

SHORT FACILITATION SCENARIOS

Instructions

The following are designed as “quick response” facilitation challenges. The way i do it is to get the group into small groups of 3-4 people, so you’ll want to print sufficient packets for each group to have one. The packets are designed to be printed out and then cut into half sheets, then compiled with a paper clip.

Give each group a full packet. Designate one person to start. Then have the person on their right read them one of the slips. The person whose turn it is then says what they would actually say (or do) in that moment as facilitator. They don’t talk *about* what they would say, instead they say it *as if they were actually at the meeting*. The listeners can offer a bit of feedback if there’s time and the person seems open to it, but be careful that you don’t end up spending most of your time in analysis instead of in practice—actual practice is generally more useful and fulfilling. For the next turn, the slips move to the left, so that the person who just facilitated becomes the next reader.

I wrote all of the scenarios below with the exception of the final two [w] and [x] which are from Randy Schutt. Feel free to write more scenarios, and if you do, i’d love to see ‘em! These scenarios are mostly oriented toward community living groups, but you could rewrite as needed to adapt for many other groups, as the basic facilitation challenges are similar.

Enjoy!

A complex proposal has been working its way through multiple meetings and finally seems ready to pass. Then someone who skipped those meetings shows up at the last meeting and brings up a bunch of concerns (e.g., the cost seems too high, the group historically has had weak follow-through on things like this, and so on).

[What do you say the moment they are finished speaking?]

[a]

During the time at the meeting set aside for announcements, one of your community members starts going on about how they found cat poop in the garden yet again, and they are really frustrated about it, and they know this is supposed to be announcements only but what is the community going to do about it?

[What do you say next?]

[b]

In the middle of a somewhat difficult meeting—where the group is running over time on an agenda item that seems close to resolution, but it hasn't come to agreement yet and time is passing—someone speaks about how frustrated they are by the process, and “couldn't this whole thing just get wrapped up already?”

[How do you respond?]

[c]

During personal check-ins, a member says that they have just returned from a doctor appointment where they were diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease).

[What do you say next?]

[d]

Two of your members, Mike and Jennifer, have a long history of not getting along well. Mike is presenting a proposal at the regular meeting. During clarifying questions, Jennifer puts out a question with a sharp tone that clearly has an edge to it. Mike answers the question though you can tell he's uncomfortable.

[What's your response?]

[e]

Maria is attending the meeting with her 6-month-old daughter Janie in her arms. Janie starts wailing, making it difficult for others to concentrate, while Maria continues to sit in the meeting. Participants are sending you imploring looks.

[What do you say?]

[f]

One of the older members of the group, Charles, is rambling on in the meeting. It's not the first time he's done this, and while he's always tended to be talkative, recently some members have privately started to suspect that he has Alzheimer's. You try giving him a few cues to wrap up, but he continues speaking. Finally you know that you have to step in more directly.

[What do you do/say?]

[g]

Jonathan makes a proposal at community meeting to build a bike shed near the main entrance to the community. Members list various concerns, such as visibility (will cars still be able to see well enough to turn in and out of the parking lot safely), other uses for that land ("Isn't that where we were going to put native plants?"), aesthetics ("I'm not sure i want some shed to be the first thing people see when they come in here. What's it gonna look like?"), and so on. After the list is complete, Jonathan says in a tone of obvious frustration: "Fine. I'm just gonna drop it. Forget i brought it up."

[What do you say?]

[h]

Marilena was the initial founder of the group and has taken a lead role in its development, thus she tends to have a dominant role in group discussions. She has a lot of expertise to offer, yet is not always sensitive to social and emotional dynamics. At this meeting, she has just made a proposal to the group that people are having significant resistance to, and your sense is that she's trying to push it through. Sam brings up a concern, and Marilena responds, "Well i really don't think that's anything we have to worry about."

[What do you say next?]

[i]

The membership committee has just presented their plan for how outreach will be handled from now on. The committee did a lot of research and gathered a lot of input before making the proposal, so it was quite solid and most members at the meeting seem pleased with it. Dusty, however, starts bringing up a bunch of nitpicky concerns, and you can see the energy getting lower in the meeting as Dusty goes into more and more detail.

[How do you respond?]

[j]

The community has several times committed to working on its vision and values statements, and somehow it keeps not happening. The topic was scheduled for tonight's meeting, but then during agenda review (at the start of the meeting) it comes out that the committee that was supposed to present didn't meet, so the facilitator proposes putting the topic off again. Kevin, whose frustration at the group not working on this has been mounting for a long time, says "I'm not willing to consense to anything else until we get this done."

[What do you say?]

[k]

The topic on the agenda is whether or not to start a bulk buying club for food staples. Chris asks whether the club might include a CSA subscription (community supported agriculture), and members start debating the pros and cons of various CSA farms in the area. Someone has just said, "I think Riley's Farm has a drop-off point just up the road from here."

[What do you say?]

[l]

You are facilitating the landscape committee meeting, which is discussing which trees to plant where. Leslie and Katrina, who both serve on the committee, have a long-standing conflict with each other. At this point, Leslie is explaining the importance of planting native species, while Katrina wants fruit trees, many of which are not native. You see the conflict starting to heat up between them.

[What do you say?]

[m]

It's mid-way through a long meeting and energy is dragging. The discussion has gotten fairly technical, and you can see that most people are not engaged. As Louis drones on, you see one person surreptitiously open a magazine to read, while another is nodding off.

[What's your response?]

[n]

The group has had a longstanding norm of having the common meals be vegetarian. Over time, some people's diets have changed, and there's been some turnover in the community, so that there are really only a few vegetarians left. Steve brings a proposal to community meeting to change the expectation about meals to include meat, and most people respond favorably. Then Audrey, who is vegetarian, says she is very against the proposal because it does not fulfill the community value of ecological sustainability.

[What do you say next?]

[o]

Nadia presents a proposal that isn't well-researched enough. Pat responds with a comment about her lack of preparation that is funny and sarcastic—on target but perhaps a little hurtful.

[How do you respond?]

[p]

Your group has one member known for having emotional outbursts at meetings, to the point where some people consider Taylor to be borderline mentally unstable. A normal discussion is taking place regarding the conflict resolution policy when suddenly Taylor interrupts the person speaking, and starts going off about the topic at high volume and high tempo, clearly quite agitated.

[What's your immediate response?]

[q]

Lindsey, an elderly member of the community who is difficult to deal with and therefore not very well liked, has fallen sick. Someone suggests that the group should offer a bunch of assistance to Lindsey, such as meals, rides to the doctor, and so on. A few people respond halfheartedly, and then there is a long silence . . .

[What do you say?]

[r]

The meeting is discussing participation issues yet again. There are two camps, one of which thinks that the community would be well served by having a clear system for what work gets done how and by who, with tracking of hours and so on to keep it fair, while the other camp thinks that is too uptight and wants a more laid back, trusting attitude about it. Someone from the second camp has just declared, “If we have a tracking system, i’m not going to follow it. I don’t support us setting up our own little police state here.”

[What do you say?]

[s]

The group is discussing limiting kids’ access to the common house. Lee and Corey disagree about whether this is a good idea. They get into a back-and-forth where they are basically repeating their points and neither feels heard.

[How do you respond?]

[t]

The group has a member named Laura who many others find difficult to work with, because she has a negative attitude, a thin skin, and often blows up at people. The meeting is discussing the topic of who serves on what committees, and Laura is not present at the meeting. Roberta says that she won't serve on the kitchen team with Laura, and starts telling the story of a difficult encounter she had. Jan interrupts and says, "I'm really uncomfortable with Laura being talked about behind her back."

[Next?]

[u]

Insert your own scenario here!

[v]

You are facilitating and the following conversation takes place in rapid fire:

Elena: I think we should stage a concert to raise money.

Lucas: Concerts take too long to organize. Let's have a bake sale.

Barbara: My cousin is in a band called The Tweedles that might play for free.

Dorothy: Our church raised a lot of money by doing a car wash.

Stephen: If we have a bake sale, I want at least half the items to be free of dairy products.

Julia: The Tweedles are great. They could draw a big crowd.

[What do you say next?]

[w]

You witness the following exchange in the meeting:

Janet: I don't like the idea.

Hernando: I do. I think it would be fun.

Janet: Well, it might be fun, but i still don't like it.

Hernando: I think we should do it. It would be fun.

Janet: But I don't like it...

[What do you say next?]

[x]

