



## Facilitation Best Practices

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### FACILITATION PLANNING

Thorough planning is key for seamless facilitation. This includes fully developing the facilitation design for the meeting in advance, as well as setting out how the broader process will unfold (if the facilitation is in support of a multi-step process). This document details important steps and best practices for facilitation design.

#### Key Steps for Facilitation Design

- **Clarify the role of each facilitation component:** Keeping in mind the goal of the process or project the facilitation is supporting, it is important to clarify what role each component of the facilitation (ie., meeting or activity) will play in reaching that goal, and the order they need to happen in. Think through what kinds of inputs are needed, how those inputs might build on one another, and then begin to structure your planning around specific meetings or activities designed to gather those inputs. More detail on activity design is included in the meeting design section of this document.
- **Choose the appropriate platform(s):** Once you determine the role each facilitation component will play in achieving the wider goal, begin to identify the appropriate platform(s) for gathering the inputs you need. The platform choice should be based on: what type(s) of input you are looking for from your participants; the degree and type(s) of participation you will need; the number of anticipated participants; the familiarity of participants with tech-enabled facilitation exercises; internet bandwidth your participants will have (this is especially important for international facilitations); and your own preferences. Some options to consider are listed in Annex 1.
- **Organize the facilitation team:** Depending on the length and complexity of the facilitation, the facilitation team might include:
  - *Lead facilitator:* The team member leading the facilitation activity; takes a speaking role in the meeting(s)
  - *Co-facilitator(s):* The team member(s) supporting the lead facilitator; typically takes a speaking role in the meeting(s)
  - *Producer:* Recommended for sessions with complex tech features or a high volume of participants; manages all tech for the meeting(s)
  - *Notetaker:* Recommended for most sessions, especially when verbal discussion will play a large role
- **Build out the facilitation plan(s):** As you develop the facilitation design for a meeting, populate the facilitation plan to include *all* relevant details. A sample template for the facilitation plan is included in Annex 2 of this document. The facilitation plan should be filled out in its entirety *prior* to the meeting, and will later serve as a step-by-step guide for the facilitation team during the meeting. Here are some helpful tips for using each component of the facilitation plan:
  - *Timing:* Be as detailed as possible in the timing section. Include both duration (e.g., 15 min) as well as actual times (e.g., 9:00-9:15).
  - *Session and screen:* Include a description, slide numbers, or screenshot to indicate what the screen should look like for each activity. This helps ensure everyone is on the same page and serves as a handy reference during the meeting.

- *Facilitation:* Each facilitator should flesh out their speaking notes in as much detail as possible. In addition to being helpful for the planning process, it also serves as a back-up guide in case tech issues come up and one of your co-facilitators needs to step in for your session.
- *Tech support:* Fill out the tech column in as much detail as possible and try to minimize or eliminate overlap between the facilitator and tech roles within a given activity. A dedicated team member handling tech for a given activity helps ensure focus, calm, and presence on the part of the facilitator and contributes to the overall seamlessness of the activity.
- **Plan for communication with participants:** Identify how communication with your participants will work throughout the facilitation project (whether for one meeting or over the course of multiple) and build this into your planning process and timeline. Some factors to consider include: who will be responsible for communicating with participants both before and after a meeting; whether you will distribute an agenda prior to the meeting and when; whether supplemental or read-ahead materials should be sent to participants prior to the meeting and what follow-up is needed after a meeting and when it will be sent; etc. An additional note regarding agendas: generally, bare-bones agendas (without times) are best for participants; if a more detailed agenda is necessary for the group planning the meeting, you can circulate a more detailed agenda to that group separately.

## Meeting Design Best Practices

- **Setting the stage:** An opening question or exercise is a good way to set an engaging tone and prepare the group for active participation throughout the meeting. This is particularly important for instances where you aren't sure about the level of engagement your participants will bring, or when you know that a high level of engagement is required to meet the objectives of the meeting. The opening exercise can be a simple introduction prompt, something related to the meeting content, or just a fun icebreaker; whichever you as the facilitator feel will fit with the overall tone and flow of the meeting. A few examples include:
  - As you arrive, please introduce yourself in the chat by sharing your name and the team you work on. You can also identify what indigenous lands you are currently on for our land acknowledgement by visiting this site: <https://native-land.ca/>
  - As you get settled, we invite you to introduce yourself in the chat and tell us what you are most hoping to get out of today's meeting on [topic].
  - As you enter the room, please take a moment to reflect on last week, and let us know what you found most valuable about [topic/activity from a previous meeting].
  - As you arrive, we invite you to introduce yourself in the chat and tell us what your favorite summertime activity is.
- **Changing voices:** It is recommended to have at least two facilitators (one lead facilitator and one co-facilitator) for most sessions. For longer sessions (more than 1 hour), consider adding additional facilitation voices throughout the meeting. Changing the speaking voices between each session or activity keeps things moving and increases participant attention and engagement.
- **Clear roadmaps:** Plan to give a broad-brush agenda at the start of the meeting to give participants a sense of where you're headed for your time together and how the different activities will fit together. Then, throughout the meeting, plan to give clear instructions and narrate the participants through what is happening when transitioning between sessions, when beginning and ending activities, etc. (E.g., "Now that we've finished with activity X, we will move into our next activity focused on Y;" or, "I am now going to pull up the Zoom poll for you to provide your

input;” etc.). This narration will hold participants’ attention, put them at ease when moving through activities, and ensure a seamless flow throughout the meeting.

- **Detailed timing:** It’s important to identify the timing needed for each element of your planned facilitation to ensure that enough time is available for everything you’d like to cover. Where possible, avoid rough estimates: think through the time required for each step of an activity, and test out the timing with dry runs of presentations, activity instructions, etc. That said, there will always be some amount of variability in how long a session or activity will take during the meeting, so it is helpful to build buffer time into your facilitation plan, particularly for complex or multi-step activities.

## Tips for Designing Engaging Activities:

- **Select activities based on the purpose:** When identifying activities to use throughout the meeting, identify very concretely what you want or need from the participants in that portion of the meeting. (e.g. are you looking to: gain buy-in on an existing set of ideas or a plan? Gather detailed feedback on a rough set of ideas? Generate new ideas from scratch? Provide participants an opportunity to respond and react to one-another's ideas? Etc.) The type of input and level of detail that you need from participants at that moment in the meeting should guide the type of activity that you choose for each session in the meeting.
- **Mix it up:** Try to use a few different activity types throughout the meeting, especially for longer sessions. Using a few different activity types helps keep participants interested and engaged, reduces meeting fatigue, and helps play to the preferences and strengths of a wider range of participants throughout the meeting (e.g. extroverts and introverts, internal and external processors, visual and auditory learners, etc.). Some activity types include, but are not limited to:
  - Verbal discussion
  - Resounding via chat
  - Polls
  - Word clouds
  - Active whiteboard input (text entry onto the screen via sticky notes, text, shapes, etc.)
  - Reactive whiteboard input (engaging with existing inputs on a whiteboard (stamper tool, affinity mapping, etc.)
  - Breakout rooms
  - Games/quizzes
- **Give instructions:** When introducing an activity, be sure to give clear instructions for how the activity will work and how to use the feature/platform. Instructions can be brief for platforms that are very familiar and straightforward (e.g. chat, verbal discussion), but should be more detailed for new or complicated platforms (e.g. whiteboards, word clouds). For new or complicated platforms, it can be helpful to both demonstrate the platform via screenshare, and send summary instructions via the chat for reference. Pause for questions on how to use the platform before beginning the activity.
- **Be specific:** For any activity type, give very specific prompts to your participants to guide their participation. Try to make your ‘ask’ of participants is as clear and direct as possible. Some examples of helpful activity prompts include:
  - “Use the chat to tell us what questions you have about [specific concept/idea/activity/etc].”
  - “Use the sticky notes to add 1-2 examples of [specific concept/idea/etc].
  - “Use the Mentimeter box to tell us what word comes to mind when you think of [specific concept/idea/etc].”
  - “Use the poll to tell us what you think [poll question here].”

- “Use the stamper tool to add a star to the [idea/example/topic/etc] you are most interested in discussing today.”
- **Consider alternatives:** If an activity requires the use of a tech feature/platform that might not work for some participants (e.g. Zoom whiteboards that don’t appear for mobile users, external platforms that require additional bandwidth or browser windows, etc.), you can choose to provide an alternative way for them to engage, such as by coming off mute or by using the chat. To limit confusion between the two ways to engage, clearly offer the alternative as a *backup* option, and wait until you have fully explained and launched the main mechanism before offering the alternative.
- **Follow up:** It is common to have a main activity (e.g. a poll, whiteboard activity, breakout session, etc.) followed by a verbal debrief/reflection discussion. Just like the main activity, it is important to have prompts ready to guide the discussion. You can include a menu of prompts in your facilitation notes and make a note to choose which seem most appropriate based on how the discussion is going.
- **Write it down:** As described above, be sure to detail your activity design and all associated steps in the facilitation plan. This applies not only to activity descriptions but also instructions, prompts, alternative plans, slide advances, etc – anything you might want to remember when facilitating the meeting. When in doubt, note it down!

## DURING THE MEETING

Creating a detailed facilitation plan in advance of the meeting goes a long way toward a seamless, high-quality facilitation. That said, things inevitably come up that the facilitation team will need to manage during the meeting itself. Practice is key for building facilitation skills, but the following tips will help with executing your design and managing common dynamics and challenges during the meeting.

- **Do a tech check:** All facilitators and tech support (as applicable) should log on about 15 minutes before the start of the meeting to do a tech check. This should include microphone checks, screenshare test for all windows to be used, and test launch of other features to be used (e.g. Zoom polls or whiteboard).
- **Use two screens:** If possible, try to use two screens when facilitating. This will enable you to view the facilitation plan, meeting window and chat, and any screenshare windows simultaneously. Some facilitators also find it helpful to print out hard copies of the facilitation plan.
- **Trust one another:** There are numerous moving parts to manage during a facilitation, and one person usually cannot be involved with all of it. Trust your co-facilitator(s) to carry out the responsibilities you agreed to when making your facilitation plan, and focus on the pieces you are responsible for unless/until you hear otherwise from your co-facilitator(s). If a game-time decision is needed at a given moment to adjust for timing or other issues, trust the person facilitating to make the decision (and that may mean trusting yourself!). There are usually a few different ways to approach any facilitation issue, but a clear decision from one facilitator is generally better than a muddled one from multiple voices.
- **Use a back-channel chat:** Consider using a back-channel (such as Teams chat) for communicating with your co-facilitator(s) during the meeting. This could be to flag a problem that they may not be aware of, ask an (urgent) question, raise a tech issue, communicate a timing change needed, etc. A back-channel is especially important for complex facilitations with multiple moving parts.
- **Be comfortable with pauses:** When participants don’t respond immediately to a prompt, it is usually helpful to wait a few seconds longer than you are initially comfortable with before

interjecting, clarifying, or moving on. The pauses always feel longer to you as a facilitator than they do to the participants, and the few extra moments of silence are often what your participants need to gather their thoughts, decide to speak up, find the unmute button, or type their response.

- **Encourage broad engagement:** Try to pay attention to which participants are speaking, and try to encourage additional voices if the conversation is being dominated by a few participants. This can be done by asking directly (e.g., “Let’s hear from someone who hasn’t spoken yet today,”), asking a specific follow-up question related to an office/role/subject that you know is relevant to other participants, or calling on specific people (depending on the stakeholders and context of the meeting). These techniques can also be used to encourage general engagement if very few or no people are yet participating.
- **Fall back on the facilitation plan:** If something goes awry with the connection and your facilitator drops from the call or otherwise can’t participate as planned, use the facilitation plan to keep things moving. If your facilitation plan is thorough, anyone from the facilitation team should be able to fill in for one another when needed by simply following the guide and picking up where they left off.
- **Smile, even when nobody can see you:** People can ‘hear your smile’ through your voice (really!) and it will help put participants at ease!

## ANNEX 1: PLATFORM GUIDE

Platform	Activity Types	Best For	Limitations	Account Needs
<i>Meeting Platforms</i>				
Teams	Verbal discussion, chat, reactions, hand raise, breakout rooms, white board (coming soon), live captioning	Plays nicely with DoS-issued laptops; using in-platform features facilitates greater participation and seamlessness of facilitation.	In-platform features are somewhat limited; typically, an additional platform will need to be used for interactive activities; breakout rooms are slightly more difficult to manage compared with other platforms (e.g., only the meeting organizer can run the breakout rooms).	Individual single sign-on by organization
Zoom	Verbal discussion, chat, reactions, hand raise, breakout rooms, polls, whiteboard, live captioning	Has more in-platform features compared with other meeting platforms; has wide familiarity; breakout rooms easy to use; whiteboard feature integrates directly with slide deck; using in-platform features increases participation and seamlessness.	Does not play nicely with DoS-issued laptops; the whiteboard works well for marking up existing ideas, but is not as well-suited for idea generation.	Individual or by organization; free and paid options available
Google Meet	Verbal discussion, chat, hand raise, breakout rooms, whiteboard (via Jamboard), live captioning	Using in-platform features facilitates greater participation and seamlessness of facilitation.	Attendees may be less familiar with it as it is less commonly used; typically, an additional platform will need to be used for interactive activities; attendees need to be logged in to their FAN account to use.	Individual accounts or by organization. For DoS, FAN account required
WebEx	Verbal discussion, chat, reactions, hand raise, breakout rooms, live captioning	Accommodates large numbers of participants with ease.	In-platform features are somewhat limited; typically, an additional platform will need to be used for interactive activities; WebEx tends to give an impression of a meeting being a one-way communication rather than an interactive meeting.	Individual or by organization; free and paid options available

Platform	Activity Types	Best For	Limitations	Account Needs
<i>Supplemental Platforms</i>				
Mural	Whiteboard	Numerous features for flexible design, including idea generation, reaction to ideas, affinity mapping, etc; can be presentation platform in place of short PPT; auto-zoom can guide participants through activities.	For simultaneous facilitation (i.e., a meeting), will need to be supplemental to a meeting platform; a larger learning curve for participants, so thorough explanation is necessary.	Individual, free accounts offer great degree of functionality
Google Jamboard	Whiteboard	Simple, easy to use whiteboard with a slight learning curve for participants; can integrate slide deck into platform.	For simultaneous facilitation (i.e., a meeting), will need to be supplemental to a meeting platform; somewhat limited whiteboard functionality and flexibility compared with Mural.	Individual or by organization. For DoS, FAN account
Google slides	Whiteboard-like activities	Easy to use with slight learning curve; best for idea generation; can integrate slide deck into platform.	For simultaneous facilitation (i.e., a meeting), will need to be supplemental to a meeting platform; limited whiteboard functionality and flexibility compared with other whiteboards.	Individual or by organization. For DoS, FAN account
Shared text file (Google or SharePoint)	Whiteboard-like activities focused on text	Easy to use for gathering feedback or recommended edits on a text document. Almost no learning curve – wide familiarity of use.	For simultaneous facilitation (i.e., a meeting), will need to be supplemental to a meeting platform; linear in nature so not best suited for brainstorming or idea generation.	Individual accounts or by organization.
Mentimeter	Polls, quizzes, games	Easy to use; visually appealing; slight learning curve; can integrate slide deck into platform.	For simultaneous facilitation (i.e., a meeting), will need to be supplemental to a meeting platform; feedback is usually one-way – limited options for participants to interact with each-others' ideas.	Paid account is recommended
Slido	Polls, quizzes, games	Easy to use; visually appealing; slight learning curve; can integrate slide deck into platform.	For simultaneous facilitation (i.e., a meeting), will need to be supplemental to a meeting platform; feedback is usually one-way – limited options for participants to interact with each-others' ideas.	Paid account is recommended
Kahoot	Polls, quizzes, games	Easy to use; visually appealing and fun/lighthearted; slight learning curve.	For simultaneous facilitation (i.e., a meeting), will need to be supplemental to a meeting platform; limited functionality outside of the game; less appropriate for some settings given the lighthearted/somewhat silly feel.	Paid account is recommended

## ANNEX 2: FACILITATION PLAN TEMPLATE

### [SESSION NAME]

[SESSION DATE, TIME]

*Sample content in red*

TIMING	SESSION TITLE + SCREEN	FACILITATION	TECH SUPPORT
10 min (8:50-9:00 AM)	<p>Pre-meeting welcome and room entry</p> <p>Opening slide (PowerPoint)</p>	<p><b>Facilitator: Kirsten</b></p> <p>As attendees are entering the room:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Good morning, thank you for joining us! We will get started in a few moments.</li> <li>- In the meantime, we invite you to introduce yourself in the chat and tell us what you're hoping to learn in today's session. Go ahead and share your thoughts in the chat.</li> </ul> <p>At 9:00:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Alright, let's get started. I'll hand it over to my colleague Nicole to kick us off.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Nicole:</b></p> <p><i>Pull up:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- PPT</li> <li>- Jamboard</li> <li>- Speaker Notes + Notes for chat</li> </ul> <p><i>Share PPT (slide 1)</i></p> <p><i>Place intro question prompt in the chat:</i></p> <p>Welcome! We will get started right at 9:00. As you arrive, please introduce yourself in the chat and let us know what you're hoping to learn in today's session.</p> <p><i>Admit attendees into the room</i></p> <p><i>Address any tech/access questions that come up</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mute participants</li> <li>- Monitor chat</li> </ul>



[X min (XX:XX- XX:XX)]	[Session Title]  [Slides X-X; Or screenshot; Or description of what will appear on screen]	<b>[Session facilitator name]:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Facilitation notes here. Include a description of what will be discussed and/or what activities will take place in this session. Include as much detail as possible in order to guide your co-facilitators in case they need to step in for any reason.</li> </ul>	<b>[Session tech lead name]:</b> Any tech steps here, e.g. screenshare, slide advancement, monitoring chat, etc. If any text/links needed in the chat, include them verbatim here.
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		[Add additional rows as necessary.]	