

# FACILITATION 101



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For Hamilton, For Ever

THE HAMILTON  
SPECTATOR

August 2009

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Why was this training & publication created?

June 2008 - Youth Engagement & Action in Hamilton (YEAH) held a check-in with the broader community to evaluate whether the first year of program operation was effectively engaging the youth of Hamilton. Youth were recruited to be facilitators during the small group discussions at the check-in. Feedback from the youth made it clear that they wanted more opportunities to facilitate as it was an empowering experience that doubled as a chance to earn money. Our response to this expression of interest from youth has been to work with youth in the creation of this manual and the complimentary training sessions that are being piloted in 2009.

## Acknowledgements

The development of this manual was led by Mandark Gandhi – a young person hired for this project through the generous support of the 2009 Summer Experience Program of the Government of Ontario.

A very special thank you to the members of the youth advisory group that guided the development of the training content through the sharing of their ideas, experiences, and expertise: Lisa Carbonara, Katie Chisholm, Sharron Guest, Rohit Jain, John Murphy, Sadie Simon, and Nastasha Zimmerman.



Thank you to the members of the Youth Engagement Network of Youth Engagement & Action in Hamilton (YEAH) for providing valuable insights from the perspective of the service provider.

The YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington/Brantford and Youth Engagement & Action in Hamilton (YEAH) gratefully acknowledges funding for this project provided by the Ontario Trillium Foundation – an agency of the Government of Ontario.

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# INTRODUCTION

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## WHAT IS A FACILITATOR?

**A facilitator's job is to make things easier and/or operate smoothly to achieve a goal.** Most facilitation scenarios you will be dealing with will involve supporting a group discussion or a project-based group. This short manual focuses on facilitating discussions but these concepts can be applied to other types of facilitation as well.

## ROLE:

- ❖ It is the responsibility of the group members to assume roles within a group but when a role is missing or lacking, a facilitator must identify this and step in. Since facilitators are sometimes doubling up on roles that already exist within a group, becoming trained as a facilitator will make you a better group member as it will make you more aware of group process.
- ❖ Help the group take ownership of their process, while still being available when the group needs guidance.
- ❖ Guide process instead of teaching or leading.
- ❖ Help focus and structure the discussion.
- ❖ Trigger the group to work effectively. This can be done through observation of group behaviour and open ended questions.
- ❖ Help the group members come together and work towards a product of their maximum potential.

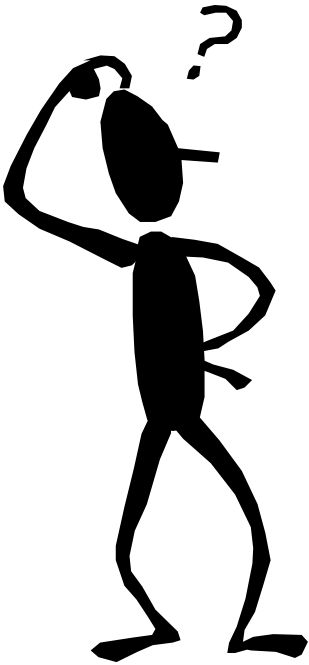


*Before beginning, it is important to note that there is no one way to facilitate.*

*Facilitators must facilitate according to the size of the group, objectives of the program, length of program, the actual people in the group and physical location.*

# INTRODUCTION

## WHY ARE FACILITATORS NEEDED?



Often in a group, members become focused on the content and ignore the process that they are going through. However, for a group to be considered high-functioning, members must be aware of both content and process. Being aware of both content and process allows group members to be used to their maximum potential, which allows the group to create the best possible product. A “product” could be anything from an agreed course of action to a simple decision to support something. In groups where process is being neglected, it is often helpful to have a facilitator present to make the group aware of issues involving the group’s process that need more attention.

Facilitators :

- ❖ Are inclusive and engage everyone in the group.
- ❖ Ensure everyone participates equally.
- ❖ Maximize the potential of teamwork.
- ❖ Make participants feel as though their contributions are valued.
- ❖ Allow for the group to work more effectively and efficiently.
- ❖ Help to explore new ideas and encourage new approaches to tackling issues/decisions.

**Group Process:** The steps taken to accomplish a task. This includes aspects such as the relationship between group members, the interactions within the group, the roles that each member plays in accomplishing the task & how decisions are made. Placing importance on group process can strengthen the group’s product.

**Examples of Roles:** Conflict mediator, time keeper, recorder, encourager, energizer, evaluator, equalizer.

**An Example of Group Process:** A group is so focused on their final product that they don’t realize that one member is not participating in discussions. They are losing valuable contributions that he/she may have to offer. If greater attention is placed on process, the group can identify this and find out why the individual is not contributing to the discussion. Something as simple as the speed of the discussion could have been preventing valuable ideas from being put on the table. By using each group member to their fullest potential and building off one another, a group is able to create products of their greatest potential.

# **FACILITATOR TRAITS**

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## **HOW SHOULD YOU BEHAVE?**



- ✓ **Be enthusiastic**
  - ↪ Bring your energy to the table and encourage others to be active.
- ✓ **Be confident**
  - ↪ Know your stuff and be prepared.
- ✓ **Be open**
  - ↪ Accept new ideas and listen to new approaches.
- ✓ **Be supportive**
  - ↪ Acknowledge all participation even if you do not agree.
- ✓ **Be patient**
  - ↪ Sometimes techniques you've learned won't work on the group that you are facilitating. Stay calm and try to find another means of getting through to the group.
- ✓ **Be flexible**
  - ↪ Each group is different and may need to be facilitated differently.
- ✓ **Be a role model**
  - ↪ Model behaviour of an effective group member so that others may learn.
- ✓ **Be self-aware of your actions and your comments**
  - ↪ You should not be taking sides in conflict or in issues regarding the content of the discussion. Your role is to help the group work through their issues while allowing them take ownership of it.

# FACILITATOR TIPS

## WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

- ✓ Create an open & accepting atmosphere
  - ✦ The group should feel safe to share any and all of their ideas/thoughts/comments.
- ✓ Set a relaxed and open tone
  - ✦ Get the group comfortable, ask how the physical setting can be changed to make people feel comfortable. Example: Moving tables and chairs.
- ✓ Encourage the establishment of expectations
  - ✦ Examples: Stay focused, alert and interested in discussion, maintain eye contact with all participants, listen carefully and encourage participation.
- ✓ Focus on the group process rather than the content
  - ✦ Provide friendly reminders to the group when they aren't focusing enough on their group process.
- ✓ Observe individual/group behaviour & body language
  - ✦ By observing behaviour you can spot group issues and try to address them appropriately.
- ✓ Provide focus & direction when the group gets "lost" or off topic
  - ✦ Help clarify where the group wants to go and/or where the group is in their discussion.
- ✓ Encourage the evaluation of statements made
  - ✦ Encourage participants to question the strength of their statements or thinking. Probing questions can be used to reveal their line of thinking.
- ✓ Remain impartial in discussions
  - ✦ Your personal views for the content do not need to be shared. It is the group's responsibility to contribute the content, not yours.
- ✓ Manage participation
  - ✦ Prevent aggression, encourage passive members to speak up, and make sure members speak one at a time so that all contributions are heard.
- ✓ Summarize key points in discussion or ask others to do so
- ✓ Keep track of the timeline for discussion
- ✓ Take breaks
  - ✦ A quick break can re-energize a group. Lengthy meetings can be very exhausting.
- ✓ Allow for periods of silence
  - ✦ Sometimes group members need a little more time to reflect on their thoughts or figure out what is being asked and may be waiting for the right opportunity to speak up.



# **FACILITATOR TIPS**

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## **WHAT SHOULD YOU AVOID DOING?**

- ✘ Read from a script
  - ↳ If you are too prepared, you won't leave enough room for flexibility. Unpredictable circumstances will always arise and you cannot plan for them. Being too rigid will disconnect you from the group.
- ✘ Push personal agendas and opinions as the “right” answer
- ✘ Dominate the group
  - ↳ Prompt the group but let them work out some of the issues on their own.
- ✘ Favour certain people/sub-groups within the group
  - ↳ Create an inclusive environment where everyone's opinions and ideas can be shared and valued.
- ✘ Be judgemental
- ✘ Downplay ideas
  - ↳ Be supportive of all contributions even if you don't agree with a certain point or idea.
- ✘ Make up answers to questions to which you do not know the answer
  - ↳ Be honest with the group if you don't know something. They will respect your honesty and will place more trust in you.
- ✘ Allow bullying of group members to occur
  - ↳ Bullying should be stopped immediately. It can hurt people on a personal level and is completely unacceptable.
- ✘ Tell inappropriate or offensive stories
  - ↳ Your role is to keep things comfortable for all participants and to maintain a professional standard.



# STARTING A MEETING

## HOW CAN YOU PREPARE?

- ❖ You don't have to have an in depth knowledge regarding the topic but you should have a rough idea by speaking to the organizer, doing some research about the topic or group and asking people questions.
- ❖ Prepare yourself according to the topic, location, group size and group members. These will dictate which activities are appropriate and how you may want to structure your facilitation.
- ❖ Make sure you speak with the person organizing the group that you are facilitating before the start date so that you can get information such as: exactly what they expect from you, if they expect you to bring anything, what topics will be discussed, a rough outline of the day's events, what types of people are attending the facilitation session and potential next steps for the group.
- ❖ Be sure to bring or make arrangements for any materials/supplies that you will need for activities that you will be running. Examples: A ball for an icebreaker or chart paper and markers for recording.



# STARTING A MEETING

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## HOW SHOULD YOU BEGIN A MEETING?

- ❖ **Introductions** - Introduce yourself, your role, the task for the day and what the expected outcome is.
- ❖ **Roles** - Make certain that everyone understands their roles for participation.
- ❖ **Clarification** - Share the agenda and any other information with the group. Be sure to ask if there are any questions that need answers before beginning.
- ❖ **Icebreakers** - When a group is forming, it may be difficult to have people open up because most people don't like openly sharing personal information or opinions. Icebreakers can be used to remedy this. They are fun activities that get everyone in the group involved. They give group members a chance to mingle while introducing and learning more about each other (See page 10).
  - ↳ Depending on the reaction, it may be appropriate to lead another ice breaker just to keep everyone "loose".
- ❖ **Clarify Expectations** - Ask everyone why they are there and what they hope to achieve from the meeting. This can help align expectations and avoid future conflict.
- ❖ **Group Rules** - Before starting the discussion, set some ground rules as a group so that everyone is clear on how they are expected to behave. Instead of listing off all of your expectations, have the group come up with their own rules. This way, they will feel more attachment to them and be more likely to comply with them. If you notice any major missing rules, you can suggest them to the group and see if they want to adopt them.
  - ↳ Key topics will include: decision making, full participation, inclusion, willingness to take risks, safe space, confidentiality, respect, tone of sharing.
  - ↳ The "ouch rule" can be implemented – when someone says something offensive you say "ouch" so that the issue can be discussed.
  - ↳ Members should be able to call for time-outs. This allows group members to stop the group and ask for something to be dealt with before proceeding. The facilitator would need to guide this process through mediation.
  - ↳ Ask the group if it would be helpful to re-read the group rules before each group session or after breaks during longer sessions.

# ICE BREAKERS

## WHAT IS AN ICE BREAKER?



An ice breaker is an activity that helps to create a more open and relaxed atmosphere while having people in the group get to know one another better. This includes learning group members' names, their interests and their backgrounds. Ice breakers should be fun and fully inclusive. Below are two examples:

### NAME CHAIN

Go around the circle having group members take turns introducing themselves. The catch is that everyone must introduce themselves using an adjective beginning with the first letter of their first name and you must reintroduce everyone that was introduced before you.

#### Example:

“I’m Silly Sarah”

“I’m Daring Dorothy and that’s Silly Sarah.”

“I’m Generous George, that’s Daring Dorothy and that’s Silly Sarah.”

Continue until everyone has been introduced. Challenge group members to rhyme off all names quickly!

### CLUMPS

Have the group mingle with one another. When you feel it appropriate, instruct the group to create a sub-group with people according to a particular physical or personal characteristic. Examples: Eye colour, month of birth or number of siblings. Please note that characteristics cannot be discriminatory. Once everyone is in a sub-group, ask them a question that they can be discussed within their sub-groups. Possible questions are listed below. When it looks like everyone is finished discussing, instruct the group to start mingling again. Repeat the activity until you are out of time or the group wants to move on.

- What is your favourite cartoon (or cartoon character)?
- Who do you most admire?
- What animal is most like your personality?
- What would you do with \$100,000?
- What do you hope to be doing in 10 years?
- Create a \_\_\_\_\_ using only your bodies. (Groups can create animals, appliances, furniture or anything else that is appropriate and entertaining).



**Youth Engagement & Action in Hamilton (YEAH) has a free collection of activities available upon request. See Page 19 for contact information.**

# COMMUNICATION

## COMMUNICATION:

Effective communication is vital to any group work. It's especially important when you are the facilitator because you need to model effective communication practices while facilitating effective communication between group members.



### *Listening:*

- ✓ Face the speaker
- ✓ Maintain eye contact
- ✓ Ask questions if something isn't clear
- ✓ Nod to let the speaker know you are listening
- ✓ Keep an open mind even if you don't agree with what the speaker is saying

### *Two way communication:*

- ✓ Speaking, responding and asking questions. This leads to fewer misunderstandings, creates opportunities for clarification, and group members will feel important and valued when time is taken for them to speak and to be listened to.

## NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION:

Non-verbal communication is just as important as verbal communication. It is important to try to send the right signals with your body language and avoid inappropriate signals.

### *Try To:*

- ✓ Maintain eye contact
- ✓ Smile
- ✓ Sit still
- ✓ Lean forward

### *Try not to:*

- ✗ Look away from the speaker/group
- ✗ Glance to the side
- ✗ Sigh or yawn
- ✗ Fidget
- ✗ Frown

# DECISION MAKING

## HOW WILL THE GROUP MAKE DECISIONS?

It's important for the group to establish a way to make decisions because they will face many decision making situations regardless of what they are doing or discussing. Have the group discuss the following options to see which they would like to use. You can also allow for group members to make suggestions about how to make decisions. In the end, the whole group must agree with the decision making model that will be used.

### *Consensus*

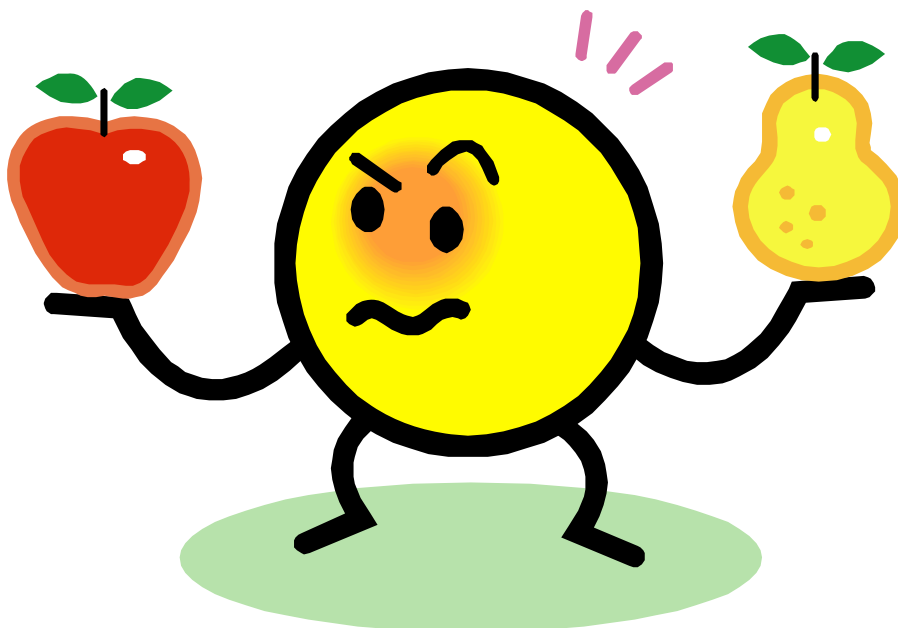
- All group members must agree. Issues are discussed until all members agree on an option.

### *Majority*

- The decision reflects the views of most of the people in the group.
- The minority group does not get their way.
- This method is especially dangerous when members of the majority lead the discussion and decision making. Minority members may be excluded from the decisions. This could lead to group issues down the road.

### *Compromise*

- Issues are discussed and a compromise is made. Neither party gets completely what they want but both parties get something.
- This may take less time than consensus, while still valuing everyone's input.



# GENERATING IDEAS

## HOW CAN YOU GET THE GROUP TO GENERATE IDEAS?

- ❖ Asking open-ended questions is an effective way to get a group talking.
- ❖ If you are having trouble getting all members to participate, you can have everyone take a turn to contribute to the discussion.
- ❖ Alternatively, a rule can be implemented where no one contributes twice until everyone has contributed once.
- ❖ Group members can be told to think on their own, write down their ideas and then contribute them to the group brainstorm when the discussion restarts.
- ❖ Someone can record what is being brainstormed so that an idea or action can be selected later for further attention.

**Open-Ended Questions** - Allows the response to be as long as the responder wants. The questions are broad enough not to lead the response.

- ❖ “What is your perspective on the issue?”
- ❖ “What are some alternative solutions to this issue?”
- ❖ “Describe how the group will be making decisions.”

**Closed-Ended Questions** - Only allows for a one word or short response. They can also be leading in creating a response.

- ❖ “Do you agree?”
- ❖ “Do you understand?”
- ❖ “Is the group going to make decisions using majority voting?”

### Narrowing

- ❖ To narrow down a list of ideas, have the group categorize items and put similar options together.
- ❖ Similarly, a prioritizing technique can be used to narrow down options. Members can rank their top three choices for priority.
- ❖ Narrowing doesn't have to be used to pick one option but rather to eliminate the weaker options if the group agrees. Now, efforts and further discussion can focus on a few of the popular choices.

### Selecting

- ❖ You can use consensus, majority or compromise decision making to select an area of focus. In using these models you can apply a number of techniques that will help with selection. Examples: Picking out of a hat, electing a leader to make the final decision, etc.
- ❖ **Red Light, Yellow Light, Green Light** is a tool that could be used to see where everyone stands on a decision (**Red** = Disagree; **Yellow** = Proceed with caution; **Green** = Agree).
- ❖ Once the decision is put forth, try negative polling to see if anyone has issues with what has been selected. Example: “Is anyone not okay with \_\_\_\_\_?”



## WHY IS RECORDING IMPORTANT?



To ensure everyone is on the same page, it is sometimes helpful to have discussion points summarized. You can either have a group member do this or do it yourself but this is difficult because it will take away from your focus on facilitating the discussion. In most scenarios, the person who has organized the group that you are facilitating will have an assigned recorder in the group so that you won't have to worry about recording.

### Advantages of a record:

- ❖ Group members don't have to rely on memory to recall previous contributions or decisions.
- ❖ It provides a point of reference during discussion, which is helpful in the process of building on ideas.
- ❖ It provides information to members who missed the discussion.
- ❖ It provides an action plan for next steps.

### In case you do have to record, here are some tips:

- ❖ Write what was said; not the general idea in your own words.
- ❖ If unsure of what was said, ask for clarification.
- ❖ Write clearly and large enough for everyone to see.
- ❖ Check in with the group from time to time to see if information is being recorded properly.

# **CONFLICT**

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## **IS CONFLICT BAD?**

- ❖ Conflict is a normal part of group work and so you must be prepared to deal with it when it arises.
- ❖ Not all conflict is bad. If handled correctly, some conflict can end up being beneficial to the group's process because it allows people to communicate their ideas and work on understanding each others' perspectives. When we understand conflict, we are strengthened by our differences.

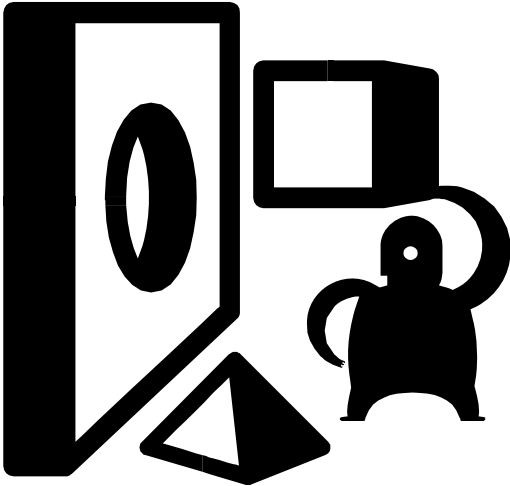
## **HOW DO PEOPLE DEAL WITH CONFLICT?**

- ❖ Some people choose to avoid conflict.
- ❖ Some people choose to accommodate other people's needs while ignoring their own.
- ❖ The best method of dealing with conflict would be to collaborate so that everyone's needs can be addressed and everyone "wins". While this is ideal, it cannot always be achieved very quickly. A break can be taken from a discussion involving conflict so that members can "cool off" and have time to reflect on the issue. If this method is used, you must take careful note to return to the topic of conflict so that the issue is not forgotten and it can be resolved.

## **WHAT CAN YOU DO TO MEDIATE CONFLICT?**

- ❖ Ensure that both parties are afforded the opportunity to speak without interruption.
- ❖ Make sure both parties take time to understand each others' positions. This can be done by having each party restate the other party's view in their own words.
- ❖ Try to help identify the source of the conflict if it is not clear. Examples: A contentious issue, a personality difference, a miscommunication.
- ❖ Encourage members to provide alternative solutions rather than restricting themselves to picking one or the other.
- ❖ Encourage group members to keep their comments constructive and respectful. Make sure that members focus their criticism on the issues and not on the people with whom they disagree.
- ❖ Ensure that all points are being acknowledged and not ignored.
- ❖ Personal conflicts often arise from unclear expectations. This can be resolved through proper communication. Dealing with issues involving individual people requires communication to clear up any confusion or misinterpretations.
- ❖ If the conflict has developed due to a violation of the initially agreed upon group rules, point this out to the group. They may be able to help solve the issues.

# COMMON PROBLEMS



## ONE MEMBER IS DOMINATING THE DISCUSSION

- ❖ Prompt other members to contribute to the discussion.
- ❖ Use non-verbal signals that do not encourage the dominator.
- ❖ If it gets serious, you can speak to the individual in private but be sure to thank them for their contributions. Suggest to them that the rest of the group needs an opportunity to speak as well. Be careful not to offend the dominant member because their contributions are valuable to the group as well.

## A MEMBER DOES NOT PARTICIPATE FREELY IN DISCUSSIONS

- ❖ Be patient.
- ❖ Ice breakers and other group activities can help the individual become more comfortable.
- ❖ Ask to hear from everyone.
- ❖ Ask the person direct questions on topics which you know they have expertise.
- ❖ Make sure you are allowing time for people to respond.
  - ↳ Check for non verbal cues that indicate that a person is ready to speak.
  - ↳ Provide appropriate pauses so that quieter members have a chance to jump in.
- ❖ Use “round robin,” which requires every member of the group to participate in sequence. This technique puts people “on the spot” so it should be used carefully.
- ❖ Thank the individual for participating when they do contribute and comment on the positives of their contributions to encourage further input. Be careful not to make it seem like you are favouring the quiet individual. This can be done by making positive comments after other individuals contribute as well.
- ❖ If all else fails, you can speak to the individual in private to see what the problem is and how you can help address it.



# COMMON PROBLEMS

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## A GROUP IS UNABLE TO MAKE A DECISION

- ❖ Make sure that all members understand and agree on how group decisions are being made.
- ❖ Make sure that all members are participating in the decision making.
- ❖ Ask the group if revisiting the issue at a later point in time would be helpful. Sometimes final decisions aren't made through one discussion.
- ❖ Ask what the group sees as advantages and consequences to each option and/or if there are any alternatives that haven't been considered.



## THE DISCUSSION LACKS FOCUS AND DOES NOT MOVE FORWARD

- ❖ Check in with the group to see how engaged they are.
- ❖ Tell the group that they are off topic from what was originally agreed upon for discussion. Ask the group if they would like to continue in that direction or get back to what was originally agreed upon to discuss.
- ❖ Sometimes members don't realize that the group is off topic and pointing it out can help them focus.
- ❖ A quick, five minute break or short icebreaker/teambuilding activity can energize the group.

## LACK OF INTEREST, NO ONE WANTS TO SPEAK, ONLY A FEW PEOPLE ARE PARTICIPATING

- ❖ People need time to think, reflect, and get ready to speak.
- ❖ If the pacing of the discussion is too fast for individuals to jump in, they may become uninterested. To stimulate these members into the discussion, watch for verbal and non-verbal cues and respond to them accordingly.
- ❖ If the entire group seems uninterested, ask the group what is going on. Learning about how a group is feeling can help determine your course of action.
- ❖ Have group members break off into partners to discuss a topic and report back to the larger group.
- ❖ The discussion may be a "dead issue" and no further consideration is required. Move on to the next topic or end the discussion and/or group.

# FEEDBACK

## DEBRIEF/FEEDBACK

Feedback is crucial to improvement. As a result, it is important to check in with the group to find out about how you are doing as well as how the group feels about their process and progress. Before this is implemented, it is important to discuss appropriate forms of feedback with the group so that comments are kept constructive and respectful. Some examples of how to get feedback include the following:

- ❖ Individuals can take turns to identify something positive from the meeting as well as something that could be improved or changed for next time. This can identify some of the strengths and weakness of your facilitation and of the group discussion.
- ❖ Members can discuss their favourite part of the meeting and/or what they learned.
- ❖ If people aren't comfortable giving verbal feedback, they could fill out a written evaluation that has been prepared in advance.



# CLOSING

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## WRAP-UP:

- ❖ Check in with the group to see if there are any final thoughts on the discussion.
  - ❖ Share the next steps for the group and individuals if you know what they are.
  - ❖ Thank everyone for their time and energy.
  - ❖ Return any supplies you may have borrowed from the person organizing the group that you are facilitating.
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**Other Icebreakers & Team Builders can be found at the following links:  
(Links are active as of August 2009)**

<http://www.thesource4ym.com/GAMES/>

<http://www.whoseline.net/show/games.html>

<http://www.ultimatecampresource.com/site/camp-activities/cooperative-games.page-1.html>

<http://wilderdom.com/games/index2.html>

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***For more information about the Youth Facilitator Training Program,  
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**Youth Engagement & Action in Hamilton (YEAH) seeks to engage youth, aged 13 - 25, as leaders of today who have a wealth of knowledge and skills to contribute to the city in which they live, work, and play. Recognizing that Hamilton cannot be strong and complete without the involvement of our youth, we facilitate connections, offer support for the engagement of youth, and provide youth with opportunities for meaningful participation.**

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