

# A FACILITATOR'S GUIDE: WHAT YOU WILL WANT TO KNOW

Developed by the  
Women4Change Civics,  
Civility, & Consensus  
program.

**When you have the responsibility of facilitating a meeting or a series of meetings, it is important to have an understanding of how groups form and develop, the specific purpose for which the group exists, and the roles and responsibilities you will take on in order for the group to form its task.**

## I. GROUP DEVELOPMENT

All groups have two major functions: Task and Maintenance. To address the task function the facilitator needs to ask what is the purpose of the group and what is the contract for getting it accomplished? The Maintenance function addresses how the group will engage and how it will work together to accomplish the task. In a training group the facilitator has already communicated the goals and objectives, but they must always check in with the participants to ensure that their expectations and what has been planned are in agreement. There are five major phases in a group, and they require certain behavior from the facilitator so the group can reach maturity.

### A. FORMING

This first phase is one in which members are introducing themselves and figuring out how much to reveal. They tend to be tentative in how much to share. In a way they are trying to find out whether they are a fit with the group experiencing uncertainty and an ambiguity. They don't yet have relationships with others in the group and may not know the facilitator either except through reputation. The usual concerns at the beginning are whether they will they be able to commit, and whether they will be able stay or leave. Members desire to be accepted by all members of the group. Controversy and conflicts are almost always avoided as members begin to know others in the group and gain an understanding of what the group is going to do together.

At this stage, group members want to know what is expected of them, how the group is going to operate, and what is acceptable. The forming stage articulates the group's purpose; obtains agreement on how the group will be organized, who will be responsible for what, a discussion of the group's goals, the schedule of the work, and the norms/ground rules, meeting times and the resources needed.

The role of the facilitator is more directive in this phase in terms of sharing the goals and objectives, norms and structure. However, this is also a phase of contract setting and the facilitator is responsible for helping members to share their expectations and goals, determine alignment and agreement between what has been planned and what is needed; and to arrive at agreement with and commitment to norms. This negotiation is very important and is what we call contract setting.

## B. STORMING

The second stage of group development is the storming stage. The storming stage occurs when group members have an understanding of the work and feel a sense of belonging, trust and connection to others. They are more able to risk dissent as they recognize that not everyone shares the same perspective and may be in conflict.

This is when the more verbal group members exercise voice and power, and those who are less so can become silent and have difficulty being heard. There will be members who will test their and others leadership and authority. This is an important developmental sign; however, it is important to be able to differentiate the need to assume more responsibility for what is going on in the group versus being counter dependent and rebellious toward formal authority. The rules, policies, norms, member responsibilities, structure are scrutinized and are often challenged. These are expected behaviors and the facilitator will need to directly address them so that the group can as well and accomplish its work. This requires the facilitator's competence in conflict management and resolution skills is essential as well as their clarity about the work and their role.

### THE QUESTION GROUP MEMBERS ASK:

**"Am I in or am I out?"**  
> **Safety and Membership**

### THE QUESTION GROUP MEMBERS ASK:

**"Am I up or am I down?"**  
> **Influence and Power**

## C. NORMING

A third phase - norming - is a time during which the group becomes more cohesive, interdependent, and productive. Members are able to conduct their conversations with greater ease and in congruence with agreed-upon norms. Members are less dependent on the Facilitator for the group's work; dependency on authority is reasonable and appropriate.

The following is a list of potential expectations members may bring to a CCC group. Given the purpose of the CCC initiative, some are appropriate and some are not. This is why making the purpose and goals explicit and enabling group members to articulate their expectations is essential. The facilitator can then make it clear which ones will be able to be met and which ones will not. As you look through this list determine which are appropriate and which are not.

1. To listen to, and seek to understand, other's views which may differ from mine greatly
2. To share personal hurts or injuries experienced in childhood, without judgement
3. To become known personally and deeply by others
4. To practice expressing my views in a civil, respectful manner
5. To make new and lasting friendships
6. To find out things I have in common with the others
7. To learn more about civics and The US Constitution
8. To persuade others of my views—to garner support for causes I support
9. To have a place to really vent my feelings about the times we are living in.
10. To learn what the leaders think, because they are experts and know more than I do.
11. To have a "SAFE PLACE" to explore my own thinking and feelings without danger of harm coming to me.

One of the first jobs of the facilitator is to discover group members' expectations. Those that are not realistic given the purposes and goals and cannot be appropriately met need to be discussed as such and other options given to meet them. If they are not articulated and clarified they cannot be dealt with and likely will end in a clash of expectations and unnecessary conflict. If boundaries have not been negotiated in the Forming phase, trust will be lost. One of the most important responsibilities of a facilitator is to provide safe space.

### III. WHAT MAKES A SPACE SAFE?

#### A. WHAT NEEDS TO BE ASSURED WILL BE PRESENT?

- Respect
- Time to think and speak at my own pace
- Sense of equal worth with all others in the meeting
- Reassurance that I don't have to know it already or have special skills, etc.
- Assurance of confidentiality of all that happens during meeting
- Sincerity and honesty—the assurance that people say what they mean, and mean what they say.
- Gentle encouragement from leaders to participate verbally

**B. WHAT NEEDS TO BE ASSURED WILL BE ABSENT?**

- Danger of someone judging or evaluating me or my behavior or my thoughts, feelings, etc.
- Prejudice and stereotyping of me or a group to which I belong
- Risk of others “putting down” or “disrespecting” what I offer
- Assumptions about me, or my partner, or my friends or family
- Sarcasm
- Humor at my expense—or at anyone’s expense
- Exposure, embarrassment
- Pressure to speak if I want to be quiet

**What are some others?**

**IV. MANAGING EMOTIONALITY**

**DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS.**

Group facilitators should encourage the awareness and expression of feelings and thoughts. There are subtle ways, often not intended, that group facilitators can undermine participants’ ability to feel safe and self-aware of both their thoughts, and their feelings. Here are some ways that any of us could unintentionally thwart members’ safe and free expression of thoughts and feelings.

Using the following categories, label each with a letter:

- A** – let me tell you how to feel
- B** – let me tell you what I feel
- C** – let me tell you about you
- D** – let me tell you about me
- E** – let me tell you what to think
- F** – let me tell you what I think
- G** – diminish or close down member’s contribution
- H** – let me correct you / let me play expert / judge

| Group member                                | Group leader                               | Your notes |
|---|--|------------|
| I just get so furious when I watch the news | I’m sure we all do                         |            |
| I feel hopeless                             | If we get the vote out, that’s what counts |            |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| I feel they are lying to us   | That's not a feeling—that's a thought                                     |  |
| I don't know if I'm making the best decision for myself   | Of course, you are! If it's your decision, then it's right for you!       |  |
| Everyone else always seems to know what I should do   | Isn't that infuriating?   |  |
| How would you handle it?  | Well, here's what I would do...   |  |
| I feel guilty because I can't wait for my son to leave for college                                  | Don't you think that's natural for parents at times?                      |  |
| I'm afraid if I express my opinion on this, I'll be the only one in the room who sees it like this. | Oh, I'm sure that's not true  |  |
| I saw a child get dropped off for school with ___ and I felt so sad for that child                  | What kind of a mother would let a child even out of the house with _____? |  |
| Create some more examples from your own experience!   |   |  |

## V. CONSTRUCTIVE COMMUNICATION

### A. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN "I"-STATEMENTS AND "YOU"-STATEMENTS

Everyone in the social sciences, and especially in facilitation or therapeutic circles, uses the term “I statement” as if everyone knows what that is. But it's good to spell it out for the group members, so all have the same understanding.

An “I” message or “I” statement is a style of speaking that intends to share or focus on the feelings or beliefs of the speaker—and deliberately **not** be about the listener.

In such statements, the speaker “owns” the experience, perception, or feeling they are talking about. In contrast, in a “you” statement style, the speaker does not own their feeling/opinion/experience, but implies it is caused by an outside person or situation.

**Examples of “I” messages/statements:**

- I feel timid and insecure when I’m with people who are expressing strong opinions.
- I feel so stupid when anyone brings up technology, because I think I’m the only one who doesn’t know what they’re talking about.
- I get so angry and frustrated with this system!! have lost all patience!

**Examples of “You” statements:**

- People make me feel insecure when they state strong opinions.
- You make me feel timid when you state your strong opinions.
- I can’t stand it when people have to be so opinionated.

Check out your understanding. Some of these are not crystal clear—but still worth thinking about.

Circle any that are **good** examples of I statements:

1. I think you are brilliant; you always have the most ingenious ideas.
2. I think you not only meant well, you found the perfect solution!
3. I feel stupid because I don't drive, and I have to always ask for a ride.
4. I feel hurt when you ignore me socially; it makes me think that you don't want to be seen with me in public.
5. You make me want to pull my hair out!
6. You make me want to kiss you!
7. You know what...I just want to kiss you.
8. Don't you find it infuriating when a man takes advantage of a woman?
9. I can't imagine why you would act this way.
10. I think you just don't like me, and there's nothing I can do to win your approval because your mind is made up.

See? It's not as simple as the words that are used. If you have any examples from your own life, please share them.

**B. "BUT" VS. "AND"**

**Connecting thoughts with “BUT...” (or “however/nevertheless/yet”)**

When a sentence has a form of “X...Y...Z... BUT A...B...C...”, the speaker has, to some degree, negated the first part of the thought—usually the main thought.



The conjunction "**but**" is used to introduce a phrase or clause contrasting with what has already been mentioned.

**Examples:**

- I love being outdoors, but if there are mosquitos, I hate it.
- I love beef, but not corned beef.
- I believe in total equality of roles for both parents, but it's only natural for the mothers to do more of the child care than the dads.
- I love him, but I don't trust him.
- I believe in freedom of speech, but not when it is hateful of others.

If you don't want to diminish the first thought, and you need a conjunction, try "**and**."

**Examples:**

- I appreciate your perspective on that, and I'd like to share my perspective as well.
- My grandmother had her ways of disciplining children, and I have my ways.
- I think I see why that was so important, and I'd like to move on now to the next person's report.

**C. "YES, BUT..."**

This is a name for a communication pattern in which a person sounds at first like they are agreeing with the other, but within a very short time, expresses a different view. It is often adopted by those who want to be liked, want to seem like they are listening and agreeing, or those who are afraid to disagree openly, so they pretend to agree, at least at first. This pattern isn't about the content of the conversation. It's about the process between the two people: the process of at first agreeing, and then disagreeing. Person A usually ends up feeling "unheard" or discounted.

"Yes, but..." is usually a pattern that had developed over a long period of time, and the person who does this often is completely unaware of their "yes, but..." pattern of communication. Many times it happens when the listener assumes that the speaker wants them to give advice or solve their situation for them—which is a dangerous assumption to make! If you, as a facilitator/listener, fall into a pattern of "Yes, but...", your speaker(s) will eventually feel that you don't care about their feelings, experiences, and opinions—that you can't listen to them without then expressing YOUR feelings, stories, experiences, advice, solutions, etc. Watch for this pattern between members as well.

If the pattern is not identified and stopped, real barriers to honest, open communication are set up. If the listener always seems to "have an answer," the unintended result can be a perception that the listener believes they are superior to the speaker.

### Examples of "Yes, but..." responses:

A: "I just hate it when my teenagers don't listen to me, and roll their eyes, and I can just see it on their faces that they think I am too stupid for words. No matter what I say, they do that."

B: "Yes! That's so awful, and it can be over the simplest thing in the world, too, like—I don't know, just keeping gas in the car, or whatever. Don't you find, though, that if you can slow down, and not be in a hurry, and really listen to them first, before you start talking, that they won't do that? Or at least not as much? I find that works for me, a lot of the time."

A: "I never know what to do when there's a promotion open at work...it's just like a no-win situation for women, I think. On one hand if I do apply for it, then I look ambitious, which can be good, but then if they think I shouldn't have applied, then I look overly confident, or even arrogant, and then that's not good either. If I don't apply for it, then maybe they think I should have but that as a woman who is married with children, I don't have enough drive or commitment to the work to want to step up—I never know what to do, so I ask other people's advice, and then they say, 'Do what you want to do.'"

B: "Yes, that's so true, it's such a double-bind. You don't know how to make the call. As a woman, especially. For men, though, I think it's really the same problem. The reality is that the very same problems and questions are there for them, too. In reality, it's the same for men and women—exactly the same, in my opinion."

### D. AVOID BEING THE FIXER OR THE EXPERT.

In many relationships, especially relationships in which you perceive yourself as the "helper" or the "expert" or the "role model" or the "leader," it is very easy and common to fall into a pattern of offering advice and opinions that were not requested—and therefore, are often not appreciated.

It's very important to have the goals of the relationship, or even a momentary conversation, clear and open. What is **your intention**? What is **theirs**? If someone wants your advice, they will ask for it. When you are tempted to offer your advice, your experience, or solutions, take a deep breath and stop yourself. Wait. See if it is requested first. In some roles, it is inadvisable to give your opinion or advice **even if it is requested**. Examples include therapy and group facilitation where the goal is to bring out the thoughts and feelings of others in a "safe place." Discuss.



**This information is intended to help the facilitators of the CCC groups increase their own skills so they can teach others and increase civil conversations. Please contact Sharon Lemler at [slemler@gmail.com](mailto:slemler@gmail.com) with recommended additions to this resource.**

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