



WHAT IS A FACILITATOR?



A facilitator is a critical member of any online community, responsible for building participation and promoting cohesion and engagement within a working group. Fostering a sense of community requires facilitators to be attentive throughout the group’s life cycle and to set aside their own agenda and biases. A good facilitator will continuously encourage contributions and feedback from members to allow for community-driven collaboration and learning to unfold.

Phases	What is the Facilitator’s Role?
Planning and Start-up	Facilitators should be involved in the initial scoping activities to help shape the group’s purpose, decide on a platform, and outline target members. Once the group’s online space is established, the facilitator will promote the group, welcome new members, facilitate introductions and kick-off activities, and help move members toward consensus on the goals and expectations within the group. If there are multiple facilitators within the group, outlining the roles of each is an important step early in the process.
Engaging the Community	The facilitator will encourage group engagement by soliciting feedback on new ideas and resources, forging consensus around group activities, and helping members work toward achieving their desired goals. Developing a schedule for activities and defining indicators for success is helpful in guiding the group’s development. The facilitator will help to foster connections and promote knowledge sharing among group members. Facilitators may also help plan for any in-person events associated with the group or help scope potential subgroups that members may want to form to focus on a particular issue.
Winding Down	The facilitator will help group members recognize when a goal has been met, revisit new goals or definitions of success, and confirm a time and process to close the group. The facilitator will also be important in archiving the group’s learning, if needed.

KEY FUNCTIONS OF A FACILITATOR

Group facilitators typically undertake a number of tasks within a working group:

- **Provide structure** by helping the group define and clearly articulate goals, deliverables, and timelines.
- **Set the tone and pace** for interactions.
- **Offer validation and feedback** on a regular basis to encourage sharing and help build trust.
- **Respond to the needs** of the group participants.
- **Encourage participants** to contribute.
- **Build connections** between members.
- **Celebrate small wins** throughout a group’s life cycle.
- **Provide technical support** for online participants or connect members with someone who can assist them.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR LEARNING LAB FACILITATORS

- Include a picture in your profile to help members connect with you. Encourage members to do the same.
- Populate group space with resources and introductory conversations prior to promoting the group.
- Inform users about the group’s email settings and encourage them to receive regular updates.
- Send an outreach letter during start-up and frequent updates throughout the life of the group.
- Establish subgroups with caution as they may limit engagement within the larger group.
- Send potential members a brief email if their request to join the group is not immediately approved.
- Discuss roles, responsibilities, and reporting requirements with any sponsoring organizations.
- Contact [Learning Lab](#) with any questions.

FOR FURTHER READING...

- [Communities of Practice Guidance](#)
- [Online Facilitation Guidance](#)
- [Learning Lab Working Group Resource Center](#)