**Facilitating**

**Public Issues:**

**Best Practices**

**Facilitator Best Practices**

Learning how to be a skilled facilitator is similar to learning how to be a skilled athlete. You can quickly learn the rules of the game and begin to play, but to play well you need considerable practice. It is one thing to know about the process of facilitation; it is quite another thing to be able to successfully apply your understanding on a consistent basis.

Although some of the skills necessary for successful facilitators may be second nature for you, there are likely some areas you are not as strong in. It will be important for you to focus on these particular areas and try to go on the path of mastery that invites you to not only learn, but also practice getting better at what you learn.

Importantly, facilitation skills are useful beyond group meetings. They can be used for planning, for “growing” new leaders, for resolving conflicts, and for keeping good communication in any organization or system to which you belong.

Core Principles

*Full Participation –* Members of groups need to feel comfortable raising their ideas and any difficult issues. They also need to practice identifying and acknowledging the diversity of ideas and potential contributions inherent in any group. Skilled facilitators demonstrate this principle by:

Creating environments where all are encouraged to speak out

Inviting/encouraging a variety of perspectives

Managing inequalities of access and power

*Mutual Understanding –* Members of groups need to accept and understand the validity of others’ needs and goals. This allows people to develop creative ideas and solutions that incorporate all points of view. Skilled facilitators demonstrate this principle by:

Seeking areas of common ground

Seeking to understand rather than persuade

Resisting ideological sloganeering

*Respect Others –* Members of groups need to feel they have been heard and understood, and that the ideas they put forth for consideration are valued. As participants learn more about each other’s perspectives, they progressively become more able to integrate their own goals and needs with those of the other participants. This leads to innovative, original thinking that often results in wise and inclusive solutions. Skilled facilitators demonstrate this principle by:

Maintaining neutrality

Stressing a focus on issues rather than on individuals

Valuing a variety of valid evidence – testimony, statistics, etc.

*Shared Responsibility –* Members of groups feel a strong sense of responsibility for creating and developing sustainable agreements. They recognize that they must be willing and able to implement the proposals they endorse, so they make every effort to give and receive input before final decisions are made. Skilled facilitators demonstrate this principle by:

Jointly establishing a framework for dialogue

Encouraging participants to take responsibility for defining group goals and methods for achieving those goals

Assuming responsibility to understand and learn from others

Fundamental Skills

A facilitator supports a group to do its best thinking by encouraging full participation, promoting mutual understanding, fostering inclusive solutions, and teaching new thinking skills. In order to perform these functions effectively, there are a number of basic skills and methods a facilitator should have, and continually improve upon, in their behavioral repertoire.

Skills for Encouraging Full Participation and Fostering Mutual Respect

*Validating Various Communication Styles*

Use paraphrasing to help people summarize her/his thinking when someone is being repetitious.

Help slow a person down and draw out their ideas when they are speaking in awkward, broken sentences.

Validate the central point of an idea that has been exaggerated or distorted without arguing over its accuracy.

Assure the speaker that when the current discussion ends, they will ask the group what to do with new topics the speaker is interrupting with.

Acknowledge intense emotions when they are expressed and then make sure the speaker’s point is recorded.

*Paraphrasing* – This fundamental listening skill has both a clarifying and calming effect on the speaker. It helps people feel their ideas are being heard (validates worth) and understood (checks accuracy of intended message).

Use your own words to say what you think the speaker said.

Preface paraphrase with something like, “It sounds like what you are saying is…” or “Let me see if I am understanding your…” Then you can test your inference with “Is that what you were saying or did I get it wrong?”

Mirror the speaker’s words, not their tone of voice – the facilitator should deliver the message back in a warm and accepting tone, regardless of how the original message was delivered

*Courageous listening to draw people out* – This is the art of holding the uncertain balance between yourself and the speaker as you explore what their idea is about. Testing inferences generates valid information that you can use to make informed choices. This is a particularly helpful skill when someone is having difficulty clarifying an idea or when someone thinks s/he is being clear, but the thought is actually vague or confusing to the listeners.

Pay respectful attention to the content and feelings expressed in a member’s communication

Say back to the speaker what you have heard in your own words (paraphrasing) that reflects their thoughts and feelings in such a way that they know they have been accurately heard and understood

Ask an open-ended question that allows the speaker to elaborate on her/his experience and allows the facilitator to check their inferences about the communication, such as, “Can you say more about that?” or “What do you mean by…?”

*Brainstorming* – This skill allows the facilitator to gather ideas for possible solutions.

Ask for quantity of ideas on a specific task, not quality

Do not clarify or ask for clarification

Ask group to suspend judgment of listed ideas in order to stimulate creativity

Go for “off the wall” ideas and honor all points of view

Encourage piggybacking off other’s ideas

List every idea (pro or con) but do not attach with names

*Stacking* – This skill assures people who want to speak that they will have their turn when people can listen to their ideas without distraction. It relieves the facilitator of having to privately keep track of who has spoken and who is waiting to speak. This also helps members avoid competing for airtime and reduces impatience and disrespectful interrupting.

First, ask members of the group who want to speak to raise their hands.

Second, create a speaking order by assigning a number to each person.

Third, Call on those people in the order assigned.

Fourth, after the last person has spoken, ask if any one else has something to say – if they do, repeat the stacking process.

*Tracking* – This skill relieves the anxiety felt by someone who wonders why the group is not responding to her/his ideas in a discussion. Very often, people act as though the particular issue that interests them is the one that everyone should focus on. Tracking lets the group see that there are several components of the issue being discussed and all are valid.

First, acknowledge to the group that there are various lines of thought going on simultaneously within a single discussion.

Second, identify the different conversations.

Third, check your accuracy with the group, “Did I get all of the various components right?”

*Balancing* – This skill assists members who need support in expressing views they think are minority positions. This technique helps round out a discussion by asking for other views that may be present but have not yet been expressed.

Sends the message that it is acceptable for people to speak their mind, no matter what opinions they have.

Examples include: “What do others think?” “Does everyone agree with this?” “Are there other ways of looking at this?”

*Making space –* This skill gives permission to the less verbal members of a group that it is okay if they do not wish to speak, but that if they would like to participate, the opportunity is extended. Members do not speak for a variety of reasons: they are afraid of being perceived as competitive; they are new and unsure about what is and is not acceptable; they are not sure their ideas are as good as others; or, they are slower thinkers and may have trouble getting a word in edgewise. Regardless, the facilitator can make space for them to participate by:

Being aware of the quiet members and look for signs that may indicate their desire to speak (body language, facial expressions, etc.).

Invite them to speak, “Do you want to add anything?” “Was there an idea you wanted to express?”

Graciously accept their decision whether to participate and move on.

Hold others from jumping in or dominating by asking members to go one at a time and inviting the quiet person to go first.

Suggest a structured go-around to give each person a chance to speak, especially if participation is very uneven.

Door openers include: “Who else as an idea?” “Is this discussion raising questions for anyone?” “Let’s hear from someone who hasn’t spoken for awhile.”

Minimal encouragers include: “Tell me more.” “For instance…” “And?” “Go on.” “Really?”

*Attentive silence –* This skill gives participants the time to reflect on what they are thinking and feeling, and whether they want to express their thoughts in more depth.

Be prepared to tolerate the awkward five seconds or so while members organize their thoughts into coherent communications.

Stay focused on the speaker.

Provide no verbal or nonverbal feedback – just stay relaxed yet attentive.

Sometimes cues, such as raising your hand, to prevent others from breaking the silence may be needed.

This technique can also be used when the group is confused, agitated, or having trouble staying focused. “Let’s take a minute of silence to think what this means to each of us.”

*Listening for shared interests –* This skill focuses the group on areas of agreement versus areas of disagreement. Often group members hold on to their polarizing positions instead of seeking common ground by discovering what values, beliefs, or goals they may share. Facilitators can reduce this tendency toward polarization by validating areas of disagreement and emphasizing areas of agreement.

Summarize the group’s differences and similarities – “Let me summarize what I am hearing – that there are some differences, and also some similarities in what each of you are saying.”

Note the group’s differences – “It sounds like one group wants ‘X’ and the other group would prefer ‘Y’.

Identify the areas of common ground – “Although there are differences being expressed, you all seem to agree that you want ‘Z’.

Check for accuracy – “Have I got that right?”

Skills for Supporting the Exchange of Ideas and Building Group Momentum

*Determining Who Talks When –* One of the most clear-cut and valuable contributions a facilitator can make is to help group members know when it is their turn to speak. Allowing members to speak up whenever they have something to say often results in confusion and inequity – those who are more assertive may come across as rude or domineering; those who are more tentative may come across as having fewer ideas to contribute. Being able to effectively determine who goes when helps the facilitator organize the flow of a discussion

Advantages & Disadvantages of Stacking: While stacking can be an effective traffic tool, it also can impede spontaneity, allow too many topics on the floor without being able to explore any one in depth, seem artificial and forced. The rule of thumb is to not overuse this technique and consider interrupting it when you want to permit a few responses to a hot topic. Caution! When introducing stacking to the group, preempt them with the idea it may be interrupted so as not to create the appearance of playing favorites when it happens.

Helping Individuals Make their Points: Use courageous listening to help speakers who are clearly having difficulty expressing themselves, and whose need for support would be obvious to other participants. Caution! Continual courageous listening becomes tiresome and annoying. It also slows down the flow of discussion and can impede spontaneity. Use it sparingly and use it with as many participants as possible to preserve neutrality.

Broadening Participation: Use invitations to talk, balancing, and making space to shift the focus away from the frequent contributors and create opportunities for less frequent contributors to speak. Caution! No one likes to feel they have been singled out or put on the spot. Use this technique sparingly and direct your attention to the group, not individuals by name.

*Focusing the Discussion –* It is critical to know when to keep the focus of group discussion on specific points being raised and when to help the group move away from specific points to other lines of thought.

Managing Divergent Perspectives: It is normal and healthy for group members to have different frames of reference; to differ in what they think is important or not, and what they think is on or off-track. However, when these individual frames of reference bias members’ assessment of the value of one another’s contributions, the facilitator needs to intervene. Caution! Simply stating that it sounds like the group has gone off track and needs to refocus is usually ineffective and sends the message that it is not normal or healthy for individuals to have different frames of reference. As a result of this discomfort, people will become impatient, say things they regret, and basically stop listening.

i. It is more helpful for the facilitator to practice sequencing by

validating each perspective and then directing the group to

focus on each line of thought in sequence, one at a time.

This works well there are two perspectives going on; for more

than two it becomes tedious and too controlled.

ii. In calling for responses, the facilitator guides whoever speaks

next to remain on the same track as the person who just spoke.

Example: “After listening to the previous two speakers, does

anyone have any questions for them or comments about what

they said?”

iii. Deliberate refocusing is another method for keeping the

discussion balanced by refocusing the conversation in order to

provide fair opportunities for other issues. This is particularly

helpful when there are speakers who have monopolized the

conversation. Example: “For the last 15 minutes you have

been talking about topic ‘A’ and some of you indicated you

wanted to talk about topic ‘B’, would now be a good time to

switch?” or “A while ago Erika brought up an issue and no one

responded at that time. Before we lose that thought, I want

to check to see if anyone has a comment for Erika before we

move on?” Caution! When a facilitator directs the

discussion in one way from another, they run the risk of being seen as non-neutral – again, use sparingly.

iv. Tracking different lines of thought is helpful when a discussion

is at its most competitive and when people are least likely to

be listening to each other. It is important that the facilitator

remains neutral by refraining from prioritizing or structuring

the discussion’s agenda and supporting every speaker.

Responses to tracking are usually either integrative proposals

combining various themes or insisting on one key topic. If

there is a dispute about which topic to discuss and in what

order, sequencing can help.

Tolerating Silences: Occasionally, group members need time to form an analysis of complex problems or need time while they search for tactful ways to express difficult feelings. Although silence can be experienced as painful, a skilled facilitator is advised that it reflects the groups needs and should be confused with the facilitator’s own discomfort level for tolerating it. Tolerating silence is like any other skill in that it is acquired through practice.

Additional Tips

*Be Authentic:* Even with a well-prepared agenda and key points you must make, you need to be flexible and natural. If people sense that you are reading memorized lines, they will feel like they are being talked down to, and won’t respond freely.

*Be Mindful:* Are people shifting in their seats? Are they bored? Tired? Looking confused? If folks seem restless or in a haze, you may need to take a break, or speed up or slow down the pace of the meeting. And if you see confused looks on too many faces, you may need to stop and check in with the group, to make sure that everyone knows where you are in the agenda and that the group is with you.

*Check Your Inferences:* Be careful about deciding where the meeting should go. Check back after each major part of the process to see if there are questions and that everyone understands and agrees with decisions that were made.

*Summarize and Pause:* When you finish a point or a part of the meeting process, sum up what was done and decided, and pause for questions and comments before moving on. Learn to “feel out” how long to pause -- too short, and people don’t really have time to ask questions; too long, and folks will start to get uncomfortable from the silence.

*Self-Monitor:*

Take a break to calm down if you feel nervous or are losing control. Watch that you’re not repeating yourself, saying “ah” between each word, or speaking too fast. Watch your voice and physical manner. (Are you standing too close to folks so they feel intimidated, making eye contact so people feel engaged?) How you act makes an impact on how participants feel.

Hold onto a marker, chalk, or the back of a chair. Don’t play with the change in your pocket!

Be careful you are not offending or alienating anyone in the group. Use swear words at your own risk!

Using body language to control the dynamics in the room can be a great tool. Moving up close to a shy, quiet participant and asking them to speak may make them feel more willing, because they can look at you instead of the big group and feel less intimidated. Also, walking around engages people in the process. Don’t just stand in front of the room for the entire meeting.

Always wait until you have stopped writing and are facing the group to talk.

**Dealing with Disrupters: Preventions and Interventions**

Along with these tips on facilitation, there are some things you can do both to prevent disruption before it occurs to stop it when it’s happening in the meeting. The most common kinds of disrupters are people who try to dominate, keep going off the agenda, have side conversations with the person sitting next to them, or folks who think they are right and ridicule and attack other’s ideas.

Try using these Preventions when you set up your meeting to try to rule out disruption:

*Get agreement on the agenda, ground rules and outcomes:* In other words, agree on the process. These process agreements create a sense of shared accountability and ownership of the meeting, joint responsibility for how the meeting is run, and group investment in whether the outcomes and goals are achieved.

*Listen carefully:* Don’t just pretend to listen to what someone in the meeting is saying. People can tell. Listen closely to understand a point someone is making. And check back if you are summarizing, always asking the person if you understood their idea correctly.

*Show respect for experience:* We can’t say it enough. Encourage folks to share strategies, stories from the field, and lessons they’ve learned. Value the experience and wisdom in the room.

*Find out the group’s expectations:* Make sure that you uncover at the start what participants think they are meeting for. When you find out, be clear about what will and won’t be covered in this meeting. Make plans for how to cover issues that won’t be dealt with: Write them down on newsprint and agree to deal with them at the end of the meeting, or have the group agree on a follow-up meeting to cover unfinished issues.

There are lots of ways to find out what the group’s expectations of the meeting are: Try asking everyone to finish this sentence: “I want to leave here today knowing....” You don’t want people sitting through the meeting feeling angry that they’re in the wrong place and no one bothered to ask them what they wanted to achieve here. These folks may act out their frustration during the meeting and become your biggest disrupters.

*Stay in your facilitator role:* You cannot be an effective facilitator and a participant at the same time. When you cross the line, you risk alienating participants, causing resentment, and losing control of the meeting. Offer strategies, resources, and ideas for the group to work with, but NOT opinions.

*Don’t be defensive:* If you are attacked or criticized, take a “mental step” backwards before responding. Once you become defensive, you risk losing the group’s respect and trust, and might cause folks to feel they can’t be honest with you.

*“Buy-in” power players:* These folks can turn your meeting into a nightmare if they don’t feel that their influence and role are acknowledged and respected. If possible, give them acknowledgment up front at the start of the meeting. Try giving them roles to play during the meeting such as a “sounding board” for you at breaks, to check in with about how the meeting is going.

Try using these Interventions when disruption is happening during the meeting:

*Have the group decide:* If someone is dominating the meeting, refuses to stick to the agenda, keeps bringing up the same point again and again, or challenges how you are handling the meeting:

First try to remind them about the agreed-on agenda. If that doesn’t work, throw it back to the group and ask them how they feel about that person’s participation. Let the group support you.

*Use the agenda and ground rules:* If someone keeps going off the agenda, has side conversations through the whole meeting, verbally attacks others:

Go back to that agenda and those ground rules and remind folks of the agreements made at the beginning of the meeting.

*Be honest: Say what’s going on:* If someone is trying to intimidate you, if you feel upset or undermined, if you need to pull the group behind you:

It’s better to say what’s going on than try to cover it up. Everyone will be aware of the dynamic in the room. The group will get behind you if you are honest and up -front about the situation.

*Use humor:* If there is a lot of tension in the room, if you have people at the meeting who didn’t want to be there, if folks are scared/shy about participating, if you are an outsider:

Try a humorous comment or a joke. If it’s self-deprecating, so much the better. Humor almost always lightens the mood. It’s one of the best tension-relievers we have.

*Accept or legitimize the point or deal:* If there is someone who keeps expressing doubts about the group’s ability to accomplish anything, is bitter and puts down others’ suggestions, keeps bringing up the same point over and over, seems to have power issues:

Try one or more of these approaches: Show that you understand their issue by making it clear that you hear how important it is to them. Legitimize the issue by saying, “It’s a very important point and one I’m sure we all feel is critical.” Make a bargain to deal with their issue for a short period of time (“O.K., let’s deal with your issue for 5 minutes and then we ought to move on.”). If that doesn’t work, agree to defer the issue to the end of the meeting, or set up a committee to explore it further.

*Use body language:* If side conversations keep occurring, if quiet people need to participate, if attention needs to be re-focused: Use body language. Move closer to conversers, or to the quiet ones. Make eye contact with them to get their attention and covey your intent.

*Take a break:* If less confrontational tactics haven’t worked, someone keeps verbally attacking others, shuffling papers, cutting others off:

In case you’ve tried all of the above suggestions and nothing has worked, it’s time to take a break, invite the disruptive person outside the room and politely but firmly state your feelings about how disruptive their behavior is to the group. Make it clear that the disruption needs to end. But also try to find out what’s going on, and see if there are other ways to address that person’s concerns.

*Confront in the room:* If all else has failed, if you’re sure it won’t create backlash, if the group will support you, and if you’ve tried everything else:

Confront the disruptive person politely but very firmly in the room. Tell the person very explicitly that the disruption needs to stop now. Use body language to encourage other group members to support you. This is absolutely the last resort when action must be taken and no alternatives remain!

**Basic Principles of Moderating\***

\* From Hodge and Dineen, 2006

An effective moderator:

Remains neutral about the subject of the forum. Do not express your own opinion or evaluate the comments of the participants.

Does not take on an “expert” role with the subject matter. Your role is not to teach the participants about the issue even if it is a subject you know well.

Keeps the deliberation focused on the approaches. When comments go astray, bring participants back to the issue book framework. Make sure that each approach receives equal consideration.

Listens for values that motivate a participant’s comments. In deliberation, the participant’s values and motives are just as important, if not more so, then their opinion. Sometimes people with different opinions share the same motive or value and that can form the basis for their common ground.

Intervenes as necessary. If the conversation begins to focus on personalities rather than issues, gently remind the group of ground rules or refocus the discussion back to the issues.

Asks clarifying questions, if necessary. If you are not sure what a participant means, chances are good that others are also unclear. You may ask them to clarify what they are trying to say and ask if you have understood correctly if absolutely, but be aware that people can get the impression that they aren’t being articulate.

Encourages everyone to join in the conversation. But be careful. Comments like “that’s a good idea” may make the speaker feel welcome in the conversation, but participants who disagree may think you are being biased.

Asks thoughtful and probing questions to surface costs and consequences. Make sure that the participants have considered the potential outcome of their comments. Help draw out what people are willing to accept and are not willing to accept.

Helps participants find common ground. Participants will not always agree and may sometimes be in direct conflict with each other. Recognize it and seek to focus on “What can we do together even if we don’t fully agree.”

Encourages deep reflection. Ask participants to share why they feel a particular way or what in particular about the issue (or approach) is important to them.

**CPD’s Quick Starting Guide to Facilitating Forums**

Facilitation is essentially about supporting a productive, respectful conversation that helps participants better understand the issue and each other. While there are many advanced facilitation skills that you can work on as you get more and more experience, the basics of deliberation are actually rather simple.

Deliberative conversations start with “**starting questions**,” which are open ended questions that get people talking about an issue. For NIF style forums, the starting question for each approach is often, “So does anyone have any particular things you like about this approach?” Once you ask an initial starting question, the deliberation begins when someone starts talking. As the facilitator, you must both listen carefully to what is being said, and plan your next move. Your next move will generally be one of the following:

**The Five Basic Facilitator Choices:**

1. **Move on** to the next speaker by simply pointing to the next person in line or asking the group for additional comments. People like to talk, and in many cases, you will often have a line of people ready to talk, and can simply move from one to another (after insuring the previous comment has been captured by the notetakers).
2. **Paraphrase** what that person said in order to clarify the point, help the notetakers, and/or move the conversation to a deeper level. When paraphrasing, always do so in a way that makes it easy for the speaker to correct you (“So what I’m hearing is that…is that right?”)
3. **Ask a** “**probing**” or “**follow up**” question to the same speaker to get clarification or dig deeper

Ex. “Why is that important to you?” “What do you think the consequences of that perspective would be?” “Are there any drawbacks to that position?”

1. **Ask a “reaction**” question that seeks to have other people respond to the last speaker’s comments in some way.

Ex. “Does anyone else have a different view?”

“What do others think about that idea?”

1. **Ask a new** **starting question.** Depending on the design of the forum, you may have a set of questions you are supposed to ask, or you may have certain issues you want to discuss, that you may just jump in to take the conversation a different direction. Based on the responses, you may also develop a question that works to combine or compare opinions that were shared. A new starting question may be particularly important if the deliberation got off track and the participants need to be redirected to the issue.

Ex. “Many argue that one of the key topics with this issue is X, what are your thoughts on its importance?”

**Primary Facilitating Styles (CPD)**

Facilitating is an art, not a science. Like deliberation itself, it involves trying to find the perfect balance between various, often competing, goals. For example, moderators seek to remain impartial, but must also insure all views are considered. Facilitators are charged with guiding the discussion and making sure the group stays on track time-wise, but also they do not want to dominate or force the discussion into too strict of a set structure.

The best facilitators are flexible yet consistent, another tricky balance. Overall, there seems to be at least four primary facilitating styles**:**

1. **The Referee** – Only interferes as necessary to enforce rules and time constraints. A good moderator from this perspective is barely noticed. They introduce a topic, and let the participants take over. They may only say “So what do you think?” and then step back until its time to consider a different approach.

2. **The Interviewer** – Prepares specific questions beforehand and pushes participants on particular issues. A good moderator from this perspective helps the participants dig deeper and do the hard work that the group may not naturally do on their own.

3. **The Devil’s Advocate** – Works to present views that are not represented in the forum. Can be particularly important if the room is not diverse, or if the deliberation is particularly one-sided. A good moderator from this perspective is able to introduce alternative voices without seeming to lose their impartiality.

4. **The Weaver** – Focused on helping participants identify and build upon common ground. A good moderator from this perspective is able to dig deeper into participant comments, identify underlying motives and values, and connect those values to others. May also focus more on strengthening the interpersonal relationships between participants.

No one style is “best.” It depends on the subject matter, the participants, and the goals of the deliberation. Good facilitators are likely able to play all four roles as necessary.

**The Art of Asking Good Questions**

“The quality of our lives is determined by the quality of our thinking. The quality of our thinking, in turn, is determined by the quality of our questions, for questions are the engine, the driving force behind thinking.”

Elder and Paul, *The Foundation for Critical Thinking*

The following five pages provide a variety of information from NIF sources concerning the kinds of questions facilitators can ask during forums. Asking good questions is a critical part of facilitating, as is knowing when *not* to ask questions. Forums can often progress pretty well without specific questions, all participants may need is some initial prodding to react to the background material. This fact makes is somewhat easy for novice facilitators, because they can learn on the job by simply letting things go on their own somewhat and picking and choosing when to intervene. If the participants are doing well on their own, the need for the facilitators and their questions is diminished, so don’t feel the need to force questions.

**Some Overall Thoughts about Asking Questions**

* Question asking will depend on the overall goal/purpose for the event
* Be careful of starting a forum with specific questions. People may have something pressing they want to share, and a specific question may not give them that chance.
* Preparing questions beforehand can be helpful, but also be prepared NOT to use them
* At times there will be some questions you NEED to ask because you are gathering specific information on that question from all the groups. There is nonetheless an important tension here between too much and too little structure. Asking specific questions of all groups will provide good information on that question, but it is also somewhat forced. The topic did not necessarily come up naturally in all groups, it was introduced by the facilitator. A more open process may bring more interesting results because you will be able to observe what issues arise naturally in the groups. The tradeoff is that by allowing the natural process, you may not get feedback on a particularly important issue. All in all, you need to be careful when introducing specific discussion questions, and be transparent in the reporting of the data about what questions were asked. Impartiality can be questioned if questions are loaded or direct participants in particular ways.
* Most questions will be reactive clarification/follow up questions
* Asking too many questions can be as bad as asking too few
* Ideally, participants are asking each other good questions by the end of the forum

**NIF’s “Four Key Questions of NIF Forums”**

1. ***What is valuable to us?*** This question gets at the reason that making public choices is so difficult, namely, that all the approaches are rooted in things about which people care very deeply. This key question can take many different forms. To uncover deeper concerns, people may ask one another how each came to hold the views he or she has. Talking about personal experiences, rather than simply reciting facts or stating rational, impersonal arguments, promotes a more meaningful dialogue.

* How has this issue affected us personally?
* When we think about this issue, what concerns us?
* What is appealing about the first option or approach?
* What makes this approach acceptable – or unacceptable?

1. ***What are the consequences, costs, benefits and trade-offs associated with the various approaches?*** Variations of this question should prompt people to think about the relationship that exists between each approach and the values people have. Because deliberation requires the evaluation of pros and cons, it is important to ensure that both aspects are fully considered. Questions to promote a fair and balanced examination of all potential implications include:

* What would be the consequences of doing what we are suggesting?
* What would be an argument against the approach we like best? Is there a downside to this course of action?
* Can anyone think of something constructive that might come from the approach that is receiving so much criticism?

1. ***What are the inherent conflicts that we have to work through?*** As a forum progresses, participants should consider the following:

* What do we see as the tension between the approaches?
* What are the “gray areas”?
* Where is there ambiguity?
* What are you struggling with? What are you not sure abount?
* Why is reaching a decision (or moving forward) on this issue so difficult?

1. ***Can we detect any shared sense of direction or common ground for action?*** After saying during the first few minutes of a forum that the objective is to work toward a decision, the moderator or someone else may continue to intervene from time to time with questions that move the deliberation toward a choice, always stopping short of pressing for consensus or agreement on a particular solution. Then, as the tensions become evident, as people see how what they consider valuable pulls them in different directions, the moderator tests to see where the group is going by asking such questions as:

* Which direction seems best?
* Where do we want this policy to take us?
* What tradeoffs are we willing and unwilling to accept?
* If the policy we seem to favor had the negative consequences some fear, would we still favor it?
* What are we willing and unwilling to do as individuals or as a community in order to solve this problem?

**Questions with a Purpose**

Perhaps one of the most important jobs of a moderator is to ask good questions. Questions like, “What do you think?” or “Do you agree with this statement?” do not encourage people to think *deeply* about their own opinions and the impacts they might have on others. Instead, questions should serve specific, intended purposes. Consider the following types of questions and the examples provided.

**Questions that connect the policy issue to the lives and concerns of real people**

* Could you illustrate how this issue is touching the lives of most of us in the community?
* What makes this issue real for us?
* What evidence do you see that this is something that is important to all of us?

**Questions that ask participants to weigh the costs and consequences of each approach**

* What might be the effects of your approach on others?
* Could you identify those things that are important to us that seem to be clashing?
* In a positive light, what seems to be most important to those who are attracted to this approach?
* Also, for those who think negatively about this approach, what seems to be their concern?

**Questions to ensure a fair and balanced examination of all potential effects**

[NOTE: “Balanced” does not necessarily mean listing an equal number of advantages and disadvantages for each approach. An approach could have many disadvantages but still have greater value because of one or two accompanying advantages.]

* What would be the consequences of doing what you are suggesting?
* What would be an argument against the choice you like best?
* Is there a downside to this course of action?
* Can anyone think of something constructive that might come from this approach, which is receiving so much criticism?

**Questions that ask participants to weigh the costs they are willing to accept in order to achieve the results they want**

* Can you live with the consequences?
* Would you give up \_\_\_\_\_ in order to achieve \_\_\_\_\_?
* What costs are at stake and can we live with them?
* What do you see as the tension among the approaches?
* What are the gray areas? Where is there ambiguity?
* Why is this issue so difficult to decide?

**Questions that probe each participant's statement until others can understand what he or she believes should be done and why he or she thinks it should be done**

* What does that mean to you?
* Why does that choice appeal to you?
* What is important about taking this direction?
* Can you give an example of how that might work out?

**Questions that encourage the speaker to make a connection between the actions he or she would advocate and what is important to him or her**

* Could you live with the actions being considered?
* Would you be willing to have that action apply to everyone?
* What is most valuable to you or to those who support that action?
* If we did what you have suggested, could you explain how that might impact your life?

**Questions that promote interaction among participants instead of just between the moderator and the participants**

* Does that bring up anything for anyone?
* That gets us started, so how do you respond?
* Could someone give an example to illustrate what was just said?
* Allow silence. Someone will respond.
* Move back out of the circle.

**Questions that give the participants an opportunity to identify what they have heard, to recognize a shared understanding of the issue, and/or to acknowledge a common ground for action**

**The Art of Paraphrasing (CPD)**

* What actions did you hear that you think we could not accept or live with?
* What trade-offs are you unwilling to accept?
* What seemed important to all of us?
* Suppose we cannot have everything. What are we willing and unwilling to do as individuals or as a community in order to solve this problem?
* Is there some action we could all live with?
* Have we come to some common ground to support certain actions? What are those actions?
* Which direction seems best?
* Where do we want this policy to take us?

**Purposes of paraphrasing**

* Shows you are listening and thus shows them that what they are saying is important
* Helps solidify your role as impartial facilitator (so your paraphrases need to be fair and nonjudgmental)
* Checks meaning and interpretation of a message
* Helps people more clearly express themselves
* Helps equalize contributions (those that are more eloquent do not gain as much an advantage)
* Helps others understand each other better (your paraphrase may be the key to others getting what the original speaker meant)
* Gives them a chance to clarify their points (they realize they aren’t explaining themselves well)
* Helps them evaluate their own feelings (your paraphrase may actually teach them about themselves – “yeah, I guess that is what I meant….”)
* Helps notetakers capture a summary
* Can help shift the discussion to a deeper level (move from positions to interests)
* Can help shift the discussion from a tense/emotional level to a more understanding level (especially when you paraphrase and take out “inflammatory statements”)
* Helps you keep present in the conversation and paying attention

**Perils of Paraphrasing**

* You can easily get too caught up in paraphrasing everything, making it more about you than them.
* Paraphrasing encourages more back and forth between you and the speaker, rather than the speaker and the rest of the group.
* People may get the impression that you are implying you speak better than they do.
* You may only capture part of what they are trying to say
* You may miss the main point and they may not feel comfortable correcting you

Be sure to paraphrase in a manner that allows the participant to feel overly comfortable disagreeing with your paraphrase. Do not paraphrase matter-of-factly (“You mean that…”), always paraphrase with qualifiers (“What I am hearing is…is that right?”; “So do you mean that…”; “Would you say then that…”; etc.

Facilitators can also utilize the participant, the notetakers or the other members to help paraphrase, particularly by relying on the need to capture the thought well on the notes. You can ask the person to summarize for the notes (“How could we write that briefly and still capture your concerns?”) or ask others (“Could someone try to paraphrase that for me so we can get that down?”). If you as the facilitator are not following a comment—and you think it is important—be honest. Ask for help to make sure the comment is captured and appreciated.

# **Forum Recording**

**Purpose of Recording**

* To help establish that what the participants say is valued and being listened to
* To remind forum participants of their comments, agreements, and action items, particularly to during the reflections time.
* To support the importance of equality and inclusion. Comments are captured regardless of the source, and the author is not identified.
* To serve as a reference document for future forums
* To facilitate the writing of the report that will inform a wider audience of the discussion, decisions, and actions

**Qualities of Effective Recording**

• Brief • Clear

• Legible • Accurate

• Well organized • Uses active verbs

• Reports the appropriate amount of information

• Captures the tensions, trade-offs and common ground for action

• Notes are distributed soon after the forum

• Treat each person’s contribution with equal respect. It is not your role to determine the value of a comment, but rather to capture the discussion.

**Suggestions from Kaner’s *Facilitators Guide to Participatory Decision-Making\****

* Print in capital letters 2 to 4” tall
* Make think-lined letters
* Write straight up and down
* Close your letters (don’t leave gaps in B’s and P’s, for example)
* Use plain, block letters
* Practice makes perfect
* Alternate colors between speakers, but don’t use too many colors on one page
* Don’t crowd the bottom of the page

**Additional suggestions**

* Use their words as much as possible.
* If you plan on using “dot voting” at the end of the forum, be sure to leave some space for the dots. You may also want to draw lines between the separate comments
* Be sure to label the sheets before you take them down.
* Have a pen or pencil handy to write additional clarification comments if necessary. Have recorders add comments to the sheets before they are taken down.
* Moderators and recorders should discuss beforehand how they will work together, especially concerning how much the recorders will interact with the participants.

**Interactions between Moderators and Recorders**

This likely needs to be discussed beforehand, because different moderators and recorders have different styles, and those styles have different pros and cons.

Some interact frequently. Ultimately, the moderator is in charge, and she/he should to some extent be “in charge” of the notetaking. They need to make sure that thoughts are being captured and captured well. Before moving on to the next speaker, a quick peek at the notes to doublecheck can be important. If the recorders completely miss something and the moderators move on, the participants may feel nobody thought it was important. We don’t make those judgments. It is the group’s memory, not our memory of what we thought was important.

Moderators can certainly help the recorders, particularly in paraphrasing and summarizing comments to make it easy for the recorders.

Some recorders are semi-moderators. They may interact more with the participants, asking clarification questions or for the participants to sum up. Moderators and recorders don’t want to be competing or talking over each other, but both can work to insure that everything is being captured well.

As a moderator, be careful simply assuming that the recorders are capturing everything well.

As a moderator, make sure the participants feel comfortable correcting or helping recorders. At the beginning when you explain your role and the role of the recorders, mention to them to speak up if they feel their point was not clearly captured.

**Tips for Organizing Information at the End of a Forum**

* At the CPD, we clearly mark all pages while they are on the wall, and then take digital photographs of each. It is much easier to type up the notes from photographs than handling the paper itself. We still keep the paper until the notes are typed, in case they are needed for clarification.

* Remove group memory from walls.
* Put sheets in order and number the pages.
* Review each page to check titles and section headings.
* Make sure writing is legible and sentences make sense.
* Roll up group memory pages.
* Label outside with group name and date
* Deliver to person responsible for producing minutes (which may be you!)