meeting purpose?
How much time can you devote to the check-in?	• Consider how much time you have for the check-in, then divide it by the number of people you anticipate participating in the meeting. This will be the amount of time each person can take to respond. • Pick a question that can be answered in the amount of time you have allocated per person.

Get your meeting off to a great start by preparing an appropriate check-in question ahead of time and being ready to introduce it well.

Here is how you can introduce a check-in.

1. **Explain what a check-in is and how it works.**
   a. Explain: *"A check-in is a way for all of us to transition and become fully present at this meeting."*
   b. Share the specific purpose for doing the check-in, if relevant.
   c. Explain: *"Each person will have an opportunity to respond to the check-in question. If you are not ready when it is your turn, you can say 'Pass.' Once other people have shared, we will come back around to give a second chance to anyone who passed."*
   d. Let them know how much time there is for the check-in and how much time each person will have to respond, e.g., 30 seconds or *"in two sentences."*
   e. Explain: *"During check-ins, we listen rather than respond to what is shared. This helps us focus on listening fully to what others say rather than on our responses."*
   f. Optional: Say, *"Once everyone has shared, we can take a few minutes to comment on what we noticed or observed."* Note this is optional; it is perfectly okay to just do the round of individual responses and then thank everyone and close out.
2. **Introduce the check-in question using appropriate framing**, if needed, e.g., how it ties to the meeting.
3. **Consider modeling how to respond.** Make sure to keep your response to the allocated time.
4. **Ask for a volunteer to go next.** After this person goes you can continue in a set order or you can popcorn responses. If time is limited, set the order. Remind everyone they can pass if they are not ready or want to opt out.
5. **Ask if anyone who passed would like to share.** Remember check-ins are an invitation. Never require anyone to participate.

4.3.3 Icebreakers and Energizers

Icebreakers and energizers are great ways to engage everyone and infuse some upbeat energy during your meetings. They are similar but different.

Icebreakers are a great way to begin a meeting. They are usually about 15-minutes long and intentionally involve everyone at the beginning of a meeting.

Energizers, or positive disruptions, are usually shorter in duration and are helpful to re-engage, re-motivate, or re-energize participants at some point during the meeting. Energizers can be creative opportunities, fun brain teasers, or physical activities. To select an appropriate icebreaker or energizer that is a good fit for your purpose, keep in mind the considerations and tips below. Search the internet for icebreakers and energizers that fit your needs.

ICEBREAKER AND ENERGIZERS

Purposes

- Get the group interacting in a fun, upbeat way
- Generate positive energy and tone
- Prepare for other activities or conversations
- Build relationships

Selection Considerations

- Group size
- Available time
- Purpose of meeting
- Purpose of icebreaker/energizer
- Materials required
- Preparation needed
- Appropriate emotional engagement for the meeting

Other Tips

- Keep it simple
- Select activities that are inclusive of all abilities and cultures
- Give clear, straightforward directions
- Share the purpose of the icebreaker or energizer
- Connect it to the meeting agenda or topic, if relevant
- Debrief the experience

4.3.4 Team Building Activities

Team building activities are often longer than icebreakers and energizers and can serve additional purposes. Team building activities can be a great way to build relationships, encourage good communication, build collaboration skills, and have fun working towards a shared goal. There are many activities that can meet a wide variety of goals. Whether it is for fun or a specific purpose, use the basic steps below to facilitate a powerful experience.

Before the Meeting

Planning

- Clarify your objective(s) for doing an activity
- Determine how much time can be devoted to the activity
- Know the space where the activity will take place
- Estimate how many people will participate
- Consider if people with unique needs require accommodations
- Search for and select an activity that fits these parameters
- Gather the materials you will need
- Make sure you understand the directions and can share them succinctly and clearly

Set up

- Set up the space so you are ready to go before the meeting
- Make sure all the necessary materials or supplies are in place

During the Meeting

Introduce the Activity

- Express excitement about the activity
- Give a brief introduction including the purpose of the activity
- Connect it to the meeting focus or topic, if relevant
- Carefully explain the directions, including any time limitations or resources that are or are not available during the activity
- Ask if there are any questions before the activity begins
- Clarify your role during the activity, if relevant

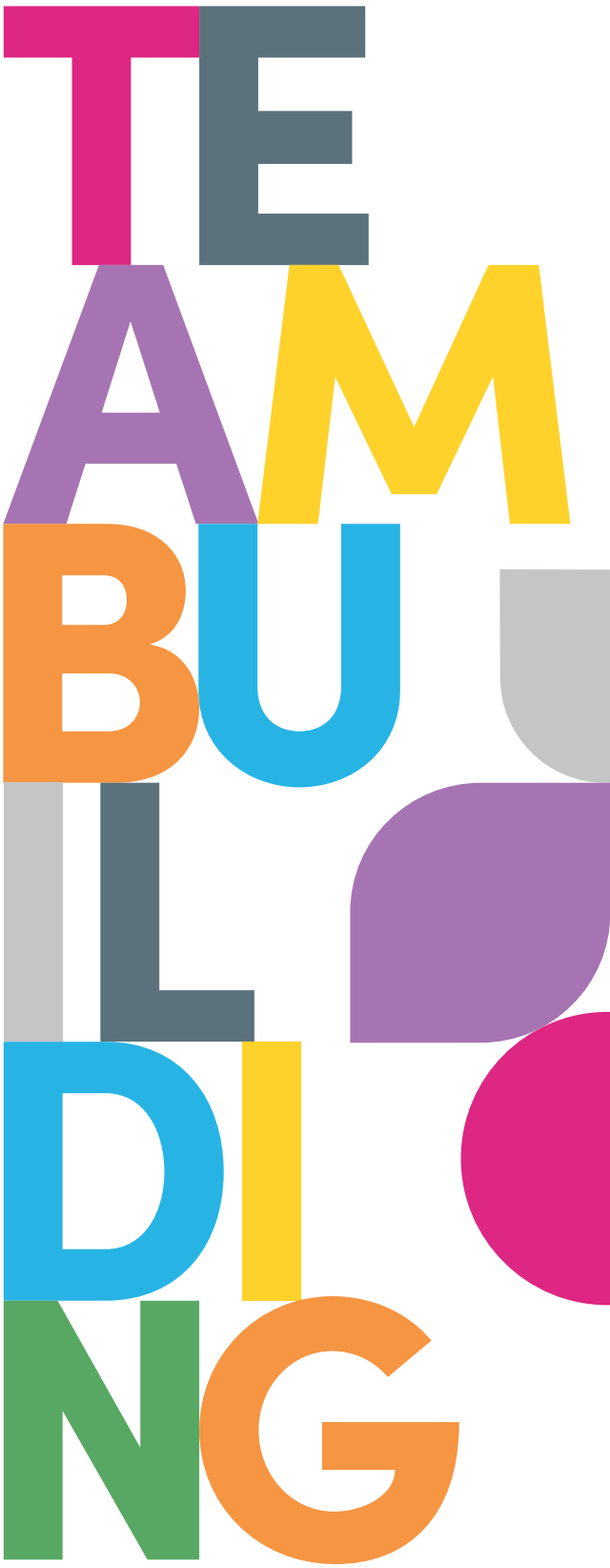
Complete the Activity

- Pay attention as the group engages in the activity
- Keep track of time
- Watch and listen for important things to call attention to after the activity

Immediately After the Activity

Debrief the Activity

- Reserve time in the agenda to do the activity and talk about it after it is finished
- Have a plan for how you will debrief, e.g., see section *4.3.5: Debriefing with What? So What? Now What?*
- Wrap up by summarizing the group's key insights and takeaways or asking the group to do it
- Thank everyone for participating



4.3.5 Debriefing with What? So What? Now What?

Group activities can be fun, energizing, and an excellent opportunity to learn by doing. While the activities can be powerful on their own, deeper insight and learning results when you actively debrief the activity. A simple, but powerful model for doing this is the *What? So What? Now What?* model that is described below.[16]

	Description	Example Questions
What? ***Observation:*** Focuses on what happened; can include facts and feeling	• Focuses on what participants experienced • Can share personal experiences or observations about the group's experience • Includes facts and feelings	• What just happened? • What did you notice? • How did you feel? • What went well? • What could have gone better?
So What? ***Analysis:*** Focuses on the relevance of what happened	• Focuses on what was important about what happened • Starts to connect the activity experience to what is meani ngful or relevant to the group • Surfaces the relevant learning	• What stands out about what just happened? • Why is it important? • How is this activity (or a specific situation in the activity) connected to our work/efforts? • What are we learning from this activity?
Now What? ***Action:*** Focuses on meaningful next steps resulting from the learning	• Invites group to think about how they will apply what they learned to their individual and/or collective world(s) • Surfaces next steps	• What are our main takeaways from this activity? • How will we apply our learning? • What are some next steps?

4.3.6 Working with Group Energy

An often overlooked part of successful facilitation is an understanding of group energy. Cheryl Conkin and Ann Linnea refer to this as group energetics in their writing about energy in groups and circles. They describe **group energetics** as the interpersonal force fields that can be picked up by others. Our personal energy field is made up of electrical charges that are generated by our thoughts, moods, intentions, and feelings.[18] These charges can be perceived by others through their senses without us saying a word.[19]

Group energetics is like what happens between two people, but it is much more complex. When a group is functioning well, people feel energized, interactions are positive, and energy goes into the group's collective efforts.[20] When the group is not functioning well, people feel resistant and may even withdraw. When people withdraw, there can be an overall drain on the group's energy.[21] The following table provides some tips for working with group energy.[22]

Facilitator Tips for Working with Group Energy

✓ Commit to a personal practice that strengthens your awareness and management of your personal energy, e.g., mindfulness.

✓ Slow the conversation (or meeting) pace so the group can become more aware of their energy.

✓ Invite the group to do a personal check-in about their personal thoughts, feelings, or needs when tensions rise.

✓ Support the group to listen attentively by focusing on non-verbal as well as verbal communication.

✓ Encourage the group to speak intentionally, understand their motivations for speaking, and self-monitor the amount of time they use in a conversation.

✓ Break the group into pairs or triads.

✓ Take a break.

Tips for Creating an Inclusive Environment for Conversations

✓ Get to know your collaboration members – use introductions, ice breakers, and goal sharing to engage people right away.

✓ Pause and allow people time to enter the conversation without pressure.

✓ Allow for thinking time to let people consider questions and their own thoughts and ideas, e.g., writing time, silent brain-storm, reflective activities.

✓ Invite additional questions, thoughts, and ideas.

✓ Go table by table or group by group to make sure everyone gets a chance to speak.

4.3.7 Tips for Creating an Inclusive Environment

We end this section with a few general tips for creating an inclusive environment.

4.4 USING QUESTIONS EFFECTIVELY

Using questions effectively is such an important part of facilitation that we include it both as a primary skill set in *Chapter 3: Essential Facilitation Skills* and here as a core facilitation task. Chapter 3 provides the basics on different types of questions, when to use them, and tips. Here we provide guidance and general tips for developing and asking powerful questions. The following call out describes the actions associated with this task, related facilitation skill areas, and several techniques to guide your facilitation.

This Competency is About:

- Knowing the different types of questions
- Knowing the characteristics of a powerful question
- Developing powerful questions
- Using appropriate questions for the situation
- Asking powerful questions in effective ways

Skill Sets

- Emotional and Social Intelligence
- Asking Powerful Questions
- Active Listening

Techniques

- Developing Powerful Questions
- Asking Powerful Questions
- Soliciting and Managing Questions
- Responding to a Participant's Question for You

4.4.1 Facilitation Skills for Using Questions Effectively

Like other facilitator competencies, asking powerful questions stems from our emotional and social intelligence. Just as we need good emotional and social skills to be an effective communicator, we also need them to listen closely to what others say and ask powerful questions (see *Chapter 3: Essential Facilitation Skills*).

4.4.2 Developing Powerful Questions

There are different types of questions. What makes a question "powerful" depends upon whether it is appropriate for the situation, open- or closed-ended, and how it is constructed. Additional characteristics include conciseness, focus, bias-free, relevance and appreciative language. It also depends on the context, the group, and sometimes who is asking the question. Explore the following descriptions and examples of powerful questions.[23]

Powerful Question Characteristics and Examples

Characteristic	Description	Example
Purposeful	The question matches your purpose for asking it.	• You want to brainstorm ideas: "How might we create a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere at our collaboration meetings?"
Open-ended	Open-ended questions invite thinking and conversation. Close-ended questions elicit binary responses, e.g., "yes" or "no," without furthering the conversation.	• Open-ended: *"What, if anything, is most important to talk about right now?"* • Closed-ended: *"Do you want to continue this conversation right now?"*
Construction	What, how, and why questions are considered more powerful than who, when, and where questions.[24]	• *"What are some reasons we want to pursue this system initiative at this time?"* Compared to *"Who thinks this is a good time to pursue this system initiative?"* • The first question opens a conversation about pursuing the initiative, while the second question narrows the focus to who is in support of it. Both are good questions, but it depends on the purpose for asking the question.
Clear and concise	The group knows exactly what you are asking without any need for clarification.	• *"Do we need more time for this conversation?"* or *"Are we ready to bring the conversation to a close?"* • Choose the right words to get at your purpose, e.g., do you want to know how people feel or what they think: *"How do you feel about..."* or *"What do you think about..."*
Focused	The question invites the group to think about one thing at a time.	• *"What topic do we want to host at our next lunch and learn for providers?" compared to "What shall we do for our next lunch and learn for providers?"*
Assumption and bias-free (non-leading)	The question is not based on assumptions, nor does it imply "right" responses.	• Neutral example: *"What do you think of the new referral system?"* • Biased/leading example: "*What are the problems with the new referral system?"*

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Powerful Question Characteristics and Examples		
Characteristic	**Description**	**Example**
Relevant	The question is meaningful to and timely for the group and the conversation.	• *"In what ways, if any, is this approach aligned to our current goals?"* • Note: *This question does not assume there is alignment.*
Evokes positive emotions and thinking through appreciative language	The question is appreciative; it focuses on possibilities rather than problems.	• *"What more might our collaboration be?"* compared to *"How can we improve our collaboration?"* • Note: Sometimes the focus may be on problems. The first question allows for strengths to build upon as well as specific problems.

You can develop powerful questions by following the seven steps below.

Developing Powerful Questions Before the Conversation or Meeting	
Steps	**Process**
1 **Know the purpose of your question**	Know why you are asking the question and what outcome you are trying to generate, e.g., if you're brainstorming, ask an open-ended, broader question that elicits many diverse ideas.
2 **Construct it well**	Open-ended questions open the conversation and invite a range of possible responses. Start your questions off with the right word: What, How, or Why are great when divergent thinking is needed. Who, when, and where as closed-ended questions are appropriate for convergent thinking.
3 **Make it powerful**	Consider the powerful questions characteristics as a guide.
4 **Keep it simple**	State the question using simple language and as few words as possible so the focus is clear and concise.
5 **Write it several ways**	Write the same question several ways, then see which one gets at the essence of what you want to ask.
6 **Test it out**	Ask a few people to respond to the question. This will help you understand how people are interpreting your question. Determine if you need to adapt the question to make sure it is getting at your purpose for asking it.
7 **Frame it**	Consider what context or background is needed for the group to be able to answer the question. Even the most powerful questions can usually benefit from good framing that helps people understand why you are asking the question and relevant context.

4.4.3 Asking Powerful Questions

Facilitators are continuously posing questions to the group. Preparing powerful questions to get the conversation started is best practice. Depending on the topic, you may also want to develop additional probing questions that can help the group achieve the meeting outcome for the topic (see section *3.2.3: Probing*).

There will be times when you will need to ask powerful questions in the moment to respond to the group's needs and process. Develop your questions using the same characteristics described previously.

How you ask powerful questions is just as important as how you develop them. Here are some tips to help you ask powerful questions.[25]

4.4.4 Soliciting and Managing Questions

Another aspect of meeting facilitation is soliciting and managing questions from collaboration members. This helps to create an inclusive environment for all participants and address concerns and questions they may have. Below is a five-step approach to consider.[26]

Tips for Asking Powerful Questions

- ✓ Pose the question to the whole group (rather than put anyone on the spot).
- ✓ Avoid questions that may put anyone on the defensive.
- ✓ Pause and allow participants enough time to think and consider the question.
- ✓ Ask if the question needs clarification or rewording if no one responds. Reword or clarify the question as needed.
- ✓ Seek many responses, e.g., *"Let's hear from this side of the room."*
- ✓ Look for nonverbal signals from participants that may want to be involved and invite them into the conversation.
- ✓ Acknowledge people's responses to your question without giving an evaluation of the comment. Say *"thank you"* or *"thank you for sharing"* to every response.

FIVE STEP PROCESS

FOR SOLICITING AND MANAGING QUESTIONS

1. **Invite questions**
   - Use a welcoming, calm, and gentle tone to ask, "*What questions do you have?"* or *"What is unclear?"* or *"Where do we need more information?"*
2. **Acknowledge the question**
   - Confirm you and everyone has heard the question. Say, *"[Name] asked [repeat question]. Did I hear you correctly?"*
   - If you or others do not understand the question, ask the questioner to restate or share a little more.
3. **Respond or gather responses to the question.**
   - Respond to the question briefly if it's about process.
   - Consider redirecting the question to the group if it's about the topic or decision.
   - Scan the room and ask, *"What do others think?"* or *"Does anyone have an answer to this question?"*
4. **Confirm the question has been answered.**
   - Ask the questioner, *"Does that answer your question?"*
5. **Solicit the next question.**
   - Ask, *"What other questions can we address?"* or *"Who else has a question?"*
   - Limit new questions. If needed, say, "*We have time for two more questions. What is on your mind?"*

Additional tips for managing questions:

- ✓ Anticipate common questions asked on a topic or issue.
- ✓ Prepare answers or strategies for handling certain types of questions.
- ✓ If no one asks any questions, consider saying, *"I often get asked..."* or *"Common questions on this topic are often..."*
- ✓ Create a "**parking lot**" to collect questions as you go that can be addressed later in the meeting or at another time.
- ✓ Use a notecard at the end of the meeting to solicit anonymous questions that can be addressed before or at the next meeting.

4.4.5 Responding to a Participant's Question to You

Sometimes meeting participants will direct a question to you. This could be a question about the topic or the process, for example. How you respond depends in part on whether you are the person to answer the question, or whether the answer should come from the group. In responding to a question, you have three options:

Options	How to respond
Answer directly	• If the question is about the process, usually you can answer the question directly. • If the question is about the topic, you need to use your facilitator discretion before responding. – If the person is asking for your personal perspective on the topic, decide if it is appropriate to share, and if you do, let the group know you are stepping out of the facilitation role momentarily to share your perspective. Be very mindful not to do this too often. – If the question is more related to the process of the topic, e.g., *"What did the group talk about at the last meeting when this topic was discussed?"* it is within your role to provide a recap of that conversation, of course, without editorial comment. • Revisit how to manage your various roles (see section *1.1.4: Managing your Various Roles*).
Ping-pong	• Often it is appropriate and more effective to bounce the question back to the group or to someone specifically. This keeps you in your facilitation role. This also helps you remain "neutral" on the content while keeping the conversation among the group members.[27]
Get more information	• Sometimes, you may need more information from the person asking the question before you can decide how to respond. Seek this out first. • Sometimes, you need more information from others, e.g., meeting participants, partners, and/or regional/state leaders, to answer the question. Determine the appropriate next steps with the group.

4.5 INVITING BROAD AND BALANCED PARTICIPATION

Inviting broad and balanced participation is a core competency because the most generative conversations happen when diverse perspectives are engaged and balanced in the conversation. This competency helps facilitators make sure that everyone is supported to contribute their best thinking.

Through a variety of skills and techniques, facilitators make sure diverse perspectives are heard and understood, people stay in the conversation even when it gets messy in the middle (the groan/emergent zone), and the group agrees on how they will proceed. The next call out describes the actions associated with this task, related facilitation skill areas, and several techniques to guide your facilitation.

This Competency is About:

- Supporting everyone to contribute their best thinking
- Using a variety of techniques to support the conversational flow
- Helping people stay in the conversations even when it gets messy
- Keeping the group moving in their desired direction

Skill Sets

- Emotional and Social Intelligence
- Asking Powerful Questions
- Active Listening
- Encouraging Participation
- Organizing Conversation Flow

Techniques

- Helping People Make their Points
- Check-ins and Check-Outs
- Creating Shared Agreements
- Summarizing the Conversation
- Getting the Group Back on Track
- General Tips for Encouraging Participation

4.5.1 Facilitation Skills for Inviting Broad and Balanced Participation

All the facilitator skill sets support broad and balanced participation whether in small group conversations or larger CSD meetings. Emotional and social intelligence, asking powerful questions and active listening are baseline skills for inviting broad and balanced participation. Encouraging participation and organizing conversation flow are equally significant for engaging people in the conversation (see *Chapter 3: Essential Facilitation Skills*).

4.5.2 Helping People Make their Points

Sometimes people have an important contribution to make, but they need help sharing their thinking. It may be that they are verbal processors and are still developing their ideas as they speak. Sometimes what someone says could be interpreted in more than one way so you may need to seek clarification. Some people just need more help connecting their thoughts to the broader conversation. You can use skills you learned in *Chapter 3: Essential Facilitation Skills* to help people make their points. Consider the following five examples.[28]

Skill	Why Use It	How to Practice This
Mirroring Matching or repeating back exactly what the speaker says	• To show you are trying to understand the speaker's thoughts and feelings exactly • To allow the speaker to hear their words and clarify, if necessary	• Use the speaker's words or some of their words and tone to mirror back what they are saying • Avoid over using this skill as it could be distracting and annoying
Paraphrasing Restating the same information, using slightly different words to concisely reflect what the speaker is saying	• To test your understanding of what you heard • To allow the speaker to hear and focus on their own thoughts or ideas	• Use different words than the speaker to concisely summarize what the speaker said • Use synonyms • Change from active to passive voice
Drawing people out Helping people clarify, develop, or refine their ideas in a non-directive manner	• To help people think deeper and to share their ideas with the group • To build connection between ideas	• Use probing or clarifying questions • Ask for concrete examples • Invite people to *"Tell me more."*
Linking Ideas Inviting speakers to explain the relevance of what they said to the broader conversation	• To help the group understand how someone's point, which may seem off topic, connects to the topic being discussed • To illuminate a possible breakthrough idea	• Paraphrase what the speaker said • Ask them to explicitly connect it to the topic being discussed • Validate it by paraphrasing what they said again • Decide what to do next: – Ask the speaker to share more – Invite reactions from the group – Ask for other ideas or reactions and start a stack, if necessary – Start or add to a parking lot if off topic
Listening for logic and understanding Listening for the logic of the speaker's reasoning and assessing whether the group understands it	• To offset the tendency of the group to dismiss constructive criticism of an idea • To support the person making the critique to share their thoughts	• Watch for signs of a logical analysis: – Challenges an assertion – Identifies a bias – Seeks to clarify – Calls attention to an assumption – Points out a contradiction • Pay attention to how the group responds: – If positive: stay out of the way – If speaker's reasoning is dismissed: paraphrase it, draw out the speaker (see next section), then ask the group for reactions

See also section *6.2.3: Helping People Make their Points.*

4.5.3 Check-ins and Check-outs

Check-ins and check-outs invite broad and balanced participation because they are a simple way to give everyone an opportunity to participate. For more on this technique, see section *4.3.2: Check-ins and Check-outs.*

4.5.4 Creating Shared Agreements

Shared agreements, sometimes referred to as **group agreements**, are expectations about how the group will engage with one another. Having shared agreements can contribute to a positive and productive meeting experience for everyone. Generally, there are two types of agreements. *Relational agreements* focus on how members of the group will interact, e.g., listen to understand. *Operational agreements* are more procedural, e.g., start and end on time.[29]

Group agreements are different from group norms and rules. **Group norms** are about the way the group currently behaves whereas group agreements are focused on how the group commits to behaving in the future. **Group rules** are enforced by an authority and may not have the buy-in of the group.[30]

One of the benefits of shared agreements is that everyone gets an opportunity to express what they need to participate fully. While no agreement will be perfect for everyone, it can be useful to consider ones that meet 1) the core needs of the group, and 2) as many preferences as possible.[31] **Needs** are the things people must have to participate, while **preferences** are the things they want. We can be flexible about preferences if they don't work.[32] To be effective, group agreements should be concrete, realistic, and genuinely agreed upon:[33]

Characteristics of Shared Agreements

Characteristic	Example
Concrete This means the agreement is clear and everyone understands exactly what it means.	Move from general ideas of respect confidentiality to specific agreements such as *"Do not share personal experience or stories outside of this conversation"* or *"Do not use identifying information when sharing families' stories."*
Realistic This means that the agreement is possible for group members to implement, using language and concepts that make sense to everyone.	It might not be possible for all group members to leave emotion at the door, but perhaps it can be possible for all members to agree to: *"Express yourself by using 'I' statements."* This agreement can only be used if members understand what it means. You might need to clarify with an example, *"We commit to using 'I' statements to say, 'I feel...', 'I believe...' when expressing how we feel and what we believe."*
Genuine agreement This means that all group members feel their core needs are met by the agreements and therefore can commit to them.	When developing shared group agreements, make sure to give everyone space to consider their and others' needs. Once drafted, review the agreements with the group and make sure all members agree and consent to using the agreements going forward.

Sometimes, especially when time is limited, predetermined agreements can be posed for the group to agree to or amend. Ideally, the group co-creates the agreements as they will then be more likely to uphold them.[34]

If you are creating shared agreements for the first time, make sure you set aside sufficient time to really discuss and build genuine consent. Plan at least 30–45 minutes. If you are revisiting established shared agreements, then you may just need 5 minutes to read and confirm consent. If there are suggested changes or additions, then discuss that with the group. Here are some key steps for co-creating shared agreements:[35]

STEPS FOR CO-CREATING SHARED AGREEMENTS

1. Explain shared agreements including their purpose and how they can be helpful.

a. Share a definition of shared agreements and a few examples.

b. Share or ask the group how shared agreements could benefit their group process.

c. Share the characteristics of effective agreements.

2. Provide an opportunity for group members to think about their individual needs.

a. Explain the difference between needs and preferences.

b. Offer prompts to help group members think about what they need to participate fully:

i. *"What do you need from others in this group to feel supported, open, productive, and trusting?"*

ii. *"What agreements have worked well for you in other meetings?"*

3. Ask for proposed agreements.

a. Consider using a go-round where everyone has an opportunity to suggest an agreement. Write the suggested agreements so they are visually displayed for all to see.

b. Ask each person to write their top agreement on a sticky-note, then stick them to the wall.

4. Sort the agreements together.

a. Collapse similar agreements with the permission of the group.

b. Ask questions, as needed, to clarify the behavior the group wants to see, e.g., *"be respectful"* might become *"listen with full attention until the person finishes speaking."*

c. Rewrite agreements as needed, with permission.

5. Refine the agreements using the characteristics described above.

a. Ask where the agreements can be clearer or more concrete.

b. Ask if the agreements are realistic.

c. Ask if any core needs are missing.

6. Check for consensus on the proposed agreements.

a. A simple **thumbs up** (in support), thumbs sideways (not quite there), and **thumbs down** (not in support) will give you an instant pulse on the degree of agreement (see section *9.2.5: Checking for Agreement* for additional polling methods.

b. Invite those with a thumb sideways or thumbs down to share what they need to get to a thumbs up.

c. Continue refining the agreements until there is 100% thumbs up.

7. Implement the group agreements.

- Create a clean copy of the agreements and make them visible, e.g., on your agenda and/or posted in the meeting space.
- Periodically revisit the agreements at the beginning of meetings.
- Make sure to talk about them with new group members.

See also sections *4.8.4: Using Shared Agreements; 7.3.1: Creating Accountable Space;* and *7.3.2: Using Courageous Conversation Agreements.*

4.5.5 Summarizing the Conversation

A very helpful technique for broadening and balancing participation is to periodically summarize the main points of the conversation (see section *3.5.5: Summarizing the Conversation*) and then check for additional perspectives. This is different from summarizing a speaker's point of view (see section *3.3.7: Summarizing a Speaker's Point of View*). Both types of summarizing are highlighted below:

TWO TYPES OF SUMMARIZING	
Summarizing a speaker's point of view	**Summarizing the conversation**
Checking your and the groups' understanding of a speaker's point.	Recapping the main ideas or points of a conversation.
This is an active listening skill.	***This is an organizing conversation flow skill.***
• To help a speaker feel heard • To check for understanding • To keep everyone focused and on track	• To help a group review where they are in a conversation • To check for understanding of major points or perspectives • To move the conversation to closure

– Verbally summarize after the speaker finishes.
– Check that your summary is accurate.
– Optional: Ask the group if they have questions about what everyone shared.
	– Restate the topic or question that initiated the conversation.
	– State how many themes or main points you heard.
	– One at a time, state the theme then elaborate with one or two main points for the theme.
	– Repeat the above step for remaining themes.
	– Depending on your purpose for summarizing, ask if:
	  • You've missed anything.
	  • There is agreement on themes or points.
	  • They are ready to close the conversation.

Summarizing the conversation is about helping the group recognize key points of many speakers and track where they are in the conversation. Here are some tips for supporting the conversation flow by summarizing:[37]

TIPS FOR SUMMARIZING TO SUPPORT THE CONVERSATION FLOW

✓ Keep track of key points either privately or in a visual way so the whole group can see.

✓ Wait for a pause or when the group could benefit from a recap of the conversation so far.

✓ Start your summary by saying something like *"What I've heard people say so far is..."*

✓ Succinctly restate key points without going into too much detail. This will help people stay focused on the main points.

✓ End the summary by saying something like *"Is this right?"* or *"Did I leave anything out?"*

4.5.6 Getting the Group Back on Track

It can be easy for a group to get off topic. This is especially true when the group is working in the divergent zone where the intention is to broaden the conversation and explore a variety of perspectives or ideas. It also happens in the groan/emergent zone – that messy middle where the group is trying to integrate a range of ideas. The group can also get off track in more simple straight forward conversations. Here are a few techniques for helping the group get back on track:

Techniques to Get the Group Back on Track

Label Sidetracks

Tell the group when they are getting off track. Then let the group decide if the sidetrack is important to pursue or if they want to get back to the agenda.[38] Decide if the sidetrack should be added to a parking lot for future conversation.

Parking Lot

Sometimes a topic or question will come up that is different from the main agenda but is important to the group. Whether it is related or unrelated to the main topic, if the group decided the emergent topic or question is not a priority at this moment, put it in a parking lot to revisit at another time.[39]

4.5.7 Additional Tips for Encouraging Participation

Here are a few more ways you can encourage participation:[40]

Additional Tips for Encouraging Participation

- ✓ Set up the space to encourage participation – use the room to match your objectives, group needs, and planned activities.
- ✓ Revisit group agreements periodically and as needed.
- ✓ Acknowledge participation and sharing, particularly new ideas, partial ideas, or minority views.
- ✓ Mix up your facilitation techniques to encourage involvement, interaction, and sharing, e.g., ask someone to choose the next speaker, use a soft ball to invite new people into the conversation, break into pairs or small groups.
- ✓ Pay attention to the pace and keep the conversation moving.
- ✓ Read the group and know when to move forward or take a break.
- ✓ Stay aware of group dynamics and group needs then adjust as needed.
- ✓ Express your support, empathy, and respect to the group

4.6 MAINTAINING FOCUS AND MANAGING THE PROCESS

Maintaining focus and managing the process refers to the content and process of the conversation or meeting. When it comes to meeting facilitation, maintaining focus refers specifically to the agenda topic and its related meeting outcomes – the intended result of the conversation (see section *8.2.2: Topic Versus Meeting Outcomes*). Most agenda items should have a defined meeting outcome. You help the group achieve this outcome through a well-managed process.

In this section, we pay particular attention to how you manage the process. This includes how to set up the room, manage time, use effective facilitation strategies, adapt the process when needed, and engage others in meeting roles to support the process.

This Competency is About:

- Setting up the room to accommodate the group and the planned facilitation methods
- Planning and monitoring facilitation to ensure efficient and effective use of time
- Using effective meeting facilitation strategies
- Recognizing and adapting facilitation plans and efforts when needed
- Engaging others in key meeting roles to support good process

Skill Sets

- Emotional and Social Intelligence
- Asking Powerful Questions
- Active Listening
- Encouraging Participation
- Organizing Conversation Flow

Techniques

- Setting up the Space
- Assigning Roles
- Framing Agenda Items
- Introducing a Facilitation Process
- Managing Time
- Using Visual Methods to Capture the Conversation

4.6.1 Facilitation Skills for Maintaining Focus and Managing the Process

At one time or another, all the essential facilitation skill sets are helpful to maintain the group's focus and manage the process. See *Chapter 3: Essential Facilitation Skills* for a review of the essential skills related to each area.

4.6.2 Setting up the Space

The set up of a meeting space can have a dramatic impact on the group, their process, and the outcome of the meeting. When setting up the meeting space, consider people's comfort as well as what they need to be able to participate fully and interact with one another. Use the tips in the callout.

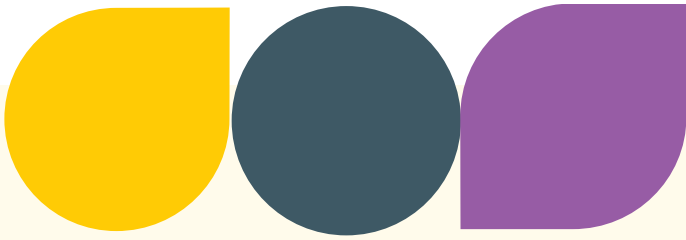
4.6.3 Assigning Meeting Roles

In *Chapter 1: Core Facilitation Concepts*, we described other meeting roles that can contribute to an effective group process and outcome (see section *1.1.9: Other Meeting Roles*). These roles include having a process and a content facilitator, timekeeper, visual harvester, note keeper, process observer, meeting host, a coordinator who attends the venue logistics, and of course, participants.

There are several reasons to engage others in fulfilling these roles. First, it will greatly improve the group process and participants' meeting experience. Second, it is a fantastic way to engage participants in meaningful ways. Finally, it will contribute to better meeting outcomes. Here are some recommendations for assigning meeting roles to others:

Tips for Setting Up your Meeting Space

- ✓ Plan your room set up to meet your meeting objectives, group needs, and activities.
- ✓ Prep the space to accommodate the group methods you plan to use, e.g., how tables and chairs are set, placement of materials, etc.
- ✓ Leave room between tables for people to pass and have personal space.
- ✓ Test out audiovisual equipment prior to the meeting to make sure it works.
- ✓ Making sure everyone will be able to see the audiovisual, flipcharts, etc. from different points in the room.
- ✓ Create a space that feels welcoming and invites collaboration.



Assigning Meeting Roles to Others

Determine which roles are needed for each meeting

- Generally, it is helpful to have a separate note taker.
- A content and process facilitator may be helpful if you will be using a more complex facilitation method or the topic requires some expertise.
- A timekeeper is helpful when the group has trouble sticking to timeframes or there are many urgent issues that must be addressed during a meeting.
- A visual harvester can help the group "see" the main points or ideation during the conversation.
- A process observer can be helpful to get extra eyes on the group process. – especially for emotionally-charged topics.
- A meeting host is helpful when you anticipate that people may be arriving at different times and there is a need to orient people as they arrive.
- A coordinator is helpful when there are many logistics to attend to that might distract you from facilitating.

Recruit people for these roles

- Recruit people before or at the start of a meeting.
- Recruit at the end of the meeting for the next meeting.
- Ask for volunteers as the role is needed.
- Rotate roles among group members.

4.6.4 Framing Agenda Topics

Framing each agenda topic is important, because it helps participants understand *what* is being discussed and *why* the topic is on the agenda. In addition to the topic and meeting outcome, members often need *background information* that will help them make beneficial contributions to the conversation and/or find value in the conversation. Framing can be helpful for all types of agenda items:

- Informational – an update or presentation
- Discussion topics – a conversation to understand an issue or reach a decision
- Action items – updates and discussion on the status of a task or activity

Here are some considerations for framing each topic on your agenda:

Considerations for Framing Agenda Topics	
Be aware of your attitude about the topic	• Be neutral or enthusiastic about the topic. • Remember your personal effectiveness as you introduce and frame the topic – it will influence how the group perceives it.
Provide context	• Provide key information about the background, conditions, assumptions, importance, and/or relevance related to the agenda item. • Anticipate questions and address in your framing. • Link the current agenda topic to work or discussions from previous or other ongoing meetings.
Connect to prior meetings if the topic is ongoing	• Help participants see where things are in terms of process or progress if it is happening over time.
Clarify the purpose and outcome for the topic	• State the purpose of the agenda item, including what will be discussed and why. • Share the desired meeting outcome of the agenda item, e.g., decide on next steps.
Share the time allocated for the topic	• Communicate the amount of time planned for this agenda item. • Include the time allocation on the agenda.
Name the process you will use to have the conversation, if relevant	• Name the facilitation process that will be used, if relevant, e.g., brainstorming, world café, triads. • Describe the full process in more detail once you are ready to begin.

4.6.5 Introducing a Facilitation Process

After you frame the conversation, which usually focuses on *what* and *why*, explain *how* the conversation will take place. Almost all process introductions will include the elements found in the following table. We use a brainstorming example to provide simple examples of what you might say for each element.

Introduction Elements	Examples of What you Might Say: Brainstorming Example
State the focus and purpose of the conversation	*"Today we're going to brainstorm ideas for _____. This will help us _____."* Note: If you've just framed the conversation, you may have already shared this.
Describe how the activity/process will happen and the timeframe	*"There are five steps to brainstorming: generating, clarifying, combining, categorizing, and narrowing ideas. Today, we will focus only on idea generation. Once in your group, you will have 5 minutes to individually generate as many ideas as you can.* *Then with my signal, you will have an additional 15 minutes to share your ideas with each other in a small group. As you listen, please remain silent and listen to others' ideas without judgment.* *When time is up, I will give additional instructions on the next step of the process."*
Explain how groups will be formed, if relevant	*"We will form four groups. Let's count off now. Please remember your group number."* Note: After everyone knows their group number, let them know where each group will meet. You may want to have them move now so they are settled and ready to begin as soon as you finish the instructions.
Introduce the focus question	*"After deciding to focus on improving our cross-agency referral processes, one of our next steps is to figure out who to engage in this work. Our brainstorm focus question is: Who has an important perspective about how we might enhance our referral processes?"*
Tell them how to share their responses	*"Please record each person's name on a sticky note, which you will find on your table. Include only one name per sticky-note. Use as many sticky-notes as you need."*
Share any relevant handouts or resources	*The flip chart here provides some broad perspective categories that might help you remember specific people to note. Please do not be limited by these categories."*
Ask if there are any questions	*"What clarifications, if any, are needed before we get started?"*

4.6.6 Managing Time

Managing time allows the meeting to flow and the process to move along. It also keeps group members engaged and participating. Managing time can be challenging. For example, often there are more agenda topics than time to address, people get off topic, a new insight or question leads to a relevant conversation that wasn't on the agenda. Despite these occurrences there are ways to proactively manage time during meetings. And periodically, you may need to adapt time allocation with the agreement of the group. Here are some tips for how to manage time:

Managing Time Tips

Be prepared

- Design the meeting agenda with participants, process, and outcomes in mind (see *Chapter 8: Planning CSD Collaboration Meetings*).
- Start and end the meeting on time to avoid late starts and to respect participants' time.
- Connect with meeting participants between meetings to be informed of important insights, developments, or needs that may need to be addressed during the meeting.
- Engage meeting participants in co-creating the agenda.

Prioritize agenda items

- Focus on what matters most such as relevant and timely agenda items that need discussion and/or action.
- Determine priority items; put these items at the top of the agenda, label them as high priority or urgent on the agenda, and verbalize their importance to the group.
- Work with a co-facilitator and/or timekeeper to keep track of the allotted time and make sure the group discusses prioritized agenda items.

Pay attention to the energy or feeling in the meeting

- Read the group's energy (see section *4.3.6: Working with Group Energy*).
  - What is the interest in the current topic/conversation? Are people actively engaged?
  - What's the feeling and tone of the conversation, e.g., excited, energized, drained, unclear, uncertain?
  - Is the process technique working?
  - Would a pause, break, or energizer help the group?
- Vary the pace of the meeting to accommodate the needs of the group. Slow down or speed up depending on what is needed.
- Ask yourself, *"How is the group doing? What do they need?"*
- Use an anonymous activity like **polling** or **notecards** to ask how the process is going so far.

Adapt the process

- Listen deeply and stay present during the meeting then adapt the meeting agenda or process as needed.
- Be flexible with time when needed. Some activities, tasks, and discussions may take longer than expected. Check in with participants about the agenda plans and needs and adjust accordingly.
- Consider *"What does the group need now to move forward?"*
- Use tools to allow participants to provide input on meeting agenda items such as where to go next or what to discuss, e.g., use voting or polling.

Be careful with how much time you spend on informational items. Too many updates or long presentations can be boring and unnecessary. Try sharing information before the meeting by email or through your shared workspace, e.g., Google docs. Save your meeting time for activities and discussions that involve everyone.

4.6.7 Using Visual Methods to Capture the Conversation

Visually capturing the conversation while it is happening can be helpful for both small and large group meetings. Visual methods include writing on chart paper, a whiteboard, a shared document, etc. It can be any method that helps the group see what is emerging from the conversation as it is happening.

When information is captured visually, people have more brain space to keep processing new ideas without forgetting ideas that have already been offered.[41] This helps individuals with their short-term memory and at the same time creates **group memory**, both of which supports the group's participation and ability to do their best thinking together.[42]

Additionally, visually capturing the conversation allows members to:

- Clarify their point when they see how it was captured
- Build on ideas already proposed
- Track the conversation
- Increase their engagement and participation
- Reduce repetitive comments
- Make better decisions

Visuals can also inform meeting notes that are shared after the meeting. Consider taking photos of the charts to include within the notes. Seeing the images helps the group recall the conversation. Type the information also to enhance readability. Here are some simple tips for capturing the conversation in attractive and easy to read ways.[44]

Ideally, someone other than the primary facilitator does the chart writing. This allows the facilitator to stay facing the group, while the visual harvester focuses on the chart. Consider inviting a group member to take on this role. Below are some tips for the visual harvester:

Chart Writing Tips

Lettering	• Print instead of using cursive writing • Write straight up and down
Color	• Alternate colors in a list • Earth colors for primary text minimizes eye strain • Bright colors highlight or add graphic touches
Graphics	• Bullets help points stand apart • Stars highlight important details • Circles and arrows show connections
Formats	• Use a variety of formats as appropriate, examples include: – List – Mind map – Matrix – Venn diagrams – Flowchart

Tips for the Visual Harvester

- ✓ Engage in active listening
- ✓ Remain neutral
- ✓ Capture speakers' exact words
- ✓ Ask the group to repeat or slow down, as needed
- ✓ Accept corrections graciously
- ✓ Work in tandem with the facilitator
- ✓ Capture key points, decisions, and action steps

4.7 MANAGING GROUP DYNAMICS

Group dynamics describe the effects of group members' roles and behaviors on each other and the group.[45] When group dynamics are positive, the group is often more trusting, creative, able to make decisions, and hold each other accountable. When dynamics are poor, people's behavior can be disruptive leading to ineffective collaboration.[46] *Chapter 5: Supporting Productive Group Dynamics* will go into much more detail on this topic.

In this section, we describe actions associated with this task, related facilitation skill areas, and a few techniques to guide your facilitation.

This Competency is About:

- Creating the conditions to support productive interpersonal relationships and collaboration
- Helping the group engage in productive group behaviors
- Dealing with disruptive individual behaviors that take the group off track
- Supporting the group to overcome conflicts

Skill Sets

- Emotional and Social Skills
- Asking Powerful Questions
- Active Listening
- Encouraging Participation
- Organizing Conversation Flow

Techniques

- Shared Agreements
- Check-ins and Check-outs
- Co-Facilitation
- Process Observer Role

4.7.1 Facilitation Skills for Managing Group Dynamics

As with encouraging participation, all the essential skill sets will likely be helpful to manage group dynamics. Using all these skills on a consistent basis will help support productive group behaviors, effective conversations, and promote collaboration. When disruptive behaviors or conflict arise, many of the skills found within these skill sets can be used to resolve the situation. See *Chapter 3: Essential Facilitation Skills* for a review of these basic skills.

4.7.2 Shared Agreements

Shared agreements are a fantastic way to set productive norms for how the group wants to work together. Establishing shared agreements early in the group's process can be a powerful way to support productive group behavior and prevent disruptive behavior (see sections *4.5.4: Creating Shared Agreements* and *4.8.4: Using Shared Agreements*).

4.7.3 Check-ins and Check-outs

Check-ins and check-outs can serve many purposes during meetings. Whether check-ins and check-outs focus on personal or professional questions, they help group members get to know each other better. As relationships are strengthened, trust can grow – two fundamental aspects of creating positive group dynamics. See section *4.3.2: Check-ins and Check-outs.*

4.7.4 Co-Facilitation

Often, we are in a position where we are left to attend to all the facilitation roles and responsibilities. While it is possible to be a solo facilitator, often – especially when dealing with complex topics and/or relational issues – it is ideal to have a co-facilitator (see section *1.1.8: Co-facilitation*).

4.7.5 Process Observer Role

Like co-facilitation, a process observer can be a specific role someone from the group can play to support a productive process. This person pays specific attention to the ways in which the group is engaging, their energy levels, their emotional responses, and the overall effect this is having on the group. This will assure that someone is paying close attention to the group dynamics so that disruptive behavior and early signs of conflict can be addressed in thoughtful and intentional ways before it grows into a bigger problem. See section *1.1.9: Other Meeting Roles* for guidance on the process observer role.

4.8 CENTERING EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Centering equity and inclusion is about creating conditions for engagement and participation of all members, particularly those who have been traditionally excluded from the table. This includes helping people feel welcome and part of the group, paying attention to group participation and needs, and using inclusive practices to support and encourage participation of everyone. See *Chapter 7: Facilitating Equity-focused Conversations* and section *9.1: Centering Equity in CSD Meetings* for more on centering equity and inclusion.

The following call out describes the actions associated with this task, related facilitation skill areas, and several techniques to guide your facilitation.

This Competency is About:

- Helping people feel welcome and included in the group
- Creating conditions for everyone to be seen, heard, and valued for their contributions
- Paying attention to group participation and needs
- Using inclusive practices to support and encourage participation

Skill Sets

- Emotional and Social Skills
- Asking Powerful Questions
- Active Listening
- Encouraging Participation
- Organizing Conversation Flow

Techniques

- Meeting Expectations and Norms
- Creating Inclusive Spaces
- Using Shared Agreements
- Supporting Productive Meeting Conduct
- Engaging Diverse Perspectives
- Managing Equitable Airtime
- Calling In and Calling Out
- Shifting and Balancing Power
- Changing the Facilitation Method

4.8.1 Facilitation Skills for Centering Equity

As with creating a positive and inclusive climate and inviting broad and balanced participation, all skill sets are important for centering equity and inclusion. Competency in all five skill sets enable facilitators to expand participation and deepen collaboration work for everyone. See *Chapter 3: Essential Facilitation Skills* for a review of these skill sets.

4.8.2 Meeting Expectations and Norms

Meeting expectations help participants prepare before a meeting. **Meeting norms** are the standards of behavior expected from participants during the meeting. You can set the stage for inclusion before your meeting by sending the agenda ahead of time and communicating what is expected from participants. For example, you might invite participation and encourage active listening by saying, *"Be ready to share as well as listen with an open mind."*

At the start of the meeting, you can establish or review your shared agreements, which might include relational expectations that may be helpful for the meeting. You might have norms for specific types of meetings or conversations. Setting these expectations and norms and tone for the meeting helps people feel supported.[47]

4.8.3 Creating Inclusive Spaces

In section *4.6.2: Setting up the Space*, the focus is on creating a space that feels welcoming, invites collaboration, and is inclusive of the diverse needs of participants. This might start with making sure everyone has a literal seat at the table. Additionally, consider people's needs related to audiovisuals, translation, and accessibility in terms of location and mobility around the facility and room. Ask people if they have accessibility needs and provide a private way to respond.[48]

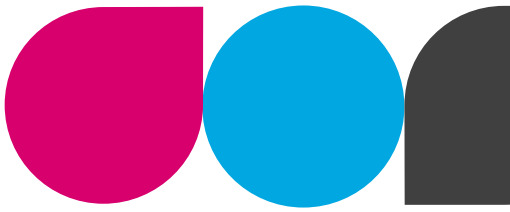
To set the tone, you can greet people by name when they enter the room. Also, make sure that the seating and viewing accommodates everyone.[49] See also section *4.3: Creating a Positive and Inclusive Climate*.

4.8.4 Using Shared Agreements

Shared agreements are an essential way to set expectations for how the group wants to work together. Establishing shared agreements early in the group's process can be a powerful way to support diversity, equity, and inclusion practices within meetings. For example, you might want to establish the importance of speaking openly and offering dissenting opinions without fear of retribution.[50] See sections *4.5.4: Creating Shared Agreement; 7.3.1: Creating Accountable Space;* and *7.3.2: Using Courageous Conversation Agreements*.

4.8.5 Supporting Productive Meeting Conduct

Part of centering equity and inclusion is about supporting meeting conduct. This might mean paying close attention to meeting dominators and interrupters. For example, if someone tries to control the dialogue, you can interject and redirect the conversation back to the broader group.[51] Use your emotional and social intelligence skills and encourage participation skills in these situations. See *Chapter 5: Supporting Productive Group Dynamics* for more information on meeting behaviors. See also section *7.4: Facilitating Equity-Focused Conversations*.



4.8.6 Engaging Diverse Perspectives

Effective meetings allow for differing perspectives, constructive disagreement, and meaningful collaboration. We can use our active listening skills to notice who is engaging in the conversation and then ask powerful questions to invite others into the conversation. To track participation, ask yourself:

- Who is participating the most?
- Who is participating the least?
- What patterns of participation do I see with respect to race, ethnicity, gender, language of origin, etc.?
- How can I encourage diverse participation?

Use this data to understand participation needs, set a goal, and make plans for encouraging diverse perspectives. By engaging diverse perspectives, people can come together to share knowledge and experiences, engage in dialogue, provide constructive feedback, make meaning, and expand thinking on an issue or topic.[53]

4.8.7 Managing Equitable Airtime

Effective conversations and meetings require a commitment to inclusive practices, such as actively and intentionally giving all participants time to share. This means giving everyone time to speak, and sometimes giving those who are often silenced or left out even more time to share their view, provide a different perspective, and/or to make their point.

4.8.8 Calling In and Calling Out

Calling in and calling out are useful ways to bring attention to harm, bias, or discrimination. Calling in and calling out is done to:

- Stop the negative effects of harmful words or behavior regardless of intention
- Create accountable space for listening and understanding as well as checking for biases and assumptions
- Support tough or uncomfortable conversations[54]

Calling people in is an invitation, often one-to-one or in a small group conversation, that brings attention to an individual or group's harmful words or behavior, including bias, judgment, prejudice, microaggressions, and discrimination.[55] Calling in might sound like, *"What makes you believe that?"* or *"How might someone else see this differently?"*

Calling people out is often done to bring public attention to an individual, group, or organization's harmful words or behavior.[56] Calling out sounds like, *"It sounds like we are making some assumptions that we need to unpack"* or *"It sounded like you said ____, is that what you meant to say?"* Get more suggestions on what to do and say when calling in and calling out below:[57]

Calling In and Calling Out	
What to Do	**What to Say**
Ask clarifying questions from a place of curiosity to assist with understanding their perspective.	• *"I want to make sure I understand what you were saying."* • *"Were you saying...?"* • *"I'm curious, what makes you say/believe that?"* • *"Could you say more about what you mean by that?"* • *"How have you come to think that?"*
Ask clarifying questions to discuss the impact.	• *"What do you think people think when they hear that type of comment?"* • *"I'm wondering what message it is sending."* • *"Could there be another way to look at this?"* • *"What impact do you think that comment could have on..."* • *"You may not realize this, but when you [comment/behavior], it was hurtful/ offensive because..."*
Own your thoughts and feelings around the impact by using first-person language.	• *"When I hear your comment, I think/feel..."* • *"I felt ... when you said ... and it ....(describe the impact it had on you)."* • *"In my experience, that comment can perpetuate negative stereotypes and assumptions about... I would like to think that is not your intent."* • *Use your own stories to demonstrate how you've unlearned certain harmful, inaccurate, and misleading assumptions or information.* • *"I noticed that you [comment/behavior]. I used to do/say that too, but then I learned [behavior]."*
Assist with repairing the harm caused by offering recommendations.	• *"I'd appreciate it if you... because..."* • *"It would be helpful to me if you..."*

Resources:

- Don't Call People Out – Call Them In video, by Ted Talk by Loretta J. Ross
- Calling In and Calling Out Guide, by Harvard Diversity Inclusion & Belonging
- Conversation Guide: Calling In & Calling Out, by Living Room Conversations
- Responding to Microaggressions in the Classroom: Taking ACTION, by Tasha Souza

4.8.9 Shifting and Balancing Power

Meetings participants are often very aware of who holds power, who has a voice, and who makes decisions.[58] Often these power dynamics reinforce a sense of powerlessness and pointlessness among some participants,[59] particularly those who are often discriminated against, oppressed, or left out of systems. To facilitate powerful and equitable meetings, pay attention to power dynamics especially with awareness of historical patterns of privilege and oppression based on race, gender, class, age, and role, just to name a few.[60]

You can create ***structures*** and build ***cultures*** that support balancing and sharing power through strategies such as the ones shared below:[61]

How to Shift and Balance Power

Structural Ways to Share Power

- **Community voting:** Create collaboration governance bodies with fifty percent or more of the members reflecting the population, especially people who experience inequities, so that their voices carry more weight in decision-making.
- **Community voice:** Some collaborations create intentional space for community voice through parent cafes, forums, community gatherings, or regular membership in collaborations meetings.
- **Community advisory committees:** Some collaborations create community, parent, or youth committees that serve in an advisory function. These committees include families who represent the community population and have lived experience with the problems the collaboration seeks to improve. They are engaged in a feedback loop on decisions and often require approval before big decisions are made.
- **Last word:** Some collaborations are inviting those with lived experience to have the last word in discussions before decisions are made.
- **Resource decisions:** Some funders give collaborations discretion in how resources are allocated and distributed to help move their shared agenda and strategy forward.

Cultural Ways to Share Power

- **Name power imbalances:** Recognize and name power dynamics between people with formal and informal authority. People who hold formal authority have power of resources and public influence. People with informal authority have power through their community credibility, community knowledge, and/or community influence.
- **Commit to address power imbalances:** Ask collaboration members to commit to supporting inclusive and equitable decision-making. Name power dynamics as needed.
- **Build relationships and trust:** Facilitate activities to support team building and relationship development among members and organizations within the collaborations. Ensure that people with formal and informal power can connect and share with each other.
- **Facilitate inclusively:** Create space for diverse perspectives to share and for all members to feel heard and a sense of belonging.
- **Create shared learning and shared creation spaces:** Support collaboration members to learn from each other through peer-to-peer conversation, co-creation, ongoing action learning, and/or communities of practice.
- **Acknowledge tension and conflict:** Acknowledge the inherent conflict, discomfort, and tension within the work or process. Remind the group that they can work through difficulty, discomfort, and tension together.
- **Engage in power moves:** Power moves is a framework for building, sharing, and wielding power where those with formal authority can use their power to benefit the group and generate more equitable outcomes.[62]

When groups are supported through both the shift and balance of power, they are more equipped to work through tension and conflict and help each other see that different perspectives lead to better work and better results.[63] See also section *4.5: Inviting Broad and Balanced Participation.*

4.8.10 Changing the Facilitation Method

Pay close attention to the conversation and participation to determine if the current facilitation method is working for everyone. Changing up the facilitation method can be an effective strategy for opening the space to new or different voices. Consider using one of the following facilitation techniques: **individual think time, writing, think-pair-share, small group conversation, go-round, gallery walk,** or **comment cards.** See *also* section *4.6.5: Introducing a Facilitation Process.*

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CHAPTER 5

Supporting Productive Group Dynamics

In this chapter, we share ideas for building a foundation for effective collaboration and supporting productive meeting behaviors. We also provide guidance on how to recognize and intervene disruptive behaviors and deal with interpersonal conflict during meetings. This chapter will help you support the psychological and behavioral process that occurs among group members as they interact.

5.1 BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

To build a foundation for effective collaboration, you can use facilitation strategies that support the group in working together for a common purpose. In addition, considering the stages of group development and where your collaboration is at in its journey will help you to better support its needs.

5.1.1 Using Basic Facilitation Strategies to Promote Collaboration

Community systems development happens through collaboration. The more you support the collaboration's ability to work well together, the more effective your meetings will be in supporting change in your community. Here are some general strategies you can use to promote collaboration:

Build trust among the group

- Use team building activities to allow for one-on-one interaction and small group bonding (see section *4.3.4: Team Building Activities*).
- Use check-in and check-out techniques to help group members get to know each other (see section *4.3.2: Check-ins and Check-outs*).

Establish expectations

- Explain the purpose of meetings and conversations to ground the collaboration in the work ahead.
- Co-create and use shared group agreements (see sections *4.5.5: Creating Shared Agreements* and *4.8.4: Using Shared Agreements*).

Use common language

- Define terms for how you talk about the work.
- Make sure collaboration members have the same understanding of the work, why they are doing it, the role they play, and how to measure success.

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Listen and lead with curiosity

- Model active listening, presence, and full engagement as others share ideas (see sections *3.3: Active Listening* and *4.2.6: Supporting the Group's Active Listening*).
- Ask questions to understand perspectives, dig into biases, learn, and reflect (see sections *3.2: Asking Powerful Questions* and *4.4: Using Questions Effectively*). This can sound like:
  - *"Tell me more."*
  - *"In what way...?"*
  - *"What else?"*
  - *"What does that mean to you?"*

Remain agile and adaptive

- Continuously reflect on your facilitation (see section *10.2.2: Reflecting on your Facilitation*).
- Regularly gather feedback on the facilitation and meeting process.
- Use feedback to improve the collaboration process over time (see section *10.2.1: Evaluating Meeting Effectiveness*).

Support group development and collaboration

- Give everyone equal opportunity to share.
- Encourage participation and engagement (see sections *3.4: Encouraging Participation* and *4.5: Inviting Broad and Balanced Participation*).
- Create accountable space to discuss important topics (see section *7.3.1: Creating Accountable Space*).
- Understand the stages of group development and support the group by meeting them where they are in their group development (see sections *1.2.4: Stages of Group Development* and *5.1.2: Facilitating through the Stages of Group Development*).

Hold everyone accountable

- Keep everyone aligned to the shared agenda and goals of the collaboration and CSD work.
- Hold each other accountable to inclusive and equitable actions and behaviors during conversation (see section *7.4.1: Creating Accountable Space*).

5.1.2 Facilitating through the Stages of Group Development

In chapter one, we introduced the stages of group development which includes forming, storming, norming, and performing. Understanding the stages of group development can help you plan your meetings and intervene empathetically and appropriately in the group process. Review the previous table on the stages of group development in section *1.2.4: Stages of Group Development* to recall the feelings and behaviors related to these group stages. The next table will help you consider how to support the group depending on their stage of development.[1]

Using the Stages of Group Development		
Stage	**Group Development Tasks**	**Facilitation Considerations**
Forming: Coming together	• Get clear about purpose or goals, expectations of members, way of working together • Focus on engaging in shared work	• Clarify the group purpose, work, and member roles. • Establish behavtioral norms for working together.
Storming: Working through conflict	• Develop group process skills • Build conflict management skills	• Acknowledge and normalize feelings. • Address group dynamics and behaviors with empathy. • Model active listening and support group to do the same.
Norming: Working together effectively	• Be productive together • Resolve group problems	• Support group identity and team building. • Focus on desired results. • Promote open communication. • Use consensus-building methods.
Performing: Focusing on shared goals and problem solving	• Make significant progress toward team goals • Continue to develop individual and collective capacities	• Trust group to take more responsibility for their process and result. • Share more of the facilitation role. • Help group self-reflect and engage in continuous improvement (action learning).

In recognizing where the collaboration is at in the stages of group development, you can anticipate how the group might feel and behave. In knowing the "tasks" associated with each stage, facilitators can be prepared to support and respond to certain types of meeting behaviors.

In the **forming** stage, the group is first coming together to work toward a common goal.[2] During this stage of optimism, high expectations and anxiety, the group needs a clear vision, structure, and boundaries.[2] You can help the collaboration co-create shared agreements, so they know how to operate and work together.

In the **storming** stage, the group is moving past their hopes and into the realities of working together. During this stage it is common to experience interpersonal conflicts, lack of skills, ineffective leadership as well as problems with tasks and barriers.[6] This could cause the group to experience some conflict. If this happens, acknowledge and validate feelings, address group dynamics, and model active listening.[7] Communication is essential during this stage! You will want to balance assertiveness and neutrality to move the team forward (see section *1.1.7: Facilitator Neutrality*).[8]

In the **norming** stage, the group is moving from being a group to a team.[9] During this stage, team members can confront and resolve problems. Also, team members can face their challenges, accept feedback, and act on information.[10] Help the group to identify and solve problems with open communication and consensus-building methods (see sections *4.2: Communicating Effectively* and *8.3: Making Inclusive and Sustainable Decisions*).[11]

In the **performing** stage, the group is in a productive and supportive place where team members share power and leadership.[12] During this stage, the team continuously evaluates and improves their efforts. They function as an effective team making shared decisions and using time and resources effectively.[13] Trust the team more, share facilitation, and help the team to continuously reflect and improve (see section *9.3: Using Action Learning to Improve Results*).[14]

5.2 SUPPORTING PRODUCTIVE MEETING BEHAVIORS

To consider how to support productive meeting behaviors. Let's first review some behaviors that enhance group effectiveness. Then we'll share some tips for promoting productive behaviors as well as how to identify disruptive behaviors and how to intervene.

5.2.1 Identifying Behaviors that Enhance Group Effectiveness

Group behavior affects group dynamics and effectiveness at reaching their goals. Productive group behaviors allow for engaging, enjoyable, and productive group meetings. Overall, they allow your collaboration to achieve its big goals. So, what do productive behaviors look like? The table to the right summarizes some productive group behaviors.[15, 16, 17]

5.2.2 Promoting Productive Interpersonal Behavior

Below are some basic do's and don'ts for facilitators to support productive group behaviors:[18]

Facilitator Actions for Supporting Productive Group Behaviors

DO'S

- Model behavior you want group members to use.
- Use body language, tone of voice, and words to encourage participation.
- Give support and positive feedback.
- Be self-aware of your own biases and assumptions.
- Stay aware of group members' reactions and feelings, then respond accordingly.
- Manage relationships within and among others.
- Use active listening (see section *3.3: Active Listening*).
- Ask powerful questions (see section *3.2: Asking Powerful Questions*).
- Encourage diverse perspectives and ideas (see Section *3.4: Encouraging Participation*).
- Balance participation (see section *3.5: Inviting Broad and Balanced Participation*).
- Manage disagreement and conflict (see section *5:4: Dealing with Interpersonal Conflict During Meetings*).

DONT'S

- Don't let one or a few individuals dominate the conversation.
- Don't let one point of view overshadow others.
- Don't assume that anyone holds opinions or positions due to their culture, background, race, personal style, etc.
- Don't assume someone from a particular culture, race, or background speaks for everyone.
- Don't overshare your knowledge, wisdom, perspective, or opinions.

Productive Group Behaviors

- **Trust:** Communicating openly and honestly with each other without concern of being harmed
- **Active participation:** Participating actively in group meetings, activities, and discussions
- **Collaboration:** Participating in collaborative learning and problem solving
- **Shared commitment:** Working towards a shared vision, agenda, and/or goals
- **Emotional and social intelligence:** Understanding and managing one's emotional reactions, building social awareness of others, and improving the quality of interactions
- **Communication:** Communicating with others using active listening and the ability to be in difficult conversations
- **Constructive conflict:** Creating space for healthy and constructive conflict and disagreement
- **Feedback:** Giving and receiving feedback regularly
- **Clarity:** Seeking clarity when needed
- **Accountability**: Being held accountable for collective results
- **Appreciation & celebration:** Practicing appreciation for all participants and celebrating big and small wins

5.3 RECOGNIZING AND INTERVENING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS

Sometimes it is necessary to intervene with an individual or group when behavior is disruptive. In this section, we focus on general types of disruptive behavior. See section *7.4.3: Supporting When Harm Happens* for guidance on responding when harm is caused, e.g., through a microaggression.

Be ready to intervene when a behavior is disruptive to the meeting and collaboration process. An **intervention** is an action – any statement, question, or nonverbal behavior – that is intentionally taken to help the group and support group function.[19] The goal in these situations is to minimize the interruption of the behavior, resolve the situation, and maintain the group's effectiveness.

5.3.1 Questions to Ask Yourself Before Intervening

It's important to recognize when the intervention is needed. Before intervening, the facilitator should ask themselves the questions in the callout to the right.[20]

Questions to Ask Yourself Before Intervening

- Is the behavior serious? Is the problem serious?
- Is this behavior causing harm?
- Will the issue go away on its own in a few minutes?
- Is the behavior, issue, or problem getting in the way of the intended outcome of the meeting?
- Will the intervention be more disruptive than the behavior, issue, or problem itself?

5.3.2 Recognizing and Responding to Difficult Behavior Types

It is easy to notice when behavior is not productive. However, it is important to figure out the type of behavior that is happening before intervening. By understanding these stereotypical behaviors, you will be able to spot them and know the best way to respond to each one. See the table below for behavior types and strategies for intervening:[21, 22]

Difficult Behavior Type	How to Intervene
Negativity or blocking Obstructs ideas and suggestions of the group	• Ask clarifying questions: *"Perhaps you can offer an alternative idea."* • Capture comment and point to it if it's repeated: "*Let me capture your complaint here so we make sure to avoid this."* • Describe the impact: *"Other members seem a little discouraged."* • Redirect: *"Let me capture your concern here so we can move to the next issue."* Or *"Let's agree to revisit this later."*
Dominant or aggressive Takes up a lot of the meeting to express their views and opinions. Attempts to take control by use of power, aggression, time, etc.	• Listen actively, give time to vent, and then use their name before thanking them and opening to others' perspectives: "*Anthony, thank you for reminding us of that issue. Who else has another perspective on this matter?"* • Be firm but friendly: *"I can tell you care about this. I will capture it on our flip chart (or **parking lot**). Let's do a **go-around** to hear from everyone else."* • Reflect what you see: *"I see you are having a strong feeling about this."* • Redirect: *"Let's remember the ground roles... to let one person speak at a time and to step up and step back. Let's hear from someone else. Maria, what do you think?"*
Talkative Uses a lot of airtime to share ideas, enthusiasm, or show knowledge; may ramble, monopolize the discussion, or not give others time to speak.	• Listen actively: *"I would like to capture your idea here and then give others time to speak."* • Reflect: *"I appreciate your enthusiasm."* • Describe impact: *"We need to hear from everyone. So, let's do a **go-around**."* • Redirect: *"Let's hear from someone else."* Or *"Let's ask what others think."*

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Difficult Behavior Type	How to Intervene
Withdrawal or disengaged Removes self from discussion or decision-making; resists or refuses to participate.	• Consider checking in with this person to understand the situation better. • Use the person's name to engage them. • Ask a question: *"Alice, do you have a perspective on this topic?"* • Describe the impact: *"We are interested in hearing from everyone. Our solutions are stronger when we have diverse ideas. Who else has an idea to share?"*
Diverting Takes the group away from the purposes through stories or digressions.	• Ignore remark and refocus: *"Does anyone have anything to add related to the topic?"* • Paraphrase: *"If I understand your point, you're trying to say..."* • Write comment: *"Have I captured your idea here?"* • Reflect: *"I appreciate your humor to keep the tension down."* • Describe impact: *"We have a lot to cover today, let's get back to our task of..."* • Redirect: *"Do you have something to add related to this topic?"*
People pleasing Often super agreeable and overly positive; may seek approval by giving approval or overcommit.	• Ask questions: *"How can this get done realistically?"* • Get specific: *"Your commitment here is big, what kind of support do you need?"* • Describe the impact: *"With so much on your plate, this might delay our progress on this action."* • Redirect behavior: "*I'm sensing concern that this is too ambitious. What do others think?"*
Indecisive May have the inability to move forward due to perfectionism, fear of disagreeing, or issues going on record.	• Ask questions: *"What else do you need to know to make a decision?"* • Paraphrase: *"I am hearing you are concerned with XYZ. Let's consider our options."* • Reflect: *"I can see you are weighing the options."* • Describe the impact: *"In order for the group to make a decision, we need to better understand your position or hesitation."* • Redirect: *"You can be honest and tell us what you are leaning towards."*

If the behavior or problem is serious, then proceed with caution and work carefully to not worsen the situation. Here is the three-step process for intervening:[23]

Process for Intervening

1. **Hold up a mirror.** In a nonjudgmental way, describe what is happening in the meeting. Make your comments factual and solely an observation of the situation.

2. **Make an impact statement.** Using observation, tell members what you are noticing about how their behaviors or actions are affecting the meeting, process, or other people. Ask them what they notice. *Note:* This step can be eliminated if it will create too much tension.

3. **Redirect the behavior.** Direct the group back to the next agenda item and continue with the meeting. If there was tension in the group, then consider a group reset or break before reconvening.

If the behavior is not serious, but perhaps a recurring issue, you might consider how to intervene outside of the meeting by approaching the person individually to bring awareness to the issue. Or you might consider an activity or conversation for a future meeting to review group expectations and agreements for all collaboration members.

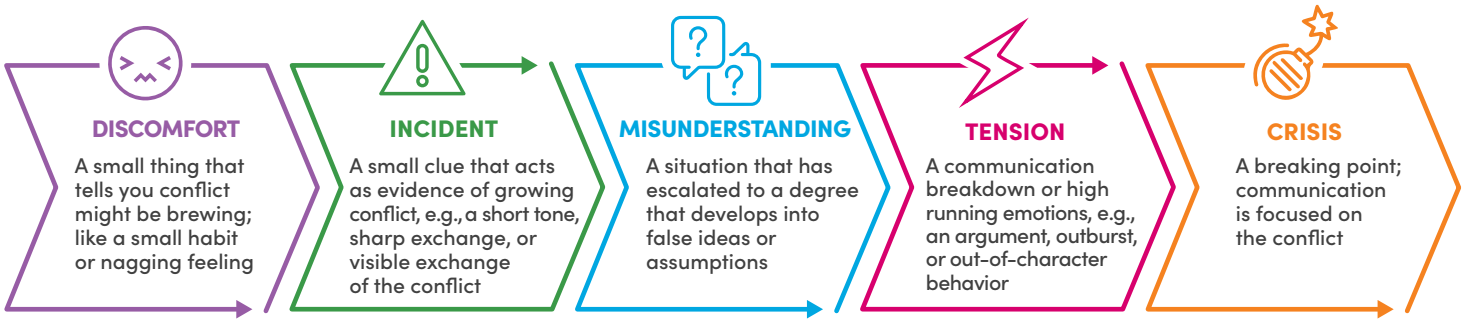
5.4 DEALING WITH INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT DURING MEETINGS

To deal with interpersonal conflict during meetings, seek to understand the conflict, including the stages and nature of it. There are also ways to minimize conflict before it escalates and strategies for dealing with conflict.

5.4.1 Understanding Conflict

"Conflict is a natural part of being human – it happens in every type and size of group."[24] This is true of collaboration work too. Conflict happens when two or more people have differing opinions, values, or needs.[25] Conflict can be healthy and an opportunity for collaborations. Understanding conflict can help you to maintain awareness during your facilitation and working with conflict will take some practice.

Conflict can develop in five stages that move from minor discomfort to major crisis. These stages are summarized below:[26]



These stages came from Seeds of Change's Working with Conflict in Our Groups.

Often times, people view conflict as a negative thing or as a danger. Conflict is natural and sometimes it is desirable. There can be a risk that conflict can drive people apart. There is also great opportunity to solve societal problems and create new solutions.[27]

The DANGER or Negative Outcomes of Conflict[28]

- Feelings of defeat or disinterest
- Distance between individuals or within groups
- Distrust
- Resistance

The OPPORTUNITY or Negative Outcomes of Conflict[29]

- Better ideas
- New approaches
- Resolution of problems
- Clarity on perspectives and opinions
- Creativity

Some common cases of conflict include:

- Competition
- Defensiveness
- Lack of respect
- Failing to value or understand others' lived experience or views
- Escalated emotions
- Holding tight to positions
- Misinformation or misconceptions
- Morals and priorities[30]

Sources of conflict stem from disagreements, which often fall into one of the following areas:[31]

Facts and Data	Goals and Interests	Relationships and Structures	Methods and Procedures	Values	Sticks and Stones
Rumors, misinformation, assumptions	Differing agendas, interests, goals, or objectives	Distrust, power imbalances, competition	Disagreement on strategies for achieving goals	Differing morals or values	Language, tone, and context in which they are used

5.4.2 Minimizing Conflict Before it Escalates

There are some ways you can minimize conflict before it escalates. Here are some strategies for improving communication within the group:[32]

Supporting empathy and connection

- Use check-ins to develop connection between members and within the group (see section *4.3.2: Check-ins and Check-outs*).
- Set aside a section of the meeting or a whole meeting just to discuss feelings. Consider the following questions:
  - *"What do you appreciate about this group right now?"*
  - *"What are you finding difficult about this group right now?"*
  - *"What might help us collaborate?"*

Respecting differences

- Encourage group members to see things from a different point of view.
- Encourage group members to listen and respect each viewpoint.
- Help group members to look for common ground.

Keeping an open mind and holding back judgments

- Support the group in gathering more information before making assumptions or jumping to conclusions.
- Encourage the group to practice non-judgment through shared agreements (see section *4.5.4: Creating Shared Agreements*).

Listening actively

- Encourage group members to actively listen to another person's perspective, wants, needs, concerns, and fears (see sections *3.3 Active Listening* and *4.4.6: Supporting the Group's Active Listening*).
- Help group members understand what people are trying to say by asking questions, summarizing what is said, or paraphrasing (see sections *3.2: Asking Powerful Questions*, *3.3.7: Summarizing a Speaker' Point of View*, *3.5.5: Summarizing the Conversation*, and *4.5.5: Summarizing the Conversation*).

Expressing ourselves

- Create space for group members to express their own feelings, needs, opinions, and fears.
- Encourage group members to be open and honest with each other.
- Encourage the group to use "I" statements to express themselves, which focuses on that person's feelings and is less likely to elicit a defensive reaction.

Open communication about issues

- Invite conflicting parties to discuss issues before they escalate.

5.4.3 Dealing with Conflict

There are times when you will need to take effective action to deal with conflict in your group. In fact, you can use the energy that is generated during conflict to offer solutions.

There might be occasions where a **mediator** is needed to address conflict between people or the group. Mediation is when someone outside the conflict helps two parties in conflict resolve tension. This can be an informal or formal process. You might mediate in an informal way by working to improve communication between people or helping people hear each other.

In a more formal way, you (or someone else) might meet with a small group involved in the conflict or as a whole group. Consider whether you can be a neutral person to mediate and whether you feel you can hold space for emotions and disagreement. Alternatively, you can ask another neutral member or an outside mediator to support conflict resolution of the issue. Check out the tips for facilitating when people are in conflict in the sidebar.[34]

Here is a **step-by-step process for conflict resolution** that you can use for discussion:[35]

1. What do you see happening? (Observation)
2. How do you feel about what is happening? (Feelings)
3. What do you want to happen? (Requests)
4. What can we agree to do about it? (Agreements)

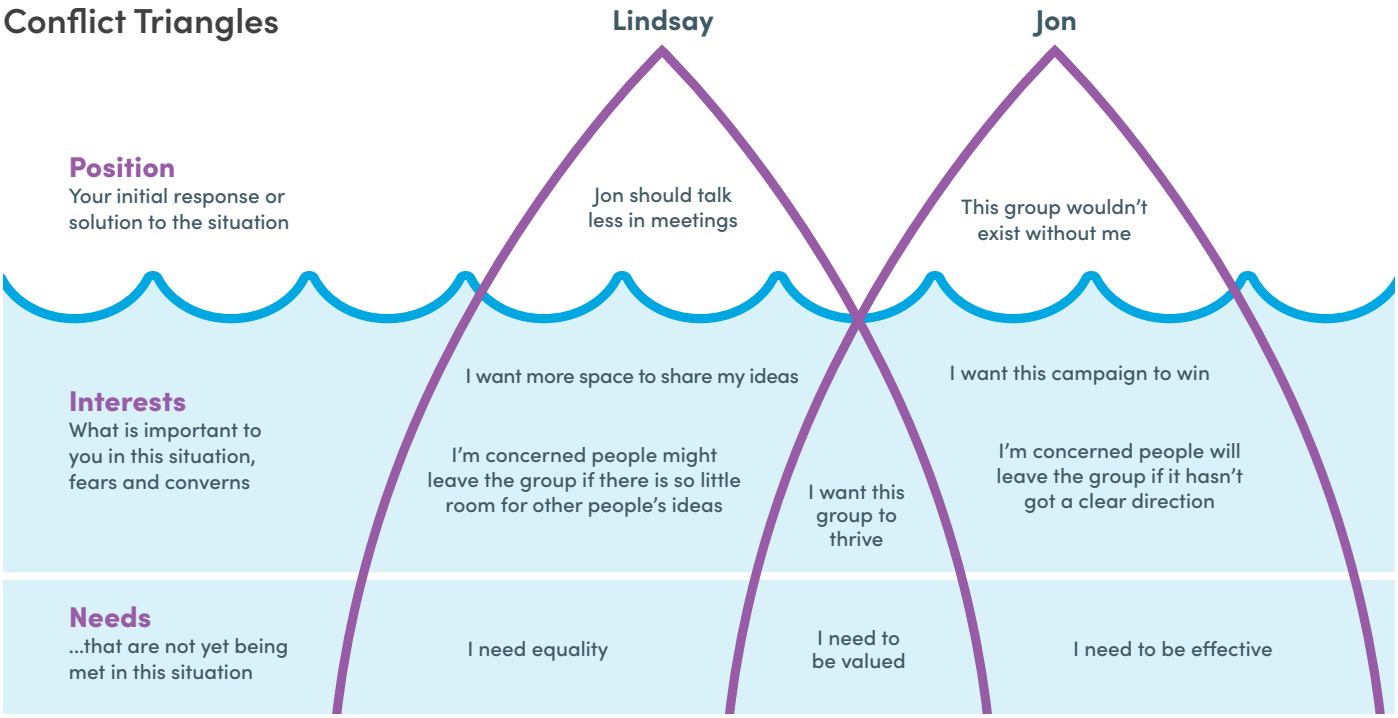
Tips for Facilitating When People are in Conflict

- ✓ Stay neutral as you can (unless you need to intervene).
- ✓ Support those in conflict to find their own solutions.
- ✓ Make sure everyone has an opportunity to speak.
- ✓ Encourage "I" statements, such as *"I feel..."*
- ✓ Help them to listen to each other t o gain a deeper understanding of each other's perspective.
- ✓ Encourage understanding and empathy.
- ✓ Help them to mirror what each other says.
- ✓ Help them identify their feelings, wants, and needs.
- ✓ Help them find common ground and resolution forward.

5.4.4 Using Conflict Triangles

Understanding what is important to both parties in conflict is a great starting point for understanding what the conflict is about and can help you and the group consider potential solutions.[36] **Conflict triangles** can be helpful in unpacking and addressing conflict.

Conflict triangles include each person's initial response or *position* to the situation as well as their *interests* and *needs* related to the situation.[37] By getting the conflicting parties to acknowledge their and each other's interests and needs, they can more effectively resolve the conflict. In doing so, we can understand differing perspectives, find common ground, and develop solutions that work for all. The graphic that follows illustrates how this looks.[38]



A conflict map example from Seeds of Change's Working with Conflict in Our Groups: A Guide for Grassroots Activists.

5.4.5 Using Conflict Mapping

Another helpful process tool is **conflict mapping**, which helps the group get a clearer picture of the underlying conflict. Like conflict triangles, conflict mapping is a process that encourages people to share their interests and needs with each other.[39] This can be facilitated by you, someone in the group, or an external facilitator. Using a large piece of chart paper or white board you will help the group to work through the following steps:[40]

Conflict Mapping

Steps	Process
1 **What's the issue?**	• Ask, *"What is the issue?"* • Write the issue down on the chart paper or white board. • Use neutral and non-blaming language.
2 **Who's involved?**	• Ask, *"Who is involved?"* • Discuss who is involved in the conflict. • Give each person named a segment of the paper or white board.
3 **What do they need? What do they fear?**	• Ask each person: *"What are your wants? What are your needs? What are your fears?"* • Write their wants, needs, and fears on the chart paper or white board. The facilitator, note taker, or the people in conflict can write. • Get specific with the list of needs.
4 **Read the map**	• Invite everyone to look at the map and consider others' wants, needs, and fears. • Look for common ground in values and needs. • Discuss conflicting needs and concerns.

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Conflict Mapping	
Steps	**Process**
5 **Look for new solutions**	• Ask everyone to brainstorm possible solutions that might meet everyone's needs. • Ask everyone to share their ideas. • Write down all ideas on the chart paper or white board. • Welcome all ideas without critique from anyone. • Ask for any additional ideas.
6 **Choose the most suitable option**	• Help the group find the best solution. • If there is no clear solution, then help the group to rate each solution using a scale (very useful, somewhat useful but missing elements, not practicable). • To get to a solution, ask: – *"Is it fair?"* – *"Is it feasible?"* – *"Does it satisfy everyone's needs?"*
7 **Implement the plan**	• Ask the group: – *"What needs to be done?"* – *"Who will do what?"* – *"When will it be complete?"* • Schedule a time to review the plan and see how it's going. • Make sure everyone is satisfied with the plan.

This conflict map comes from Seeds of Change's Working with Conflict in Our Groups.

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[37]Seeds of Change. "Working with Conflict." April 2013.

[38]Seeds of Change. "Working with Conflict." April 2013.

[39]Seeds of Change. "Working with Conflict." April 2013.

[40]Seeds of Change. "Working with Conflict." April 2013.

CHAPTER 6

Facilitating Small Group Conversations

In this chapter, we focus on facilitating small group CSD conversations and meetings, which lays the foundation for facilitating larger group meetings as well. We start by defining some characteristics of small group conversations. Then we describe and provide guidance on two approaches to facilitating conversations and meetings: open conversation and planned conversations.

Open conversations are the typical conversational way of talking in groups where the group takes on more responsibility to direct the conversation. A **planned conversation** has a predetermined agenda and process that are prepared before the meeting. In planned conversations, the facilitator takes on greater responsibility for helping the group reach predetermined meeting outcomes. Both conversation approaches can be effective with small and large groups.

6.1 UNDERSTANDING SMALL GROUP CONVERSATIONS

6.1.1 Small Group Conversations

Small group conversations generally involve 12 or fewer people. A group of two or three people probably does not need a facilitator, but when the group has six or more members the need may change. A facilitator, whether serving in a formal or informal role, can ensure effective communication when the group size is between eight and twelve people.[1] But don't get too hung up on numbers. As the definition from the Community Tool Box notes below, the most important factor is that the group is of a size that allows everyone to participate.[2]

SMALL GROUP CONVERSATION

A conversation about a particular topic, or perhaps a range of topics, conducted in a group size that allows all members to participate.

Small groups can be an effective way to get work done, especially when everyone has a chance to participate. It's easier for most people to engage in the conversation in smaller groups. Small groups provide more opportunity for individuals to contribute their ideas and more time and space to hear diverse perspectives without slowing down the pace of the conversation.

From a facilitator's perspective, it is also easier to read the group's attention and energy levels and adapt the process to meet the group's needs. There are many reasons to have a small group conversation.[3]

Reasons to Have Small Group Conversations

- Provides more opportunity for everyone to share their truth, perspective, and ideas
- Offers an inclusive space for everyone to speak
- Allows for group members to express and discuss a variety of ideas
- Supports a democratic process
- Leads to group ownership of decisions, plans, and actions
- Opens communication channels for group members

There are many times when a small group conversation is the best option. For example, you might facilitate a small group conversation at the start of something new, when an issue needs to be discussed, when a group needs to come together around a shared issue or action, or when a group needs to take a next step or consider an important issue.[4, 5] Sometimes the need for an impromptu small group conversation arises in the context of a larger meeting. In any of these situations, you may find that a small group conversation is the best way to proceed.

6.1.2 Purposes of Small Group Conversations

A small group conversation can have a variety of purposes such as to:

- Creating something new, e.g., a coalition, working group, initiative
- Exploring collaboration agreements among members or organizations
- Discussing and better understanding an issue or problem
- Solving a problem
- Developing powerful strategies, strategic plans, or action steps
- Discussing system barriers, practice, policy, and policy change
- Making decisions
- Providing mutual support and community building
- Resolving conflict

6.1.3 Characteristics of Effective Small Group Conversations

While there are some universal characteristics of effective group conversations, there are a few specific to small group conversations. You can use the checklist in the sidebar to monitor the process and your facilitation to assure the group has a good experience and achieves their purpose.[7]

In the remainder of this chapter, we look at facilitating open and planned small group conversations.

Checklist for Effective Small Group Conversations

- ✓ All group members have an opportunity to speak and experience their perspectives, ideas, thoughts, and feelings freely.
- ✓ All group members have an opportunity to hear others' perspectives and ideas.
- ✓ Group members can share and test developing ideas.
- ✓ Group members can receive and respond to respectful, honest, and constructive feedback.
- ✓ A variety of perspectives are shared and considered.
- ✓ A single person can't dominate the conversation.
- ✓ Disagreement is possible yet also grounded in an understanding that the group is working together to solve problems, make plans, and move to action.

6.2 FACILITATING OPEN CONVERSATIONS

6.2.1 Open Conversation

The most common approach to thinking and talking in groups are open conversations.[8] An **open conversation** is the unstructured, conversational, and familiar way of talking in groups.[9] The conversation may start out with or without a stated purpose or outcome. And, while a facilitator can be helpful, she does so with a light touch.

There are pros and cons to open conversation.[10] The primary advantage is it enables the group to direct the conversation. This can allow group members to share and explore more divergent perspectives. At any point a topic may change direction if a new more interesting or relevant topic emerges. The group decides. Open conversations work well for people who are quick thinkers and good communicators.

A downside is that open conversations can get messy from too much advocating for individual ideas rather than trying to connect ideas. For some people it can be hard to find a way into the conversation.

Open conversations can be appropriate in a range of situations, e.g., a one-time, impromptu conversation or a group of people coming together informally on a regular basis. Additionally, breakout sessions during larger meetings typically use an open conversation format.

6.2.2 Facilitator Key Tasks and Skills for Facilitating Open Conversations

In open conversations, the small group is mostly responsible for their conversation. In these open and free-flowing conversations, your role is to support – but not control – the conversation. This means allowing the conversation to move in its own direction while supporting the group to do its best thinking. This type of facilitation support:

- Allows for all participants and diverse perspectives to be heard
- Creates an inclusive environment
- Builds trust and collaboration among participants
- Aides in meaningful and productive conversation

The facilitator's objective is to support everyone to contribute their best thinking. To do this, the facilitator should focus on three primary facilitation tasks:[11]

- Help people make their points
- Broaden and balance perspectives
- Manage the conversation flow

Use some of the basic skills from *Chapter 3: Essential Facilitation Skills* to perform these tasks. In the following sections, we elaborate on these tasks and point out some of these related skills.

6.2.3 Helping People Make their Points

Sometimes you will see a need to help someone make their point. This may be because they did not communicate it clearly. It might also be that the speaker did not connect their idea to the larger topic. As a result, the group may have not understood its relevance. This is a time to gently help the person articulate their idea and then pay attention to whether the group understands it.

As you listen to hear and understand the speaker, ask yourself:

- Is it clear?
- Could it be interpreted in different ways?
- Is it clear how it connects to the broader conversation?

Next pay attention to how the group responds to what other members say. Sometimes a comment will be dismissed because it is not understood. It can also be because it's not in line with how a majority, or even a dominant person, is thinking. Consider:

- Is the group dismissing a relevant comment?
- Do people look confused?
- Is this idea aligned to dominant group thinking or is it novel?

Some of the skills to help a person make their point include paying attention, drawing people out, mirroring, paraphrasing, and linking ideas.

Skill	How to Do It
Paying attention Listening closely to what someone is saying with the goal of understanding rather than responding	• Pay close attention to what someone is saying. • Show the speaker that you are listening by making eye contact, nodding, smiling, turning your body toward a person, or making small listening noises like *"mmm"* or *"uh huh."* • Refocus when you notice you are thinking about a response or your next facilitative move while the speaker is talking.
Drawing people out Helping people clarify, develop, or refine their ideas in a non-directive manner	• Use effective questions such as probing or clarifying questions. • Ask for concrete examples. • Invite those who are less involved to share. • Invite a person to *"Please share more."* • Ask those with relevant expertise, technical skills, or specific roles to share.
Mirroring Matching or repeating back exactly what the speaker says	• Use the speaker's words or some of their words and tone to mirror back what they are saying. • Avoid over mirroring as this could be distracting and annoying.
Paraphrasing Restating the same information using slightly different words to concisely reflect what the speaker is saying	• Use different words (than the speaker) that concisely summarize what the speaker said. • Use synonyms. • Change from active to passive voice.
Linking ideas Inviting speakers to explain the relevance of what they said to the broader conversation	• Paraphrase what the speaker said. • Ask them to explicitly connect it to the topic being discussed. • Validate it by paraphrasing what they said again. • Decide what to do next: – Ask the speaker to share more. – Invite reactions from the group. – Ask for other ideas or reactions and start a stack if necessary. • Start or add to a **parking lot** (a visual list of topics to come back to at another time) if off topic.

For additional facilitator skills to help people make their points, see sections *3.3: Active Listening and 3.4: Encouraging Participation.*

6.2.4 Broadening and Balancing Perspectives

Most conversations benefit from broad participation by group members. **Broadening** participation means you actively engage everyone to contribute their best thinking so there are a range of ideas to consider. **Balancing** means you are assuring all perspectives are heard and considered rather than letting one or a few people dominate the conversation. Some of the ways you can do this is by making space for a specific person to enter the conversation, encouraging more *people and perspectives* to be heard, and inviting additional unheard perspectives to balance the conversation.[13]

Skill	How to Do It
Making space Creating a no-pressure opportunity for a person to join the conversation	• Pay attention to facial and body language that might indicate a specific person has something to add • Say: *"[Member name], you look as if you might have something to add?"* • If someone nods or appears to be thinking and it feels right, address them directly and ask, *"Is there something you'd like to share?"* • Say: *"Let's pause and see if anyone else who has not shared would like to now."* Then pause for a few seconds before moving on
Encouraging Creating an opening for people to participate without putting anyone on the spot	• Pause to allow others time to enter the conversation • Ask questions such as: – *"Who else has something to add?"* – *"What do others think?"* – *"Can anyone give an example of what [member name] just described?* – *"Would someone from table two share what came up in your conversation?"*
Balancing Helping the group broaden the conversation by including other perspectives that have not yet been shared	• Slow down the speed to allow new voices into conversation • Ask vocal people to wait then invite new voices • Ask: *"Who else has something to add?"* • Say: *"Let's here from someone that has not spoken."* Or "*Who else has something different to add?"* • *"We've heard how many people think about [topic]. What are some other ways to think about this?"* • Say: *"Let's hear from someone who has not spoken."*

For additional skills for broadening and balancing perspectives see sections *3.4: Encouraging Participation* and *4.5: Inviting Broad and Balanced Participation.*

6.2.5 Managing the Conversation Flow

Organizing the flow of the conversation focuses on the conversation process. More specifically it includes supporting the group to determine who speaks when and in what order, supporting diverse perspectives to be heard, and keeping track of various threads or themes in the conversation.[14] These four skills for managing the conversation flow are described on the next page:[15]

Skill	How to Do It
Stacking Determining who will speak in what order when multiple people want to speak	• Watch for people raising their hands. • Respond aloud with their name, saying they are *"on stack."* • Summarize the stack order periodically. • Encourage participants not to interrupt. • Solicit additional thoughts or ideas before moving on to ensure people who are quieter or slower have time to respond and be heard.
Balancing Helping the group broaden the conversation by including other perspectives that have not yet been shared	• Slow down the speed of the conversation to allow new voices into conversation. • Ask vocal people to wait then invite new voices. • Ask: *"Who else has something to add?"* • Say: *"Let's hear from someone that has not spoken."*
Tracking Keeping track of the various lines of thought that are happening at the same time within a conversation	• Keep track of key points either privately or in a visual way so the whole group can see. • Summarize what you are hearing as needed (see next skill).
Summarizing the conversation Helping the group recognize key points of many speakers and track where they are in the conversation	• Wait until there is a pause or when the group could benefit from a recap of the conversation so far. • Start your summary by saying something like, *"What I've heard people say so far is..."* • Succinctly restate key points without going into too much detail. This will help people stay focused on the main points. • End the summary by saying something like, *"Is this right?"* or *"Did I leave anything out?"*

See section *3.5: Organizing Conversation Flow* for additional skills that may be helpful.

6.3 FACILITATING PLANNED CONVERSATIONS

6.3.1 Planned Conversations

A **planned conversation** is one where you prepare for the meeting or conversation in advance. For a planned conversation, we assume the group is coming together for a pre-determined purpose. With this in mind, we also assume that you will take a more active role in not only helping the group do its best thinking, but also helping them achieve the intended outcome of the meeting or conversation. The table on the following page shows the distinctions between open and planned conversations.

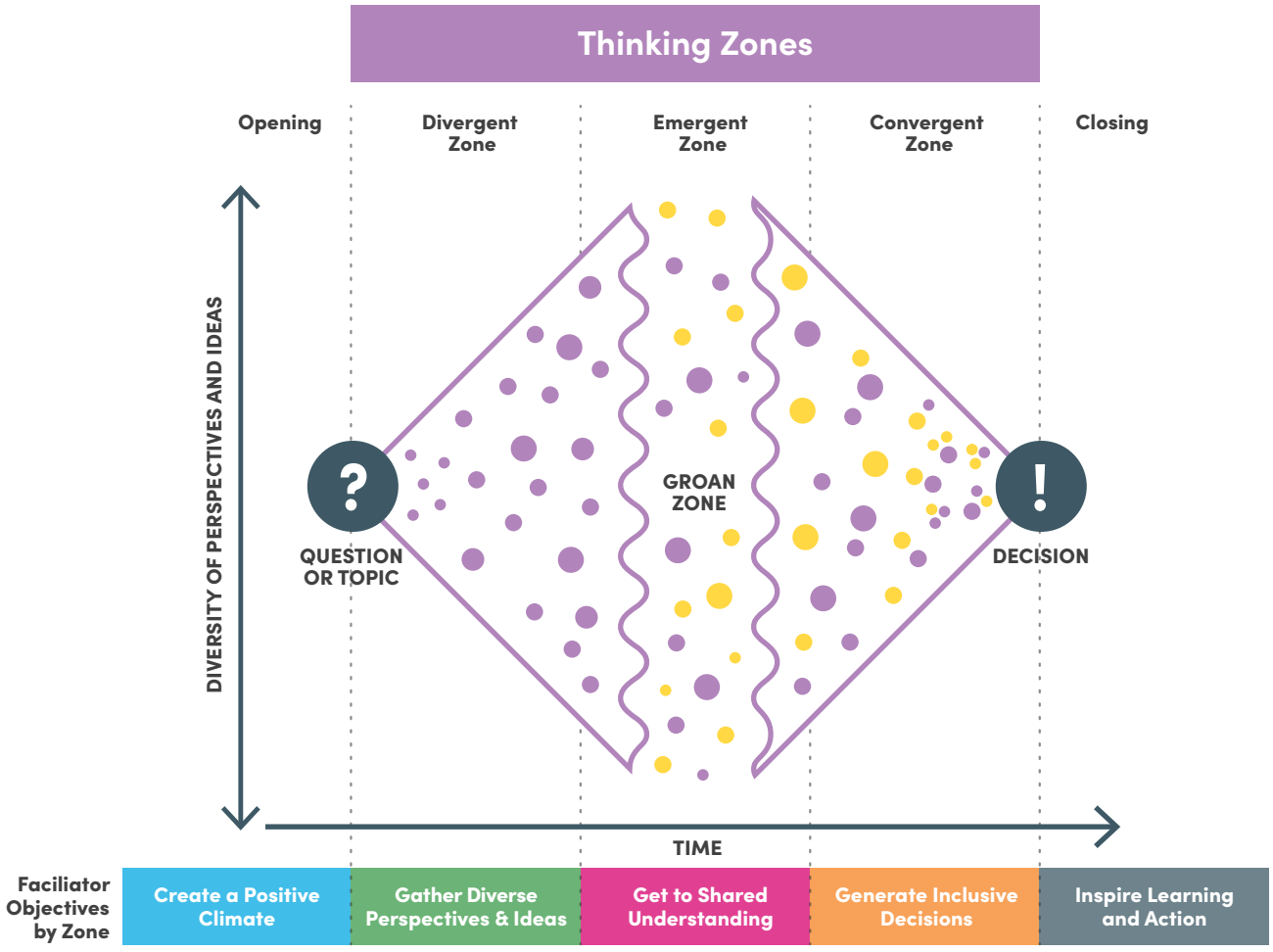
	Open Conversations	Planned Conversations
Facilitator Objective(s)	• Help the group do their best thinking together	• Help the group do their best thinking together • Support the group to achieve their purpose or desired outcomes
Facilitator Involvement	• Low involvement • Group takes more responsibility for the conversation	• Higher involvement • Facilitator takes more responsibility for supporting the conversation and getting to the defined outcome
Facilitator Tasks	• Helping people make their points • Broadening and balancing perspectives • Managing the conversation flow	• Create a positive climate • Gather diverse perspectives and ideas • Support shared understanding • Generate an inclusive agreement • Inspire learning and action

6.3.2 Using the Diamond of Participatory Decision-Making for Planned Conversations

Often there will be a need to facilitate a small group conversation that requires more advanced planning. These conversations usually have a pre-determined meeting purpose or desired outcome (see section *8.2.2: Topic versus Meeting Outcomes*). The **Diamond of Participatory Decision-Making** is a helpful framework for structuring a planned conversation (see section *1.2.7: Diamond of Participatory Decision-Making*). While this framework was specifically developed to support effective decision-making, it is helpful for any type of conversation as it delineates **five parts of a conversation**:

1. Opening the conversation
2. Facilitating in the divergent zone
3. Facilitating in the groan/emergent zone
4. Facilitating in the convergent zone
5. Closing the conversation

Almost all effective conversations will go through these five parts of the conversation to some degree. Sometimes the group will move through all five parts during a single meeting or conversation. Sometimes it may take the group multiple meetings or conversations to achieve the desired outcome and to completely close the conversation.



Adapted from Sam Kaner et al.

In this section, we break down each part of the conversation. For opening and closing of the conversation, we describe why these parts are important, your objective and tasks, then give some light guidance for carrying out the tasks. For each of the three thinking zones, after describing the part and some typical group dynamics, we share the primary facilitator objective and tasks, highlight helpful facilitator skills, and provide example facilitation techniques.

We come back to the Diamond in sections *8.3.2: Developing a Facilitation Plan for Major Agenda Topics* and *9.2: Making Inclusive and Sustainable Agreements*.

6.3.3 Opening the Conversation

All conversations benefit from a strong start. For people to be ready to contribute their best thinking, they need to know who else is in the conversation, why the conversation is needed, and important background information. They also need to feel welcome and a sense that they have something to contribute to the conversation.

Facilitator's objective and tasks: Your primary objective is to create a positive climate.[16] Minimally, this includes welcoming everyone, making introductions, clarifying the purpose and intended outcome of the conversation, and framing the conversation. The table below shares why these tasks are important and some techniques and tips to carry out each task.

FACILITATOR OBJECTIVE: CREATING A POSITIVE CLIMATE

Facilitator Tasks
- Making introductions
- Clarifying the purpose and intended outcome
- Framing the conversation

Facilitator Skill Sets
- Emotional and social intelligence skills
- Communication skills

Facilitation Techniques
- Check-ins
- Creating Shared Agreements

Creating Positive Climate Tasks

Task	Why?	How?
Making introductions	Help people get to know each other and connect before starting the conversation	• Share basic information such as name and role. • Share additional information if helpful for the conversation, e.g., why they are part of this conversation. • Consider using a **check-in question** or brief **icebreaker** (see sections *4.5.3: Check-ins and Check-outs* and *4.3.3 Icebreakers and Energizers*). • Use **group agreements** if helpful for the conversation (see sections *4.5.4: Creating Shared Agreements; 7.3.1: Creating Accountable Space*; and *7.3.2: Using Courageous Conversation Agreements*).
Clarifying the purpose	Clarify the reason for the conversation so everyone knows what they are trying to accomplish together	• State the purpose, meeting outcome, or goal for the conversation or meeting (see section *8.2.2: Topic Goal versus Meeting Outcome*). • Sometimes it will be as simple as brainstorming something or deciding.
Framing the conversation	Help people keep the conversation on point by helping them understand relevant information about the topic	• Provide any additional background or details that are needed for the group to have a conversation. • See section *4.6.4: Framing Agenda Items* for more information on framing.

6.3.4 Facilitating in the Divergent Zone

The divergent zone, where the conversation begins, is named for the type of thinking that is helpful at this point of the conversation – divergent thinking (see section *1.2.5: Divergent and Convergent Thinking*). **Divergent thinking** helps the group generate lots of ideas or gather diverse perspectives. Sometimes divergent thinking is helpful to understand a problem – especially complex problems that require multiple points of view to understand. In the divergent zone, the focus is on expanding the range of perspectives or ideas to be considered without judgment.[17]

Group dynamics: Initially groups tend to share familiar ideas and judge them as they are named, both of which are barriers to divergent thinking.[18] Some people may be more dominant while others may need support to get their perspectives or ideas into the conversation. And all too often, the group may push for a premature conclusion or decision so they can move to action.[19]

Your objective and tasks: Your primary objective in this zone is to gather diverse perspectives or generate a lot of ideas depending on the meeting outcome (see section *8.2.2: Topic and Meeting Outcomes*). To accomplish this objective, amplify a wide variety of perspectives, generate many ideas, restrict judgment, and engage the full group and support their expansive thinking.

FACILITATOR OBJECTIVE: GATHERING DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES OR IDEAS

Facilitator Tasks

- Amplifying diverse perspectives
- Generating ideas
- Suspending judgment
- Encouraging full and honest engagement

Facilitator Skill Sets

- Emotional and social intelligence skills
- Communication skills
- Asking powerful questions
- Active listening
- Encouraging participation
- Organizing conversation flow

Facilitation Techniques

- Individual writing
- Individual think time
- Go arounds
- Chart writing
- Brainstorming
- Sticky notes
- Small groups

Facilitator skill sets: All the skill sets in *Chapter 3: Essential Facilitation Skills* can be useful during the divergent zone. Your emotional and social skills and communication skills are foundational to effective facilitation. Asking powerful questions will stimulate thinking and illicit a greater response. Active listening will help you amplify ideas when needed and support group understanding. Encouraging participation and organizing the conversation flow helps people stay in the conversation and generate more ideas.

Divergent zone techniques: To move past familiar ideas, hold the conversation open longer until more diverse and novel ideas surface.[20] You may need to draw people out or help amplify some voices while asking more vocal people to wait. Use a variety of techniques to keep people engaged. Below are a few facilitation techniques that work well when supporting divergent thinking.[21] Also check out *Appendix B: Facilitation Methods, Techniques, and Tools* for more options.

Divergent Thinking Techniques		
Technique	**Definition**	**How to Do It**
Thinking time or individual writing	Give everyone personal time to develop their ideas through thinking or writing	• Share the topic or question. • Explain whether they are thinking or writing for themselves (to develop their idea) or if they will be asked to share. • Tell them how much time they have. • Give a 30-60 second warning before time is up. • Reconvene the group when time is up.[22]
Go arounds	A structured way for each group member to share and be heard	• Make sure everyone can see one another. • Explain the topic in a sentence, e.g., *"In a moment, each person will share their idea for our next community meeting."* (Or use a sentence stem: *"In a moment, each person will complete this sentence stem: 'My idea for the next community meeting is...'*) • Explain the order, ask them to say *"Pass"* or *"I'm done"* to signal the next person to go, tell them *"no commenting on each other's ideas."* • Share how much time per response. • Encourage people to speak succinctly and use active listening. • Start the go around. • Refrain from paraphrasing or drawing people out until the round is over[23]
Listing ideas	Making visible the ideas that are generated during divergent thinking	• Capture ideas on chart paper as ideas are shared. • Consider inviting a group member to serve as a chart writer. • Have people write their ideas on sticky notes then post them to a chart paper (this will make it easier to sort ideas later in the process.)
Brainstorming	The process of generating lots of creative ideas to solve a problem or create something new	• Check out resources such as these for a variety of brainstorming methods and guidance: – IdeoU – SessionLab

6.3.5 Facilitating in the Groan/Emergent Zone

The **groan zone**, also referred to as the **emergent zone**, is the messy yet generative part of the conversation. The "groan" zone can be a time of confusion and even conflict as the group struggles to make sense of all the diverse perspectives or proposed ideas.[24] However, if the group stays engaged long enough, they can start to see new connections among various ideas that have been proposed.[25] And sometimes, totally new ideas or understanding emerge from their conversation. This is the **generative nature of conversation** (see section *1.2.6: Generative Nature of Conversation*) and why this zone is also referred to as the emergent zone. When a group gets to the emergent side of this zone, there is a greater degree of shared understanding and ownership.[26]

Group dynamics: You know the group has moved into the groan zone when the group struggles to integrate all the diverse ideas or perspectives.[27] This part of the process can be quite challenging, mostly because people are still hanging on to their own ideas and ways of thinking.[28] They are not able to really listen to or understand others' ideas or perspectives.

Sam Kaner refers to this as competing **frames of reference**.[29] As a result, some people struggle to follow the conversation, lose patience, and/or get frustrated. Others may continue advocating strongly for their idea, hoping to reach a decision and bringing the conversation to a close.[30] This either/or thinking creates a barrier to getting to the generative side of this zone. Groups often need support to really listen to one another, link and connect their ideas, and listen to the whole of the conversation. Supporting both/and thinking can be very powerful in this zone. Also pay careful attention to interpersonal relationships and exchanges.

Your objective and tasks: Your main objective in the groan/emergent zone is to help the group expand beyond their individual frames of reference to shared understanding.[31] To be successful, you must help people understand one another, keep people engaged, support productive interpersonal communication and dynamics, link and connect ideas, and listen for what is emerging from the conversation.[32]

FACILITATOR OBJECTIVE: GETTING TO SHARED UNDERSTANDING

Facilitator Tasks

- Understanding others' perspectives
- Helping people stay engaged
- Strengthening interpersonal communication and dynamics
- Linking and connecting ideas
- Listening to the whole of the conversation and what is emerging

Facilitator Skill Sets

- Emotional and social intelligence skills
- Communication skills
- Asking powerful questions
- Active listening
- Encouraging participation
- Organizing conversation flow

Facilitation Techniques

- Categorizing
- Scrambler
- Jigsaw
- Open conversation
- Fishbowl

Facilitator skill sets: As with the divergent zone, all your facilitator skill sets may be needed in the groan/emergent zone. An additional skill that is important in this zone is both/and thinking. **Both/and thinking** is the opposite of either/or thinking, which is the more dominate way of thinking. Both/and thinking embraces complexity by valuing diverse perspectives. It stretches our thinking to be able to hold more than one possibility at a time. With both/and thinking the group explores many ideas rather than pushing to choose one over another. It is through this broader exploration of ideas that new ideas emerge. To recognize what is emerging requires **generative listening** – listening to the whole of the conversation and for what is bubbling up from the conversation.

Groan/emergent zone techniques: At the heart of this zone is the need to help the group make sense of all their diverse perspectives or ideas. The techniques below can help the group start to integrate their ideas and get to **generative thinking**.

Technique	Definition	How to Do It
Categorizing	A group process for creating categories for a list of ideas *Note: If categories are pre-determined, go right to sorting*	1. Review the list of ideas. 2. Invite the group to start proposing categories relevant to the group. 3. Ask for possible variations or combinations of categories and refine with the group. 4. Discuss the adapted list of categories. 5. Check for agreement on the categories. 6. Sort the list by the categories *(Note: the group may find they want to refine their categories as they sort the list.)* [33]
Scrambler	A small group technique that enables group members to work with many different partners using rounds to broaden understanding or possibility	1. Form groups of three. 2. Counts off *"1, 2, 3"* within each group. 3. Describe the activity you want them to do and give them a time limit; assign specific roles, e.g., #1: speaker, #2: listener, #3: notetaker. 4. Scramble the groups after the round is done; ask person #1 to move clockwise to the closest group; ask person #2 to move counterclockwise and join that group; person #3 stays in place. 5. Start round two once people are in their new groups. Ask each person to take on a new role. 6. Shift the group a third time so everyone fills each role once.[34]
Jigsaw	A small group technique that gives people an opportunity to first talk with people who share an interest then with people who have other interests	1. Break the topic into themes. 2. Form a small group for each theme and discuss the theme. 3. Form new "jigsaw" groups with one person from each theme group (e.g., if 3 themes then each jigsaw group would include 3 people). 4. Take turns sharing highlights from jigsaw small group conversations. 5. Reconvene everyone and debrief new insights and connections.[35]
Open conversation	An unstructured, conversational, and familiar way of talking in groups	Focus on the three main facilitator tasks for open conversation to give the group more opportunity to self-direct their conversation. See section *6.2: Facilitating Open Conversations.*
Fishbowl	A technique for organizing medium to large group discussions to encourage dialogue	1. Separate participants into an inner and outer circle. 2. Give participants in the inner circle, or fishbowl, a topic to discuss. 3. Instruct the individuals in the outer circle to listen, observe, and take notes. 4. Support reflection on the fishbowl conversation starting with the speakers then the listeners.

6.3.6 Facilitating in the Convergent Zone

The convergent zone comes after the emergent zone. This part of the conversation is about **convergent thinking**, or analysis – narrowing ideas, developing the best ones, and deciding (see section *1.2.5: Divergent and Convergent Thinking*).[36] This is the time for more critical and logical thinking. Good judgment is welcome in this zone.[37]

Group dynamics: Once the group has reached shared understanding, they will feel the progress they are making, though they know there is more work to do. But there is less groaning now. Often there is renewed energy with more shared understanding and real possibilities to develop and then decide upon.[38]

Facilitator objective and tasks: As the group moves into the convergent zone, the focus is on getting to a solution or idea that everyone agrees to – an **inclusive agreement.**[39] At this point, there may be several possible options still on the table. Your key tasks in this zone are to support the group to strengthen good ideas, narrow possibilities, and get to an agreement that everyone can support.[40]

FACILITATOR OBJECTIVE: GENERATING INCLUSIVE DECISIONS

Facilitator Tasks	Facilitator Skill Sets	Facilitation Techniques
• Strengthening good ideas	• Emotional and social intelligence skills	• Chart writing
• Narrowing possibilities	• Communication skills	• Trade Show
• Getting to inclusive and sustainable agreements	• Asking powerful questions	• Debate
	• Active listening	• Decision-Making

Facilitator skill sets: All the facilitator skill sets may be helpful with active listening being particularly helpful. Paying close attention to what group members are saying and the degree to which the group seems to be understanding each other is an overall focus during this part of the conversation. More specifically, facilitators can ask questions to help clarify when needed, listen for logic, and summarize periodically to check everyone's current understanding (see sections *3.2: Asking Powerful Questions* and *3.3: Active Listening Skills* for more on these skills).

Convergent zone techniques: There are many techniques which can be used in the convergent zone. A few are described in the table below.[41] See also section *9.3: Making Inclusive and Sustainable Decisions* for more information on decision-making.

Technique	Definition	How to Do It
Chart writing	Capturing the group's thinking on chart paper and displaying it around the room to create group memory	See section *4.6.7: Using Visual Methods to Capture the Conversation* for more on how to do chart writing.
Tradeshow	A presentation format where 3 or more presenters share their information at the same time each to a different small group then groups rotate to hear and discuss every presentation. *Note: Ideal when presentations are 15-minute or longer*	1. Identify a station location for each presenter to share with a small group. 2. Send presenters to their location; then divide up the rest of the group evenly among the presenters. 3. Have presenters share for a set period, then allow a set time for follow-up conversation. 4. Rotate groups clockwise to the next presenter. Repeat step 3 then rotate as many times as needed so that everyone participates at each station. 5. Reconvene the entire group to debrief.[42]
Debate	An intentional process to emphasize differences between two points of view.	1. Identify two points of view. 2. Form teams to represent each view. 3. Give each team time to build their case including their position, rational, and logical reasoning. 4. Decide which team goes first. 5. Give 7 minutes per side to make their case; no interruptions are allowed. 6. Give 5 minutes to each team to respond to the other team's case. 7. Debrief with the whole group to determine which is the stronger case.[43]
Decision-Making	The act or process of deciding something especially with a group of people	See Chapter *9.2: Making Inclusive and Sustainable Decisions* for detailed information on making decisions.

6.3.7 Closing the Conversation

All conversations need closure. Closure happens after the group has decided or achieved a meeting outcome. Now is the time to briefly highlight the group's accomplishments, help them recognize the ways in which they worked together to get to the decision, and to acknowledge their effort. Taking some time to close the conversation strengthens interpersonal relationships and the group process as well as supports action on the decision.

Even if the conversation should continue, the group still needs closure for the most recent part of the conversation. In this case, take a few minutes to summarize where the conversation is and where it is going at the next meeting. Asking the group to reflect on their process and the conversation so far will set the group up for the continued conversation. And it is always a good idea to celebrate any accomplishments along the way.

Facilitator objective and tasks: Your objective as you close out the conversation is to inspire action on next steps and/or the decision. Minimally, this includes providing a high-level summary of the conversation including any decisions made, defining and summarizing next steps, reflecting briefly on the process and outcome, and celebrating and/or expressing gratitude for the group's work. The table below shares additional details about these primary tasks, why each task is important, and some techniques and tips to carry them out.[44]

FACILITATOR OBJECTIVE: INSPIRING LEARNING AND ACTION

Facilitator Tasks

- Summarizing the conversation (including decisions made)
- Determining and summarizing next steps
- Inviting reflection
- Celebrating and/or expressing gratitude

Facilitator Skill Sets

- Emotional and social intelligence skills
- Communication skills
- Summarizing

Facilitation Techniques

- Check-outs
- What? So What? Now What?
- Plus/Delta

Task	Why Do It	How to Do It
Summarizing the conversation, and if relevant, any decision made	Reinforces key points from the conversation including key decisions	• Review key points of the conversation. • Highlight any decisions that were made.
Determining and summarizing next steps	Supports action on the decision made	• Determine any relevant next steps, including who will be responsible and by when. • Share when and where the conversation will continue if that is a key next step.
Inviting reflection on the process and outcome	Supports the group to continually improve how they work together	• Use a **check-out** as a simple way to invite and capture people's thoughts about the process and result (see section *4.5.4: Check-ins and Check-outs*). • Use a reflection model for a more in-depth reflection: – **What? So What? Now What?** (see section *4.3.5: Debriefing with What? So What? Now What?*) – **Plus/Delta** (see section *10.2.1: Evaluating Meeting Effectiveness)* – For additional reflection models (see section *10.2.2: Reflecting on your Facilitation*)
Celebrating and/or expressing gratitude	Promotes positive emotions and supports strong relationships	• Ask people to complete a sentence stem such as: *One thing I appreciate about this meeting is…".* • Share a gratitude affirmation then invite each person to respond with how the affirmation speaks to the group's conversation process or outcome. • Search the internet for gratitude practices and inspiration to share with the group.

We build upon this basic understanding of how to use the Diamond of Participatory Decision-Making in *Chapter 8: Planning CSD Collaboration Meetings* and *Chapter 9: Facilitating CSD Collaboration Meetings.*

[1]Adapted from Phil Rabinowitz. Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas. Community Tool Box. "Chapter 16. Section 4: Techniques for Leading Group Discussions."

[2]Adapted from Phil Rabinowitz. Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas. Community Tool Box. "Chapter 16. Section 4."

[3]Adapted from Phil Rabinowitz. Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas. Community Tool Box. "Chapter 16. Section 4."

[4]Phil Rabinowitz. Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas. Community Tool Box. "Chapter 16. Section 4."

[5]Adapted from Phil Rabinowitz. Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas. Community Tool Box. "Chapter 16. Section 4."

[6]Phil Rabinowitz. Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas. Community Tool Box. "Chapter 16. Section 4."

[7]Adapted from Phil Rabinowitz. Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas. Community Tool Box. "Chapter 16. Section 4."

[8]Sam Kaner, Lenny Lind, Catherine Toldi, Susan Fisk, and Duane Berger. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making." 2014.

[9]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[10]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[11]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[12]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[13]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

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[16]Adapted from Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[17]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[18]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

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[21]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[22]Adapted from Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[23]Adapted from Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[24]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[25]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

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[27]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[28]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[29]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[30]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[31]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[32]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[33]Adapted from Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[34]Adapted from Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[35]Adapted from Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[36]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[37]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[38]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[39]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[40]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[41]Adapted from Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[42]Adapted from Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[43]Adapted from Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[44]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

CHAPTER 7

Facilitating Equity-Focused Conversations

In this chapter, we prepare you to hold planned, equity-focused conversations. These are conversations about inequities, race, and/or racism, among other topics. Here we describe courageous conversations and why to have them, explain how to prepare for and facilitate equity conversations, and introduce the importance of and how to hold space for equity-focused conversations.

7.1 UNDERSTANDING EQUITY-FOCUSED CONVERSATIONS

In *Chapter 2: Centering Equity in Facilitation,* we explored how facilitation can be a tool for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Another way to center equity within the collaborative's CSD efforts is to host intentional and planned conversations about equity.

7.1.1 Courageous Conversations

In the CSD field, there are different names for these types of equity-focused conversations: **fierce conversations, courageous conversations, race equity dialogues, living room conversations, civic reflection**, etc.

There are many different organizations and initiatives working to improve interracial and equity-focused dialogue. An organization called "Courageous Conversation" created an award-winning protocol for effectively engaging, sustaining, and deepening interracial dialogue. While the protocol was originally designed with schools in mind, the agreements are useful and apply to collaboration conversations about race too (see section *7.3.2: Using Courageous Conversation Agreements*). Courageous conversation is a way of conversing together about important race issues.

> A **courageous conversation**, more generally, is an honest, and sometimes uncomfortable, conversation about race equity. It is a strategy that uses agreements and conditions to engage, sustain, and deepen interracial dialogue about race to support individuals and groups to address persistent racial disparities intentionally, explicitly, and comprehensively.[1]

These conversations create space for us to talk about issues of fairness, bias, and justice. Openly discussing equity issues allows the collaboration and individuals from all backgrounds to consider diverse perspectives and to intentionally build personal and collective awareness and analysis of race, status, social class, and other positions. For some of us, this requires that sometimes we step out of our comfort zone, acknowledge our relative privilege/power, recognize our biases, and learn and act upon information. Discussing tough issues and hard questions is what promotes growth in your collaboration and overall change within systems and society. Sometimes challenges, discomfort, and tension are necessary to get through conflict, build a stronger community, address inequities, and create lasting social change.

7.1.2 Why Have Equity-Focused Conversations

There are many reasons for engaging in an equity conversation, including to:

- Bring people together to discuss a particular issue
- Build relationships across diverse groups of people
- Build trust among members
- Raise the voices of marginalized groups
- Expand diverse perspectives
- Practice democratic methods
- Understand issues of racism, discrimination, oppression, and systemic racial disparities
- Address biases, inequities, or injustices within the group or the work

With that said, there can also be challenges with *having* and *not having* courageous conversations. A few challenges are noted in the sidebar.

Challenges of HAVING courageous conversations

- Differences may come up
- Conflict may arise
- Tension is possible
- Discomfort is likely
- Hard dialogue may occur

Challenges of NOT HAVING courageous conversations

- Diverse perspectives stay silent
- Tension builds
- Disconnection begins
- Trust is broken
- Inequity persists

7.1.3 Courageous Conversation Topics

Equity-focused conversations can take many different forms and functions. For example, an equity-issue may arise at any stage of your collaboration process. You or someone in the group may recognize it and bring it to everyone's attention.

You can work with the collaboration to determine the best way to hold space for needed topics and discussions. In many cases, this might mean holding time on the next meeting agenda for dialogue around a topic or hosting a small group conversation to dig deeper. In other cases, this might mean addressing an issue when it arises. This could also mean using the **equity choice point** process or an **equity pause** to address the issue in the moment (see section *9.2: Centering Equity in CSD Meetings*).

Here is a list of possible equity issues that your collaboration may discuss.

EQUITY TOPICS

- History of structural racism and how to operate today
- Historical context of specific systems or institutions
- History we were never told
- Understanding our shared histories
- Identity and culture
- Race and ethnicity
- Dismantling racism within systems and institutions
- Racial inequities
- Structural and systemic oppression
- Privilege, power, and oppression
- Racial justice
- Racism and antiracism
- White dominant culture
- White supremacy
- Equality versus equity
- Diversity and inclusion
- Status quo versus equity impact
- Advancing equity and inclusion
- Freedom and liberation

This list is not exhaustive. There are many discussion guides and conversation starters out there. See the resources listed below for some ideas. You will likely want to tailor and adapt these guides for your specific needs and use.

Sample Conversation Guides for Inspiration

- Equity Conversation Guides for Young Leaders and Partners, The Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Courageous Conversations about Race, Glenn E. Singleton
- 21-Day Equity Challenge: Discussion Guide for Groups
- Living Room Conversations (various topics)
- Moving the Race Conversation Forward, Race Forward
- Talking About Race, National Museum of African American History & Culture

7.2 PREPARING FOR PLANNED EQUITY-FOCUSED CONVERSATIONS

7.2.1 Preparing for the Conversation

When planning a small group equity conversation, consider a duration of one-hour for groups of six or less and about ninety minutes to two hours for groups of seven or more. For groups of twenty or more, you may want to use small groups or breakout rooms to make sure everyone has space to speak.

Consider the following ideas to provide support and structure to an equity-focused conversation:

Additional Ideas for Supporting Equity-Focused Conversations

- Use and adapt an equity discussion guide.
- Access the Center for Civic Reflection's library to discover relevant texts, images, videos, and music to help groups make sense of important issues.
- Use the Liberatory Design deck to start a dialogue that addresses equity challenges and change efforts in complex systems.
- Ask your partners and collaboration for ideas! Get their questions and their creative methods, tools, etc. for conversations.

It can be helpful to have a general conversation guide for the conversation to provide some structure while also leaving room to follow the conversation where the group wants to go. A conversation guide might include the essentials in the sidebar.

You can also consider different facilitation methods or techniques to support engagement in these equity conversations (see *Appendix B: Facilitation Methods, Techniques, and Tools*).

Conversation Guide Essentials

- Welcome and framing the conversation
- Setting expectations
- Developing or revisiting group agreements
- Introductions, check-in, or another opener
- Discussion prompts or questions
- Closing, thank you, and possible next conversation or next steps

7.2.2 Organizing the Logistics

You can set the group up for meaningful dialogue by preparing the conversation logistics. Check out the logistics checklist sidebar for guidance.

7.2.3 Setting Expectations

Setting expectations with your collaboration about the equity-focused conversations ensures that everyone understands the purpose, goals, and outcomes. This allows everyone to co-create the conversation and support each other through the process. Without expectations outlined from the beginning, you run the risk of misunderstanding and low engagement. How you invite people to the conversation and frame the conversation is a first effort in setting expectations. You will want to communicate with your collaboration the "why" of the conversation including the purpose and goals.

Logistics Checklist

Effective meetings have:

✓ Send out any preparation notes prior to the meeting to give participants an idea of what to expect for the conversation (see section *7.4.4: Taking Care of Self and Others*).

✓ Create a welcoming environment and atmosphere that is supportive of individual and group needs.

✓ Secure space that allows for:

- Everyone to see and hear each other
- Limited distractions, such as outside noise or interruptions
- The possibility of breaking out into smaller groups

✓ Bring needed resources and tools, such as:

- White board or chart paper for taking down key takeaways
- Group agreements, if already developed
- Key materials, if needed, such as definitions or terms
- Discussion guide that provides talking points for framing the conversation, opening the conversation, developing and/or using group agreements, and probing questions

✓ Determine roles, e.g., facilitator, co-facilitator, note taker, timekeeper (see sections *1.1.9: Other Meeting Roles* and *4.6.3: Assigning Meeting Roles*).

7.3 FACILITATING EQUITY-FOCUSED CONVERSATIONS

There is indeed an art to hosting equity-focused conversations, much of which can be supported by creating accountable space, co-creating shared agreements, and promoting awareness and engagement. Beyond that, your work is to stay present and navigate collaborative conversations by maintaining a balance of neutrality and intentionality when needed. In many cases, you might also have a plan to follow up and act after the conversation.

7.3.1 Creating Accountable Space

You are most likely familiar with the concepts of safe or brave space. There is beginning to be a shift to accountable space. In this section, we describe the differences among these spaces and share some reasons why a shift to accountable space is encouraged.

Safe and Brave Space

We often hear about the need to create **safe space** when discussing diversity, equity, and inclusion. However, we cannot always ensure "safety" in courageous conversations because conflicts and disagreements may arise.

We can encourage **brave spaces**, which are committed to learning, naming, and engaging. Brave spaces encourage individuals to stick with discomfort and engage meaningfully. While it can be difficult not to turn away from this discomfort, brave spaces can help us move through tension to get to better understanding and achieve desired outcomes.[2]

Brave space: A brave space is an environment that follows these five common ground rules:[3]

1. *"Controversy with civility"* – where varying opinions are accepted, and participants can agree to disagree
2. *"Owning intentions and impacts"* — where participants acknowledge and discuss instances where a dialogue has affected the emotional well-being of another person
3. *"Challenge by choice"* – where participants have an opportunity to step in and out of challenging conversations
4. *"Respect"* – where participants agree to show respect for one another's basic personhood
5. *"No attacks"* – where participants agree not to intentionally inflict harm on one another

Accountable Space

While "brave space" may be more commonly known and used in the CSD field today, there is a growing interest in what is referred to as "**accountable space**." Elise Ahenkorah argues that *"to move forward, we don't need to promise safety or expect bravery. We need to embrace accountability to foster more inclusive and equitable spaces in communities and workplaces."*[4] Brave spaces emphasize the importance of being brave enough to enter spaces and share your authentic self and lived experience. However, people from underrepresented groups must be brave everywhere daily. In fact, some brave spaces do not alleviate the burden marginalized or oppressed communities face. Instead, they ask for individuals and communities to be "brave" while educating others based on their most traumatic experiences.[5]

Accountability means being responsible for yourself and your intentions, words, and actions. Accountable space guidelines allow collaboration members to agree on behaviors and actions during a conversation. Therefore, accountable space guidelines do not place an unfair burden on bravery. To align well-meaning intentions with action, consider the accountable space guidelines on the following page:[6]

Accountable Space Guidelines

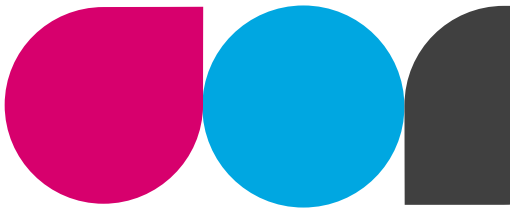
(adapted from the University of California, Los Angeles — UCLA)

1. Please do not interrupt others.
2. Listen actively, instead of just waiting to speak. Please use a pen and paper to record your thoughts, if necessary.
3. Be mindful of your total talk time and, if you are comfortable, speak up to add to the conversation.
4. Give everyone a chance to speak, without unnecessary pressure.
5. Understand that we are all learning. If you said something offensive or problematic, apologize for your actions or words being offensive — not for the person feeling insulted.
6. Recognize and embrace friction as evidence that multiple ideas are entering the conversation — not that the group is not getting along.
7. Give credit where it is due. If you are echoing someone's previously stated idea, give the appropriate credit.
8. Ask for clarification — do not assume or project.
9. Speak for yourself. Use "I" statements and do not share others' lived experiences.
10. Words and tone matter. Be mindful of the impact of what you say, and not just your intent.
11. Self-reflect on actionable items to become an ally in your daily work or personal experiences, after leaving the space. Can't figure it out? Use Google but for the sake of the few Black people in your office — don't place the burden of educating yourself on others, especially those from equity-deserving communities.
12. If you attend as an ally of the community, please allow space for equity-deserving and marginalized communities to share their experiences.
13. Other — ask your audience if there are other guidelines needed to support them to ensure the conversation does not create further trauma or undue mental or emotional hardship.

If collaboration members can participate in an accountable space with agreements or guidelines there is more possibility for genuine exchange and better understanding, which can strengthen relationships, the collaboration process, and the community.

It is important to note that even during courageous conversations, you should be prepared to mitigate potential harm. See section *7.4.3: Supporting When Harms Happens.*

The distinctions among safe, brave, and accountable spaces are summarized in the table on the following page.[7]



Space Comparison Guidelines		
Safe Space	**Brave Space**	**Accountable Space**
• Impossible to anticipate participants' triggers • Impossible to guarantee complete safety as participants' behaviors and actions cannot be known or controlled during or after the conversation • No accountability for inclusive and equitable thoughts, behaviors, and actions	• Unbalanced expectations for marginalized communities to be brave in sharing their lived experiences to educate others • Negates daily bravery of marginalized communities • No accountability for inclusive and equitable thoughts, behaviors, and actions	• Equalizes responsibility to behave equitably and inclusively • Creates opportunity for everyone to challenge conditions of marginalized communities in real time • Intentions and outcomes are rooted with accountability to promote thoughts, actions, and behaviors that are equitable and inclusive

7.3.2 Using Courageous Conversation Agreements

Just like with regular CSD conversations and meetings, it can be helpful to create and use **shared agreements** to set the tone and ready the group for meaningful equity conversations (see section *4.5.4: Creating Shared Agreements*). Remember shared agreements should meet the group's core needs and as many preferences as possible. And to be effective, shared agreements should be concrete, realistic, and genuinely agreed. See section *4.5.4: Creating Shared Agreements* for more on co-creating shared agreements.[8]

Your current shared agreements may work for equity-focused conversations. You may also want to consider specific agreements for equity conversations, e.g., the **Four Agreements of Courageous Conversations**.[9] Doing so can support your collaboration in engaging diverse perspectives, sustaining the conversation when it feels uncomfortable, and deepening the conversation to get to authentic and meaningful dialogue. The Four Agreements for Courageous Conversations are shared below:[10]

Four Agreements of Courageous Conversations

1. Stay engaged

- Stay morally, emotionally, intellectually, and socially involved in the dialogue.
- Try not to "check out" of the conversation.
- Try not to divert the conversation or remain silent rather than speaking your truth.

2. Experience discomfort

- Discomfort is inevitable, especially, in dialogue about race, and that participants make a commitment to bring issues into the open.
- Discomfort may help with problem solving and healing.

3. Speak your truth

- Be open about thoughts and feelings. Don't just say what you think others want to hear.
- Your truth may be different from someone else's truth; share your truth when you are ready.

4. Expect and accept a lack of closure

- Expect that we will not reach closure or solutions for issues discussed. We must "hang out in uncertainty" and not rush to quick solutions.
- Know that you may leave with questions or concerns that will be addressed next time.
- Commit to ongoing dialogue.

You are welcome to adapt these with your collaboration to fit the group's needs. For example, some groups may choose to clarify or reword an idea or add a concept such as "listen to learn" or "hold judgment." See also section *7.3.1: Creating Accountable Space* to see what you might add or adapt from the list of accountable space guidelines.

7.3.3 Promoting Awareness and Engagement

One way to promote awareness and engagement within equity-focused conversations is to work with participants to monitor and actively uphold the six conditions of Courageous Conversations. This will allow the collaboration to engage in, sustain, and deepen the conversation. Learn about the conditions and how to practice them in the table below.[11]

Condition	What it is	How to Practice This
ENGAGE		
1. Focus on personal, local, and immediate	• Demonstrating respectful understanding of specific historical, contemporary, local, and immediate racial contexts.	• Ask: *"What are your racial attitudes, beliefs, and expectations?"* • Encourage others to speak from a place of *"I"*, such as *"I feel...."* Or *"I believe..."*
2. Isolate race	• Engaging through your personal and racial experiences, beliefs, and perspectives	• Encourage others to identify their race when speaking: *"As a white male, I believe..."*
SUSTAIN		
3. Normalize social construction and multiple perspectives	• Sustaining others in the conversation through mindful inquiry into multiple perspectives, beliefs, and experiences that are different from your own	• Ask for diverse perspectives. • Inquire about different beliefs and experiences
4. Monitor agreements, conditions, and establish parameters	• Checking in on the shared agreements and conditions to keep focused and grounded	• Write the agreements and conditions so all have access. • Revisit the agreements and conditions throughout the conversation
DEEPEN		
5. Use a "working definition" for race	• Examining how race is lived differently by white people and people of color	• Ask: *"What is our collective definition of 'race'?"* • Differentiate from nationality and ethnicity
6. Examine the presence and role of "whiteness"	• Understanding the role of whiteness and our beliefs about our association with and relationship to white privilege and power	• Ask: *"Where is 'whiteness' playing out here?"*

7.3.4 Navigating the Conversation

As described in previous sections, there are ways to support the collaborations' ability to discuss and engage with challenging topics. Consider these tips for navigating equity-focused conversation:

Navigating Equity-Focused Conversations

Create a positive atmosphere

- Open with a warm tone and positive attitude.
- Use participants' names and make eye contact.
- Make sure everyone has a seat at the table and the ability to see and hear each other.
- Arrange the space so that it feels inclusive and welcoming.

Open the conversation

- Check-in with the group, e.g., *"What is your personal weather today?"*
- Frame the conversation by explaining the purpose of the conversation.
  - Provide background, as needed.
  - State the desired meeting outcome(s) for the conversation.
- Remind participants that discomfort or emotions may arise and to stay present with themselves and each other.
- Invite participants to take care of their own needs during the conversation (see section *7.4.4: Taking Care of Self and Others*).
- Review the Four Agreements of Courageous Conversations (see section *7.3.2: Using Courageous Conversation Agreements*), and either create or revisit your shared agreements (see section *4.5.4: Creating Shared Agreements*) or accountable space guidelines for conversations (see section *7.3.1: Creating Accountable Space*).

Guide the conversation

- Consider different open-ended question types to elicit greater response, explore perspectives, and clarify positions (see section *3.2: Asking Powerful Questions*).
- Know when to remain neutral and when not to be neutral (see section *1.1.7: Facilitator Neutrality*).
- Build a culture of **calling in** to the conversation and **calling out** when needed (see sections *2.3.1: Centering Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Facilitation* and *4.8.8: Calling In and Calling Out*). Calling in involves inviting people into a conversation rather than shaming or blaming.
- Spend sufficient time discussing concepts, issues, and perspectives.
  - Make sure people do not move too quickly into problem solving or fix-it mode.
  - Write down key ideas or themes on a chart page, white board, or virtual board so you can easily bring the group back if the conversation gets off track.
  - Point back to the written notes and ask, *"Is there anything else to add?", "What else should we consider?", "What is another perspective?"*
- Monitor the shared agreements and conditions, discussed above, to engage, sustain, and deepen the conversation (see section *7.3.3: Promoting Awareness and Engagement*).
- Hold each other accountable for inclusive and equitable actions and behaviors (see section *7.3.1: Creating Accountable Space*).
- Slow down, take breaks, or check in as needed to support participants and their diverse perspectives, emotions, and awareness (see section *7.4.4: Taking Care of Self and Others*).

Wrap up the conversation

- Determine the next steps with the collaboration. The conversation or issue at hand may not be resolved in the same discussion. Does the current group need another discussion? Is it time to engage others, such as a working group or the community? Perhaps specific people or perspectives need to be engaged in the conversation? What information needs to be gathered to better understand the issue?
- Ask people to take on specific small actions and set a mutually agreeable time to check back in with each other.

Close the conversation

- Summarize what the group shared.
- Invite the group to reflect upon what they learned, e.g., *"What did we learn?", "What did we gain from this conversation?"*
- Highlight any decisions, action, or next step.
- Provide a check-out question or prompt to reflect and ground everyone, e.g., *"How do you feel about our discussion?", "What's one word to describe how you feel after this conversation?"*

7.3.5 Acting After the Conversation

After an equity-focused conversation, focus on gratitude, reflection, and communication with your collaboration. Your post-equity conversation communication might include the following:

- **Express gratitude** for those who took part in the conversation. Give appreciation and recognition for participants' time and emotional energy.
- **Summarize** the key learnings from the conversation.
- **Reflect** how the conversation aligns to the collaboration's shared vision and agenda.
- **Follow up** on action commitments resulting from the conversation or learnings.
- **Share** how the conversation and action commitments will lead to desired change for the collaboration or shared work.
- **Share** any key resources to support your conversation and action moving forward.
- **Indicate** how the collaboration will keep the conversation and learning going. This might include a follow-up conversation on the topic, a commitment to regular space for dialogue, and/or open feedback opportunities for collaboration members.

7.4 HOLDING SPACE

Engaging in equity-focused conversations requires courage, both as a facilitator and a collaboration member.[12] When holding space for equity-focused conversations, discomfort is likely to arise. Staying present in the discomfort and responding to emotions that may arise will help you build your strength, courage, and ability to hold this space. Remember to look at section *2.2: Inner Work of Centering Equity* for your own reflection and preparation. Part of holding space for others is holding space for ourselves.

7.4.1 Staying Present with Discomfort

Feelings of discomfort are normal as we reflect on our experiences with inequities and deepen our understanding of race and racism.[13] If you feel discomfort, consider how it can be an opportunity to go inward (see section *2.2: Inner Work of Centering Equity*).[14] Stay present with the discomfort as it arises within yourself and others during conversations. The more you practice facilitating difficult conversations, the more you will be able to manage discomfort as it comes up.

While it might not get "easier" to hold space for these conversations, your ability to support meaningful conversation will expand.[15] Stay grounded, present, and engaged; the journey inward and in holding space will be worth the effort. In doing so, we begin to expand our individual and collective awareness. We also strengthen our ability to have hard conversations that lead to deeper change and transformation within our collaborations, organizations, systems, and communities.

7.4.2 Responding to Emotions

Collaboration members' reactions to talking about inequities, race, and racism will vary widely. Some participants in the conversation may be passive, express anger, feel triggered, become visually upset, or actively push back against the topic. Emotional reactions may range from sadness, anger, and guilt, to hope and optimism. Difficult emotions may stem from deep pain, wounds, and traumas.

It is important to be aware that any sort of stressful or dysregulating situation or conversation may activate an individual's stress response through the autonomic branch of the nervous system.[16] The sympathetic nervous system is responsible for the "fight" or "flight" response. This can look like someone trying to fight the threat or flee for safety.[17] The parasympathetic nervous system works to conserve energy. It may look as if someone is "freezing" or stuck and unable to speak or act. The "fawning" response is when someone tries to please others.[18]

Being aware of these possible reactions to stress may help you to understand what may be happening to a participant during a charged or uncomfortable conversation. Rather, than reacting to the stress response, we can choose to stay present, available, and curious.

Remember that emotions are not bad. In responding to emotions, your role is to remain calm, grounded, and neutral. This will allow you to assess the situation and to consider how best to respond. It may also help others remain calm. As you hear participants, listen to the emotions behind the words and consider the suggestions below:

RESPONDING TO EMOTIONS

- Stay present with emotions that come up.
- Allow emotions to be there.
- Avoid shutting down emotions.
- Avoid any judgment about the emotions.
- Avoid fixing the emotion.
- Don't ask people to calm down (unless the emotion is leading to harmful words, actions, or behaviors).
- Reflect on what you hear and see.
- Become curious about emotions and what is underneath them.

The **RAIN** model from Tara Brach can guide you in bringing awareness and compassion to emotions as they arise:[19]

R - Recognize what is going on

A - Allow the experience to be there, just as it is

I - Investigate with interest and care

N - Nurture with self-compassion

Consider the following emotions that may arise during a conversation on inequity, race, and/or racism and how you might respond:[20]

Emotion	Facilitator Response
Sadness/grief/pain/suffering	• Acknowledge the emotion. • Check-in with participants on how they are feeling. • Model body language and tone of voice that is open and compassionate. • Invite participants to share if they want to or are able. • Understand that sadness or grief may activate a "freeze" response.
Anger	• Acknowledge the emotion. • Check-in with participants on how they are feeling. • Invite participants to share if they want or are able. • Try to understand what may be under the emotion, e.g., anger is often a messenger of several things including other emotions, e.g., grief, sadness, a core limiting belief, a trigger being activated, a boundary being crossed, or an unmet need. • Understand that anger might activate the "fight" or "flight" response. • Offer support by inviting everyone, including yourself, to take a deep and grounding breath. • Take breaks in the conversation as needed.
Anxious	• Acknowledge the emotion. • Check in with participants on how they are feeling. • Invite participants to share if they want or are able. • Understand that anxiety might activate the "fight" or "flight" response. • Offer support by inviting ourselves, individuals, and the collective to take a deep and grounding breath. • Take breaks in the conversation as needed.
Guilt	• Ask participants to share what they feel responsible for. • Remind participants to accept responsibility for their own actions and future efforts, while considering the past actions of groups, systems, and history.
Shame	• Invite participants to reflect and/or share what feels shameful. • Ask questions that allow participants to provide their own solution to an action, thought, or behavior that is perpetuating a behavior.
Blame	• Remind participants that they did not create the system but they can support change and improvement for better outcomes.
Confusion or denial	• Understand that individuals may be operating from a space of misinformation about topics or groups of people. • Ask questions anchored in understanding or rooted in data, history, and research. • Offer accurate or objective facts for consideration.

It is important to be aware that discomfort and emotions can grow into something else, even when you do your best to prepare, hold space, and respond. As you know from section *5.4: Dealing with Interpersonal Conflict During Meetings*, conflict can develop through five stages often starting with discomfort and growing into incident, misunderstanding, tension, and then conflict.

Staying present with the emotions and discomfort that arise will help you understand if minor discomfort or emotions are growing into something more conflicting or even harmful. See sections *5.3: Recognizing and Intervening Disruptive Behaviors* and *5.4: Dealing with Interpersonal Conflict During Meetings* for more information on how to minimize conflict before it escalates and how to take action to deal with it.

Pre-established group agreements can help collaboration members support a healthy environment for dialogue and conversation and reduce the likelihood that you need to intervene.

7.4.3 Supporting When Harm Happens

Equity-focused conversations are often intended to improve conditions for racial and ethnic minorities in a community. However, sometimes these same conversations may harm the very groups for which they aim to support.[21] Collaboration members not belonging to the dominant group can be at greatest risk of unintended harm. The facilitator should be prepared to avoid, mitigate, or reduce potential harm, when possible.

Racial trauma or **race-based traumatic stress (RBTS)** refers to mental or emotional injury caused by encounters with racial bias and ethnic discrimination, racism, and hate crimes.[22] According to Mental Health America, *"Any individual that has experienced an emotionally painful, sudden, and uncontrollable racist encounter is at risk of suffering from a race-based traumatic stress injury."*

Trauma, when recounted through dialogue, can cause an individual to relive the traumatic event, i.e., re-experience the trauma. Participants may feel triggered and RBTS symptoms may arise. This can result in the reliving of painful experiences and emotional distress. Additionally, discussing inequities, race, and/or racism has the potential to leave People of Color feeling distressed, exhausted, depleted, and dismissed.[23]

Keep in mind that revisiting and disclosing harm has consequences for the people sharing and the people listening. Some consequences are severe. Before entering conversations, consider the overall purpose of the conversation and the strategies below to mitigate harm.

STRATEGIES TO MITIGATE HARM

- Developing a welcoming, supportive, and healing space for participants
- Framing conversations about inequities, race, and/or racism. This may include question prompts that invite reflection before the conversation begins, a reminder that different emotions may arise, and/or encouragement to take care of their own needs by only sharing what they feel willing, ready, and able to share
- Reminding participants that they don't have to (re) tell their stories of harm nor disclose things about themselves to be part of the collaboration
- Avoiding invalidating, dismissing, or deluding participants' experiences with inequity, racism, discrimination, or oppression
- Inviting participants to take care of their own needs during these conversations and to engage as they see appropriate and possible for themselves given their own experiences and needs
- Engaging with a community partner and/or trained diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) facilitator to conduct dialogues, if needed. Note: It is also possible that harm, individually or collectively, has already occurred within a collaboration. Sometimes an outside or third party may be helpful to support and guide participants to restore trust
- Providing resources to support those who have experienced harm, trauma, racism, or discrimination
- Offering tools for inner learning and historical learning to participants interested in going deeper

7.4.4 Taking Care of Self and Others

Navigating equity conversations can often leave people feeling exhausted, frustrated, or emotional. To support ourselves and each other, it is essential to care for self, collaboration members, and communities to sustain the work toward equity. Consider the following ways to care for yourself and others:

Taking Care of Self	Taking Care of Others
• Trust your own inner readiness, willingness, and ability when it comes to facilitating equity-focused conversations. Meet yourself where you are and consider what added reflection, learning, or skill-building might be needed. • Clarify your own experiences, motivations, and commitments before the conversation. • Show up as your authentic self and be willing to reflect your own humanity and truth if it feels helpful to you and the group. • Check-in with yourself on what thoughts, feelings, and body sensations are coming up before, during, and after the conversation. • Invite a co-planner and co-facilitator for the conversation, e.g., you may consider partnering with someone in your collaboration who has experience and/or interest in centering equity. • Consider your own needs and what you need to facilitate difficult conversations, e.g., do you need space for inner work, historical learning, additional skills, and/or practice facilitating and being with discomfort. • Practice with peers or others to be able to stay present with discomfort as it surfaces. • Create space to reflect on the conversation and consider what worked well, how to improve, and how to support the group forward, e.g., it could help to debrief the conversation with a trusted mentor, peer, or co-facilitator. • Give grace and self-compassion to yourself on your inner journey and facilitation journey.	• Provide preparation for the conversation, when it feels appropriate, e.g., you might choose to offer a note to your participants that a variety of emotions may come up during the planned equity-focused conversation and invite participants to stay present with the material, be individually and socially aware, and offer compassion to self and others. • Agree on shared goals and agreements for the conversation. • Meet people where they are on their equity journeys. • Space out or pace the conversation to support participants and their diverse perspectives, emotions, and awareness. • Take breaks during the conversation to give people time to slow down and take care of their own needs. • Check-in with each other if emotions come up or if the conversation gets heated. • Consider the benefit of a co-facilitator or third-party facilitator. • Create a sense of closing by doing a check-out. Note: We cannot guarantee closure or completeness for a conversation, but we can offer participants space to check out on how they are feeling, what they learned, or what they are taking away. • Follow up with participants and ask how they are doing, what they need to feel supported, what their experience was like, and for any feedback. • Offer compassion and empathy to individuals and the group for sharing their experiences and perspectives. • Provide additional tools and resources to support individuals and the collective in reflecting, learning, and healing.

Facilitating and holding space for equity-focused conversations can be difficult work. This is why it is important to do the inner work. We need to enter this work and these conversations with a deep understanding of ourselves as well as with compassion as we seek to understand different experiences and perspectives.[24] While discomfort may arise, hopefully, we will find ourselves individually and collectively more aware, accountable, and better able to improve community outcomes.[25]

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[22]Mental Health America. "Racial Trauma."

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[24]Dominique Samari, JD and Paul Schmitz. FSG. "Racial Equity Toolkit: A Reflection and Resource Guide for Collective Impact Backbone Staff and Partners." February 2023.

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CHAPTER 8

Planning Collaboration Meetings

In this chapter, we provide detailed guidance on how to plan for a CSD collaboration meeting. First, you will explore some of the unique characteristics of large group CSD meetings and a few basic building blocks of meeting design. The focus then turns to developing your collaboration meeting agenda and preparing for the meeting in the last section.

8.1 UNDERSTANDING LARGE GROUP CSD MEETINGS

Large group CSD meetings have unique characteristics which are important to keep in mind when designing CSD meeting agendas. Here we use the five core focuses of meeting facilitation described in section *1.2.1: Five Facilitation Focuses Facilitation* to take a closer look at the unique characteristics of CSD meetings: people, content, process, group dynamics, and equity.

8.1.1 People

CSD efforts require the engagement of people from diverse sectors and perspectives. Sectors often include early learning and care, families and family support, health and mental health, human services, school systems and more. Perspectives include families who are the users of the system, people who provides services and supports, decision makers and influencers, and others who care about the health and well-being of families and their young children.

Engaging families in the process of early childhood system improvement is a key part of centering equity. By engaging families, we can make sure we are enhancing the system in ways that work for them. Illinois Action for Children has developed many resources that can help you engage families.

Time is a very important consideration when it comes to engaging people in collaboration efforts. Already busy with other commitments, collaboration meetings need to be worth people's time and effort to participate. Making meetings relevant and focused on action around a shared agenda will go a long way in keeping people engaged.

People Design Considerations

- Be intentional about inviting people to each meeting.
- Plan for facilitation techniques and methods that create space for and bring out the diverse perspectives in the group.
- Support the group in listening to understand each other's perspectives, as they may be very different.
- Center family voice in conversations and decision-making.
- Create authentic and meaningful ways to engage families.
- Spend time strengthening relationships among collaboration members.
- Keep meetings relevant, engaging, and action-oriented.

8.1.2 Content

Content refers to "what" the collaboration focuses on in collaboration meetings, e.g., topics, problems, and opportunities. CSD meeting agendas can have a range of topics each with a different meeting outcome (see section *8.2.2: Topic Goal versus Meeting Outcome*). Later in this chapter we will look at different types of meeting outcomes. Regardless of the meeting outcome, topics are generally focused on the early childhood system.

Early childhood collaborations are often tackling very complex (also referred to as "wicked") systems problems. Adding to the complexity is the dynamic nature of community systems. Community systems can change overnight because of funding shifts or the closing of a prominent community agency, for example.

Sometimes, new opportunities emerge that were not foreseen but require quick action, e.g., a last-minute funding opportunity. Sometimes we learn about these new developments during the meeting. When these types of changes happen in our communities, we need to be willing and able to adapt our meeting agendas quickly whether that is just before or during the meeting.

Supporting the group through the three thinking zones of the Diamond for Participatory Decision-Making is critical to getting to inclusive and sustainable decisions that everyone will support through action. It is also important to note that while meetings focus on topics, they also need to focus on action. Aim to include agenda topics that are action-oriented rather than information sharing.

Content Design Considerations

- Clearly state the meeting outcome for each agenda topic.
- Keep the focus on the early childhood system.
- Support the group through the three zones of divergence, groan/emergence, and convergence to address complex system problems.
- Be ready to adapt your meeting design when emergent opportunities or issues arise before or during meetings.
- Integrate action learning into your meetings whenever relevant.
- Connect conversations that continue across meetings using good framing.

8.1.3 Process

Process refers to "how" the group engages in conversation. The process may range from being free-flowing (open conversation) to more supported and deliberate by design (planned conversation). While open conversation tends to be the default way of being in conversation in groups, CSD meetings often have agenda topics that require a specific process to achieve the meeting outcome, e.g., a decision-making process.

Since CSD collaborations seek to improve early childhood systems, they often are engaging in problem-solving as a primary focus. Most collaboration meetings will have one or more agenda topics that focus on some part of the problem-solving process, i.e., uncovering problems, understanding a problem, designing strategies to address the problem, engaging action learning to understand and improve strategy implementation, and measuring the impact of efforts.

Problem-solving is often a very iterative process. Given the complex nature of system problems, it is impossible for any one person to fully understand the problem, its root causes, or the many ways in which it impacts other aspects of the system. Even the strategies designed to address the problem will be a best guess at what might work. The collaboration will need to engage in **action learning**, a continuous process of learning about system problems and taking action to improve the early childhood system until they discover what works. More on this in section *9.3: Using Action Learning to Improve Results*.

Given this complexity and iterative nature of the problem-solving process, the same topic – or problem the collaboration is addressing – may flow across many meetings. For example, at one meeting the collaboration may seek to identify and understand a system problem and at another future meeting they might focus on developing strategies to address it. This requires us to connect the dots between conversations and action between meetings so that the group can advance their efforts. Making these connections is critical to the process.

Finally, CSD facilitators will need to keep the group focused on and engaged in action between meetings. This means the process doesn't end when the meeting is over. Follow up with members between meetings and support them to act on the commitments they made during the meeting. For more on how to support members to act see sections *9.3: Using Action Learning to Improve Results* and *10.1.3: Supporting Action Between Meetings*.

Process Design Considerations

- Set clear meeting outcomes for each major agenda item.
- Plan for appropriate facilitation methods that match each meeting outcome.
- Be ready to engage in problem-solving during meetings.
- Get comfortable and competent at working through an iterative process so that you can address emergent learning as it happens.
- Be ready to adapt your meeting design and facilitation during meetings to address emergent issues or opportunities.
- Connect conversations across meetings that are about the same topic.
- Support action learning during meetings and action between meetings.

8.1.4 Group Dynamics

Productive group dynamics are important for any group conversation or meeting. Collaboration members' attitudes, behaviors, and skills influence their collective capacity to reach their shared goals. The diversity of CSD collaboration members, complexity of system issues, and iterative nature of problem-solving require even more attention to group dynamics for the collaboration to be successful.

CSD meetings tend to include more people than small group conversations. This in turn has an impact on group dynamics. In large group conversations, you need to be more intentional about making space for people to be part of the conversation.

Often the group will benefit from more facilitation techniques and methods, e.g., pair shares to develop their individual thinking to rounds to assure everyone has an opportunity to contribute. Using processes like these will help the collaboration benefit from the diverse perspectives in the room. This means taking time ahead of the meeting to plan for appropriate processes to keep everyone engaged and contributing.

When designing your meeting agendas, consider the collaboration's stage of development (see sections *1.2.2: Spectrum of Collaboration; 1.2.4: Stages of Group Development*; and *5.1: Building a Foundation for Effective Collaboration*). For example, if the collaboration is newly forming, it will be hard to engage members in deep systems work because the collaboration most likely lacks a governance structure to support decision-making. Additionally, if members are accustomed to attending collaboration meetings to share information, it may be challenging to engage them in action planning.

Consider the following questions to understand your collaboration's action readiness as you design your agendas:

- What is your collaboration's vision, mission, and primary goals?
- How formal is the collaboration's structure?
- What is the overall level of engagement of members?
- What is the level of trust among members?
- Where on the collaboration spectrum does your collaboration fall?
- At what stage of the collaboration lifecycle is your collaboration?

Another factor that influences group dynamics is the ebb and flow of the collaboration's capacity and engagement. All collaborations, regardless of their collaboration life stage, go through periods of varying collective capacity and member engagement. **Collective capacity** refers to the group's knowledge, ability, and commitment to work together and engage in community systems development efforts. This is closely tied to member engagement. As membership changes over time, so does engagement. Whether it is a change in who represents a community agency or a change in agency membership, any change to group membership has the potential to affect how the group interacts.

Finally, matters of turf and trust deeply impact group dynamics. Many factors can influence turf issues, including financial resources, recognition and publicity, control over the collaboration's identity and ideology, and strategy decisions.[1] While this topic is beyond the scope of this handbook, facilitators need to be aware of and watch for turf and trust issues.

Group Dynamics Design Considerations

- Plan for facilitative methods before the meeting then make space for everyone to contribute to the conversation.
- Consider the collaboration's stage of group development when designing agendas.
- Devote ongoing effort to build the collaboration's collective capacity as it will ebb and flow over time.
- Realize that any changes in collaboration membership can have an impact on how the group works together.
- Continually build a mindset and practice of focusing on action over information sharing.
- Pay attention to matters of trust and turf.

8.1.5 Equity

Since centering equity is integral to CSD efforts, it is important to consider how it can be addressed during CSD meetings. In addition to being a powerful tool to support diversity, equity, and inclusion in your collaboration's efforts (see section *2.3.1: Centering Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Facilitation*), centering equity in meeting planning is an intentional way to build an equity lens, mindset, and practice for yourself and the collaboration.

In centering equity, there may be planned and emergent opportunities. A planned meeting might focus on discussing equitable outcomes, for example. On the other hand, opportunities for centering equity, such as identifying system root causes contributing to inequities may arise in the moment. You can plan for the unplanned, by having your equity toolkit at your disposal.

When thinking about equity as a meeting planning process, it is not just when facilitating equity conversations. It is also about how a facilitator manages who gets airtime, who gets centered or involved, how decisions are made and who gets to make them, etc.

Centering equity is essential to CSD work and improving the early childhood system. By centering equity, we can assure we are improving the system through both equitable processes and advancing equitable outcomes. Illinois Action for Children has developed many resources that can help you center equity, particularly racial equity.

Equity Design Considerations

- Continually build a centering equity lens, mindset, and practice in your meeting design and facilitation.
- Use an equity self-assessment to raise individuals', organizations', and the collaboration's awareness of where and how they need to grow in their equity journey.
- Be prepared to center equity in planned and emergent opportunities.
- Develop and use the collaboration's equity definition, goals, and priorities to inform meeting planning.
- Revisit shared agreements and accountable space guidelines as needed.
- Plan for facilitation methods that are inclusive and allow diverse perspectives to contribute, as well as shift power dynamics when necessary.
- Develop planned opportunities for equity practices and conversations.

8.2 MEETING DESIGN BASIC CONCEPTS

With an understanding of some of the unique aspects of large group CSD meetings, we now turn our attention to the basics of meeting design. We will look at three core components or building blocks of major agenda items: the topics, meeting outcomes, and the facilitation processes (or techniques) used to achieve the outcomes. We will build on these concepts throughout the remainder of this chapter.

To set the stage, let us remember that a good meeting starts with a thoughtfully designed agenda. The time and effort you put into crafting the agenda will pay off – even if you find that you need to adapt in the moment. The general rule of thumb is to spend twice the amount of time planning as you will be facilitating.

TIP

Plan to spend at least twice the amount of time planning the meeting as you will be facilitating it. Given the complexity of some topics, it may take even more time.

8.2.1 Agenda Topic Components

Each segment of your agenda, i.e., agenda item, includes three components: meeting topic, meeting outcome, and facilitation process.

- The **topic** is the content of the conversation – it is what the collaboration will talk about during the meeting. Sometimes topics are presented as questions.
- The **meeting outcome** is what you want to achieve regarding the topic at a particular meeting, e.g., make a decision.
- The **facilitation process** is how the conversation will take place. It is a planned activity (or a set of activities), technique, or method that will support the group in getting to the desired outcome, e.g., consensus decision-making.

Together the topic, meeting outcome, and facilitation process become a segment of your agenda. The table below offers a key design question and example for each of these components. Later in this chapter, we will explore how to develop a facilitation plan for each major agenda item.

Building Block	Key Design Question	Example
Agenda topic	What specific topic do we need to address at this meeting?	Coordinated intake strategies
Meeting outcome	What is the desired meeting outcome for this topic at this meeting?	Decide on a strategy for this fiscal year
Facilitation process	What facilitation process (or set of processes) will best support the group to achieve the meeting outcome?	Consensus decision-making

8.2.2 Topic Goal versus Meeting Outcome

As described earlier, often CSD topics are complex and require ongoing conversations and meetings to fully address the topic. This is especially true when we are engaging in problem-solving system issues but can also be true for planning events. Because of this it is important to distinguish between topic goals and meeting outcomes.

A **topic goal** is the overall result for the topic or issue. It is the result you seek in the world. It is likely a goal or objective from your strategic plan. For example, perhaps an overall goal is to improve the coordinated intake process for home visiting. This is a very big goal that will take many conversations, meetings, and collaborative efforts over time to achieve.

A **meeting outcome** on the other hand, refers to the more narrowly defined, specific outcome you want the group to achieve related to the topic at a specific meeting.[3] For example, a more specific meeting outcome related to coordinated intake might be understanding current intake processes used in your community. When you frame the conversation, you want to share both the overall topic goal and the specific meeting outcome. That way the group knows the north star of their efforts and the milestone for the current meeting.

There are many types of meeting outcomes, e.g., to share information, provide input, advance the thinking, make decisions, build community, and build capacity. Some examples of meeting outcomes and facilitator considerations for each one can be found on the next page.[4]

Meeting Outcomes		
Meeting Outcome Type	**Example**	**Facilitator Considerations**
Share information	• Make an announcement • Share a report or presentation • Provide project updates	• Consider if this information could be shared electronically. • Make sure information is relevant to the group. • Build in engagement opportunities to help the group integrate and process the information in meaningful ways.
Provide input	• Bring a topic to the group for feedback or suggestions	• Be clear that the request is for input not decisions. • Share relevant information about how the input may or may not be used. • Clarify who the decision-maker will be.
Engage diverse perspectives	• Understand diverse experiences and perspectives on a topic • Encourage honest dialogue on a topic • Deepen trust and understanding among members	• Clarify the purpose of the conversation is to hear and be heard. • Utilize shared agreements to support courageous conversations. • Use inclusive facilitation techniques to create space for everyone to be heard.
Advance the thinking[1]	• Define the problem • Identify root causes • Develop strategies • Prioritize system change strategies • Create a work plan	• Use a more specific outcome to help the group know exactly how they are advancing the thinking, e.g., define the problem, identify success criteria. • Connect the parts of the process using good framing so the group knows where they are in the larger process.
Make decisions	• Decide which coordinated intake strategy to move to action • Vote to approve our collaboration charter	• Determine how decisions will be made ahead of time, i.e., your decision rule (see section *9.2.2: Selecting a Decision Rule*). • Make sure the group has reached a shared understanding of the issue before moving toward closure with a decision.
Build team capacity	• Learn how to engage in consensus decision-making • Develop dialogue skills • Understand coordinated intake best practices	• Create a norm for capacity building as an ongoing part of collaboration meetings. • Focus learning experiences on content and skill building that will help the group advance their CSD efforts. • Integrate practical application next steps. • Celebrate the ways the collaboration's capacity is growing.
Build community	• Welcome new collaboration members • Understand the services that collaboration members provide to families	• Establish routine and novel ways in which the collaboration builds interpersonal relationships. • Use facilitative methods that build trust among collaboration members. • Pay attention to the quality of relationships.

[1]Note: This is a broad outcome that often applies to an ongoing process that has many steps, e.g., problem-solving. Generally, it is more helpful to state a meeting outcome related to the current step in the process, e.g., define the problem, instead of the broader "advance the thinking." See the table above for more examples.

8.2.3 Facilitation Process Options

The third component of a meeting segment is the **facilitation process**, which is the way the conversation or discussion will take place. Often the default process is **open conversation** – the conversational way of talking that happens without a specific facilitation process or technique (see section *6.2: Facilitating Open Conversations*). Sometimes open conversation is an appropriate way to have the conversation. More times than not, the group process could be improved by using one or more facilitative processes to deepen engagement and support getting to the meeting outcome.

A process does not need to be complicated to be helpful. There are many simple formats like some of the techniques shared in *Chapter 4: Facilitation Core Tasks and Techniques*. Additional techniques to achieve very specific objectives can be found in section *6.3: Facilitating Planned Conversations*. The processes in that section were organized by the three thinking zones: divergent, groan/emergent, and convergent. Here is a list of some process examples.

Process Examples	
Debate	Debate is an intentional process to emphasize differences between two points of view. Each position is championed by a team. The teams take turns making their case followed by a rebuttal from the other team (see section *6.3.6: Facilitating in the Convergent Zone*).[5]
Fishbowl	Fishbowl is a technique for organizing medium to large group discussions to encourage dialogue. Participants are separated into an inner and outer circle. In the inner circle, or fishbowl, individuals have a discussion on a given topic; individuals in the outer circle listen, observe, and take notes. After, the group is invited to reflect on the fishbowl conversation, as a participant and listener. For more about this fishbowl technique.
Gallery walks	A gallery walk engages participants in an exploratory and visual feedback and reflection process. This technique can be used to review, inspire, discuss, assess, or provide feedback on ideas, strategies, materials, or other work products. Learn more about gallery walks, which can be adapted from the classroom for the collaboration.
Go-arounds or round robin	A go-around is a structured way for group members to have the opportunity to share and be heard in response to a question. There is no conversation; the emphasis is on listening.
Individual writing	Individual writing time allows participants personal time to develop their ideas through writing. Share a topic or question, explain if they will write just for themselves or to share with others, and let participants know how much time they have.[6]
Listing ideas	Listing ideas allows you to make visible the ideas that are generated during divergent thinking.
Pairs or triads	Putting people into pairs or triads and gives speakers the time and space to share their thoughts while encouraging others to listen rather than think about their responses.[7]
Small group conversations or breakout groups	A small group conversation or break-out group is a conversation about a particular topic, or perhaps a range of topics, conducted in a group of a size that allows participation by all members.[8]
Individual think time	Giving diverse participants, learners, and thinkers time and space to reflect on questions and their own ideas before speaking, sharing, and discussing.
Think-pair-share (or pair-share)	A cooperative technique that can be used with any topic or group size. The facilitator poses a question, the participants think to themselves and then pair with someone else to discuss, and finally share what they discussed with the group.

A table of all the techniques and methods mentioned throughout this handbook can be found in *Appendix B: Facilitation Methods, Techniques, and Tools*.

8.2.4 Selecting Facilitation Process Techniques and Methods

A variety of terms are used to describe how facilitators guide the group process: skills, tasks, techniques, and methods. We highlighted several core **facilitation skills** in *Chapter 3: Essential Facilitation Skills* and **facilitator tasks and techniques** in *Chapter 4: Facilitation Core Tasks and Techniques.* In section *6.3: Facilitating Planned Conversations*, we provided sample techniques for the three thinking zones.

Our focus here is on the intentional facilitation techniques or methods you select to achieve the meeting outcome for a specific agenda item. **Facilitation techniques** are relatively simple, short duration ways to engage meeting participations in the conversation. **Facilitation methods** are more involved processes that take more time and have more steps, e.g., a **world café, consensus decision-making,** and **open space technology**.

One of the most important considerations for selecting a facilitation process – whether that is a technique or method – is that it is appropriate for the thinking zone the group is currently working in. The next table below reminds us of the primary facilitator objective, tasks, and sample techniques for each zone. *Appendix B: Facilitation Methods, Techniques, and Tools* is organized around the thinking zones to make it easy for you to select an appropriate technique or method.

	Divergent Zone	Groan/Emergent Zone	Convergent Zone
Facilitator Objective	• Gathering Diverse Perspectives or Ideas	• Getting to Shared Understanding	• Generating Inclusive Decisions
Facilitator Tasks	• Amplifying diverse perspectives • Generating ideas • Suspending judgment • Encouraging full and honest engagement	• Understanding others' perspectives • Helping people stay engaged. • Strengthening interpersonal communication and dynamics • Linking and connecting ideas • Listening to the whole of the conversation and what emerges	• Strengthening good ideas • Narrowing possibilities • Getting to inclusive and sustainable agreements
Techniques	• Individual writing •Think time • Go arounds • Chart writing • Brainstorming • Sticky notes • Small groups	• Categorizing • Scrambler • Jigsaw • Open conversation • Fishbowl	• Chart writing • Trade show • Debate • Decision making • Ask the Expert • Reports and presentations

Of course, also consider your meeting outcome when selecting a facilitation technique or method. For example, if problem-solving, select a technique specific to the problem-solving step, e.g., understanding a problem versus deciding on a solution. Each of these steps call for different types of techniques.

8.3 DEVELOPING THE MEETING AGENDA

Together the agenda topic, meeting outcome, and facilitation process become the foundation from which you can develop a facilitation plan for each major agenda segment. Before developing your facilitation plan, it may be helpful to first determine which agenda topics should be prioritized for the time you have available. In this section, we will first look at key questions to help you determine which topics to include in the agenda, how to develop a more detailed plan for each major topic, and then how to put together an annotated agenda for you and a general agenda for collaboration members.

8.3.1 Determining the Full Meeting Agenda

CSD collaboration meeting agendas often have many significant topics on each agenda. This section will help you think about which agenda topics to include and how to order them for the most productive conversations. Below are some guiding questions and suggestions.

What topics are you considering for this agenda?

- Make a list of topics you are considering for this agenda.
- Note which topics can be addressed through email, newsletters, or other forms of communication, e.g., updates and announcements.
- Consider planning only for the agenda items that require meeting participants' active engagement.

What is the desired meeting outcome for each topic?

- Clarify why this agenda topics is important currently.
- Define the meeting outcome that is desired, e.g., brainstorm options, decide on strategies, understand the problem.

Who needs to contribute to each topic?

- Brainstorm all the perspectives that are needed to understand the topic and get to the desired outcome.
- Consider whether you can get all these perspectives at the next meeting or whether this topic might need to be addressed in a different setting or way.
- Note accommodations that are needed to welcome and support inclusive engagement of all meeting participants.

What is the priority of each agenda item?

- Determine the relevance and urgency of each agenda item relative to your strategic plan.
- Plan to address more urgent items early in the agenda unless other topics must be addressed first.
- Consider consolidating brief updates into one agenda topic and putting them in writing. Distribute this information before or during the meeting. This leaves more time for conversation and worktime during the meeting.

Which topics require deep engagement?

- Plan to address these agenda topics early on when energy and attention are high.
- Consider alternating high-engagement topics with other quicker topics which can be addressed more quickly and require less energy and effort.
- Take brief pauses or breaks to refresh between high-engagement topics.

How much time will be needed for each topic to get to the desired result?

- Choose which facilitation technique or method will best support the group to the desired outcome, e.g., consider which brainstorming technique you use if you are trying to come up with a list of options.
- Estimate how much time might be needed for the chosen technique.
- Remember to allocate time for opening and closing the meeting (see sections *6.3.3: Opening the Conversation* and *6.3.7: Closing the Conversation*.

What might be a natural order of the agenda topics?

- Recall the priority and urgency you have indicated for each topic.
- Note agenda topics that may need to occur in a particular order.

Can you address all the topics in this meeting?

- If yes, great! Move forward with planning the meeting in greater detail (see the next section).
- If no, explore alternative ways and settings to address lower priority topics that cannot be addressed at this meeting.

8.3.2 Developing a Facilitation Plan for Major Agenda Topics

Once you have determined which meeting topics will be addressed at the next meeting, it is time to develop a more specific plan for how you will facilitate the major agenda topics. A **facilitation plan**, also referred to as an **annotated agenda,** is a detailed document that you can use to guide your facilitation. Essentially, it is your **process design**. Explore the following checklist of questions you can use to guide your design process. Note that this approach to agenda design begins with the three topic components described earlier in this section: topic, meeting outcome, and facilitation process. The questions and suggestions that follow will help you develop an expanded facilitation plan for each major agenda topic.

Checklist for Developing a Facilitation Plan for Major Agenda Topics

- ✓ **Topic:** What is the meeting topic or agenda item?
- ✓ **Topic goal:** What is the overall goal of this topic?
- ✓ **Meeting outcome:** What is the meeting outcome you want to achieve at this meeting?
- ✓ **Diamond Zone:** Which zone (or zones), i.e., divergent, groan/emergent, convergent, will the group be working in at this meeting?
- ✓ **Process:** What facilitation method or technique is most appropriate given the topic, meeting goal, zone, and group size?
- ✓ **Framing:** What context and background information is needed as you open this conversation?
- ✓ **Time:** How much time do you anticipate needing to achieve the desired meeting outcome? How much time can be devoted to this topic at this meeting?
- ✓ **Questions:** What powerful questions will you ask to support the group's best thinking?
- ✓ **Facilitation skills:** Which facilitation skills will most likely be helpful given the zone for this topic?
- ✓ **Supportive roles:** What meeting roles might be helpful for this agenda item?
- ✓ **Harvest:** How do you plan to capture the conversation both visually during the meeting and for meeting notes?

Topic Goal: Recall that this is the overall result the collaboration seeks for the topic. Using the earlier example, an overall goal might be to improve coordinated intake for home visiting. Of course, the collaboration may have a more detailed goal. If so, that should be shared. This may seem obvious, but it is easy to overlook the obvious when you are so closely immersed in the work. Keep in mind that not everyone who is attending the meeting may be as familiar with the collaboration's efforts and goals. So, it's always a good idea to briefly remind the group.

Meeting Outcome: Your facilitation plan should start with the end in mind. Determine what you want to accomplish at this meeting, e.g., brainstorm ideas, understand an issue, or determine the next steps. What you want to accomplish will influence the facilitation method or technique you select.

Diamond Zone and Facilitation Process: Almost all topic conversations will move through the zones of divergence, groan/emergence, and convergence (See sections *1.2.7: Diamond of Participatory Decision-Making* and *6.3: Facilitating Planned Conversations*) to some degree. The more complex the topic, the more time that may be needed in each zone. Some complex CSD topics will need to be addressed over multiple meetings. If that is the case, you may only be working in one or possibly two of the zones during a single meeting. Remember to select an appropriate facilitation method and/or technique for the zone you are working in. Here is some general planning guidance for simple and complex topics:

Working with the Zones for Simple and Complex Topics

For a relatively simple topic that is fully addressed in one meeting	For more complex topics that happen over multiple meetings
• Plan to move through all three thinking zones in one conversation. • **Opening:** Start by opening the conversation with a clear introduction, framing, and meeting outcome for the conversation. • **Divergent Zone:** Think about how you will support divergent thinking by encouraging diverse perspectives and supporting everyone to be heard and understood. • **Groan/Emergent Zone:** Help the group integrate their ideas and start to see the topic or issue from a broader shared view using both/and thinking. • **Convergent Zone:** Narrow possibilities, strengthen the good ideas, and come to an agreement related to the stated meeting outcome. • **Closing:** Summarize the conversation, outcome, and next steps then bring the conversation to a close.	• Identify the zone the group is working in, e.g., divergent, groan/emergent, convergent at the current meeting. • Select an appropriate facilitation method or technique to support the conversation given the current zone. See *Appendix B: Facilitation Methods, Techniques, and Tools* to identify a facilitation technique or method that can support getting to the desired meeting outcome. • Make a more specific plan for the selected technique or method, e.g., what questions will you ask, what roles and materials are needed. • Note how you will frame the conversation, so the group connects the work in this meeting to prior meetings. • At the end of the meeting, let them know the next steps in the process.

Time: After you plan for the selected facilitation method or technique, compare it to how much time you initially allocated for this agenda item. If the timing does not work, decide whether you will adapt the process or the allocated time. Admittedly, time is affected by many variables that are out of your control.

Carefully consider how long the process you selected needs to effectively achieve your meeting outcome. Also consider the complexity of the topic, the group's familiarity with the topic, and the potential for wildly differing perspectives. If any of these factors are relevant, you may want to add more time for the conversation. During the meeting, be ready to check in with the group to determine if an adjustment needs to be made, e.g., whether more time is needed for the conversation or whether certain parts of the conversation can wait for another time.

Questions: One of the most critical parts of developing a facilitation plan is developing powerful questions to ignite deep and engaged thinking. Develop questions that are appropriate for the process method you are using. For example, if you will be hosting a world café (see *Appendix B: Facilitation Methods, Techniques, and Tools*), which is a divergent thinking method, develop questions that invite people to think broadly and welcome very diverse perspectives. Open-ended questions should be used to start a conversation.

Develop your conversation kick-off questions in advance of the meeting then draft, test, and revise your questions before the meeting (see section *4.4.2: Developing Powerful Questions*). You would be surprised how a question that is so clear to you is interpreted very differently by others. You may also want to develop other key questions in advance, e.g., follow up prompt questions or specific reflection questions that will yield good action learning (see sections *3.2: Asking Powerful Questions* and *4.4: Using Questions Effectively*).

Framing: Think about what information the group needs to be able to have the conversation you are planning. Jot down a few notes about how you will introduce the topic so you can be clear and concise. Minimally, this should include the topic goal, background information, and the meeting outcome (see section *4.6.4: Framing Agenda Topics*). It may also be necessary to connect the topic to other conversations or collaboration efforts. Once you finish framing the conversation, explain how the conversation will happen (see section *4.6.5: Introducing a Facilitation Process*).

Facilitation skills: To a certain degree, knowing the zone you are working in will help you know which facilitation skills might be needed. For example, if you are working in the divergent zone, you may need to be ready to make space for more diverse perspectives. See the tables for each zone in section *6.3: Facilitating Planned Conversations* for more on possible skills and techniques that might be helpful.

Supportive roles: As you know from reading earlier sections, facilitating diverse perspectives on complex topics can be challenging to facilitate alone. Consider what roles might be helpful and how you might invite others to take on certain roles, e.g., a chart writer to capture conversation details during the meeting so that everyone can see in real time (see section *4.6.7: Using Visual Methods to Capture the Conversation*). Having a content and process facilitator might also be helpful (see section *1.1.8: Co-Facilitation*). For more on assigning the roles see section *4.6.3: Assigning Meeting Roles*.

Harvest: Harvest refers to collecting and recording important parts of the conversation both live during the conversation so everyone can see key points and as a record of the conversation, i.e., meeting notes (see section *10.1.1: Writing and Sharing Meeting Notes*). Use a flip chart or whiteboard during the meeting to capture key ideas or points. This can be a simple and effective way to help people feel heard, to keep people engaged, and to track the conversation. Having someone take notes to distribute after meetings is best practice to make sure everyone is clear about the outcome of the conversation and next steps. The table below compares the two types of harvesting and references other parts of the handbook that can be helpful.

To Support the Conversation	To Create a Record of the Conversation
Example: Using chart paper or whiteboards during conversation to capture key points/ideas as the conversation is taking place	**Example:** Meeting minutes which are taken during the meeting and then cleaned up before sending to collaboration members after the meeting
See section *4.6.7: Using Visual Method to Capture the Conversation*	See section *10.1.1: Writing and Sharing Meeting Notes*

8.3.3 Preparing to Center Equity for Planned and Emergent Opportunities

While developing your agenda consider planned and emergent opportunities to center equity so that you are prepared. A **planned meeting** might focus on discussing equitable outcomes, for example. Part of this plan may include facilitating with an equity-centered mindset, using equity-focused practices, and paying attention to who is getting airtime and who is not. Here are a few ways you might prepare for planned opportunities to center equity:[9, 10]

Planned Opportunities to Center Equity

- Include the collaboration's equity definition, vision, priorities, goals, and/or outcomes on your agenda or related meeting documents, if you have them.
- Add specific agenda item(s) on equity topics, processes, and/or outcomes.
- Add equity-related questions to your agenda (see section *9.1: Centering Equity in CSD Meetings*).
- Develop a discussion guide on an equity related topic (see section *7.1.3: Courageous Conversation Topics*).
- Consider opportunities to develop or revisit shared equity agreements (see section *7.3.1: Creating Accountable Space* and *7.3.2: Using Courageous Conversation Agreements*).
- Consider facilitation techniques for creating inclusive space (see section *4.8: Centering Equity and Inclusion*).

On the other hand, opportunities for centering equity, such as discussing equity or using inclusive practices, may surface in the moment. An **emergent opportunity** might bring attention to biases that may be arising in the conversation. How you manage who gets airtime, who gets centered or involved, how decisions are made, and who gets to make them are all significant ways to center equity anytime. While you may not know when these opportunities come up, you can plan for the unplanned, by using your equity toolkit. Here are some questions to ask yourself when planning and designing meetings:[11]

Being Prepared to Center Equity

- How is the agenda established? Who is involved in creating the agendas?
- Do we have a common language for discussing equity? How can we develop or better use our equity definition, vision, priorities, goals, and outcomes?
- Does the group have established norms or shared agreements for how we interact and work together? Do we need to establish these or revisit these, how and when?
- Do we have the appropriate accommodations for diverse needs, e.g., visual, verbal, and kinesthetic modes; language translation, etc.?
- Are we holding ourselves accountable to inclusive and equitable actions and behaviors?
- Who speaks in the group? Who doesn't? How does the group ensure space is created for all voices, including dissenting ones?
- How are decisions made? Is the decision-making process transparent?
- How does the group discuss or address power imbalances among individuals and organizations?
- Do we have adequate time to get to know each other and build relationships?
- Do we have adequate time to discuss topics and to give space for diverse perspectives?

8.3.4 Putting the Entire Agenda Together

Once you have worked through the checklist for each of your major agenda topics, you should be well on your way to a good meeting design. Next, think about how you will open and close the meeting. If you are allocating time for announcements and/or updates, keep it brief. Use the meeting to get work done while everyone is together.

Now you can put all these details together into an **annotated agenda** for your use during the meeting. The annotated agenda should include the process details to support your facilitation. Consider the list of information in the sidebar.

There is no one way to create an annotated agenda. Format it to work for you. Consider the complexity of the process, how much detail you want to include, and the format that will be easiest for you to use. For example, if you are planning an open conversation you may just need to annotate the questions you will ask (e.g., main question and probing questions) and the approximate amount of time for each one. If you are using a more involved process, e.g., a world café, you may want to develop your talking points for describing it and explaining how it works. Additionally, you may want to determine the amount of time that will be allocated for major parts of the process, for example, the time for each small group conversation round, moving between rounds, and large group harvesting. For each round, you may want to include talking points for framing the conversation, the core question, and the amount of time the group has for the conversation.

After you have drafted your annotated agenda, review it to make sure you have the details you need, the timing works, and the meeting flows. Also, check that you have included opportunities for everyone to actively engage in the process throughout the meeting.

Once you finish the annotated agenda, create a **participant agenda** and send it out before the meeting. The participant agenda should be much simpler with only the following elements fitting on a single page, if possible:

- Meeting title
- Meeting location, date, and time
- Meeting topic
- Topic goal
- Meeting outcome
- Time allocation for the topic
- Resources provided
- Optional: A key open-ended question that gets at the essence of the topic

Information to Include in an Annotated Meeting Agenda

- Meeting topic
- Topic goal
- Meeting outcome
- Time allocation for the topic and major process parts
- Framing notes
- Questions to guide the conversation
- Assignment of other meeting roles, if relevant
- Resources and supplies needed

Additional Resources: Participant Meeting Agendas

- Shared Agenda Template, by ABLe Change
- New Tools for Collective Impact Working Groups, see page 12-13 of the Working Group Meeting Agenda and Notes Template, by Collective Impact Forum
- Team Meeting Templates: Agenda, Minutes, and Notes, Smart Sheet, by Kate Eby

8.4 PREPARING TO MEET

Now that you have an annotated agenda and a participant agenda, it is time to prepare for the meeting. There are several key tasks: inviting meeting participants, preparing meeting materials, preparing process resources, coordinating with others who have meeting roles, setting up the meeting space, and preparing yourself. Review the at-a-glance preparation checklist to the right.

8.4.1 Inviting Meeting Participants

There is a difference between sending out a meeting notice and inviting stakeholders to the meeting. This difference can make or break getting to the desired meeting. Inviting stakeholders means you consider whose perspectives are needed for the conversation to be successful. Consider your meeting outcome for each major agenda topic. Who needs to participate to reach this outcome?

Within organizations, staff working at a variety of levels have different perspectives and levels of authority. A frontline worker, who is working with families, has a perspective that is different from supervisors or department directors or even the executive director. All are important perspectives. So, consider who from the organization needs to be at the meeting to achieve your meeting outcome.

In addition to your meeting announcement, you may need to make personal invitations to some people. This is especially important when the meeting topic is focused on solving complex system issues. Sometimes, people do not realize they have a contribution to make.

Checklist for Preparing for the Meeting

- ✓ **Invite meeting participants:** Whose perspective is needed? How will you invite them?
- ✓ **Prepare meeting materials:** What data or information needs to be prepared for this meeting?
- ✓ **Prepare process supplies:** What supplies are needed for the facilitation process you planned, e.g., sticky-notes, sticky dots for voting, chart paper and markers?
- ✓ **Coordinate with others with key meeting roles:** Who else will support the facilitation process or present information? Who will be responsible for what?
- ✓ **Set up the meeting space:** How does the meeting space need to be set up to support the process and good interaction among group members?
- ✓ **Prepare yourself:** What do you need to do to show up fully present and be ready to facilitate this meeting?

Checklist for Inviting Meeting Participants

- ✓ Which perspective groups are important to engage for this experience?
  - Those experiencing or affected by the problem
  - Those who are trying to address the problem
  - Those making or influencing decisions about the problem
  - Those who care about the problem and the people who are experiencing it
- ✓ Who needs to be in the conversation?
- ✓ How will participants benefit from their participation?
- ✓ Who may need a personal invitation to join?
- ✓ What information do you need to share in advance of the meeting so they can see their perspective matters and they too can benefit from their participation?
- ✓ How will you invite people to the conversation, e.g., individual calls, more targeted emails to a smaller group of people, a special notice about the meeting?
- ✓ What accommodations might be needed to be inclusive and welcoming?

8.4.2 Preparing Meeting Materials

Meeting materials are resources the collaboration needs to have a productive conversation and achieve the meeting outcome. This could be past meeting notes, reports, data summaries, best practice resources, etc. CSD meeting topics often involve conversations that are informed by or are about analyzing data or information, which could be quantitative and/or qualitative. To have good conversation it is important to take time to prepare it. See the checklist for a few ideas.

Think about how to present dense data in ways that are easy to read and analyze, e.g., turning data into visual charts or graphs. Visually depicting data helps lessen the divide between those who are and are not skillful with data. **Gallery walks** are another useful strategy for sharing a large volume of data in visual ways (see section *8.2.3: Facilitation Process Options*).

Illinois Action for Children has many resources that can help you prepare data for meetings including the course described below:

Checklist for Preparing Data or Information

- ✓ Determine the data or information that is needed.
- ✓ Determine how the data needs to be organized or presented; pay particular attention to the needs of visual learners and those with unique learning styles and needs as well as the differing levels of individual and group experience with data.
- ✓ Consider the facilitation technique or method that is appropriate for the group and conversation.

On-Demand Collaboration Data Course

Data is crucial to the work of early childhood collaborations. This course is comprised of six modules focused on data and the crucial role it plays in community systems development. It includes how to focus your purpose, collect data, make meaning from the data, communicate findings to drive action, and build a data culture.

8.4.3 Preparing Process Resources and Supplies

Some facilitative methods – even simple ones – require or are enhanced by using supplies to execute them. Whether sticky notes, voting dots, or chart paper and markers, these resources can be helpful for capturing key points or ideas, sorting ideas, prioritizing, and deciding on next steps. Once you decide which facilitative technique or method you use, take a moment to think about what is needed to execute it well. Most method descriptions will indicate the supplies needed.

Before the meeting, gather and organize these materials so they are ready to go. For example, if the group will be divided into small groups each working at a table, divide up the materials so you can easily set them out before or during the meeting. Think ahead about when you can distribute the supplies. It works best to have supplies already in place, so you do not have to slow down the process to distribute them. Prior to the meeting, walk through the entire process in your mind to ensure you know what you and the group need at different points during the meeting. Then make sure those supplies are easily accessible during the meeting.

And of course, be mindful of audio-visual needs. This may be especially important for larger meetings or certain meeting outcomes. This can also become an issue if you host the meeting at a different venue.

Checklist for Preparing Meeting Supplies

- ✓ Walk through your facilitation plan to note what supplies are needed.
- ✓ Bring extra supplies just in case.
- ✓ Organize the supplies ahead of the meeting to make it easy to distribute before or during the meeting.
- ✓ Put supplies in place ahead of the meeting, if possible.
- ✓ Assign someone to distribute resources during the meeting if they cannot be put out ahead of time.
- ✓ Plan for technological needs to improve audiovisuals.

8.4.4 Coordinating with Others Who Have Meeting Roles

For some meetings, you may want to engage others in key roles. This might be a co-facilitator, a note taker, a visual harvester (see sections *1.1.9: Other Meeting Roles* and *4.6.3: Assigning Meeting Roles*). In addition to these roles, you may also need to coordinate with a speaker or a work group. Take the time to make sure everyone is on the same page about their responsibilities, what supplies are needed, and when or how you will interact during the meeting. Determine who will be providing the needed meeting materials and supplies.

8.4.5 Setting up the Meeting Space

First, choose a meeting location that is mutually accessible. Then focus on how the space is set up. The arrangement of your meeting space can have a tremendous effect on meeting participation and success. When thinking about the meeting space, consider people's comfort, how well people can see, hear, and interact with one another, and what is needed to execute the facilitation methods you intend to use.

Meeting participants' attention will be distracted if they are not comfortable. So, to the extent possible, arrange the room in ways that allow people to sit in an anatomically comfortable position. Also, make sure that everyone has their personal space while also being close enough to engage with others. Keep in mind some people may have needs, e.g., to be closer to the primary speaker or visuals. Get to know your group and consider group and individual needs. Be mindful of the room temperature which is another factor that influences people's comfort and engagement.

Everyone needs to be able to see, hear, and interact for the meeting to be successful. How you arrange the tables and chairs needs to be comfortable, but also practical for getting work done during the meeting. Consider this as you develop your annotated facilitation plan. What facilitation methods will you use and how will this impact how the room needs to be arranged? Also consider the lighting and acoustics in the room. If you will be using chart paper or a whiteboard, consider where to position it so everyone can see it. If people will need to get up and move around during the meeting, e.g., to visit different stations around the room, make sure there is room to navigate around the tables and other furniture.

Checklist for Setting Up the Room

- ✓ Consider what people will need to be physically comfortable in the meeting space.
- ✓ Be mindful of people's personal space, visual, and/or hearing needs.
- ✓ Set the room temperature appropriately.
- ✓ Make sure process supplies are easily accessible.
- ✓ Arrange the tables and chairs so that everyone can see, hear, and interact with one another.
- ✓ Position chart paper or whiteboards so that everyone can see.
- ✓ Make sure the room is safe to navigate to stations in the room.

8.4.6 Preparing Yourself

Remember: an important part of effective facilitation is the way you show up. You will not regret taking a little extra time right before the meeting to collect yourself and become fully present before you begin the meeting. This will require showing up early and being fully ready for the meeting so that you can take a few minutes to focus on yourself before people arrive. For more tips on preparing yourself see section *4.1: Demonstrating Personal Effectiveness*.

[1]Larry Cohen and Jessica Gould. Prevention Institute. "The Tension of Turf: Making it Work for the Coalition." December 2003.

[2]Sam Kaner, Lenny Lind, Catherine Toldi, Susan Fisk, and Duane Berger. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making." 2014.

[3]Adapted from Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[4]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[5]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[6]Sam Kaner et al. Community at Work. "Facilitator's Guide." 2014.

[7]Seeds for Change. "Active Listening." 2021.

[8]Phil Rabinowitz. Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas. Community Tool Box. "Section 4: Techniques for Leading Group Discussion."

[9]Youth Development Executives of King County. "Tip Sheet: Planning Equitable Collaboration Meetings."

[10]MP Associates and CAPD. Race Equity Tools. "How Can we Create an Inclusive and Equitable Planning Process." 2013.

[11]MP Associates and CAPD. Race Equity Tools. "How Can we Create." 2013.

[12]Drs Pennie Foster-Fishman and Erin Watson. 2017. "Promoting Systems Change using the ABLe Change Framework: Participant Handbook." 2017.

CHAPTER 9

Facilitating Collaboration Meetings

In this chapter, we focus on how to facilitate community system development (CSD) collaboration meetings. This chapter builds upon earlier chapters and focuses on making collaboration meetings action focused. The first section provides additional techniques for centering equity in your CSD meetings. Then we provide guidance on how to facilitate decision-making that is inclusive and sustainable. In the final section, you will learn how to use action learning to improve your collaboration's CSD efforts for greater impact.

9.1 CENTERING EQUITY IN COLLABORATION MEETINGS

For collaborations with a goal of equitable opportunities and outcomes, they must embed equity throughout their efforts.[1] This means that equity is at the center of the "doing" or the action of the work, not simply seen as an add-on to the work.[2]

To meet this goal, applying an equity lens to all that you do is essential for the success of your work. In section *2.1: Centering Equity in CSD Work*, we highlighted how a racial equity lens can be used as a critical thinking tool to center equity in our CSD work and facilitation. A **racial equity lens** is a critical thinking approach that allows us to be intentional and focused on equity in both processes and outcomes. You can apply an equity lens to the collaboration structure, processes, practices, and culture. In this section, we will discuss some key equity facilitation competencies and how to embed equity in your facilitation through the following techniques:

- Using an equity framework
- Taking equity pauses
- Making decisions with equity choice points
- Using equity impact assessment questions

These are four practical ways to center equity. There are some similarities across these techniques, e.g., the use of equity questions to support the conversation. There are also some key distinctions so pick the technique that makes sense for your unique process.

9.1.1 Using an Equity Framework

A racial equity framework is a frame of reference that enables facilitators, leaders, and collaborations to navigate equity challenges, develop their capacity to solve problems, and design powerful strategies to create more equitable community systems and outcomes. Through tools, frames, and processes, an equity framework helps facilitators and collaborations build habits and practices that can lead to more equitable outcomes.

If your collaboration does not have its own equity framework, consider using, adapting, or building one as a group. The **standard elements of a racial equity framework** invite collaborations and decision-makers to consider:

1) Who is included and who is left out
2) Their values and assumptions
3) How information is gathered
4) How decisions are made and who is involved
5) How policy, programs, or decisions impact people

Each of these practices holds a potential power shift towards inclusion and equity. Below are the standard elements of a racial equity framework and some equity questions that can be used to create a more inclusive approach in your facilitation and work. An equity lens will not tell you how to act. However, it helps you discuss and reflect on the equitability of the action and decision-making process.[3] Below are the elements of an equity framework and equity questions you can ask.[4]

Racial Equity Framework Elements	Equity Questions to Ask
1. Consider who is at the table and who is left out of the conversation or process	• Who or what informs the thinking on the problem or issue? • Who is most affected by decisions and systems of oppression? Are they at the table? How can they be included? • How are different stakeholders sharing their perspectives and telling their stories? • How do we hold ourselves accountable for the unique needs within an interracial group? • How can we foster a culture of trust to move forward?
2. Examine values and assumptions	• What beliefs, values, and assumptions guide how the problem or topic is being considered? • What assumptions underlie the issue?
3. Focus information gathering and decision-making on those most impacted by decisions	• How do we understand the racial factors behind the inequities we see? • How are we talking about the problem we are trying to solve? Are we looking at the system level? Are we getting to the root causes of the problem and understanding who will be affected? Are we answering questions about how, where, and why certain groups are more affected? • What are the boundaries of the problem? Who is included and who is excluded from defining and setting boundaries around the problem? What are the population and geographic targets for our efforts? Where do racial disparities exist?
4. Consider who is making decisions and how they make them	• Who does and does not have power in the community? In a particular institution or system? • Who shapes the dominant narrative about the problem and solution? • What sources of information, e.g., data, are being used to tell the story? • What decisions are groups making? How are groups making decisions? What participatory structures can allow for different perspectives to balance participation and reach consensus?
5. Consider how policy, programs, or decisions impact the outcomes for those most affected	• What does an equitable outcome look like? What is the likely impact of our efforts? How are we making progress toward our equity goals? • Does the policy, program, or decision improve, worsen, or make no change to existing disparities? Does it result in a systemic change that addresses inequity? • Does the policy, program, or decision produce any intentional benefits or unintended consequences for the affected groups? • What are the revisions to policy, programs, or decisions that can address inequity and promote equity?

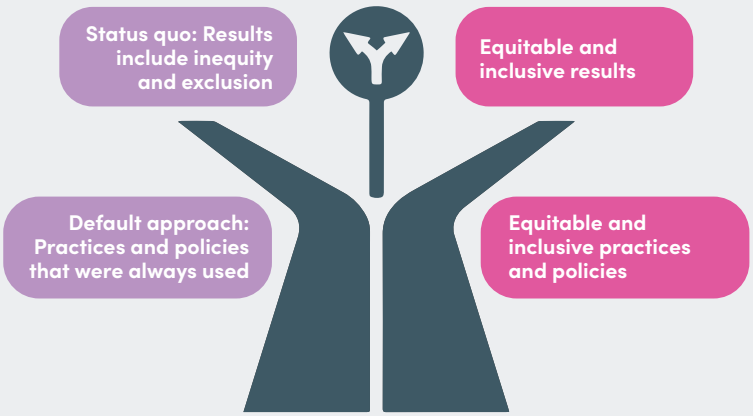
9.1.2 Taking Equity Pauses

An **equity pause** is another way to view through an equity lens. It allows the collaboration to disrupt their thinking by taking a pause in the process to:

- Reflect and share learning
- Remind each other of their shared goals/practices
- Name what might be done to support racial equity and inclusion[5]

Without this pause, groups may default to what is familiar or known, making it very likely that they will repeat past practices. Incorporating checks and pauses during and after each stage of your collaborative planning process allows your collaboration to notice, name, and understand obstacles getting in the way of equity. It also ensures that our ideas remain on the path of achieving equity. Here are some equities pause questions that you can ask before, during, and after a CSD design or planning process:[6]

Equity Pause	
Topics	**Questions**
Awareness	• What would we like to say that has not been said? • How are we expanding our self-awareness? How are we expanding our awareness of others' experiences? • What inequities exist in the process, program, or project?
Inclusion	• Are we being inclusive? How do we know? • Who are we not engaging? Why? • Who are we not hearing from? Why? • Whose perspectives, if any, are we missing? • What would we do differently next time?
Implicit bias	• What are our blind spots and biases? • How can we interrupt our own implicit bias? • What are some areas where we could foster greater equity in our work?
Race and anti-racism	• How does systemic racism affect our processes, projects, and/or programs? • What are we doing to prevent systemic racism?
Process and practice	• Are we on the right track? Do we need to update our processes or practices? • Are we moving towards more and/or improved equity and inclusion practices?
Speaking up	• Did the group support each other to speak up during our discussion so that everyone could be heard? • Did we create an accountable space for conversation? • How did we do it? • What would we do differently next time?
Relationships	• Is this conversation, action, or project supporting relationships and/or partnerships?
Acknowledgement	• Are we acknowledging history? • What and who would we like to acknowledge?



Equity Choice Point

Adapted from The Management Center

9.1.3 Making Decisions with Equity Choice Points

Equity choice points are decision-making opportunities for collaboration facilitators, leaders, or members to pause to:

- Spot bias and uncover disparities
- Reflect on unintended consequences
- Generate alternative options
- Enact changes that advance racial equity and inclusion[7]

Choice points create opportunities to shift the status quo and can create cumulative change that will help level the playing field for under-resourced communities.[8] Like forks in the road, when you arrive at a choice point you can take the path that replicates the status quo or the path that opens opportunities for racial equity, inclusion, and belonging.[9]

The **main steps for using equity choice points** are as follows:

1. Understand your equity issue(s) and desired outcome(s).
2. Pause and identify decision-making opportunities (choice points) and check for implicit bias.
3. Examine the choices and their potential equity and inclusion impact.
4. Brainstorm alternatives to the default approach.
5. Choose the best path for equity advancement and evaluate results.[10]

While choice points alone will not solve racism or completely overturn systems of oppression within a community system, they can help to uncover specific biases, systems, and traditions that hinder equitable outcomes.[11]

Choice points help facilitators to be more intentional during CSD meetings. This might include:

- Learning how to be intentional about decisions and to push back against urgency with a pause
- Analyzing how potential decisions will unfairly disadvantage people of color and over-advantage white people
- Identifying more equitable alternatives
- Making a new action plan to move forward

On a practical level, you can bring an equity choice worksheet or template to your collaboration meetings to aid in decision-making. You might choose to have an agenda item dedicated to a particular decision-making point. You can use the equity choice point questions on the following page to lead the collaboration through the process:[12]

Using Equity Choice Points	
Steps	**Ask Yourself...**
1 **Know your desired outcome**	• What is our current approach and what is the result? • What do we want to see instead?
2 **Identify decision-making opportunities that might have equity and inclusion impacts**	• What decisions do we make regularly? • What is our default path or autopilot choice?
3 **Examine choices and unintended consequences**	• Who benefits from the default path? • Who may be burdened or disadvantaged?
4 **Brainstorm alternatives to the default approach**	• What other options could lead to more equitable results? • How could we create more equity, inclusion, and belonging? • What changes can we make to ensure more equitable results?
5 **Act and evaluate**	• Did our choice lead to the desired results? • What was the impact on equity and inclusion?

Additional Resources: Equity Choice Points

- Summary of the equity choice points process
- Common equity choice points to adapt for your setting
- Case studies and examples of leaders using equity choice points to solve problems
- Template for identifying equity choice points and reflecting with team members

9.1.4 Using Equity Impact Assessment Questions

Equity impact assessments are essentially a set of questions to help you and your collaboration consider how current or planned policies, practices, or decisions could unintentionally contribute to local inequities.[13] You can use the questions to aid your decision-making around what to shift or re-design within your efforts to advance equity.[14]

Equity impact assessment questions can be used to improve a collaboration's planning or decision-making process. Here are some steps to follow:

1. Be clear about which decision-making process and rule the collaboration will use.

2. Find relevant questions from one of the equity impact assessments listed below.

3. Ask these questions while making decisions. You can add questions directly to your meeting agenda.

    a. *Note: You may want to engage diverse perspectives in answering these equity questions. Ask collaboration members who else needs to be engaged to understand the question and determine the next steps.*

4. Determine the changes the collaboration wants to make to advance equity.

Additional Resources: Equity Impact Assessments

- Equity Impact Assessment to assess the impacts of your efforts, by ABLe Change
- Use an Equity Impact Assessment for tips and resources for how to use EIAs (see Habit 4), by ABLe Change
- Racial Equity Impact Assessments for an overview and sample questions, by Race Forward

9.2 FACILITATING INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE DECISIONS

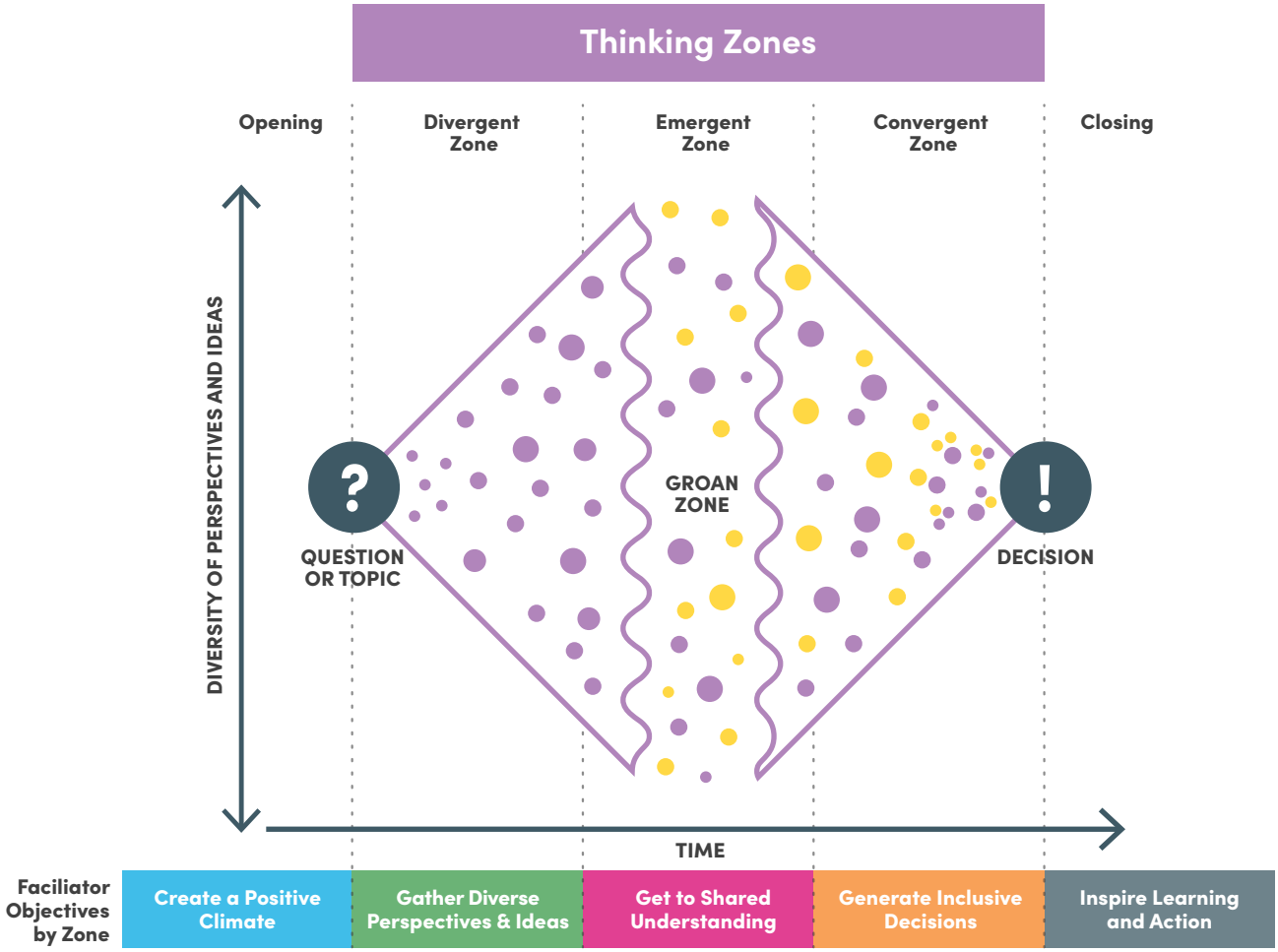
CSD collaboration meetings focus on creating positive improvements to the early childhood system. Making good decisions is crucial for effective collaboration action. A good decision is one that is inclusive and sustainable.[15] Kaner refers to this as an inclusive and sustainable agreement. This means people see their perspective in the decision and commit to action.[16] The decision or agreement provides the common ground or shared agenda for the collaboration's work.

In this section, we look at how you can support the collaboration to make inclusive and sustainable decisions using decision rules, consensus decision-making, synthesizing for proposal development, and checking for agreement.

9.2.1 Getting to Inclusive and Sustainable Agreements

When it comes to making decisions, the goal is not only to make a good decision – it's also to make one that will be strongly supported. This is especially true when the stakes are high and deep engagement is needed to carry out the decision.[17] Sam Kaner and his colleagues refer to this as an **inclusive and sustainable agreement**. It's a decision that can be effectively implemented and supported by key stakeholders.[18] This requires that everyone can see their view incorporated into the decision. In other words, each person thinks the decision works from their point of view.[19]

To get to an inclusive decision we return to the **Diamond of Participatory Decision-Making**. In *Chapter 6: Facilitating Small Group Conversations,* we laid out how the Diamond reveals five parts of a conversation, which includes opening and closing the conversation and three thinking zones in between: divergent, groan/emergent, and convergent. In that chapter, we looked at how these five parts can be used to plan for and facilitate a planned conversation. We also shared a few facilitation skills and techniques that are helpful for each part. Here we will look more closely at how this model supports decision-making.



Adapted from the Diamond of Participatory Decision-Making by Sam Kaner et al.[20]

Why Some Decisions Fail

Let's take a moment to reflect on how groups make decisions and why some decisions fail to generate stakeholders' buy-in and commitment. Often when a group opens a conversation, they will initially talk about what is already familiar, want to jump to quick decisions (so they can get to action), and fail to engage diverse perspectives on the matter.[21]

When a group pushes for early conclusion (a move to the convergent zone), they run the risk of reinforcing the status quo because they did not stay in the conversation long enough to surface new and creative solutions to the problem or issue.[22] In fact, they may not fully understand the problem.

They also risk losing stakeholders' commitment because they did not take the time to hear from everyone involved. This results in a failed decision – either because it was ill-informed, or the group did not reach shared understanding of the problem and possible solution.[23] Both reasons are a result of an ineffective group process.[24]

The remedy to this is to hold the conversation open longer and use the Diamond framework to effectively move the group through all three thinking zones.[25] Most facilitators are familiar with moving groups through the divergent and convergent zones. It is the groan/emergent zone that is novel to this model.

Using the Diamond Framework for Decision-Making

The Diamond framework shows us that it is critical to lead groups through the **groan zone** aka the **emergent zone** – the part of the conversation where there is often confusion, and sometimes conflict, as the group works to integrate all the various perspectives and ideas they have generated.[26] This can be very uncomfortable for some group members. Yet it is essential to getting the group to a shared understanding of others' perspectives so that they can eventually reach a decision they can all endorse.

By supporting **generative thinking** (see section *6.3.5: Facilitating in the Groan/Emergent Zone*) with both/and thinking and other dialogue skills (see section *1.2.6: Generative Potential of Conversation*), you can help the group experience the **generative potential of conversation**. When this happens new ideas or possibilities emerge that the whole group can support, because everyone sees their perspective reflected in it. This is the point at which **shared understanding** results, and why this zone is also called the **emergent zone**.

As you may recall from section *6.3: Facilitating Planned Conversations*, each zone has a very specific facilitator objective and set of tasks that are necessary to successfully advance through each zone.[27] The table below provides a recap of these facilitator objectives and tasks.[28] Let us look at how these zones support effective decision-making.[29]

	Divergent Zone	Groan/Emergent Zone	Convergent Zone
Facilitator Objective	• Gathering diverse perspectives and ideas	• Getting to shared understanding	• Generating inclusive decisions
Facilitator Tasks	• Amplifying diverse perspectives • Generating ideas • Suspending judgment • Encouraging full and honest engagement	• Understanding others' perspectives • Helping people stay engaged • Strengthening interpersonal communication and dynamics • Listening to the conversation and what is emerging	• Strengthening good ideas • Narrowing possibilities • Getting to inclusive and sustainable agreements

Divergent Thinking Zone: In this zone, your overall objective is to gather diverse perspectives and/or ideas. In the context of problem solving, this may also include identifying and understanding the problem. From a facilitation standpoint, this requires creating the conditions that make it easy for everyone to participate and contribute their ideas, both of which lead to a more expansive set of ideas and/or understanding of the problem.

Your tasks are to support people to make their points, nonjudgmentally shine a light on the diversity and range of perspectives, and to help the group consider everything (also without judgment). Helping the group stay in the conversation and continue to explore possibilities is another important task during this zone.

The group's work in the divergent zone is essential to the decision-making process because it supports the engagement of diverse perspectives, surfaces many perspectives and ideas, and gets the group beyond familiar thinking.[30] All of this is essential for CSD work since many diverse perspectives are needed to understand the complex and dynamic early childhood system.

Groan/Emergent Thinking Zone: During the groan/emergent zone, your objective is to get to shared understanding. During this time, the group will struggle to integrate (make sense of) all the various ideas put forth.[31] Stay the course in this messy middle zone. Help the group pay attention to the whole conversation. By doing this, they will develop a greater understanding of the situation and surface more possibilities for how to address it.

Support good conversation by engaging the group in dialogue rather than discussion (see section *1.2.6: Generative Potential of Conversation*). Help the group listen to understand and think from each other's perspective.[32] Incorporating others' views, helps the group broaden their individual views. This process leads the group to a shared understanding and the emergent side of this zone. Once the group moves from **competing frames of reference** to a **shared framework of understanding** you are ready to move to the convergent zone.[33]

The group's work in the groan/emergent zone is crucial to getting to inclusive and sustainable agreements.[34] Without the hard work in this zone the group will remain a group of people with individual perspectives versus a group that has shared understanding. If a group pushes through this zone without getting to shared understanding, they will inevitably end up deciding with competing frames of reference.

Even if they all agree to a final proposal, chances are decision implementation will not go well.[35] In essence, each person may have a very different understanding of what was decided. At some point this will become evident.

Convergent Thinking Zone: Once in the convergent zone, your primary objective is to generate inclusive and sustainable agreements aka decisions.[36] Now that the group has a shared understanding of the issue or options to address it, they can begin the process of logically developing the good ideas, narrowing them to the best options, making a proposal, and deciding on an option that everyone will support.[37]

In this zone, the group will most likely have renewed energy and excitement, because they have shared understanding and can see possibilities that can lead to action.[38] Often the group will begin to take more responsibility for the group process.[39] However, you still have work to do. Help the group develop logical options, narrow them, and develop the strongest ones so that everyone's thinking contributes to the final decision.[40]

The group's work in this zone is important not only because it is when a decision is made. The group's work to develop the best ideas using logical thinking and going through a process of developing a clear proposal before a decision is made is critical to effective decision-making. By clearly stating a proposal, the group knows exactly what they are voting on – and when a decision is being made. Later in this chapter we will provide guidance on creating proposals.

Moving through all three zones is critical to reaching inclusive and sustainable decisions.[41] Without the hard work of moving through the groan/emergent zone, shared understanding will likely never be achieved. Without shared understanding it will be difficult – if not impossible – to get to inclusive and sustainable decisions.[42] If you want better collaboration decisions, develop your capacity to support the group through all three thinking zones.

9.2.2 Selecting a Decision Rule

Let's turn now to the part of the convergent zone where the group makes a decision. This happens at the end of the convergent zone and is referred to as the decision point.[43] A **decision point** is the point between discussion and implementation.[44]

Groups often have a hard time discerning when a decision is being made because there is no clear signal or process to indicate the decision-making.[45] A clear decision rule can remedy this situation.

A **decision rule** is an intentional group agreement about how decisions will be made and who will make them.[46] A decision rule should be agreed upon before the decision-making process. The lack of a decision rule can create all kinds of challenges.[47] Sometimes people who think a decision was made move to action prematurely while others are still waiting for a decision to be made. Having a decision rule overcomes these challenges.

There are several common decision rules. You are most likely familiar with many of them: leader in charge decides, delegated group decides, majority voting, and unanimous agreement.[48] Let's focus on majority voting and unanimous agreement.

Majority vote is a decision rule where a majority of votes will determine the decision.

Sometimes groups will define what a majority means, for example, 80 percent of eligible voters must agree to the decision. Since the essence of this rule is for more people to agree than disagree with a proposed solution, one or more members may try to convince others to join a side.

Rather than bring people together, majority vote can create division. Another downside of majority vote is that it does not push the group to consider all perspectives, which can lead to disengagement of some collaboration members.[49] On the other hand, sometimes everyone does not need to be 100 percent on board. In this case, a majority vote can work just fine, e.g., when a decision needs to be made quickly and not much is at stake.[50]

Unanimous agreement means everyone agrees to the decision.

This rule forces a group to stay in the conversation until they come up with an option that considers everyone's point of view – enough so that every person is willing to support the decision.[51] There are also variations for this rule, e.g., unanimous minus one (or two). For high stakes CSD decisions, this is the ideal way to go as it increases the likelihood that there is adequate understanding and buy-in to support and sustain the decision through its implementation.[52] Unanimous agreement is achieving an inclusive and sustainable agreement. It requires both/and thinking and time to work through the three zones. A **consensus decision-making** process is used if unanimous agreement is the selected decision rule.

The table below summarizes high and low stakes considerations for each decision rule.[53]

Decision Rule	High Stakes Decisions	Low Stakes Decisions
Majority Vote	• Can produce a win/lose result • **TIP:** Consider a secret ballot to avoid relational or political influence on how some people vote	• Works well when speed of the decision is more important than the quality of the decision • **TIP:** Quickly consider the pros and cons before deciding
Unanimous Agreement	• Best chance of reaching inclusive and sustainable agreements • Especially important when enthusiastic agreement is needed • **TIP:** Make sure the group gets to shared understanding (by working through all three zones) before using this option	• Prevents some group members from pushing a decision through despite a small but strong opposition to it • **TIP:** Use this opportunity to help the group develop their skills and capacity to get to unanimous agreement

Unanimous agreements are especially helpful in certain circumstances as described in the table below.[54]

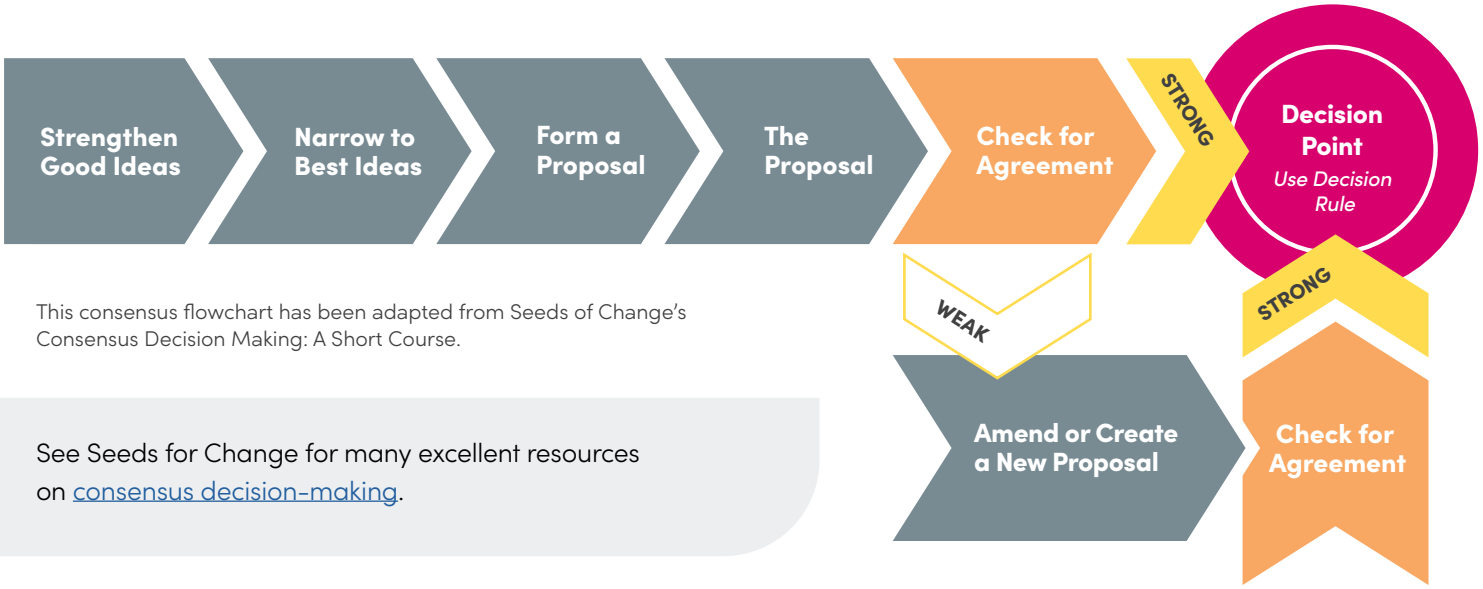
When to Seek Unanimous Agreement	
High Stakes	When stakes are high and there are consequences to failing
Length of Impact	When the decision has long-term impacts and/or is hard to change
Tough Problems	When the problem or issue being addressed is complex, ambiguous, or involves conflict
Stakeholder Buy-in	When many people need to buy-in to the decision
Group Commitment	When the group will be expected to promote and implement the decision

9.2.3 Making Decisions by Consensus

Consensus decision-making is the process for getting to inclusive agreements.[55] For best results, support the group through the three thinking zones of the Diamond model. Consensus decision-making occurs at the end of the convergent zone when the group begins to strengthen good ideas and then narrow them to their best ideas. These are also the first two steps of the consensus decision-making process.

Next a proposal is formed for one of the best options (or some combination of options). A **proposal** is a clear and concise statement that states exactly what the group is deciding.

Often the collaboration will spend some time amending the initial proposal to assure it is understood by all and it incorporates everyone's perspective. When they are ready, the facilitator checks for agreement on the proposal (see section *9.2.5: Checking for Agreement* for ways to do this). If there is weak agreement, the group continues to amend the proposal or create a new one. Check for agreement again. When it is clear the group has strong agreement, the group uses their decision rule to officially make the decision. This is the **decision point**. The following diagram depicts this process.[56]



This consensus flowchart has been adapted from Seeds of Change's Consensus Decision Making: A Short Course.

See Seeds for Change for many excellent resources on consensus decision-making.

9.2.4 Facilitating Proposal Development by Synthesizing

Facilitators leading a consensus decision-making process can draw upon their knowledge of and skillfulness at working through the three thinking zones of the Diamond framework for much of the process. One part of the process that we have not yet addressed is the skill of synthesizing to support the creation of a proposal.

Synthesizing is the act of finding connections between seemingly competing ideas and weaving them together to form *proposals*.[57] While summarizing can help the group know where they are in the conversation at a particular point in time, it is just that – a summary of main points. Synthesizing is about combining different ideas and developing a proposal that reflects everyone's perspective. This is an essential part of getting to consensus. It can also support convergent thinking even if it is not part of the decision-making process.

The following table provides guidance for synthesizing towards proposal development.[58]

Synthesizing For Proposal Development

1. Summarize the Conversation

- Summarize the key points so far.
- Ask the group about the accuracy of your summary.
- Note agreements and disagreements (both subtle and obvious) on a flipchart.
- Consider whether it would be helpful to explore people's reasons they prefer different options.
- Continue to listen for possibilities where differences are resolved and more people's preferences can be met.

2. Build the Proposal

- Start where there is agreement.
- Note any differences outside this agreement that can be resolved.
- Determine what is most important to people.
- Explore solutions that address fundamental needs and concerns.
- Keep building common ground.
- Try combining elements of different solutions to get to something that is agreeable to everyone (if **unanimous agreement rule**) or a majority (if **majority vote rule**).

Synthesizing Tips

- Focus on where there is "big picture" agreement, rather than get caught up in arguments about the details.
- Keep looking for common ground no matter how small. *"So, we all agree that...even though we disagree on..."* This helps people remember their shared aim.
- Explore whether more than one solution is a possible way forward. If everyone agrees on the overall aim, but has differing ideas about how to move forward, consider whether more than one solution can be considered.
  - Synthesize the common ground or aim.
  - Name the solutions on the table.
- Explore whether more than one solution is viable, if relevant.

9.2.5 Checking for Agreement

Whether your collaboration chooses to use majority rule or unanimous agreement, it is helpful to have a clear process for how to get to the decision point. By now you know that getting through the three thinking zones of the Diamond is essential to being ready to make an inclusive decision.

Right before the decision point, someone must make a proposal. One of the best ways to support a unanimous agreement is to periodically check for agreement about the current proposal.[59] Checking for agreement is helpful before a vote regardless of what decision rule you will use.

Consider three ways to check for agreement before you use the group's decision rule: Thumbs up thumbs down, fist to five, and gradients of agreement.[60] All these techniques can also be used for making simple decisions.

Checking for Agreement Techniques		
Technique	**When to Use It**	**Levels of Agreement**
Thumbs up thumbs down *For more about this technique*	For quick and simple check-ins to see how people feel about a proposal.	**Thumb up:** Yes, I agree with this proposal. **Thumbs sideways:** I can live with the proposal and will go with the group. **Thumbs down:** No, I disagree with this proposal and need more conversation.
Fist to five *For more about this technique*	For check-ins on proposals when you want nuanced information about the level of agreement.	**Fist:** Strong objection that would lead to a block if consensus decision-making and a *"no"* if voting. **1 finger:** *"I am close to a 'no', but I'll go along."* **2 fingers:** *"I don't like the proposal, but I'll go along with it."* **3 fingers:** *"I like some of it, but not all of it."* **4 fingers:** *"I am fine with this."* **5 fingers:** *"I like this a lot. It's a good decision."*
Gradients of agreement *For more about this technique*	When you need a much more nuanced understanding of where people stand on the proposal.	1: Whole-hearted endorsement 2: Agreement with minor point of contention 3: Support with reservations 4: Abstain 5: More discussion needed 6: Don't like, but will support 7: Serious disagreement 8: Veto "No"

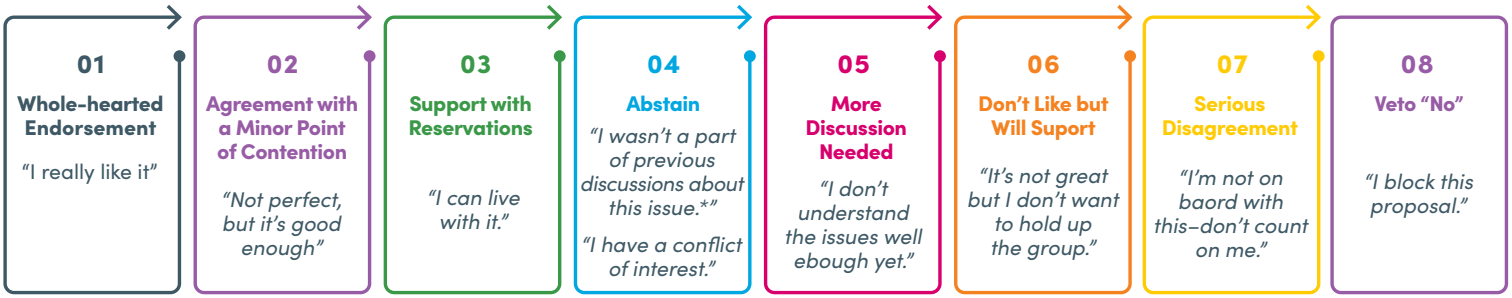
Thumbs up thumbs down: Hand signals can be a simple and quick way to check for agreement on a proposal. The thumbs up thumbs down process uses three hand signals to indicate strong agreement with the proposal, a willingness to go along with it, and a lack of agreement. This allows everyone to get a quick read of the group's position.

Fist to five: Another hand signal technique is Fist to Five. This can be used to get a sense of agreement on a proposal, or in some cases, it might help the group make the decision. Fist to Five offers five levels of agreement and a "no" option. Using this technique will give you and the group a more nuanced understanding of the group's current degree of agreement and where there might be strong disagreement.

After checking the group's level of agreement, you can engage the group in additional conversation related to points of disagreement. Once discussed, do another round using this technique. Continue this process until everyone in the group is showing 3-5 fingers signaling everyone is at least willing to go with the group's decision. Five-Finger Consensus is a similar technique.

Gradients of agreement: This scale allows everyone to share their level of agreement from *"I really like this proposal"* to *"I block this proposal."* Originally this gradient was developed with eight levels of agreement, but you can adapt it to your needs. An example of a gradients of agreement scale is shown below.[61]

GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT



Example gradient from Community at Work as cited in Kaner et al.

Help the group successfully use the gradients of agreement in their decision-making process using the steps below:[62]

Steps for Using the Gradients of Agreement

1	Display the proposal clearly where everyone can see it.
2	Check with the group to make sure that everyone understands it.
3	Ask for wording revisions to the proposal that will make it even clearer.
4	Draw the gradients of agreement scale under the proposal.
5	Explain the gradients, e.g., *"1 means you really like the proposal."*
6	Let the group know that each person will have an opportunity to share their level of agreement regarding the proposal.
7	Launch the polling method (see below) you have chosen to find out where the group stands with the current proposal. Capture each response on the gradient you have drawn under the proposal.
8	Determine the next move given the results of the poll. • If the group doesn't provide enthusiastic support, the group is likely ready to make a formal decision using their decision rule. • If enthusiastic support is not evident, continue the conversation, then poll again.

There are several **polling strategies** you can use to ask meeting participants to share their level of agreement on the gradient:[63]

- **Show of hands:** A show of hands as you call out each number on the scale.
- **Individual response:** Ask each person, one at a time, to share their gradient and briefly explain why. Record it on a visual chart of the scale without any comment or discussion.
- **Simultaneous display:** Ask each person to write their score on a piece of paper and have everyone share it at the same time.
- **Private ballot:** Ask each person to write their score on a piece of paper. Collect them and write the results on the chart.
- **Two rounds:** Invite each person to share their gradient using one of the options above. Then engage in a brief, time-limited discussion. Poll again to see where people now stand.

Using the gradients of agreement will help you know when the group may be ready to apply their decisions rule and make their official decision. After the decision, make sure you close out the conversation. See section *6.3.7: Closing the Conversation* for a reminder of the key tasks and techniques that can be used.

9.3 USING ACTION LEARNING TO IMPROVE RESULTS

Once a decision has been made and the collaboration begins to act, the collaboration will want to engage in a process of continuous improvement throughout implementation. This process is known as **action learning**. In this section, we look at how you can facilitate action learning during any type of collaboration meeting to continuously enhance the effectiveness of the collaboration's efforts. We introduce two action learning problem-solving processes for your toolkit: **Plan-Do-Study-Act** and **Define-Do-Design-Learn**.

9.3.1 Action Learning

Action learning is about learning from your actions. Action learning is a powerful and necessary means to improve collaboration efforts and generate impactful results. There are many action learning definitions and models. Below is the one used by Illinois Action for Children and the Community Systems Statewide Supports (CS3) team.

ACTION LEARNING

> [an iterative] process that involves a small group working on real problems, taking action, and learning as individuals, as a team, and as an organization.[64] [It] is an ongoing cycle of collecting data and using it to make decisions to gradually improve processes.[65]

By using action learning, collaborations can build their capacity for ongoing effective problem solving.[66] Given the nature and complexity of CSD efforts, it is impossible to design strategies that are *guaranteed* to produce the desired results. The only way to figure out what works is by engaging in **action learning** – a process of planning, implementing, reflecting and learning from the effort, then refining the plan and acting again. It is through this process of continually improving CSD efforts that we can "discover" what works.

9.3.2 Plan-Do-Study-Act Action Learning Framework

One framework for action learning is the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle. This quality improvement method originates from the work of Edward Deming. In essence, it is a four-stage problem solving model used for improving a process or carrying out an action.[67] The table below describes the actions associated with each step of this action cycle.

Plan	• State the objective. • Make predictions about what will happen. • Develop a plan to make the change.
Do	• Carry out the plan or make the change. • Document observations or problems.
Study	• Study the results and analyze any new data. • Compare predictions to results. • Summarize and reflect on what was learned.
Act	• Based on what was learned, decide if you need to refine the change and re-test. • Determine what modifications should be made. • Prepare a plan for the next iteration.

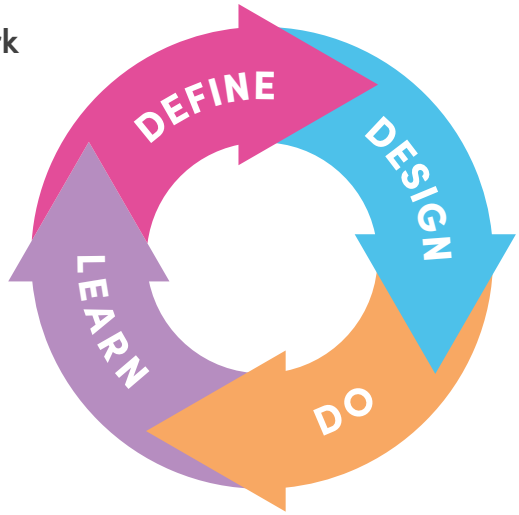
Below is an example of how collaborations can use PDSA cycles to continuously improve strategy implementation and get better results.[68]

Strategy: Expand outreach by establishing a cross-sector partnership between early learning programs and Family Quality Health Care so that doctors will "prescribe" early learning programs to all the children they serve.

PDSA Step	Example
Plan	Make it a part of the office administrator's job to stock exam rooms with early learning prescriptions.
Do	Implement for six weeks and collect data.
Study	There was only a slight improvement. The office administrator stocked rooms with prescriptions on Mondays, but did not check or restock during the week, so doctors didn't always have them available.
Act	In addition to the office administrator's job duties, make it a part of nurses' job duties to make sure that exam rooms have prescriptions ready for the doctor every time they bring a family into an exam room.

Based on what was learned through the first cycle, the collaboration can then engage in a second cycle to test out the new plan. In this example, the updated plan includes another element to the strategy, i.e., including the responsibility for stocking the prescriptions to nurse's job duties as well. The collaboration can plan another cycle to test out the impact of this additional action. The results of the second cycle will determine the next cycle and so on until the desired results are achieved.

9.3.3 Define-Design-Do-Learn Action Learning Framework



Another helpful action learning framework comes from Michigan State University's ABLe Change model. It is called **Define-Design-Do-Learn**. While this action learning process is like the PDSA cycle in some ways – it is unique in that it is a **systems thinking** action learning process that can be used for problem solving and continuous improvement.

Define-Design-Do-Learn emphasizes questions rather than tasks. Use these questions to bring a system thinking lens to your efforts and to plan your facilitation meetings. Keep in mind that all action learning is iterative. Continue to cycle through these four steps until the desired result is achieved.

Systems Thinking Action Learning Model[69]

Action Learning Step	Focus
Define Revealing and understanding emerging problems and opportunities	**Reveal:** • What is working? • What is not working? **Understand:** • Why is it happening? • What additional information is needed to understand the problem or opportunity?
Design Designing strategies to seize the opportunity or to address why the issue is happening	**Strategize:** • How can we design powerful strategies? • What assets can we leverage? • How can we align these strategies with other system efforts? **Prepare:** • What implementation needs can we anticipate? • Who do we need to engage to carry out our strategy? • What short term results can we produce in the next 3 months?
Do Engaging and supporting stakeholders in taking action to carry out the strategies	**Track Implementation Efforts:** • How is it going? • Are our strategies on track to create our desired results? **Support Effective Implementation:** • What barriers or opportunities are emerging as we implement our strategies? • How can we address these barriers or opportunities?
Learn Using information to reflect on the effectiveness of our strategies and their implementation to reach our targeted results	**Assess Impact:** • Are our efforts making a difference for families, settings, inequities? • What changes are not happening? • What unintended consequences are emerging because of our efforts? **Determine Next Steps:** • Given what we're learning, what are our next steps? • What are our opportunities to scale what is working? • What additional information do we need to address what is not working?

TIP

Use the questions in the table above to help the collaboration gain a deeper understanding of system problems, design more informed system strategies, more effectively support strategy implementation within complex systems, and reflect on the results with a systems lens.

9.3.4 Using Action Learning During Meetings

Action learning is most effective when it is embedded in how the collaboration works. This is one way problem-solving becomes a core process in collaboration meetings. To change community systems, there needs to be a change in the way people work.[70] This includes collaborations. Using action learning in collaboration meetings is a powerful way to embed and connect continuous learning across the community when collaboration member organizations also adapt the practice.[71]

During meetings, collaboration members can quickly adapt their strategies and actions based on the information gained from action learning cycles. These adaptations can lead to more timely, powerful, and effective changes in the early childhood system.

Action learning can support strategy implementation as in the previous example. It is also useful anytime a problem or opportunity comes up that needs to be addressed, for example, during full CSD meetings, CSD work groups, within organizations, other community meetings, and informal conversations among members or with families.[72] The table below illustrates two ways action learning can be used during collaboration meetings.[73]

Making Action Learning a Habit in Collaboration Meetings

When	How
To problem solving around your shared agenda	Use the appropriate questions above for each step of the problem-solving process related to your shared agenda: • Understanding the problem • Designing strategies • Implementing strategies • Reflecting on results Include the questions in your facilitation plan and participants' agenda for agenda topics related to your shared work (see section *8.3.3: Putting the Entire Agenda Together*).
To learn about and respond to emerging system problems or opportunities	Use adaptations of the Define questions to periodically check to see if there are emerging problems or opportunities related to the collaboration's shared agenda. Add these questions to your agenda: • *"What is happening related to our shared agenda (or strategy implementation)? "* • *"What is working well?"* • *"What is not working?"* • *"What new opportunities and/or problems are surfacing?"* Take time to understand why: • *"Why is this happening?"* • *"What additional information do we need to understand this?"* Then determine how to respond: • *"What action might we take to respond to this opportunity or issue?"* Remember this type of check-in can be done at any stage of the problem-solving process.

The following checklist can help you and the collaboration integrate an action learning process into everything you do.[74]

Checklist for Integrating Action Learning into all CSD Efforts

- ✓ Identify emerging system issues and opportunities on an ongoing basis.
- ✓ Understand why issues and opportunities are happening.
- ✓ Design small actions that can lead to system changes overtime.
- ✓ Identify and plan to address implementation needs for every action.
- ✓ Track implementation actions to show progress over time and reveal implementation challenges.
- ✓ Support collaboration members who are implementing system changes.
- ✓ Reflect upon actions and adapt plans and actions to discover what works.
- ✓ Use data to understand how implementation is going and identify unintended consequences.
- ✓ Weave information and learning among the collaboration and work groups to coordinate learning and action.

9.3.5 Creating an Action Learning Infrastructure

Action learning can be used in a variety of contexts both within and outside of CSD meetings. To get the full power of action learning, create an action learning infrastructure that connects related efforts. The rapid learning and adapted action that results from action learning benefits everyone involved.

This starts with coordinating learning and action among the collaboration and working groups. Make sure groups share information back and forth. The collaboration has a broader and more diverse set of perspectives on the early childhood system. They may be the first to uncover emerging issues or opportunities. Also, they are often the ones who are implementing strategies, so they have first-hand experience on how it is going. So, make sure work groups and the full collaboration are in continuous communication with each other.

Often one or more work groups may be taking the lead on specific aspects of the collaboration's shared agenda. They may be the group that is most closely leading and tracking implementation efforts. But as a small group, they do not have the broader vantage point as the collaboration.

And let's not forget about making sure families have a voice and opportunity to participate throughout the problem-solving process. Regardless of how you engage families in the process, make sure they are also part of the action learning process. Only families know if the collaboration's strategies are improving their experience of the early childhood system. They may also have key insights into emerging problems and how to solve them. So, make sure their engagement is part of the action learning infrastructure.

All these parts of the collaboration's infrastructure should be coordinated and in regular communication so they can learn and act in alignment. Action learning gives you a process to support this alignment. In *Chapter 10: Supporting Action Between CSD Meetings*, we provide more direction on how you can do this weaving.

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CHAPTER 10

Supporting Action Between Collaboration Meetings

In this chapter, we show you – whether in the role of collaboration leader, manager, or facilitator – how to support group engagement between meetings. You will gain ideas for supporting collaborative action, reflecting upon efforts, and continuously improving.

10.1 SUPPORTING COLLABORATION ACTION

Once your meetings conclude, ensure collaboration members are clear about next steps they should take after the meeting. One way to support the collaboration in moving forward is to summarize the conversations, decisions, and action items. Writing and sharing notes allows everyone to be aware and accountable to the group. With a clear vision and road map, you and other members can support collaboration members to complete next steps in-between meetings.

10.1.1 Writing and Sharing Meeting Notes

After the meeting, clean up and send out the meeting notes for collaboration member's use.
Meeting notes or minutes help:

- Support the facilitator in tracking important discussion points, decisions, and actions
- Provide a written record of decisions, actions, and next steps
- Remind participants of what they said they would do and hold them accountable
- Keep people connected to the group conversation if they cannot attend a meeting
- Store group information and save members from revisiting old discussions
- Promote inclusivity by allowing everyone to have access to a record of discussions and decisions[1]

Meeting notes do not have to be long and complicated. In fact, shorter and easy-to-read minutes are usually best. Consider the following questions to make sure you are creating a fair and accurate meeting record:

- Are you clear on what is being said and decided?
- Is the collaboration making a clear decision?
- Are the notes representing participants' points fairly?[2]

To get started on your post meeting notes here are some simple steps:

1. **Clean up the notes.** Type out handwritten notes using clear language and a simple layout, e.g., use numbers and bullet points, create clear headers, and spell out acronyms.
2. **Distribute.** Share the minutes as soon as you can so all members can see the action items and announcements. You might email the notes to your distribution list and store them in a shared folder.
3. **Check for accuracy.** Invite meeting participants to check the meeting notes to ensure they make sense and reflect the conversation, decisions, and next steps.
4. **Make the notes useful for the long term.** The notes are only useful if people read them. You might add decisions and action items to a central shared agenda.[3]

Details to Capture in Meeting Notes

- Date, time, location of meeting
- Name of group or collaboration
- Names of members in attendance
- Agenda topics and a summary of key ideas and points
- Group decisions (**TIP:** highlight or underline for easier reference)
- Rational for decisions
- Individual viewpoints
- Next steps – who will do what and by when?
- Data, time, and location of next meeting

10.1.2 Maintaining Confidentiality

While it is important that meeting notes are accessible to all, it's also important to maintain privacy and security when sharing documents. This should be considered if confidentiality or safety is a concern.

Confidentiality is the act of keeping something private or not disclosing information.[4] Confidentiality is important because it builds trust between individuals. Collaboration members, partners, and community members trust organizations and collaborations to not disclose sensitive or private information.

Confidential information is any information that is disclosed to one person or party to another in a way that is designated as confidential.[5] It can be shared directly or indirectly, verbally or in written form, or through objects such as documents, plans, or prototypes. Community systems development collaborations should be aware of the following types of confidential information:

1. **Personal or sensitive data:** This includes employee records, health information, or other private protected information protected by data privacy laws.
2. **Organizational information:** This might include strategic plans, financial information, or other strategic information that might not be publicly available and that might be vital to the organization's programs, services, management, or operations.
3. **Client, recipient, or community member information:** This may include client or participant lists, contact information, or data related to existing or potential clients or participants.
4. **Research and development data:** This includes research findings, test results, outcomes data, or survey data; information should not include individual identifying information; and reported data should be aggregated.
5. **Personal opinions or perspectives:** In some equity related or other conversations, there might be personal experiences, opinions, or perspectives shared that are sensitive or private in nature and not meant to be shared broadly to the public or in public facing documents.

Here are a few considerations for how to better support confidentiality and safety:

- **Understand the scope and limits of confidentiality.** This means understanding relevant rules and policies as well as expectations for collaboration members. Be aware of situations for which you need to disclose information, such as risk of harm, abuse, or legal obligation.
- **Inform and obtain consent.** Before sharing notes or information consider whether consent is needed to share any of the information. If in doubt, make sure to inform individuals of the purpose and intent to share. Also, ask for their permission in either written or verbal form.
- **Manage information.** No confidential information should be included in notes that are widely distributed to the full collaboration.
- **Develop protocols.** Designate who receives information on confidential matters, and how that information will be shared to protect privacy and safety.
- **Use appropriate communication channels.** Do not use personal or public devices for sharing sensitive information. Be mindful of time, place, and the audience to avoid discussing sensitive information in public.
- **Protect data.** Remove names or individual identifying makers to notes on confidential matters. Share information in generalized terms or offered as a summary of concerns.
- **Securely share data.** Use authorized methods and platforms that your organization or collaboration has designated.
- **Securely store data.** Store sensitive information in secure locations. Do not leave confidential information in public spaces.

If you have a collaboration agreement or partnership agreement, be sure to check it for guidance that applies to your collaboration and work. For more information on the topic of confidentiality see Chapter 19, Section 5: Ethical Issues in Community Interventions from the Community Tool Box.

10.1.3 Supporting Action Between Meetings

You do a lot to prepare and facilitate meetings. The support you provide in-between meetings to help collaboration members carry out action steps is equally important. Keep members informed by sharing meeting notes, following up on action item progress, supporting action if needed, and reminding members to be ready to report back at the next meeting. This process might look like this:[6]

	Supporting Action Between Meetings			
Collaboration meeting #1	**Follow up from meeting**	**Check in on progress**	**Send meeting reminder**	**Collaboration meeting #2**
Capture notes, decisions, and actions so everyone is clear what needs to happen	Share meeting notes and action items	Follow up with collaboration members about progress on action items Provide necessary support	Send next meeting reminder Ensure members are ready to report on their action items	Ask members to give updates on their action items Celebrate wins Solve implementation problems together

Checking in With Members Between Meetings

As collaboration members implement strategies, you can support their effective implementation by checking in with them between meetings. During check-ins you can provide support in the form of reminders or technical assistance. You can also gather feedback on how implementation is going. Below are a few simple questions you can ask to support action in-between meetings:[7]

Check-in Support	Questions to Ask
Provide support Provide reminders, technical assistance, and encouragement	• *"How are things going?"* • *"What barriers, if any, are you encountering as you carry out action?"* • *"What supports might be helpful?"*
Gather feedback on implementation Talk to collaboration members and learn about their experiences	• *"How is implementation going?"* • *"What is surprising you?"* • *"In what ways are we hitting or moving towards our objectives or desired outcomes?"* • *"What strategy adaptations might be needed?"*

Weaving Information among Collaboration Members and Working Groups

As you check in on progress between meetings, you may see opportunities to share information between collaboration members and relevant work groups or committees. This might be new learning, emerging opportunities, or barriers, for example.

Weaving information builds communication and feedback loops among collaboration groups and improves decision-making and responsiveness.[8] Sharing information can occur during and across meetings and during informal conversations. Either way these conversations create real-time sharing of insights and questions.[9]

When you learn about an opportunity, barrier, or challenge during a meeting, think about who else might need to know this information. Consider who could support action within and external to the collaboration.[10] Send a group email describing what was learned so people can engage.[11]

10.2 REFLECTING AND CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVING

Each collaboration meeting provides an opportunity to reflect, evaluate, learn, and improve. In this section, we look at ways to evaluate meeting effectiveness.

10.2.1 Evaluating Meeting Effectiveness

Section 1.3: Meeting Effectiveness includes information about characteristics of effective meetings. In review, effective meetings happen when collaboration members:

- Are involved, supported, and empowered participants.
- Get work done by sharing information, making decisions, and acting on those decisions.[12]
- Build a sense of community and connection needed to achieve shared goals.[13]

Here we look at how you engage collaboration members to evaluate meeting effectiveness.

Meeting Evaluation Focus

When you evaluate meeting effectiveness, first decide whether you will collect general or specific feedback from collaboration members.

If you want to give members an opportunity to provide feedback without specific prompts, consider using the Plus/Delta technique that asks two primary questions:

- What about this meeting worked well for you?
- What changes could improve our meetings?

Plus/Delta a simple quick **way** to get helpful feedback on a process, activity, or an entire meeting. Use it to gather information about what worked and what could be improved. Members can do this on individual pieces of paper or as a group activity on a flipchart.

Either way create two columns. Put "+" over the first column and a "Δ" (Delta symbol) over the second column. What worked well responses go in the first column. In the second column, ask for suggested changes rather than what didn't work. See the example below.

+ What about this meeting worked well for you?

- Check-ins to get to know each other
- Hearing everyone's perspective
- Problem-solving current system challenges

Δ What changes could improve our meetings?

- Start meetings on time
- Allow more time for discussion
- Engage families in decision-making

Perhaps you're looking for even more specific feedback related to meeting design or process. For example, you might want to understand more about the:

- Meeting design
- Agenda topics
- How time is used
- Interpersonal or group dynamics
- Meeting process
- Meeting facilitation
- Decision-making
- Meeting outcomes
- Use of an equity lens
- Equity progress
- Next steps follow up
- Individuals' experiences of the collaboration, e.g., inclusivity, belonging

Develop specific questions for each focus you select. Keep to a limited number of questions each time to encourage more thoughtful responses.

Meeting Evaluation Methods

Once you know what you want to ask collaboration members, you can select an appropriate method. Each of the methods below can be used for asking general or specific questions.

Meeting Evaluation Methods	
Method	**Details**
Meeting evaluation form	This method allows you to ask multiple open-ended questions to invite more detailed responses and close-ended questions to get basic feedback. An online survey provides for a quick summary and analysis.
Small group feedback conversation	This method is best for rapid feedback with multiple people. Gather participants into a small group and ask what they are learning, taking away, or gaining. Use a flipchart to record their responses. You can ask clarifying questions if needed.
Comment cards	This method allows people to be candid and share their thoughts honestly. Distribute note cards at the end of the meeting and ask participants to anonymously share their feedback.
Sticky notes	This quick method is semi-anonymous but does not allow for clarifying questions unless time is given for this and individuals are willing to share. Write each feedback question on a separate flipchart paper. Ask participants to write their feedback on sticky notes answering each question on a separate sticky note. Have them post their responses to the relevant flipchart.

10.2.2 Reflecting on Your Facilitation

Another significant way to enhance meeting effectiveness is by reflecting on your facilitation. Personal reflection supports continuous improvement of your meetings and your competence and confidence as a facilitator. More specifically, reflecting on your facilitation is important because it allows you to:

- Consider your own strengths and areas for growth
- Understand what you bring personally and professionally to the collaboration
- Assure meeting facilitation, discussions, activities, and decision-making is effective
- Check the appropriateness of processes, methods, and tools
- Learn from "mistakes"
- Improve the overall meetings environment and process as well as the overall experience for others

To reflect on your facilitation and the collaboration meetings, you might consider using a reflection model to support your process. Here are just a few models to get you started:

Reflection Models

What? So what? Now what?

John Driscoll developed this model in 1994. It includes three simple questions that allow you to think about the experience (what?), its implications (so what?), and what it means for the future (now what?)[14]. See section *4.3.5: Debriefing with What? So What? Now What?* for more on this model.

Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

Graham Gibbs developed this model in 1988 to give a structure to learning from experiences. The six stages cover a cyclical process of examining experiences and learning and planning forward. Stages include:

- **Description** of the experience
- **Feelings and thoughts** about the experience
- **Evaluation** of the experience
- **Analysis** to make sense of the situation
- **Conclusion** about what you learned and what could be done differently
- **Action plan** for how to deal with situations in the future and general changes that make sense

ORID

The Institute of Cultural Affairs in Canada developed the ORID model. It involves asking four types of questions:

- **Objective:** Getting the facts
- **Reflective:** Emotions, feelings, associations
- **Interpretive:** Value, meaning, purpose, learning, implications
- **Decisional:** Decision, actions, response, future steps

As you can see, there are several different ways to reflect as a facilitator. Choose the model, process, or tools that makes sense to you. To the right are some reflection questions you can use to focus your reflection.

Reflection Questions

- What happened? Did anything unexpected happen? Any surprises?
- What did you hope would happen that didn't?
- What triggered you?
- Which of your biases showed up?
- What worked well? What could be improved?
- What are your facilitation strengths? Weaknesses? Challenges?
- What are the pros and cons of the process or method you used?
- What role did you take on and why?
- How did you respond and why?
- How did your feelings influence what you said or did?
- What opportunities did you miss?
- What would you have done differently, more of, or less of?
- What was most valuable about the meeting?
- In what ways can you improve your approach?
- In what ways can you improve a method or tool?
- What feedback, if any, was meaningful?
- How can you grow as a facilitator? What support or resources do you need?

If you are interested in reflecting specifically on the use of time in your meetings, consider this meeting quality assessment tool from Dr. Steven Rogelberg. Use it to calculate wasted meeting time in these categories:

- Meeting design
- Time dynamics
- Interpersonal dynamics
- Discussion dynamics
- Post-meeting activities

Evaluating the meeting and reflecting on your facilitation gives you valuable information to help you overcome challenges and prepare for your next meeting.

10.2.3 Overcoming Facilitation Challenges

Even with diligent and thoughtful meeting planning and competent facilitation, facilitation challenges can arise. Remember that facilitation is not an exact science so be easy on yourself when this occurs.

The questions below can be used in two ways. You can use them to reflect on past meeting challenges. This may help you identify an isolated issue or perhaps identify a pattern of meeting challenges that are turning into ongoing habits. Use this awareness to determine what needs to change.

You can also use these questions to check your next meeting plan before you facilitate. It may help you notice where you may want to adapt your plan to prevent a facilitation challenge from occurring.

Either way ask yourself the following questions after and/or before the meeting:[15]

TYPICAL MEETING CHALLENGES

MEETING RELEVANCY

- Is this the appropriate group to address the topic?
- Is there another group that can act between meetings?
- Would it be more efficient to work in small groups, e.g., a working group or subcommittee?
- Is the topic relevant or urgent currently? Which topics could be addressed later?

TIME CONSIDERATIONS

- Is there an appropriate amount of time for each agenda item?
- How can or should this item carry over to a next meeting?
- Would it help to have time limits for discussions? Or for how long each person speaks?
- Is there a timekeeper? Is time kept visible and shared regularly?
- Are you realistic about the time you allocated for the topic?
- Was information shared ahead of the meeting so everyone can be prepared?
- Would an occasional longer meeting be more productive to address more complex or challenging topics?

MEETINGS LACK FOCUS

- Does your agenda include topics with a clear purpose and intended meeting outcome?
- Are the agenda topics relevant to the entire group?
- Are you trying to cover too many unrelated topics during one meeting?
- What is the process for dealing with new topics as they emerge during a meeting?
- Does the group need a break to refocus?
- How do you keep people on track when the conversation starts or between agenda items?

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POWER AND PARTICIPATION

- **Who makes decisions for the group during or outside of the meeting?** Who is enabled to put items on the agenda? How hierarchical is your meeting structure, e.g., does the collaboration make decisions or an advisory board?
- **What type of power do people have at different stages of the collaboration process?** How involved are people in designing the agenda, making decisions, and implementing action?
- **Who takes on which tasks?** How comfortable and confident are people in contributing at the meeting? What sort of teambuilding or trust building might be needed?
- **How much time do different people speak in the meeting?** How do you invite broad and balanced participation? How are you engaging diverse perspectives? How are you balancing dominant views? How can you and the group make space for different preferences for how to process information and make decisions?

GROUP DISAGREEMENT

- Does the group have a defined decision-making rule?
- Where is there agreement? Can someone summarize where there is agreement?
- What questions still need answers? What needs clarity?
- What additional information gathering or research, if any, is needed to move forward? Who can support this process?
- Do you need to go deeper in your group discussion? Have you explored reasons for different preferences?
- Does the group need a break? Some individual think time? Does the decision need to be postponed?

You can also address challenges as they arise during the meeting. Here are actions you can take during a meeting to address challenges in real time:[16]

ADDRESSING CHALLENGES DURING A MEETING

- Anticipate problems and notice issues as they arise.
- Get curious about what is happening and why.
- Describe to the group what you are seeing or sensing in the group.
- Ask the group what is going on and what they suggest.
- Listen to feedback and ask for other ideas.
- Work with the group to decide how to proceed.

10.2.4 Preparing for the Next Meeting

Prepare for the next meeting as soon as you complete the last meeting. Once you share the meeting notes, follow up on needed information and action steps.

Stay on top of implementation or other action items between meetings. The process of supporting action between meetings and weaving information among various collaboration groups helps you identify, and sometimes address, emerging issues. Being aware of emerging issues and opportunities may inform your next meeting agenda.

You can also gather emerging issues and opportunities during meetings. You can prepare for this by including time and questions on your next agenda. Below are some example agenda questions to consider:[17]

In preparing for your next collaboration meeting, keep in mind the conversations, decisions, and action steps from the previous meeting. Also consider critical framing information that is needed to help people link information from one meeting to the next:

- Center people towards the overall vision and goals
- Connect members to key concepts and points from the previous meeting
- Provide context for decisions or action items
- Offer key updates and details
- Offer space for clarifying questions or information before you continue the conversation.

See *Chapter 8: Planning CSD Collaboration Meetings* for more on developing your next meeting agenda.

Identifying and Addressing Emerging Issues and Opportunities

Example Agenda Questions

- How's it going with [e.g., goal or strategy]?
  - What ***has been working*** this past month?
    - What contributed to this success?
    - Who else needs to know about this?
  - What ***has not been working*** this past month?
    - What contributed to the challenges or things not working as we anticipated?
    - What can we do it about? Who should be involved?

[1]Seeds of Change. "Taking Minutes for Meetings." 2019.
[2]Seeds of Change. "Taking Minutes." 2019.
[3]Seeds of Change. "Taking Minutes." 2019.
[4]National Association of Social Workers. "Social Workers Ethical Responsibilities to Clients." 2024.
[5]Contractbook. "Confidential Information." 2024.
[6]Adapted from ABLe Change. "Facilitating Systemic Action Learning." 2015.
[7]Adapted from ABLe Change. "Facilitating Systemic Action Learning." 2015.
[8]ABLe Change. "Facilitating Systemic Action Learning." 2015.
[9]ABLe Change. "Facilitating Systemic Action Learning." 2015.
[10]ABLe Change. "Facilitating Systemic Action Learning." 2015.
[11]Carolyn Newberry Schwartz. Personal correspondence.
[12]Seeds for Change. "Facilitating Meetings." 2019.
[13]Seeds for Change. "Facilitating Meetings." 2019.
[14]Anonymous. "Driscoll (by Borton)."
[15]Adapted from Seeds for Change. "Facilitating Meetings." 2019.
[16]Seeds for Change. "Facilitating Meetings." 2019.
[17]Adapted from ABLe Change. "Identifying and Addressing Emerging Issues." 2015.

APPENDIX A

Chapter Summaries

Below are high-level overviews of some of the big ideas from each chapter of this handbook.

CHAPTER 1: CORE FACILITATION CONCEPTS

Chapter 1 includes three sections: Facilitation Fundamentals, Models to Support Meeting Design and Facilitation, and Meeting Effectiveness. Below are a few highlights from each of these sections to support your facilitation.

Section	This Section Helps You:
Facilitation Fundamentals	• Be clear about your role as a facilitator versus other roles you may have, e.g., collaboration leader versus subject matter expert • Remember when to be and not to be neutral as a facilitator • Consider co-facilitation and other meeting roles that may be helpful
Models to Support Meeting Design and Facilitation	• Revisit the five facilitation elements that you will focus on in almost every meeting • Remember the collaboration and engagement continuums as you invite your collaboration to act • Consider how group behavior may be the result of the group's current stage of development • Recall the generative nature of conversation and the role of dialogue to get to shared understanding • Get familiar with facilitator objectives and related tasks for each zone of the Diamond of Participatory Decision-Making
Meeting Effectiveness	• Understand characteristics and benefits of effective meetings • Use a checklist for designing and facilitating effective meetings

CHAPTER 2: CENTERING EQUITY IN FACILITATION

Chapter 2 explains the essence of centering equity in facilitation. We make the case for equity and racial equity in CSD work. We also describe race as a social construct, the levels of racism, and the importance of anti-racism. Bringing an equity lens and frame to the work allows us to uncover the structures, policies, and behaviors that create and sustain inequitable outcomes for children and families. To center equity in facilitation, we emphasize the inner work and preparation that is critical to developing as a facilitator. Return to this section for grounding in equity concepts and as you grow and evolve on your equity journey.

CHAPTER 3: ESSENTIAL FACILITATION SKILLS

Chapter 3 focuses on five essential facilitation skill sets. Each skill set is made up of core skills that are the most basic way facilitators support groups in doing their best thinking. Return to this chapter when you want to review these skills and/or need a skill to address a specific situation in any upcoming meeting, e.g., more ways to actively listen. The skill sets include:

- Emotional and social intelligence
- Asking powerful questions
- Active listening
- Encouraging participation
- Organizing conversation flow

CHAPTER 4: FACILITATION CORE TASKS AND TECHNIQUES

In Chapter 4, we move to facilitator core tasks – the next level of support facilitators can provide a group. These are facilitator behaviors – what facilitators do – that align with the facilitator responsibilities and competencies found in Chapter 1. Facilitators use their essential skills and other techniques to help them achieve the following tasks:

- Demonstrating personal effectiveness
- Communicating effectively
- Creating a positive and inclusive climate
- Using questions effectively
- Inviting broad and balanced participation
- Maintaining focus and managing the process
- Managing group dynamics and interpersonal conflict
- Centering equity

Occasionally, revisit this section to ground yourself in these key tasks, remember which skills can be helpful, and identify fundamental techniques to carry them out.

CHAPTER 5: SUPPORTING PRODUCTIVE GROUP DYNAMICS

Chapter 5 focuses on one of our key roles as a facilitator: supporting productive group dynamics. This has a tremendous impact on the group process and effectiveness. Return to this chapter for support on how to promote productive behaviors and address disruptive behaviors.

Section	This Section Helps You:
Building a Foundation for Effective Collaboration	• Recall strategies for promoting collaboration • Find tips for facilitating the group through the various stages of group development • Diagnose behavior that may be a result of the current stage of development
Supporting Productive Meeting Behaviors	• Identify behaviors that enhance group effectiveness • Find strategies to promote productive interpersonal behavior
Recognizing and Intervening Disruptive Behaviors	• Ask yourself questions before intervening in disruptive behavior • Find suggestions for how to recognize and respond to difficult behavior types
Dealing with Interpersonal Conflict During Meetings	• Understand conflict • Recall strategies to minimize conflict before it escalates • Learn tips for how to respond when people are in conflict • Learn two tools for working through conflict: conflict triangles and conflict mapping

CHAPTER 6: FACILITATING SMALL GROUP CONVERSATIONS

In Chapter 6 the focus is facilitating small group conversations. Community systems development work involves small and large group efforts. Work groups, for example, play important roles in most collaboration structures. Breakout groups are often used in large collaboration meetings, e.g., to give more opportunities for people to share and develop their thinking, engage in meaningful work together, and build relationships.

Small group facilitation is also a great place to develop your facilitation skills, as they are often simpler to facilitation than a full collaboration meeting. We offer two approaches to facilitating group conversations: open conversations and planned conversations. Both types of conversations can be used with small and large groups.

The following table compares the two types. Basically, the difference is the level and ways in which the facilitator supports the group.

	Open Conversations	Planned Conversations
Facilitator Objective(s)	• Help the group do their best thinking together	• Help the group do their best thinking together • Support the group to achieve their purpose or desired outcomes
Facilitator Involvement	• Low involvement • Group takes more responsibility for the conversation	• Higher involvement • Facilitator takes more responsibility for supporting the conversation and getting to the defined outcome
Facilitator Tasks	• Help people make their points • Broaden and balance perspectives • Manage the conversation flow	• Create a positive environment • Gather diverse perspectives and/or ideas • Get to shared understanding • Generate an inclusive agreement or conclusion • Summarize and reflect

CHAPTER 7: FACILITATING EQUITY-FOCUSED CONVERSATIONS

Centering equity is central to community systems development efforts; therefore, CSD facilitators can support equity-focused conversations by having the knowledge and skills to facilitate honest and courageous conversations about race equity. In this chapter, the emphasis is on understanding, preparing, facilitating, and holding space for equity-focused conversations.

Section	This Section Helps You:
Understanding Equity-Focused Conversations	• Revisit what a courageous conversation is and why we need to have them • Review a list of possible equity topics to discuss with collaboration members
Preparing for Planned Equity-focused Conversations	• Find a list of resources to support equity-focused conversations • Know what to include in a conversation guide to support equity-focused conversations • Use a logistics checklist
Facilitating Equity-Focused Conversations	• Create a brave space for equity-focused conversations • Set expectations and agreements • Promote awareness and engagement using six conditions of courageous conversations to engage, sustain, and deepen conversation • Navigate the conversation • Support action after conversations
Holding Space	• Remember to stay present with discomfort • Respond to emotions that may arise • Support when harm happens • Remember to take care of yourself and others

CHAPTER 8: PLANNING COLLABORATION MEETINGS

In Chapter 8, we discuss planning a collaboration meeting as foundational to meeting effectiveness. The time and effort you put into planning is a wise investment. In this chapter, we review the characteristics of large group CSD meetings. Then we focus on a few basic meeting design concepts before turning to guidance on how to develop the meeting agenda. We end the chapter with some tips on preparing for the meeting.

Section	This Section Helps You:
Understanding Large Group CSD Meetings	• Remember the unique CSD characteristics of large group meetings related to five focuses: people, content, process, group dynamics, and equity • Recall general facilitation considerations for each focus
Meeting Design Basic Concepts	• Remember to spend at least an equal amount of time designing the meeting as you do facilitating it • Use the three agenda topic components to develop your agenda: agenda topic, meeting outcome, and process selection • Distinguish between topic goals and meeting outcomes and use them to support your facilitation • Select appropriate process methods and techniques
Developing the CSD Meeting Agenda	• Determine the overall meeting agenda, e.g., deciding which topics to include and in what order • Develop a more complete facilitation plan (i.e., annotated agenda) for major agenda items • Put together an annotated agenda for your use and a general agenda for participants
Preparing to Meet	• Invite participants to the meeting • Prepare meeting materials • Gather and organize supplies needed for planned processes • Arrange the meeting space • Prepare yourself

CHAPTER 9: FACILITATING COLLABORATION MEETINGS

Chapter 9 focuses on how to facilitate CSD collaboration meetings. We review four practical ways to embed equity in your facilitation through the following techniques:

- Using an equity framework
- Taking equity pauses
- Making decisions with equity choice points
- Using equity impact assessment questions

Then, we provide guidance to facilitate collaboration decision-making by:

- Using generative thinking to get to inclusive and sustainable agreements
- Selecting a decision rule
- Making decisions by consensus
- Synthesizing to facilitate proposal development
- Checking for agreement

Finally, we suggest how to use action learning to improve your collaboration's CSD efforts for greater impact. Revisit this section to review two action learning frameworks and how to use them in meeting facilitation. It also offers support on how to create a habit and infrastructure to support continuous improvement for your collaboration efforts.

CHAPTER 10: SUPPORTING ACTION BETWEEN CSD COLLABORATION MEETINGS

In Chapter 10, we share ideas for how to support the collaboration to act between meetings and continuously improve their efforts.

Section	This Section Helps You:
Supporting Collaboration Action	• Write clear meeting notes that capture key details, decisions, and actions • Remember to maintain confidentiality for sensitive, private, or personal information • Support action steps between meetings by: – Sharing notes – Following up with support – Checking on progress – Gathering implementation feedback – Reminding the group of next steps – Asking for updates – Celebrating wins – Solving problems together – Weaving information between groups
Reflecting and Continuously Improving	• Consider questions you want to ask to improve meeting effectiveness • Develop methods for evaluating meeting effectiveness • Reflect on your own facilitation including what to reflect on and how to reflect • Anticipate and overcome challenges that arise in facilitation • Prepare for future meetings • Understand how to identify emerging issues and opportunities that may arise

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APPENDIX B

Facilitation Methods, Techniques, and Tools

Here you will find most of the facilitation process methods, techniques, and tools we have referenced throughout the handbook. We organized these processes in alphabetical order so you can quickly find a process from an earlier chapter. We also provided the chapter and section number in case you want to go back to the text where it was mentioned.

All the processes are categorized to help you discern whether a process is appropriate for your intended use. We used the five parts of a conversation (from the Diamond of Participatory Decision-Making) that we described in numerous chapters:

- Opening a conversation
- Divergent thinking
- Emergent thinking
- Convergent thinking
- Closing a conversation

We added "center equity" and "deepen engagement" as additional categories since both are essential to CSD efforts and can be important during any part of a conversation. This handbook provides only a sampling of facilitation processes. For additional techniques and tools, check out these resources:

- Facilitation Techniques: Quick Reference, by NOAA
- Facilitation Tools for Meetings and Workshops, by Seeds of Change
- Strategies and Tools for Group Processing, by Heartland
- Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making, by Sam Kaner and colleagues[1]
- Library of Facilitation Techniques, by Session Lab
- IAF Library, by International Association of Facilitators

[1]You can find the second edition online with this link. You can purchase the third edition (2014) in print. The fourth edition is expected July 2025.

Facilitation Methods, Techniques, and Tools	Opening	Divergent Thinking	Emergent Thinking	Convergent Thinking	Closing	Center Equity	Support Engagement	Chapter and Section
Accountable space is where individuals are responsible for their intentions, words, and actions through critical thinking and alignment of actions with intentions.[1]	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	7.3.1
Action learning is an iterative process that involves a small group working on real problems, acting, and learning as individuals, a team, and an organization.[2] [It] is an ongoing cycle of collecting data and using it to make decisions to gradually improve processes.[3]		•	•	•			•	9.3 10.1.3
Asking powerful questions is a technique used often and for so many reasons: to get a conversation started, engage diverse perspectives, deepen the group's thinking, reach the desired outcome, and respond to the group's needs and process.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	3.2 4.4
Brainstorming is a technique that allows groups to generate lots of creative ideas to solve a problem or create new possibilities. Learn more.		•					•	6.3.4
Call in and call out is an invitation, often one-to-one or in a small group conversation, that brings attention to an individual or group's harmful words or behavior including bias, judgment, prejudice, microaggressions, and discrimination.[4]		•	•	•		•	•	2.3.1 7.8.8
Categorizing is a group process for creating categories or themes for a list of different ideas. This technique allows individuals to think and assess together.			•				•	6.3.5
Chart writing is a technique for capturing the group's thinking in a visual way and displaying it around the room to create "group memory."[5]		•	•	•			•	4.6.7 6.3.4 6.3.6 8.2.4
Check-ins and **check-outs** are simple, yet effective ways to open and close conversations and meetings. As an opener, check-ins allow everyone an opportunity to become fully present, have their voice to be heard, and practice empathetic listening. Check-outs provide opportunities for reflection on the meeting process, comments about personal meeting experience, or final thoughts before the meeting ends. Learn more.	•				•		•	4.3.2 4.5.3 4.7.3 6.3.3 6.3.7
Co-facilitation involves two people sharing the facilitation role. Often one person focuses on content while the other focuses on process.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	1.1.8 4.7.4
Comment cards enable participants to share feedback or insights anonymously and honestly. Once collected you can theme the responses then share with the group.		•	•	•	•		•	4.8.10 10.2.1
Conflict mapping helps the group to get a clearer picture of the underlying conflict. It encourages others to share their interests and needs and to hear those of others.[6]		•	•	•		•	•	5.4.5
Conflict triangles allow you to understand conflict and get to common ground by looking at people's position on the situation as well as their interests and needs.		•	•	•			•	5.4.4

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Facilitation Methods, Techniques, and Tools	Opening	Divergent Thinking	Emergent Thinking	Convergent Thinking	Closing	Center Equity	Support Engagement	Chapter and Section
Courageous conversation or **equity-focused conversation** is an honest, and sometimes uncomfortable, conversation about race equity. It is a strategy that uses agreements and conditions to engage, sustain, and deepen interracial dialogue about race to support individuals and groups in addressing persistent racial disparities intentionally, explicitly, and comprehensively[7]		●	●	●		●	●	6.2
Courageous Conversation agreements come from Glenn Singleton's work. The four agreements are specifically for equity-focused conversations.	●					●		7.3.2
Debate is an intentional process to emphasize differences between two points of view.[8] Each position is championed by a team. The teams take turns making their case followed by a rebuttal from the other team.				●				6.3.6 8.2.3
Decision-making is the process of making a choice. In this handbook this is referred to as an inclusive and sustainable agreement.[9]				●				6.3.6 8.2.4
Define-Design-Do-Learn is an action learning model from the ABLe Change community system change framework that consists of four process steps: define, design, do, and learn.[10] Learn more.		●	●	●				9.3.3
Energizers, or positive disruptions, are used to re-engage, re-motivate, or re-energize participants at some point during the meeting. Energizers can be creative opportunities, fun brain teasers, or physical activities. Learn more.	●	●	●	●			●	4.3.3
Equity choice points are decision-making opportunities for collaboration leaders or members to pause to reflect, generate options, and enact changes that advance racial equity and inclusion[11] Learn more.		●	●	●		●		9.1.3
Equity impact assessments are essentially a set of questions to help you and your collaboration consider how current or planned policies, practices, or decisions could unintentionally contribute to local inequities. You can use the questions to aid your decision-making around what to shift or re-design within your efforts to advance equity.[13]		●	●	●		●		9.1.4
An **equity pause** is a way to disrupt the groups way of thinking and to slow down and take time to pause the [design/planning] process to reflect and share learning, remind each other of shared goals and practices, and name what the group might do better in the support of racial equity and inclusion.[14] Learn more.		●	●	●		●		1.1.7 7.1.3 9.1.2
Fishbowl is a technique for organizing medium to large group discussions to encourage dialogue. Participants are separated into an inner and outer circle. In the inner circle, or fishbowl, individuals discuss a given topic. Individuals in the outer circle listen, observe, and take notes. After, the group reflects on the fishbowl conversation as participants and listeners. Learn more.			●					6.3.5 8.2.3
Fist to five can be used to get a sense of agreement on a proposal, or in some cases, it might be the way in which the group makes the decision. Using this technique will give you and the group a more nuanced understanding of the group's current degree of agreement and where there might be strong disagreement. Learn more.				●			●	9.2.5

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Facilitation Methods, Techniques, and Tools	Opening	Divergent Thinking	Emergent Thinking	Convergent Thinking	Closing	Center Equity	Support Engagement	Chapter and Section
With the **five fingers consensus** technique, the facilitator asks the group to rate their level of consensus on a topic from 0 to 5. This is particularly useful in managing small groups where different topics may be discussed simultaneously. Learn more.				•			•	9.2.5
Gallery walks engage participants in an exploratory and visual feedback and reflection process. This technique can be used to review, inspire, discuss, assess, or provide feedback on ideas, strategies, materials, or other work products. This technique can be adapted from the classroom to fit the collaboration. Learn more.		•	•	•	•		•	4.8.10 8.2.3 8.4.2
The **Gibb's Reflective Cycle** covers a six-stage cyclical process of examining experiences, learning, and planning forward. The six stages include: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action planning. Learn more.					•			9.2
Go-around or **round robin** is a structured way for group members to have the opportunity to share and be heard in response to a question. There is no conversation. The emphasis is on listening when not speaking.		•	•	•				4.5.4 5.3.2 8.2.3
Gradients of agreement are used for participants to scale and share their level of agreement from *"I really like this proposal"* to *"I block this proposal."* Meeting participants can share their level of agreement through one of the following polling options: show of hands, individual response, simultaneous display, private ballot, and two rounds.[15] Learn more.				•				8.3
Hold up a mirror technique can call the group's attention to their behavior so that they can make their own interpretations about it and decide how they want to proceed. It is important that you are not making any judgments about their behavior but rather you bring awareness to what you notice. This may be helpful when the group gets off track or you notice disruptive behaviors.[16]		•	•	•		•	•	5.3.2
Icebreakers are great ways to engage everyone and infuse some upbeat energy into your meetings. Icebreakers are usually about 15-minutes long and intentionally involve everyone at the beginning of a meeting. Learn more.	•	•	•	•			•	4.3.3 6.3.3
Individual think time is a silent pause in the group process giving each person time to think or reflect before beginning the conversation.		•	•	•			•	2.3.1 4.8.10 6.3.4 8.2.3
Individual writing time allows participants personal time to develop their ideas through writing. Share a topic or question, explain if they will write just for themselves or to share with others, and let participants know how much time they have.[17]		•	•	•			•	4.8.10 6.3.4 8.2.3
Jigsaw is a small group technique that gives people an opportunity to first talk with people who share an interest then with people who have other interests.[18]			•					6.3.5
Label sidetracks is a technique to tell the group when they are getting off track. You can let the group decide if the sidetrack is important to pursue or if they want to get back to the agenda.[19]		•	•	•			•	4.5.6

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Facilitation Methods, Techniques, and Tools	Opening	Divergent Thinking	Emergent Thinking	Convergent Thinking	Closing	Center Equity	Support Engagement	Chapter and Section
Listing ideas allows you to make visible the ideas that are generated during divergent, emergent, and convergent thinking.		•	•	•				6.3.4 8.2.3
Mediation is used to address conflict between people or the group. Mediation is when someone outside the conflict helps two parties in conflict resolve it.[20]		•	•	•		•	•	5.4.3
Meeting quality assessment tool by Dr Steven Rogelberg focuses on time management related to meeting design, time dynamics, interpersonal dynamics, discussion dynamics, and posting meeting actions.							•	10.2.1
Open conversations are the unstructured, conversational, and familiar way of talking in groups.[21] Facilitators use a light touch to help the group do their best thinking.		•	•	•			•	6.2 8.1.3 8.2.3 8.2.4
Open Space Technology is a leadership practice where participants create and manage their own agenda of parallel working sessions around a central theme of strategic importance.[22] Learn more.	•	•	•	•	•		•	8.2.4
The **ORID reflection model** include four types of questions: objective, reflective, interpretative, and decisional. Learn more.		•	•	•				10.2.2
Pairs or **triads** give speakers the time and space to share their thoughts while encouraging others to listen rather than think about their responses.[23]		•	•	•			•	4.4.6 8.2.3
Parking lot allows you to put a topic or question to the side. If the group decides it is not a priority at this moment, put it in the parking lot to revisit at another time.[24]	•	•	•	•	•		•	4.2.5 4.4.3 4.5.6 5.3.2
Ping-pong is a way to bounce questions back to the group in general or to someone specifically. This can help you remain "neutral" on the content while continuing the conversation among the group members.[25]	•	•	•	•	•		•	4.4.4
Plan-Do-Study-Act is a model for action learning done in cycles. Learn more.		•	•	•				9.3.2
Planned conversation has a predetermined agenda and process that is prepared before the meeting. The facilitator takes on greater responsibility for helping the group reach predetermined meeting outcomes.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	6.3 8.3.3
Polling strategies are ways to get a quick read on the group's level of agreement before using a decision rule.				•				4.6.6 9.2.5
Popcorn is a self-organizing technique where the order in which people speak is dependent on when each person is ready. No one is put on the spot to respond.		•	•	•			•	4.3.2 4.4.6
Power moves is a framework for building, sharing, and wielding power where those with formal authority can use their power to benefit the group and generate more equitable outcomes.[26]						•		4.8.9

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Facilitation Methods, Techniques, and Tools	Opening	Divergent Thinking	Emergent Thinking	Convergent Thinking	Closing	Center Equity	Support Engagement	Chapter and Section
Plus/Delta is a simple yet effective way to easily get helpful feedback on a process, activity, or an entire meeting. Using two columns, put "+" over the first column and a "△" (Delta symbol) over the second column. What worked well goes in the first column. Areas for change go in the second. Ask for suggested changes rather than what didn't work.					•			6.3.7 10.2.1
RAIN tool is an easy way to remember how to practice mindfulness and compassion using four steps: recognize, allow, investigate, and nurture.[27]		•	•	•		•	•	7.4.2
Reflective pauses can be used after the group shares new information or strong emotions. Invite the group to take a silent moment to process their own thoughts and emotions. Facilitators or group members can encourage reflection pauses.[28]		•	•	•		•	•	4.4.6
Scrambler is a small group technique that enables group members to work with many different partners using rounds to broaden understanding or possibility.[29]			•					6.3.5 8.2.4
Shared agreements, sometimes referred to as **group agreements**, are expectations about how the group will participate in order to create a positive and productive meeting experience.[30] Learn more.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	4.5.4 4.7.2 4.8.4 6.3.3
Small group conversation or **break-out groups** can be about a particular topic, or perhaps a range of topics, conducted in a group of a size that allows all members to participate.[31]	•	•	•	•	•		•	6.3.4 8.2.3 10.2.1
Stations allow group members to break into small groups to share their ideas and input. You can do more than one round, first inviting participants to share ideas and then rotating and asking the group to give feedback or star ideas they like. Finally, bring everyone together for a conversation.		•	•	•			•	2.3.1
Sticky notes method gives you an opportunity to write questions on a flipchart paper and ask participants to write their insights or feedback. Include only one comment, thought, or idea per sticky-note. You can also invite participants to engage in a gallery walk to review what others shared and/or synthesize and categorize before sharing back with the group.	•	•	•	•	•		•	4.5.4 6.3.4 10.2.1
Surveys allow you to get more detailed information about the effectiveness of a meeting, training, presentation, process, or practices. You can ask multiple questions, using an online or paper format. Consider both closed and open-ended questions.					•			10.2.1
Synthesis allows you to work with the group to build upon ideas and combine diverse concepts to generate new understanding or develop a proposal.[32]				•			•	9.2.4
Team building activities can be a great way for groups to build relationships, practice good communication, build collaboration skills, and have fun working towards a shared goal. There are a wide range of activities that can meet any of these goals or others. Whether it's for fun or for a specific purpose, they can be a powerful experience for bonding and relationship building. Learn more.	•	•	•	•	•		•	4.3.4

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Facilitation Methods, Techniques, and Tools	Opening	Divergent Thinking	Emergent Thinking	Convergent Thinking	Closing	Center Equity	Support Engagement	Chapter and Section
Think-pair-share or **pair-share** is a cooperative technique that can be used with varied group sizes and for any topic. The facilitator poses a question, the participants think to themselves, then pair with someone else to discuss, and finally share what they discussed with the group. This technique can be adapted from the classroom to fit the collaboration. Learn more.	•	•	•	•	•		•	4.8.10 8.2.3
Thumbs up thumbs down uses three signals to indicate strong agreement with the proposal, a willingness to go along with it, and a lack of agreement. This allows everyone to get a quick read of the group's position. Sometimes this technique is also used to make a decision. Learn more.				•				4.5.4 9.2.5
Trade show is a presentation format where three or more presenters share their information at the same time each to a different small group. After groups rotate to hear and discuss every presentation.[33]				•				6.3.6 8.2.4
What? So what? Now what? Debriefing Model A simple, but powerful model for gaining deeper insight and learning from an activity, conversation, process, or meeting. The model allows the group to reflect on observations or facts, to analyze the relevance of what happened, and to act. Learn more.		•	•	•	•		•	4.3.5 10.2.2
World Café is a social technology for engaging people in conversations that matter, offering an effective antidote to the fast-paced fragmentation and lack of connection in today's world. More than a method, it is a way of thinking and being together sourced in a philosophy of conversational leadership.[34] Learn more.		•					•	4.6.4

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