

THE SKILLFUL MODERATOR Tips for Ensuring a Successful Deliberative Forum

Courtesy of the Maricopa Community College Center for Civic Participation

PREPARATION & SETUP:	NOTES
 Familiarize yourself with the venue in advance, and arrive early to set up. Visit the site ahead of time if possible and confirm all arrangements at that time. Otherwise have all maps and directions if necessary, ask about traffic and construction. Consider the following: -Signs -Food / Refreshments -Room Setup (tables, chairs, etc., A/V) -Flip chart pads & easels; whiteboards, etc. -Parking On the day of the event, arrive at least an hour before or earlier if necessary to complete preparations well before the first guests start to arrive.	
 2. Communicate and coordinate in advance and during the forum with co-moderator(s), recorder(s) and convener(s). • The key here is avoid creating any surprises for your forum partners! Make sure that co-moderators, recorders and conveners all have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and are comfortable with these roles, and with how they interact with each other. 	
Run a practice forum, if appropriate, or at least a dry reading of the event agenda beforehand to clarify how the event will flow.	

PREPARATION & SETUP:	NOTES:
3. Model friendly and relaxed behavior while setting the stage for discussion.	
 Greet and talk to the participants as they arrive. Try to find out a little about them and whatever personal or professional connections they may have to the topic. 	
(This is difficult to do if you are still busy with set-up tasks!)	
4. Emphasize ground rules to establish atmosphere of acceptance of all persons and ideas.	
 If possible, have a visible list of ground rules displayed on a poster, whiteboard or flipchart. 	
Explain the purpose of the ground rules and make it clear that no one will be allowed to dominate the discussion and that all views are welcome.	
Ask participants if they want to add to or change the list of ground rules. This helps convey that the forum belongs to the participants.	

DURING THE FORUM:	NOTES:
 5. Be an active listener. Active listening involves both what you perceive and how you are perceived as a listener. 	
In order to effectively guide the discussion, you must demonstrate appreciation and understanding for what is being said.	
Ask for clarification on unclear statements or unfamiliar terms if necessary.	
 Stay neutral on the subject of the forum. Moderators are often unaware of the considerable power they have to shape or affect the discussion group. 	
Caution should be exerted to limit use of this role to further discussion.	
At the end, participants should not know your views but they should have a better understanding of others' views as well as their own.	
 7. Ask open-ended questions. Questions such as, "What else haven't we considered?" will encourage discussion rather than short, specific answers. Open-ended questions also allow participants to introduce new ideas for deliberation. Avoid closed-ended or leading questions. 	
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NOTES: DURING THE FORUM: 8. Allow for pauses and silences. People need time to think and reflect. Sometimes silence will help someone build up the courage to make a valuable point. Moderators who tend to be nervous or impatient may find it helpful to count silently to ten after asking a question. 9. Don't allow the group to make you or anyone else in the group the "expert". If there is a perceived expert in the room, participants will stop talking and start listening or deferring to the "expert." Remind the group that opinions, values and ideas are the focus, rather than "facts" or expertise. 10. Encourage participants to respond to each other. Participants should be talking to each other, not with the moderator. Redirect questions posed to you for discussion by the group. You should speak less than any other person in the group. 11. Keep the discussion on track. Allow participants to explore connections and ideas, but try to keep the discussion related to the topic. One way to do this is to refer back to the choices in the discussion guide.

DEALING WITH CHALLENGES:

12. Use conflict productively.

- Exploring areas of disagreement can yield very rich and productive deliberation. Focus on the values at the heart of the conflict.
- Encourage participants to say what they really think, even when it is unpopular.

13. Don't allow participants to personalize their disagreements.

- Do not tolerate put-downs, name-calling, labeling or personal attacks.
- Refer to the ground rules as appropriate.
- Remind participants that the discussion is about issues, ideas and values, not individuals and personalities.

14. Draw out quiet members of the group.

- Be careful not to put anyone on the spot, but watch for subtle opportunities to bring people into the discussion naturally. This is easier to do if you use the time before the forum to become acquainted with each member of the forum.
- Use eye contact and body language to allow space for quiet members to speak up during a pause, without calling on any specific individual.
- If a section of the group appears to be quiet, ask for comment from the section, rather than from an individual.
- Ask, "Let's hear from some of you that haven't spoken yet."

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DEALING WITH CHALLENGES:	
15. Don't let the group get hung up on facts.	
 Disagreement about basic facts are common for controversial issues. If there is a debate over a fact or figure, ask the participants why the statistic is important, i.e., why they value the statistic. 	
16. Don't let the aggressive, talkative person or faction dominate the conversation.	
 People with strong opinions or with some personal experience dealing with the discussion topic are more likely to speak up right away. Those who are less experienced with an issue or are still forming an opinion will need more time to think before speaking. Remind participants that the focus is on understanding issues, not finding solutions. Refer to ground rules, allow for pauses and silences, and ask for comment from those who haven't spoken. 	