

## When To Use A Facilitator

We are often asked if a facilitator is needed for a particular project. While many group meetings do not need facilitation, here are some situations where you will benefit from a facilitator:

**When you are brainstorming and looking for new ideas.** A good facilitator will create an agenda for a brainstorming session that has the right flow to it, both achieving the objective and keeping the energy level of participants high and manageable. Using exercises to stretch participants' imagination and creativity, a good facilitator will expand idea options and possibilities, leading to greater innovation potential.

**When you have contentious or divisive subject matter.** Without a facilitator to mediate, groups invariably retreat to their positional arguments. A good facilitator acknowledges those positions, but then guides the group to look at new possibilities and options to create win-win opportunities.

**When the stakes are high.** High-pressure environments are challenging and can create unintended tension. A facilitator can help reduce some of the environmental tension and serve as a second set of ears to help guide the meeting or project to a successful outcome.

**When you need to focus on content.** Meetings have both a content and a process component. Both are important to success. Running a meeting requires focusing on the meeting process, which draws you away from the meeting content. A facilitator relieves you of the process responsibility.

**When the group includes naysayers.** The tendency is not to invite people who are negative about a subject. This creates major issues later when the naysayers block the implementation of developed ideas. A good facilitator can manage negativism, using legitimate concerns to help strengthen an idea and, in so doing, gain the endorsement and support of naysayers.

**When you have a wide range of job titles in the room.** If you have many different functions in a group and/or great disparity of levels, there is a tendency for some to dominate the conversation, while others contribute little. By using various interactive techniques and tempering individuals who dominate, a good facilitator 'levels the playing field or pitch,' allowing everyone a chance to interact in a way they feel comfortable. The result is gaining the best thinking from all involved.

**When you have many cultures in the room.** Like the wide range of job titles, people from different cultures interact in groups in different ways, with some cultures naturally being more dominant than others. A good facilitator will help manage this reality and use facilitation tools to make sure everyone can contribute in a way they feel comfortable.

**When your goals or objectives are murky.** Having a successful outcome starts well before a meeting or session. A good facilitator helps clarify the project objective, sets realistic goals, provides guidance on inviting the right people, helps select the right meeting environment, and identifies content expertise to strengthen a weakness area of the assembled group.

**When implementing new ideas has been historically challenging.** True success occurs when ideas are not just thought up, but implemented. A good facilitator will anticipate potential implementation roadblocks and help the project leader and the group set a clear action plan for implementation.

