**Basic Principles of Moderating\***

\* From Hodge and Dineen, 2006

An effective moderator:

Remains neutral about the subject of the forum. Do not express your own opinion or evaluate the comments of the participants.

Does not take on an “expert” role with the subject matter. Your role is not to teach the participants about the issue even if it is a subject you know well.

Keeps the deliberation focused on the approaches. When comments go astray, bring participants back to the issue book framework. Make sure that each approach receives equal consideration.

Listens for values that motivate a participant’s comments. In deliberation, the participant’s values and motives are just as important, if not more so, then their opinion. Sometimes people with different opinions share the same motive or value and that can form the basis for their common ground.

Intervenes as necessary. If the conversation begins to focus on personalities rather than issues, gently remind the group of ground rules or refocus the discussion back to the issues.

Asks clarifying questions, if necessary. If you are not sure what a participant means, chances are good that others are also unclear. You may ask them to clarify what they are trying to say and ask if you have understood correctly if absolutely, but be aware that people can get the impression that they aren’t being articulate.

Encourages everyone to join in the conversation. But be careful. Comments like “that’s a good idea” may make the speaker feel welcome in the conversation, but participants who disagree may think you are being biased.

Asks thoughtful and probing questions to surface costs and consequences. Make sure that the participants have considered the potential outcome of their comments. Help draw out what people are willing to accept and are not willing to accept.

Helps participants find common ground. Participants will not always agree and may sometimes be in direct conflict with each other. Recognize it and seek to focus on “What can we do together even if we don’t fully agree.”

Encourages deep reflection. Ask participants to share why they feel a particular way or what in particular about the issue (or approach) is important to them.

**CPD’s Quick Starting Guide to Facilitating Forums**

Facilitation is essentially about supporting a productive, respectful conversation that helps participants better understand the issue and each other. While there are many advanced facilitation skills that you can work on as you get more and more experience, the basics of deliberation are actually rather simple.

Deliberative conversations start with “**starting questions**,” which are open ended questions that get people talking about an issue. For NIF style forums, the starting question for each approach is often, “So does anyone have any particular things you like about this approach?” Once you ask an initial starting question, the deliberation begins when someone starts talking. As the facilitator, you must both listen carefully to what is being said, and plan your next move. Your next move will generally be one of the following:

**The Five Basic Facilitator Choices:**

1. **Move on** to the next speaker by simply pointing to the next person in line or asking the group for additional comments. People like to talk, and in many cases, you will often have a line of people ready to talk, and can simply move from one to another (after insuring the previous comment has been captured by the notetakers).
2. **Paraphrase** what that person said in order to clarify the point, help the notetakers, and/or move the conversation to a deeper level. When paraphrasing, always do so in a way that makes it easy for the speaker to correct you (“So what I’m hearing is that…is that right?”)
3. **Ask a** “**probing**” or “**follow up**” question to the same speaker to get clarification or dig deeper

Ex. “Why is that important to you?” “What do you think the consequences of that perspective would be?” “Are there any drawbacks to that position?”

1. **Ask a “reaction**” question that seeks to have other people respond to the last speaker’s comments in some way.

Ex. “Does anyone else have a different view?”

“What do others think about that idea?”

1. **Ask a new** **starting question.** Depending on the design of the forum, you may have a set of questions you are supposed to ask, or you may have certain issues you want to discuss, that you may just jump in to take the conversation a different direction. Based on the responses, you may also develop a question that works to combine or compare opinions that were shared. A new starting question may be particularly important if the deliberation got off track and the participants need to be redirected to the issue.

Ex. “Many argue that one of the key topics with this issue is X, what are your thoughts on its importance?”

**Primary Facilitating Styles (CPD)**

Facilitating is an art, not a science. Like deliberation itself, it involves trying to find the perfect balance between various, often competing, goals. For example, moderators seek to remain impartial, but must also insure all views are considered. Facilitators are charged with guiding the discussion and making sure the group stays on track time-wise, but also they do not want to dominate or force the discussion into too strict of a set structure.

The best facilitators are flexible yet consistent, another tricky balance. Overall, there seems to be at least four primary facilitating styles**:**

1. **The Referee** – Only interferes as necessary to enforce rules and time constraints. A good moderator from this perspective is barely noticed. They introduce a topic, and let the participants take over. They may only say “So what do you think?” and then step back until its time to consider a different approach.

2. **The Interviewer** – Prepares specific questions beforehand and pushes participants on particular issues. A good moderator from this perspective helps the participants dig deeper and do the hard work that the group may not naturally do on their own.

3. **The Devil’s Advocate** – Works to present views that are not represented in the forum. Can be particularly important if the room is not diverse, or if the deliberation is particularly one-sided. A good moderator from this perspective is able to introduce alternative voices without seeming to lose their impartiality.

4. **The Weaver** – Focused on helping participants identify and build upon common ground. A good moderator from this perspective is able to dig deeper into participant comments, identify underlying motives and values, and connect those values to others. May also focus more on strengthening the interpersonal relationships between participants.

No one style is “best.” It depends on the subject matter, the participants, and the goals of the deliberation. Good facilitators are likely able to play all four roles as necessary.

**The Art of Asking Good Questions**

“The quality of our lives is determined by the quality of our thinking. The quality of our thinking, in turn, is determined by the quality of our questions, for questions are the engine, the driving force behind thinking.”

Elder and Paul, *The Foundation for Critical Thinking*

The following five pages provide a variety of information from NIF sources concerning the kinds of questions facilitators can ask during forums. Asking good questions is a critical part of facilitating, as is knowing when *not* to ask questions. Forums can often progress pretty well without specific questions, all participants may need is some initial prodding to react to the background material. This fact makes is somewhat easy for novice facilitators, because they can learn on the job by simply letting things go on their own somewhat and picking and choosing when to intervene. If the participants are doing well on their own, the need for the facilitators and their questions is diminished, so don’t feel the need to force questions.

**Some Overall Thoughts about Asking Questions**

* Question asking will depend on the overall goal/purpose for the event
* Be careful of starting a forum with specific questions. People may have something pressing they want to share, and a specific question may not give them that chance.
* Preparing questions beforehand can be helpful, but also be prepared NOT to use them
* At times there will be some questions you NEED to ask because you are gathering specific information on that question from all the groups. There is nonetheless an important tension here between too much and too little structure. Asking specific questions of all groups will provide good information on that question, but it is also somewhat forced. The topic did not necessarily come up naturally in all groups, it was introduced by the facilitator. A more open process may bring more interesting results because you will be able to observe what issues arise naturally in the groups. The tradeoff is that by allowing the natural process, you may not get feedback on a particularly important issue. All in all, you need to be careful when introducing specific discussion questions, and be transparent in the reporting of the data about what questions were asked. Impartiality can be questioned if questions are loaded or direct participants in particular ways.
* Most questions will be reactive clarification/follow up questions
* Asking too many questions can be as bad as asking too few
* Ideally, participants are asking each other good questions by the end of the forum

**NIF’s “Four Key Questions of NIF Forums”**

1. ***What is valuable to us?*** This question gets at the reason that making public choices is so difficult, namely, that all the approaches are rooted in things about which people care very deeply. This key question can take many different forms. To uncover deeper concerns, people may ask one another how each came to hold the views he or she has. Talking about personal experiences, rather than simply reciting facts or stating rational, impersonal arguments, promotes a more meaningful dialogue.

* How has this issue affected us personally?
* When we think about this issue, what concerns us?
* What is appealing about the first option or approach?
* What makes this approach acceptable – or unacceptable?

1. ***What are the consequences, costs, benefits and trade-offs associated with the various approaches?*** Variations of this question should prompt people to think about the relationship that exists between each approach and the values people have. Because deliberation requires the evaluation of pros and cons, it is important to ensure that both aspects are fully considered. Questions to promote a fair and balanced examination of all potential implications include:

* What would be the consequences of doing what we are suggesting?
* What would be an argument against the approach we like best? Is there a downside to this course of action?
* Can anyone think of something constructive that might come from the approach that is receiving so much criticism?

1. ***What are the inherent conflicts that we have to work through?*** As a forum progresses, participants should consider the following:

* What do we see as the tension between the approaches?
* What are the “gray areas”?
* Where is there ambiguity?
* What are you struggling with? What are you not sure abount?
* Why is reaching a decision (or moving forward) on this issue so difficult?

1. ***Can we detect any shared sense of direction or common ground for action?*** After saying during the first few minutes of a forum that the objective is to work toward a decision, the moderator or someone else may continue to intervene from time to time with questions that move the deliberation toward a choice, always stopping short of pressing for consensus or agreement on a particular solution. Then, as the tensions become evident, as people see how what they consider valuable pulls them in different directions, the moderator tests to see where the group is going by asking such questions as:

* Which direction seems best?
* Where do we want this policy to take us?
* What tradeoffs are we willing and unwilling to accept?
* If the policy we seem to favor had the negative consequences some fear, would we still favor it?
* What are we willing and unwilling to do as individuals or as a community in order to solve this problem?

**Questions with a Purpose**

Perhaps one of the most important jobs of a moderator is to ask good questions. Questions like, “What do you think?” or “Do you agree with this statement?” do not encourage people to think *deeply* about their own opinions and the impacts they might have on others. Instead, questions should serve specific, intended purposes. Consider the following types of questions and the examples provided.

**Questions that connect the policy issue to the lives and concerns of real people**

* Could you illustrate how this issue is touching the lives of most of us in the community?
* What makes this issue real for us?
* What evidence do you see that this is something that is important to all of us?

**Questions that ask participants to weigh the costs and consequences of each approach**

* What might be the effects of your approach on others?
* Could you identify those things that are important to us that seem to be clashing?
* In a positive light, what seems to be most important to those who are attracted to this approach?
* Also, for those who think negatively about this approach, what seems to be their concern?

**Questions to ensure a fair and balanced examination of all potential effects**

[NOTE: “Balanced” does not necessarily mean listing an equal number of advantages and disadvantages for each approach. An approach could have many disadvantages but still have greater value because of one or two accompanying advantages.]

* What would be the consequences of doing what you are suggesting?
* What would be an argument against the choice you like best?
* Is there a downside to this course of action?
* Can anyone think of something constructive that might come from this approach, which is receiving so much criticism?

**Questions that ask participants to weigh the costs they are willing to accept in order to achieve the results they want**

* Can you live with the consequences?
* Would you give up \_\_\_\_\_ in order to achieve \_\_\_\_\_?
* What costs are at stake and can we live with them?
* What do you see as the tension among the approaches?
* What are the gray areas? Where is there ambiguity?
* Why is this issue so difficult to decide?

**Questions that probe each participant's statement until others can understand what he or she believes should be done and why he or she thinks it should be done**

* What does that mean to you?
* Why does that choice appeal to you?
* What is important about taking this direction?
* Can you give an example of how that might work out?

**Questions that encourage the speaker to make a connection between the actions he or she would advocate and what is important to him or her**

* Could you live with the actions being considered?
* Would you be willing to have that action apply to everyone?
* What is most valuable to you or to those who support that action?
* If we did what you have suggested, could you explain how that might impact your life?

**Questions that promote interaction among participants instead of just between the moderator and the participants**

* Does that bring up anything for anyone?
* That gets us started, so how do you respond?
* Could someone give an example to illustrate what was just said?
* Allow silence. Someone will respond.
* Move back out of the circle.

**Questions that give the participants an opportunity to identify what they have heard, to recognize a shared understanding of the issue, and/or to acknowledge a common ground for action**

**The Art of Paraphrasing (CPD)**

* What actions did you hear that you think we could not accept or live with?
* What trade-offs are you unwilling to accept?
* What seemed important to all of us?
* Suppose we cannot have everything. What are we willing and unwilling to do as individuals or as a community in order to solve this problem?
* Is there some action we could all live with?
* Have we come to some common ground to support certain actions? What are those actions?
* Which direction seems best?
* Where do we want this policy to take us?

**Purposes of paraphrasing**

* Shows you are listening and thus shows them that what they are saying is important
* Helps solidify your role as impartial facilitator (so your paraphrases need to be fair and nonjudgmental)
* Checks meaning and interpretation of a message
* Helps people more clearly express themselves
* Helps equalize contributions (those that are more eloquent do not gain as much an advantage)
* Helps others understand each other better (your paraphrase may be the key to others getting what the original speaker meant)
* Gives them a chance to clarify their points (they realize they aren’t explaining themselves well)
* Helps them evaluate their own feelings (your paraphrase may actually teach them about themselves – “yeah, I guess that is what I meant….”)
* Helps notetakers capture a summary
* Can help shift the discussion to a deeper level (move from positions to interests)
* Can help shift the discussion from a tense/emotional level to a more understanding level (especially when you paraphrase and take out “inflammatory statements”)
* Helps you keep present in the conversation and paying attention

**Perils of Paraphrasing**

* You can easily get too caught up in paraphrasing everything, making it more about you than them.
* Paraphrasing encourages more back and forth between you and the speaker, rather than the speaker and the rest of the group.
* People may get the impression that you are implying you speak better than they do.
* You may only capture part of what they are trying to say
* You may miss the main point and they may not feel comfortable correcting you

Be sure to paraphrase in a manner that allows the participant to feel overly comfortable disagreeing with your paraphrase. Do not paraphrase matter-of-factly (“You mean that…”), always paraphrase with qualifiers (“What I am hearing is…is that right?”; “So do you mean that…”; “Would you say then that…”; etc.

Facilitators can also utilize the participant, the notetakers or the other members to help paraphrase, particularly by relying on the need to capture the thought well on the notes. You can ask the person to summarize for the notes (“How could we write that briefly and still capture your concerns?”) or ask others (“Could someone try to paraphrase that for me so we can get that down?”). If you as the facilitator are not following a comment—and you think it is important—be honest. Ask for help to make sure the comment is captured and appreciated.

# **Forum Recording**

**Purpose of Recording**

* To help establish that what the participants say is valued and being listened to
* To remind forum participants of their comments, agreements, and action items, particularly to during the reflections time.
* To support the importance of equality and inclusion. Comments are captured regardless of the source, and the author is not identified.
* To serve as a reference document for future forums
* To facilitate the writing of the report that will inform a wider audience of the discussion, decisions, and actions

**Qualities of Effective Recording**

• Brief • Clear

• Legible • Accurate

• Well organized • Uses active verbs

• Reports the appropriate amount of information

• Captures the tensions, trade-offs and common ground for action

• Notes are distributed soon after the forum

• Treat each person’s contribution with equal respect. It is not your role to determine the value of a comment, but rather to capture the discussion.

**Suggestions from Kaner’s *Facilitators Guide to Participatory Decision-Making\****

* Print in capital letters 2 to 4” tall
* Make think-lined letters
* Write straight up and down
* Close your letters (don’t leave gaps in B’s and P’s, for example)
* Use plain, block letters
* Practice makes perfect
* Alternate colors between speakers, but don’t use too many colors on one page
* Don’t crowd the bottom of the page

**Additional suggestions**

* Use their words as much as possible.
* If you plan on using “dot voting” at the end of the forum, be sure to leave some space for the dots. You may also want to draw lines between the separate comments
* Be sure to label the sheets before you take them down.
* Have a pen or pencil handy to write additional clarification comments if necessary. Have recorders add comments to the sheets before they are taken down.
* Moderators and recorders should discuss beforehand how they will work together, especially concerning how much the recorders will interact with the participants.

**Interactions between Moderators and Recorders**

This likely needs to be discussed beforehand, because different moderators and recorders have different styles, and those styles have different pros and cons.

Some interact frequently. Ultimately, the moderator is in charge, and she/he should to some extent be “in charge” of the notetaking. They need to make sure that thoughts are being captured and captured well. Before moving on to the next speaker, a quick peek at the notes to doublecheck can be important. If the recorders completely miss something and the moderators move on, the participants may feel nobody thought it was important. We don’t make those judgments. It is the group’s memory, not our memory of what we thought was important.

Moderators can certainly help the recorders, particularly in paraphrasing and summarizing comments to make it easy for the recorders.

Some recorders are semi-moderators. They may interact more with the participants, asking clarification questions or for the participants to sum up. Moderators and recorders don’t want to be competing or talking over each other, but both can work to insure that everything is being captured well.

As a moderator, be careful simply assuming that the recorders are capturing everything well.

As a moderator, make sure the participants feel comfortable correcting or helping recorders. At the beginning when you explain your role and the role of the recorders, mention to them to speak up if they feel their point was not clearly captured.

**Tips for Organizing Information at the End of a Forum**

* At the CPD, we clearly mark all pages while they are on the wall, and then take digital photographs of each. It is much easier to type up the notes from photographs than handling the paper itself. We still keep the paper until the notes are typed, in case they are needed for clarification.

* Remove group memory from walls.
* Put sheets in order and number the pages.
* Review each page to check titles and section headings.
* Make sure writing is legible and sentences make sense.
* Roll up group memory pages.
* Label outside with group name and date
* Deliver to person responsible for producing minutes (which may be you!)