INTRODUCTION

Who should use this guide
This manual is intended as a guide for Counselors facilitating PTSS information sharing group sessions and counselors facilitating HIV support groups. This guide will also be of benefit to any Project Accept staff, such as outreach workers, conducting community group meetings.

How to use this guide
The guide presents facilitation skills and tools in the order in which they most commonly occur in a group meeting. However, it is not a guide to open and follow during a group session or group meeting. Study it before you facilitate a session as well as after the session in order to determine ways to facilitate in a better way the next time.

Responsibilities and Expectations of the facilitator’s role
On the most basic level, the responsibility of the facilitator is to deliver the material, as prescribed in the study manuals, in an ethical manner. However, the style in which this is done is also important. This guide contains recommendations regarding the style of facilitation that we believe will be most successful.

What is a facilitator?
Anyone leading or conducting a group discussion session or group meeting is a facilitator. The facilitation skills outlined in this module can be applied to a variety of settings in which Project Accept staff will interact with groups. For example, staff will frequently facilitate groups in the following settings:

- Information sharing group sessions at PTSS centers
- Support group formation sessions at PTSS centers
- Community group meetings during community mobilization

It will also be possible to use some of the facilitation skills in conducting Project Accept staff meetings and CBOVs group meetings.

What is not a facilitator?
A facilitator may be thought of as a type of coach who helps participants achieve goals and make changes in their lives. However, facilitators are not expected to deliver therapy or provide treatment for psychological disorders beyond what is described in the study intervention manuals. Instead, participants should be referred to outside sources for these needs.

What is facilitation?
Facilitation can be referred to as the art and science of managing group processes. It involves guiding group discussions while using a special set of tools. Group facilitation skills are the things that a leader says or does to promote experiential learning within a group. These skills enable a leader to guide a group through the complex stages of group development, creating a cohesive team that learns from experience. Facilitators create an
environment in which the group members share ideas, opinions, experiences, and expertise in order to achieve a common goal. Skilled facilitators smooth the way for group members to brainstorm options, identify viable solutions, and develop and implement action plans. Strong facilitation skills enable one to foster positive group interaction and individual learning.

**What is the role of a facilitator?**

Manages process for the group

- Helps group work more effectively
- Group still owns process and outputs
- Stays out of content, manages process
- Offers variety of process options
- Watches time & monitors progress

Advocates fair & open procedures

- Describes processes
- Treats everyone the same (status, talkative)
- Uses techniques that foster equity (paraphrasing, stacking & tracking, chart-writing)

Encourages full participation (not just the vocal few)

- Varies participatory formats
- Makes “space” to get thoughts all the way out
- Uses the clock – to limit or encourage speaking
- Uses balancing - draws out opposing points of view
- Helps group outgrow old patterns

Responds to group dynamics

- Involvement drawing out potentials & gifts
- Monitors/responds to group concerns, energy level

Promotes clarity & understanding

- Promotes mutual understanding
- Encourages thinking, reflection
- Fosters active listening: mirroring, paraphrasing
- Debriefs after events: feelings/concerns/lessons learned
- Models respect and inclusion
- Treats everyone equally, supportively
- Encourages inclusive solutions
- Accepts divergent thinking (without fear)
- Uses active listening skills

**What are Information Sharing Sessions?**

Information sharing sessions are large gatherings of 20-40 participants (although the exact number will vary by site and location) that will use a range of formats to address various topics. For instance, sessions may be structured as formal talks given on a specific subject by guest speaker or member of the community; or group discussion, wherein participants share information, ideas, and opinions under the guidance of a
facilitator. PTSS staff, a non-Project Accept guest lecturer, or PTSS participants may manage these groups.

Possible groups may revolve around:

- How to put on condoms and negotiate their use
- Health and nutrition for PLWHA, including opportunistic infections
- Physical exercise
- Relationships, including sexual relationships
- Life planning
- Legal issues and policies related to HIV infection
- Spiritual issues
- Resources for family members and friends
- Health and social services offered in the community (presented by representatives of community organizations)

Further, groups formation should take into account such characteristics such as the age, gender, and HIV status of participants.

Information sharing sessions can be distinguished from support groups sessions (described in more detail below) in that the latter is more emotive while the former is more didactic.

**What are Psychosocial Support Groups?**

Over time participants of the information sharing sessions may feel the need to establish smaller and more intimate psychosocial support groups to address particular emotional issues that they are experiencing. These groups will provide an opportunity for participants to meet other people in similar circumstances and to make friends. After expressing the desire to form a support group to PTSS staff, selected support group members will be trained in group facilitation skills. The groups will be led by both PTSS staff and by peers.

Group topics will be flexible and based on the expressed preferences and needs of participants as well as staffing availability. Groups may be formed around topics such as:

- Coping with negative or positive HIV test results
- Maintaining HIV negative status
- Identifying social support
- Stress management
- Safe and thoughtful disclosure of HIV serostatus to family and friends
- Emotion and feelings
- Serodiscordant couples
- Positive/healthy living
- Adherence to ART
- Gender- and age-specific support groups
- Coping with an HIV-positive family member or friend
- starting income generating projects e.g. market gardening, handcrafts, etc.
- Communication for development (writing grant proposals, securing funding, developing and sustaining community PTSS)

As with information sharing sessions, group formation should take into account such characteristics such as the age, gender, and HIV status of participants. Groups should consist of 8-10 members.

Depending on the objectives and needs of participants, members may choose to form into an open or closed support group. In a closed group, members join the group at the same time and, in cases where one member drops out during the life of a group the member may not be replaced by a new member. In an open group, guests (family members or caregivers) can join, with the permission of group members, to learn how best they can give care and support to the participant. An open group is counselor-initiated and formed specifically to offer participants continuous support after they have tested. [For more information on the nature and structure of closed and open psychosocial support groups, refer to Appendix C].

**Considerations for both Information Sharing Sessions and Support Groups**

Since the format and content of the information sharing sessions and support groups is participant driven, PTSS staff will need to play a more active role in the initial meetings to determine the goals and ground rules. Over the course of the first few sessions PTSS staff will use the facilitations skills outlined previously to address the following questions:

- Who should attend this group?
- What issues should the group address?
- What rules and structure should the group follow?

The creation and maintenance of information sharing session and support groups are dynamic and ongoing processes. PTSS staff should be sensitive and responsive to participants’ desires and form new information sharing sessions and support groups as needed.
FACILITATION SKILLS AND TOOLS

This section identifies seven (7) major skills and lists some of the tools for each skill. These skills include the following:

- Making everyone feel comfortable and valued
- Encouraging participation
- Preventing and managing conflict
- Listening and observing
- Guiding the group
- Ensuring quality decisions
- Ensuring outcome-based discussions

1. Skill: Make everyone feel comfortable and valued
Most people will not participate fully in discussions unless they feel comfortable with other members and believe their opinions will be heard. You, with members’ support, must create an environment in which members value the potential contributions of those with different perspectives.

Tools:

- **Use body language**
  You send messages with your movements as well as your voice, so be aware of what your body language is saying. By using your body language to show warmth and acceptance, you encourage others to relax and respond in kind.

- **Thank participants**
  By thanking participants, you validate and legitimize their comments and contributions.

2. Skill: Encourage participation
Some members are outspoken and energetic. Others are quiet and reserved. As a facilitator, you should balance these extremes so that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate.

Tools:

- **Use open-ended questions**
  Ask open-ended questions that encourage members to share detailed answers that may spark others’ ideas. For example, “What are some of the reasons we are afraid to disclose our HIV status to the family?” may yield more discussion than, “Are we afraid to disclose our HIV status to our family members?”

- **Encourage silent members**
  If members are silent or disengaged, catch their eye and to share their expertise
  A few increasingly intense methods follow.

  - Smile and nod at members who want to speak but are hesitating.
  - Ask the group indirectly. “Let’s get a few comments from some of the members we have not heard from yet.”
  - Ask a member directly. “Jane, you look like you are about to say something.”
• Be aware of factions who aren’t speaking and invite them to address the group.
   “I’m noticing that we haven’t heard comments from men in the group. What opinions do you have on this topic?”

**Consult the group**
When a group member addresses a question to you, prompt participation from other members by consulting the group. This is also an effective technique for shifting the focus of discussion from one member to the whole group.
After one person has given his/her input, ask the group for comment: “What do other members think about Tom’s suggestions?”
Another example: “Whom are we sending to the meeting with the village elders?” You consult the group by asking: “Who does the group think we should send to represent us at the village elders’ meeting?”

**Probe for agreement**
Measure the group’s feelings about a few members’ comments: “Do other members share Sally and Mary’s concerns?”

**Thank members for their contributions**
People like to feel you and other members value their input. However, don’t thank everyone who says something. Members may view repeated or effusive (overenthusiastic) thanks as lip service. Tell the person exactly why you are saying thank you.
• Thank members individually. “Peter, thanks for sharing that information about your HIV status.” “Martha, we appreciate your telling us about your bad experiences at the health center.”
• Thank group members collectively. “Thank you for returning promptly from the tea break. This will help us stay on schedule.”

**Post key points**
To help members follow the discussion, put key points where they can see them.

**Divide into small groups**
Small groups are particularly useful if your group is brainstorming options or solutions or if new members feel uncomfortable expressing their opinions to the entire group. Each small group should choose its own facilitator, recorder, and a person to report back. Speaking in front of large groups intimidates some members. When necessary and feasible, divide the members into small discussion groups and then have them report to the entire group. This technique might be ideal for certain situations, such as, for topics that might require in depth discussion by a much smaller group of members and when there is a critical need to arrive at a decision with the full participation of all group members, which might not be feasible in a large group.

**Use visual aids.**
Most people process information better if they see it, so write it on newsprint, an overhead, handout, etc.

**3. Skill: Prevent and manage conflict**
One of the best ways to deal with conflict is to prevent it, but some conflict is inevitable and even helpful to the process. Use it to develop options the group would not have considered otherwise.
Tools:
Use team-building activities.
Help members to get to know each other better and develop a better understanding of each other’s motivations and intentions. Their rapport lessens tension when conflict does arise.
Set ground rules.
Members’ agreement on these makes your job easier when conflict arises. Basic ground rules may be that the group will hear all views and no one will make personal attacks.
Search for agreement.
Drawing attention to points that group members agree upon helps create an atmosphere of positive collaboration and forward momentum.
Use conflict to improve decisions.
Conflict can be used to clarify individual points and to underscore how strongly people feel. Disputes don’t have to mean disrupted sessions.
Agree to disagree.
Although you would like to resolve all conflicts, you may not be able to. Urge members to treat each other with respect even when they disagree.

4. Skill: Listen and observe
Throughout a meeting keep your eyes and ears open and stay attuned to the group. Pay attention not only to the group as a whole but also individuals.

Tools:
Listen actively.
Apply the basic skills of one-on-one conversation. Truly listen before speaking.
Scan the room.
While maintaining eye contact with the speaker, note how other members are responding to the person.

5. Skill: Guide the group
At any point in a meeting you may have to guide the group to move along or to stick to the topic.

Tools:
Delegate a timekeeper.
It’s easy to lose track of time when facilitating a session, so ask someone you help you stay on schedule.
Refer back to the meeting objectives and agenda.
When the group strays, remind members of their decision to accomplish specific objectives in an agreed upon period.
Stray from the agenda when necessary.
Recognize that an agenda is a tool to reach an end, not an end into itself. If your group is having a particularly useful discussion, consider straying from your agenda, but ask the group’s permission before doing so.
Use a parking lot.
If members bring up important topics or questions unrelated to the current discussion, put these in the “parking lot,” which may be a sheet of newsprint taped to the wall. Don’t end the session without discussing or otherwise disposing of these topics.

6: Skill: Ensure quality decisions
Quality decisions are based on agreed-upon criteria backed by sound information that decision maker consider thoroughly. They use an agreed-upon process that all understand and, at a minimum, they agree to accept the outcomes. They make decisions in time to support the group’s work, and the group records and disseminates those decisions.

Tools:
Remind the group of decision deadlines.
Provide a calendar that details key dates in the planning cycle when members must make decisions.
Review criteria and supporting information.
Remind the group of the criteria it is using to make a decision and of the information the members received related to those criteria.
Review the decision-making process.
Make sure everyone understands what processes the group is using in this situation.
Poll the group before a major decision.
Avoid surprises. The group should know before a big decision that different perspectives exist. Poll the group before the official decision making to clarify the different points of view and to work toward compromises.
Review the decisions.
Ask that a group member restate the decision while someone else writes it where everyone can see it.

7: Skill: Ensure outcome-based meetings.
Information sharing sessions may encompass many related topics, and members may at times try to discuss all of these at once. As the facilitator, you bear primary—but not sole—responsibility for focusing discussion on accomplishing the objectives of the session and of the planning process.

Tools:
Review objectives of each agenda item.
Keep group members focused on the task at hand by providing objectives for each presentation, discussion, or other activity on your agenda. Remind members of the objectives as you take up each item.
Record decisions.
Your group must record activities and decisions. While taking minutes is not the facilitator’s responsibility, you can assist by writing key decisions on newsprint, flip chart, a chalkboard, etc. that members can see.
Develop an action plan.
For each decision, write down when action steps need to occur and who is responsible for these.
FACILITATING THE OPENING OF A GROUP SESSION

This section discusses some common facilitation tasks and tools you may use at the beginning of a group discussion or meeting. Remember that some of the skills and tools you use in opening a group session also work well throughout the discussion.

NOTE: Before you go to the sessions, prepare carefully for your role as facilitator. Refer to Appendix: Pre-Meeting checklist

1. Welcome Participants
Before beginning the main agenda, take a few moments to welcome participants

Tools:
Formally start the session
Some facilitators use a gavel, gong, or some other instrument to signify the start of a session. (Only use this technique if it is culturally appropriate)
Welcome everyone officially
Acknowledge that participants are contributing their valuable time to attend the session and thank them for coming. By doing so you validate and legitimize their contributions.
Use body language and tone of voice to show your comfort level and encourage others to relax
- Lean forward slightly to signify interest
- Smile, when appropriate, to help you look and sound receptive
- Do not cross your arms. This can send the message that you are “closed off.”
- Do not clutch items (pen, paper, microphone, gavel, back of chair, etc). Clutching something indicates that you are tense.

2. Introduce participants and yourself
This helps participants feel welcome and reminds them who their team members are. Introductions also give you an opportunity to clarify your role as facilitator for the session and to explain the role of any outsider. Ask everyone to say a few words, even if only just one sentence. Once people have heard their voices in a large group, their feel more inclined to speak up again later. If you have limited time or numerous attendees, find ways to ensure that introductions are brief.

Tools:
Consider an icebreaker
You may ask people to say something light and personal but non-threatening as they introduce themselves. Icebreakers, if chosen well, allow group members to relate to each other on a personal level.
Give precise instructions
Orally or on flip chart, list the information you would like members to give as they introduce themselves, e.g., name and relevant identifying information (location, marital status, etc.). Ask them to limit their introduction to 10 to 20 seconds.
Allow brief announcements
This is an opportunity to build a sense of community and collaboration and to break the pattern of name, rank, and serial number
Check in
If your group has the time, consider inviting participants to expand their introduction by briefly talking about their expectations for the session. This helps members focus on the session.

3. Set the tone and pace
It’s important to establish a spirit of collaboration, tone, trust, and respect early in the meeting, especially if you expect conflict. While some conflict can promote the airing of different perspectives and increase the options being considered, hurtful or angry conflict can impede the process. One of the best ways to deal with negative conflict is to prevent it from happening.

Tools:
Help the group develop ground rules
Having the group set and agree on certain ground rules makes your job as facilitator a little easier, and may help when conflict arises. Review the rules briefly before discussion begins. Elaborate if several new members are present or if you expect contention. Always post a copy of the rules
Set the stage for agreement
If you have agenda items that could cause conflict (e.g. reviewing the budget, voting out a member who rarely attends), remind the members of their past successes in working together and agreeing on similar issues.
Clarify the role of members
It may be helpful to remind members of their mission: e.g. to give each other emotional support.

4. Go over and approve meeting objectives and agenda
Focus participants on the desired outcomes of the group session.

Tools:
Post meeting objectives
Distribute a handout or write on a flip chart the objectives of the meeting so that members can see these throughout the meeting. Review these objectives with the members.
Ask for input on the objectives and agenda
It is better to know up front if members want to discuss any other issues than to let these percolate as hidden agendas throughout the meeting. Ask, “Is there any other topic that you feel we need to discuss today?”
Point out any changes to the agenda
This fosters an open and trustful environment and lessons chances members will assume you have a hidden agenda.

5. Review minutes (if it is group practice to take minutes of discussions)
The minutes remind group members of what has gone before. Reviewing the minutes will also help your role as a facilitator.

Tools:
Allow adequate time to review and approve minutes
If possible, distribute the minutes prior to the meeting. At the opening of the meeting, members can offer their additions or corrections prior to approval.

Address follow-up items
If there were questions at a previous meeting, acknowledge when and how these are being addressed. Continuity ensures trust in the process.
FACILITATING THE SESSION

As a facilitator, your main tasks during this portion of the meeting are to:
- Keep the group on task
- Assess the group’s concentration and engagement
- Clarify feedback to the group
- Enforce ground rules

Keep the Group on Task
To ensure that the group meets its objectives, you must focus attention and energy on the objectives for that session or meeting. Review the objectives for each agenda item. If you are running out of time because you have more agenda items than the time allocated for the meeting, choose one of the following options:
- Determine if you have enough time to complete the agenda and the closing tasks
- Extend the meeting
- Help the group set priorities and decide which remaining agenda items to address in the time remaining.

1. Tools for Listening and Observing
Pay attention not only to the group as a whole but also to individual participants. Who is actively engaged? Who is falling asleep? Who has been dominating the discussion? Who has yet to contribute?
Be responsive
- Let speakers know that you are listening to them by making eye contact with them.
- Nod your head in agreement to encourage members to continue talking.
- Seek clarification of statements you do not understand.
- Summarize lengthy comments into focused points that everyone can understand.
Scan the room
Note how members are responding to the speaker

3. Tools for Guiding the Group
Guide the group through the agenda and keep it focused on the business at hand.
Delegate a timekeeper
Set a time limit for discussion on each topic and ask someone to help you stay on schedule.
Refer back to the meeting objectives and agenda
When the group strays, remind members of their decision to accomplish specific objectives in an agreed upon period. “It seems like people want to discuss some things that are not on the agenda today. Am I right? Should we re-assess what we want to accomplish today?”
Allot extra time if needed
Don’t cut short a valuable discussion or let a conflict fester because the allocated time is up. Ask the group to approve the departure from the schedule.
Postpone non-agenda topics
Use a parking lot (usually newsprint taped to the wall) as a tool for staying on topic, not as a way to ignore comments on other topics. “John, that is definitely an issue we will need to discuss. Would it be all right to place it in the parking lot for now so that we can refocus on what we are discussing at the moment?”

Restate the question
If the discussion loses focus and drifts on to other topics, summarize key points that members have made and state the question again. “We have heard the pros and cons of this issue and we should definitely keep these in mind for discussion later. At the moment, we need to answer the question of membership.”

Speed the group
At times, members may prolong a discussion because of their interest rather than new ideas. To push the group to wrap it up and come to a decision, summarize the main points. Then you may say, “Did I accurately summarize the issues regarding a membership? To keep on schedule, should we make a decision now?”

Slow the group down
At times, members may be tired or uncomfortable and rush through an issue. Say something like, “I know that we are almost at the end of the session, but it seemed to me we rushed through that last discussion. This is a fairly important decision. Let’s step back and make sure we’ve identified all the potential problems.”

4. Tools for Ensuring Quality Decisions

Poll the group
Polling helps when you are trying to build consensus because it allows the group to assess the amount of support for a proposed decision, i.e., asking members to raise their hands to signify approval.

Record decisions
Before the beginning of the session or meeting, delegate someone in the group to record all or particular decisions made. To help members keep track of what they have decided, write summaries of key decisions on newsprint and post these where all can see.

Assess the group’s concentration and engagement
Monitor the group as a whole and as individual participants.

Tools

Read the group’s energy level
Assess the tone in members’ voices as they speak. Are they energized? Are they tired? What is the group’s body language telling you?

Check involvement
How involved is the group? What are people asking? How are people responding to you as a facilitator? How are people responding to each other?

Avoid presentations after lunch
Schedule something that requires participation by the entire group if possible. A presentation with dimmed lights is deadly after lunch.
Give them a break
If you sense the group is losing energy or the ability to concentrate, take a stretch break. Use energizers, quick exercises, or games that last no more than five minutes. “How many three-to six-letter words can you make out of a word ‘community’ in the next two minutes.” (Find appropriate games and exercises)

Provide snacks
These can give a slow and steady boost of energy for the group.

Clarify confusing discussions
As a discussion twists and turns, it’s easy to lose a couple of members. You can do several things to make sure that all stay with you and participate fully and equally.

Tools
Listen for unfamiliar terms
When members use acronyms or terms that others may not know, clarify these by asking the speakers to explain them or use them in context.

Restate the issue before a decision
Summarize key points yourself or ask speaker to clarify. “I’m not sure we all understood that. Do you mind clarifying that point?”. Or ask someone to write the points on newsprint. Be sure that the group agrees on what the issue is.

Before the group decides on an action, make sure that everyone present has had the opportunity to comment.

Provide feedback to the group when necessary or appropriate
While maintaining an objective perspective on the group’s discussion, provide feedback to individuals and to the group to support and encourage positive group behaviour and address unconstructive behaviour.

Tools
Check your personal biases
Be aware of and manage your own personal biases. Stay as objective as possible. Evenly distribute your feedback. Do not favour or disfavour any individual or group.

Be specific in describing what you observe
This helps group members to focus on a specific behaviour or comment. “I have noticed that every time we have said the word ‘sex’, our youth members have winced.”

Describe or probe the impact of what you observe
Let the group members express their feelings. “Can one of our youth members explain their reaction to the word ‘sex’?”

Ask for and summarize suggestions
Request suggestions from the group and then summarize these. “Perhaps we should all use the word ‘intimate’ instead of ‘sex.’”

Point out consensus
Consensus requires that all members accept (although they may not fully agree with) the group’s decision. “We all seem to agree that we should ask an expert to come and talk to us about good nutrition.”
Point out similarities between members’ statements
Use this technique when you sense that people are close to agreement but may not understand or recognize their common ground. “Helen, both you and John expressed concern over the lack of information about nutrition for members living with HIV.”

Use conflict to improve decisions
Conflict can be used to clarify individual points of view and to underscore how strongly people feel. “Ben, you feel really strongly that we need to consider allowing family members to attend the group sessions. Tony, you feel that this might breach member’s confidentiality. Is there a way we can address both concerns?”

Enforce ground rules
Ground rules help maintain a comfortable, productive environment for all participants. Often the group sets these rules to address past or anticipated problems. Ground rules are only effective if they are enforced. The entire group is responsible for monitoring and pointing out when group members violate any of the rules and lessens the chances of accomplishing the group’s objectives. As facilitator, you can support this process.

Tools

Know the ground rules
To monitor the bylaws, ground rules, and operating procedures, everyone needs to be familiar with them. Renegotiate, or at least revisit, ground rules each time new members join the group. Groups find it helpful to post these rules.

Create non-threatening mechanisms to enforce the rules
One of your ground rules should include ways to address violations. These can range from one person being the primary “rule watchdog” to the whole group playing a lighthearted role. For example, give all members a red flag to wave or a noisemaker to blow to note a rule violation. Lighten it even more by choosing a humorous code word or phrase to call out or supplying softballs to toss at violators. If handled in the right spirit, these techniques can take the initial sting out of being called a “violator.”

Note: Ensure that techniques used to address violations are culturally appropriate.

Correct Violations the first time – and as soon as – they occur
Be gentle. Simply address the behaviour and move on. “Mary, what you just said could be taken as a personal attack, something our ground rules try to guard against. Would you or anyone else like to reframe what you said so we understand your concern about the issue? If not, we can move on with the discussion.”

If possible, don’t embarrass as you enforce. Remember you or your designated watchdogs don’t have to call the group’s attention to every violation. For example, if two members are carrying on a side conversation; someone sitting close by can quietly ask them to stop.

Be fair and consistent in enforcing rules
Take great care to be evenhanded in pointing out violations. Follow the rules consistently throughout all sessions/meetings, not just those in which you anticipate disagreements.

Note: See Slide on Managing Conflict: Six Steps
DEALING WITH CHALLENGES (Techniques)

Occasionally, as a facilitator, you will face challenging behaviours and situations as you facilitate group sessions or meetings. Your goals are to promote positive behaviours and encourage full participation in the process.

1. General Guidelines
   
   **Always look for the positive**
   Usually a person’s negativity comes from a deeply felt concern. For instance, most people are terrified about their HIV positive status. Tap into those fears.

   **Go easy**
   Begin with the most subtle and least threatening option because that is less likely to provoke an unnecessary confrontation.

   **Put prevention before intervention**
   Do what you can before or at the opening of the session to reduce potential challenges. For example, remind members of the groups’ objectives, roles, decision processes, and ground rules.

   **Look to the group for support**
   Share responsibility for the group’s behaviour with the members

   **Seek outside assistance**
   For especially difficult situations, you may want to get technical assistance or an outside mediator. Often an objective outsider can help to ease tensions.

Challenging behaviours and situations you may encounter as a group facilitator include:
- Side conversations
- Conversation domination
- Repeaters, parrots, and ramblers
- Verbal attackers
- Disruptive audience
- Absolute silence
- Inability to reach consensus
- Revisiting of decisions
- Charges of being culturally incompetent

2. Side Conversations

You are facilitating a group session and you notice two members whispering loudly to each other and those sitting near the pair are glaring at them.

**Why is it happening?**
- The conversations relate to the subject
- The conversations are personal
- The members are bored because the meeting is dragging on
- They always do that

**Tools**

**Call for courtesy**
You can correct this behaviour more easily if you ask members to be courteous to speakers during the opening or following a break.
Catch their eye
Making eye contact with the whisperers may be enough to get them to stop

Bring them into the discussion
Call one of the pair by name, restate the last remark made by the group, and ask them for an opinion on that topic.

Walk towards the whisperers
If you move around during meetings, saunter over and stand casually behind them.

Approach them during the break
Inform them that their side conversation is distracting and ask them to either refrain or share with the group.

Confront them
As a last resort, confront them in front of the entire group. Try to do so without being accusatory.

“Is there something you’d like to share with the group?”
“Do you need a moment to settle something?”
“Shall we wait for you?”

3. Conversation Domination
While leading a discussion on sharing one’s HIV status with family members, one member repeatedly interjects opinions on stigma and discrimination in the community. He has already offered several comments even though many other members haven’t spoken.

Why is it happening?
- He feels compelled to share his knowledge
- He wants to make sure he conveyed his points
- He feels he is not being heard

Tools
Set the ground rules on recognizing speakers
Remind the group that the facilitator must recognize members before they speak.

Invite others to comment
Balance participation by asking others to respond to the dominator’s comments. Hearing that other members share his views may diminish his need to repeat them.

Propose a time limit
Set a reasonable time limit for each person’s comments. Ask an official timekeeper to enforce it or operate a timer that sounds when time is up.

Record key points
Record each point or suggestion members make on newsprint or an overhead so that they feel the group has acknowledged their perspective.

Use a round-robin
Go around the room and give each person an opportunity to comment briefly

Establish a speaking order
Assign someone to keep track of the order of hands being raised and follow that order when calling on speakers.
Hear all first
Propose that no one speak a second time until everyone else has spoken (or passed on the opportunity) at least once.

4. Repeaters, Parrots, and Ramblers
A member continuously raises her hand to speak. When called on, she repeats others’ comments, sometimes almost verbatim. At other times, she rambles for a minute or two to make the same point a previous speaker made in five seconds.

Why is that happening?
- She may be naturally wordy
- She may want to make sure a point is conveyed
- She may want to endorse a good point

Tools
Suggest brevity
Say, for an example, “If you agree with something someone else has said, don’t repeat it. Just say ‘I agree.’”

Point to similar comments
Record the gist of comments on newsprint. When someone begins repeating others’ comments, point out that you have already noted that, mark it on the list, and move on.

Thank the speaker
By doing so, you acknowledge that the member has contributed to the discussion.

Demonstrate your understanding
Acknowledge the person’s point by summarizing what you have heard. “So your point is_______. Did I hear that correctly?”

5. Verbal attackers
In the middle of an intense debate on membership to the group, one member begins to insult the intelligence of another member.

Why is it happening?
- Attackers may feel that they have been attacked and retaliate
- Attackers may lack the skills or confidence to make their point
- Attackers may be trying to distract the group

Tools
Enforce ground rules
Define in your ground rules what constitutes a personal attack. This enables you to be specific in rejecting a member’s behaviour.

Use body language
Position yourself physically between the verbal combatants as a way of disrupting their ability to argue back and forth.

Check in
Give each member an opportunity to say how she or he is feeling so that the group can process the situation.
Talk privately with the attackers
During a break, speak to the individuals involved in order to defuse the situation. Acknowledge their passion and ask that they use a different method for expressing their point of view. If necessary, remind them of the consequences of further attacks.

6. Disruptive audiences
The group has invited a guest speaker from your local institute of higher learning to speak about nutrition for PLWAs. During the presentation, one member repeatedly challenges the presenter’s knowledge and expertise in front of the entire group. That person also whispers snide comments about the guest to those sitting nearby.

Why is it happening?
- The person may feel the speaker, or the meeting is not addressing an issue
- The person may want to disrupt the presentation
- The person may dislike either the speaker or the speaker’s point of view

Tools
**Enforce ground rules**
Do not allow personal attacks on anyone at any time

**Schedule a Q&A**
Before a presentation, ask the speaker to tell the group whether he/she prefers to take questions at the end of or during the presentation.

**Refer to the agenda**
Point out opportunities when members can make comments

**Give other options**
Respectfully inform the participants of additional opportunities and venues to make comments, such as during the next group session and written submissions to the group.

7. Absolute silence
When you ask for comments on a new ground rule that you are proposing, no one responds. A few group members are staring down at the table. Others are glancing about the room.

Why is it happening?
- They may not understand what is going on
- They may be tired or indifferent
- They may be angry

Tools
**Allow some silence**
Give them time to process what is happening

**Acknowledge the situation**
Check in with the group by saying, “I noticed that everyone is being quiet. Can someone tell me what you’re thinking?”

**Take a break**
Perhaps the group is emotionally drained or tired and could use a rest. Or perhaps someone should conduct an energizer exercise to get people motivated.
8. Inability to reach consensus
The group has been discussing the proposal to invite a Roman Catholic pastor to talk to them about faith-based positive living. Some of the group members strongly feel that a Roman Catholic pastor is not the right person to address their spiritual concerns because of the Roman Catholic conservative opinions towards condom use. The group seems to be split on this as some would prefer a pastor with more liberal attitudes.

Why is it happening?
- People may feel strongly about their positions
- Some may want to disrupt the process
- People may feel their perspectives have not been adequately expressed or acknowledged

Tools
Emphasize agreement
Restate all of the points that the group agrees on in order to isolate the specific points of disagreement.

Attempt a compromise
- Ask the people who are not in agreement, “What would it take for you to agree to this decision? What aspect would need to be changed?”
- Go back to the full group and see if this new proposal is acceptable. If not, determine what changes must be made for it to be acceptable.
- Continue going back and forth with each site, and continue probing to understand the true nature of the disagreement

Predetermine a fall back decision-making process
Your group’s rules or constitution should be specific about decision making. Go to your alternative if the group can’t reach a consensus. For instance, the committee can meet and decide, or a subgroup of the committee members can decide, or the full group can vote.

9. Revisiting decisions
Near the end of your meeting, a member argues for including family members that the group had decided to exclude on a planned retreat.

Why is this happening?
- The person may not have been paying attention
- The person may be trying to stall the process
- The person may not accept the group’s decision

Tools
Post decisions
Refer to the newsprint/flip chart where the group’s decisions have been recorded.

Review decisions
When making decisions, make sure everyone understands what the group has decided. Ask members (particularly the revisitors) to articulate the decision.
10. Charges of being culturally incompetent
During a discussion on criteria for selecting new committee members, several members become very upset. They voice the concern that the group discriminates against their demographic or ethnic group.

Why is it happening?
- The process itself may not be respectful of diverse cultures
- Some group members may be culturally incompetent
- Individuals may not feel part of the process
- Individuals may not understand the decision-making process
- Individuals may not feel that the process is fair
- Individuals may be trying to disrupt the process

Tools
Use team-building activities
Increase trust with and among group members by using team-building activities

Consult the group
Ask those who are upset for suggestions on how to make the group meeting and process more culturally competent.

Solicit feedback
Use such methods as:
- Small group report-backs
- Written comments submitted in advance
- Structured discussions in which everyone speaks at least once before a decision is reached
- One-on-one conversation with members

Acknowledge the concerns
Let the group members express their concerns, but work to build consensus on when to address these. Will the groups address the cultural problems at the time of the incident, later in the meeting, or at another meeting?

Obtain technical assistance to improve your process
Do not hesitate to use outside help if it is available.
FACILITATING THE CONCLUSION

As a facilitator, you can help the group tie everything together and outline the next steps. Your primary tasks are to:

- Identify the next steps
- Evaluate the session
- Adjourn on a positive note

You have laid the foundation for success in your next session if members leave the session feeling that they have had their say and the group has accomplished its goals.

1. Identify the next steps

Tools

Complete an action plan
Keep a sheet of newsprint on the wall throughout the session and add to it whenever the group identifies a “next step.” At the end of the session, review the items on the sheet and develop an action plan that specifies what needs to be done, who will take each action, and when each action is to be completed.

Visit your parking lot
This is your last chance to review the topics you put in the parking lot. If time doesn’t allow the group to discuss all these items, propose adding some topics to the next meeting’s agenda, or assigning them to a small group or committee.

Update the group’s meeting schedule
Remind the group about upcoming discussion sessions or meetings, exchange visits, etc.

2. Evaluate the session

The group sessions need to be evaluated just like any program or intervention. Refer to Appendix: Evaluation process/form

Tools

Do a group evaluation
This can be written or oral. One way is to conduct a simple session evaluation with the entire group. Quickly poll the group on the things they liked about the session and the process. Write these on a sheet labeled “Positives.” On a sheet labeled “Changes,” record the group’s suggestions of what to do differently at the next session/meeting.

3. Adjourn on a positive note

Before adjourning, take a few minutes to acknowledge the positive

Tools

Thank members for their perseverance and hard work

Recall agreement
Remind participants of decisions that received strong support.
Make it official
Close the session by using a gavel, gong, or other instrument just as you did when you opened the session. (Only if this is culturally appropriate at your specific site)
References

3. Group Facilitation Skills: A Toolbox for Effective Meetings, Ohio Watershed Academy, Running Effective Meetings Library Module (download pdf)

Sources

A. Group Facilitation and Problem-Solving http://ctb.ukans.edu/tools/EN/chapter_1016.htm Community ToolBox (ctb)
C. Group Facilitation Skills: A Toolbox for Effective Meetings, Ohio Watershed Academy, Running Effective Meetings Library Module (download pdf)
D. Effective Meeting Facilitation: Sample Forms, Tools and Checklists http://www.nea.gov/resources/Lessons/DUNCAN2.HTML National Endowment for the Arts (nea)
Appendices

Appendix A: Pre-Meeting Checklist
Appendix B: People, Process, and Product
Appendix C: Structure of Closed and Open Support Groups

Exercises

Exercise 3.1: Four Types of Facilitating Skills
Exercise 3.2: 7 major facilitation skills (Role-Play)
Exercise 3.3: Creating a parking lot
Exercise 4.1: Self-introductions
Exercise 4.2: Helping the group develop ground rules
Exercise 5.1: Making group decisions
Exercise 7.1: Dealing with the Parking Lot

Slides

1.1 Course Objectives
1.2 Outline of Course Modules
2.1 What is a facilitator?
2.2 What is facilitation?
2.3 What is the role of a facilitator?
3.1 7 Major Facilitation skills
3.2 Skills & Tools
3.3 Skills & Tools
3.4 Skills & Tools
4.1 Opening The Group Session
4.2 Opening the Group Session
5.1 Facilitating The Group Session
5.2 Facilitating The Group Session
5.3 Facilitating The Group Session
6.0 Dealing with Challenges
6.1 Side conversations
6.2 Conversation domination
6.3 Repeaters, parrots, and ramblers
6.4 Verbal attackers
6.5 Disruptive audience
6.6 Absolute silence
6.7 Inability to reach consensus
6.8 Revisiting of decisions
6.9 Charges of being culturally incompetent
7.1 Facilitating the Conclusion