

How to Facilitate a Workshop

All of the effort you and others will put into organizing a workshop has one primary end – learning. The participants will be learning about the workshop topics, about themselves and their AFS roles, and the about the other participants and the organization that binds them together. Your primary role will be facilitating the learning that takes place.

This guide will cover the basics of facilitating an effective workshop. The same that is said of teaching can be said of workshop facilitation. It is both a science and an art. Much of this module will address the “science” of facilitation. There are steps and standards that can be followed in preparing for and running a workshop. These are skills that can be learned and used over and over again. The “art” of facilitating workshops comes from your own inspiration. There are a myriad of creative choices that a facilitator can make when working with participants. As you gain experience, you will see how the science and art continually come together as mutually supportive strands of effective facilitation.

This guide is designed to cover the same topics that are covered in the weekend training session you have participated in. The topics include: preparing for the workshop, facilitating for different learning styles, creating a learning environment, communicating effectively, achieving the workshop goals, and evaluating the results. The contents are designed to be useful reminders as you prepare for and facilitate any workshop, including the student-family liaison modules that are contained in this manual.



Preparing for the Workshop

Preparation is the starting point for your primary role as the facilitator of the workshop. To facilitate a workshop effectively, you will need to plan your approach, become fully familiar with the subject matter, and make creative choices about how you want to facilitate participant learning. Even as you become more experienced, build in preparation time before any workshop. Though the student-family liaison modules in this manual are fully designed workshops, they too require forethought and planning. The many components of preparation are discussed below.

Know Your Topic. The first essential step is to know the topic of the workshop. As a facilitator, you do not have to be an expert, but you do need to have a sound knowledge of the topic you will be covering. The participants will be looking to you for knowledge and skills that they assume you have. It is therefore important to start looking at the subject of the workshop well in advance. As you study the modules provided in this manual, you may become aware of gaps in your knowledge and topics that are less comfortable for you to discuss. You may also read information that contradicts what you thought you knew about a subject. AFS volunteers and staff operate in a complex environment and must absorb a great deal of information, so do not feel inadequate for lacking information. Instead, use these cues as the starting place for further inquiry. Most of the knowledge you need is either contained in AFS manuals, a more experienced AFSer's head, or outside resources. Spending some time researching topics that are less familiar to you will be time well spent because it will increase both your knowledge and your confidence. Valuable background materials for each module in this manual are included in the Training Resources section.

Know Your Audience. After ensuring that you are familiar with the workshop topic, you will want to make sure you know something about the participants in the workshop. If you have been directly involved in recruiting the participants, you will probably have a good idea of the following:

- How many people will be attending the workshop?
- What are the participants' names and where are they from?
- What personal and AFS background do the participants have?
- What expectations will the participants be bringing with them to the workshop?

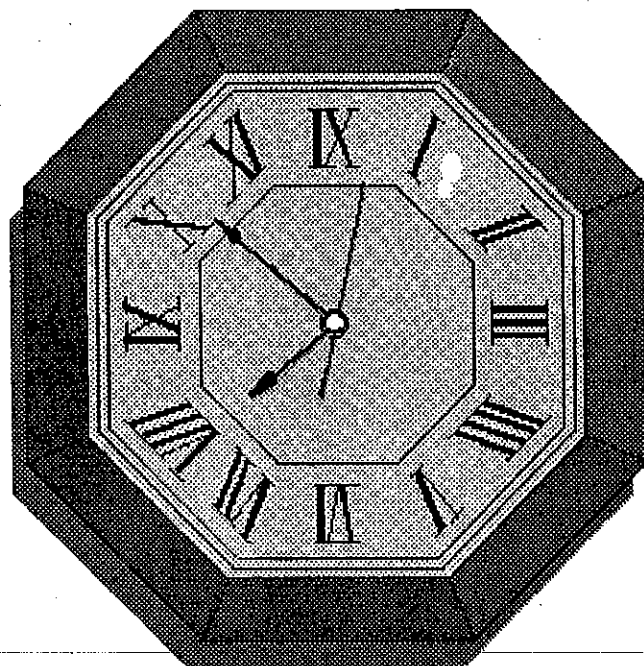
If you have not been directly involved in recruiting the participants, then you will want to talk to someone who has played a key role in doing this. Ask that person to answer the above questions as accurately as possible. Without this level of specific knowledge about your audience, it will be more difficult to prepare yourself to lead a meaningful workshop. With the knowledge, you will meet the participants where they are and have a better chance at satisfying their expectations and needs.

Know Yourself. Effective facilitators understand their own biases, strengths, and weaknesses as facilitators. It is natural for facilitators to have subject matter that they enjoy teaching the most, their own opinions on the subject, and facilitation techniques which are most comfortable for them to use. As part of planning the workshop, you will therefore want to analyze yourself. In order to reach your audience, it is helpful to understand your own preferences and make sure you balance them with the wider needs of your participants. It will also be helpful to you in building your skills as a facilitator to try out perspectives, subject matter, and learning techniques that are different from those you most naturally prefer. Later sections of this module will cover topics that will further illustrate the importance of knowing yourself. As a general guideline, participants will appreciate your self-awareness and your consequent ability to help them look at an issue from multiple angles.

Know Your Timeline. The workshop timeline definitely guides the amount of material you can cover. Part of designing the workshop is deciding how to allot the time available to individual topics so that the greatest breadth and depth of learning takes place. As you prepare, there are several useful questions to consider:

- How much total time do you have for the workshop?
- How many breaks you will need to take?
- What time of day the workshop is taking place and how does this affect participant readiness for learning?
- Can you expect a timely start?
- Can you expect all participants to stay until the designated finish?

The answers to these questions will help guide your use of the available time.



Decide What You Will Cover. Once you know your topic, your audience, yourself, and your timeline, you are ready to decide what you will cover in the workshop. Though the student-family liaison modules in this manual have already been designed, part of their design is choice. In order to fully “own” a workshop, the facilitator must have the freedom to make choices. It is therefore important for facilitators to choose how much time to spend on each topic, which topics to emphasize, and what activities to use as learning tools. Making these choices will enrich the workshop by personalizing it, while still allowing some level of standardization across AFS workshops.

Define goals and desired outcomes. As with subject matter, the student-family liaison modules have been designed with explicit goals and desired outcomes. If you are using the modules, then you will simply be bringing your final touches to the workshop by emphasizing certain goals and outcomes more than others and perhaps by adding goals and outcomes that are not explicit in the design. If you are designing your own workshop, then goals and outcomes are a key step in framing the workshop. They help to guide the choice and clarify the purpose of any material that you plan to include in the workshop. What is covered in a workshop should always be in line with the goals and lead to the desired outcomes. Without these parameters, the workshop might become unfocused and therefore confusing or frustrating to participants.

Develop the workshop outline and learning activities. Once you have the framework of topics to be covered, goals, and outcomes, it is time to piece them together and develop ways to help the participants learn the material. The first step is coming up with an order for the topics to be discussed. You will want your workshop to follow a logical procession that allows topics to build on each other and which is sensible to participants. Next, you will need to figure out all of the details that you want to cover within each topic and write these down. Then, you will want to figure out how the participants will best absorb the details of each topic. The learning activities you select will be the basis of what learning takes place. A variety of learning activities is best because you reach more people with a variety of approaches. In general, adult learners value interactive activities more than lectures, so try to keep lectures short and spaced apart. Finally, you will want to fit the material and learning activities that you plan to use into the available time. Part of this work has already been done in the student-family liaison modules, and part is left to you.

Evaluate the plan for the workshop. Once you have put together the workshop plan that you want to use, let it sit for a day and come back to it. Evaluate it from the perspective of the participants:

- Does each piece of the workshop have a purpose?
- Is the logic of the outline and information to be covered clear?
- Are the learning activities interesting and engaging?
- Are there any significant topics that are missing from the workshop design?
- Are other goals such as getting to know each other accomplished?
- Does the plan fit within the available time?
- Have you as facilitator learned what you need to know about each topic and have you anticipated questions that might arise?
- Will the goals and desired outcomes be accomplished?

If your plan does not meet the standards inherent in these questions, take the time to go back and fix the pieces that need to be fixed. More than one review may be necessary before you are satisfied.

Practice. At the same time as you are designing the workshop and evaluating it, begin to practice what you are going to say, how you are going to facilitate discussion, and what is going to happen during the learning activities. Different facilitators will have different styles of practice. Some will want to write out a complete script for the workshop. Others will use only key words and phrases to prompt themselves. The approach is entirely your own, but running through your workshop notes at least once should be standard practice. Otherwise, you run the risk of becoming lost midstream, reading notes rather than facilitating, and coming across as less prepared than you really are.

Anticipate potential issues. There are issues that can arise in the course of a workshop that facilitators should be aware of. The material you cover may raise questions about topics that you did not plan to discuss or that you do not have the knowledge to discuss. The participants may want to emphasize certain topics more than you planned to and may not be as interested in other topics that you saw as central to the workshop design. A particular learning activity may leave the group uninspired while a brief lecture may lead to an invigorating discussion. Individuals may come with their own agendas and expectations that are different from yours and those of most participants. All of these situations require flexibility on the part of the facilitator. There are no issues which are insurmountable or which cannot be turned into learning situations. Part of preparing is anticipating that some aspect of the workshop may not play out as planned. Being comfortable in your knowledge about the subject and the participants will help you handle these situations. After you have repeated workshops, you will also have a better sense of what to anticipate.

Visualize Success. It is natural to be somewhat nervous when facilitating a new workshop or facing a new audience. Such anxiety emerges in great part from the fear of failure. As you prepare for your workshop, it is important to visualize successful outcomes for what you do. As you choose, evaluate, and practice different activities, figure out how to make sure they are successful as learning tools. Imagine what a successful outcome looks like and how you get there. Not only will this help lower your anxiety, but you will most likely live up to your own expectations. Most importantly, you will be helping participants to learn.

Facilitating for Different Learning Styles

One goal of facilitation is to help all of the participants in the workshop learn the subject matter being covered. This goal can be challenging because the participants will come with a variety of learning styles and learning preferences. An effective facilitator needs to make sure that different styles and preferences are accommodated in the workshop. Though by no means an exhaustive review of the issue, this section covers two learning style typologies that will be useful to you as you prepare and present a workshop.

Visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning. One widely used typology of learning styles focuses on the senses that individuals use as they are learning. While learners have the capability to use all of their senses to take in information, individuals typically show a preference for one sensory style over the others. By designing and using learning activities which address all of the senses, a facilitator will have a better chance of reaching all of the participants. Moreover, even if individual participants have a clear preference, they may learn more completely when they are receiving information through more than one of their senses. The three categories of sensory learning that facilitators should understand are visual, auditory, and kinesthetic.

Visual learners rely most on what they see in front of them as they learn. Individuals who fall in this category need visual aids to absorb and sort the information being discussed. As standard practice, jotting down key points as they are discussed during the workshop will assist the visual learners in the room. Visual learners benefit from the following:

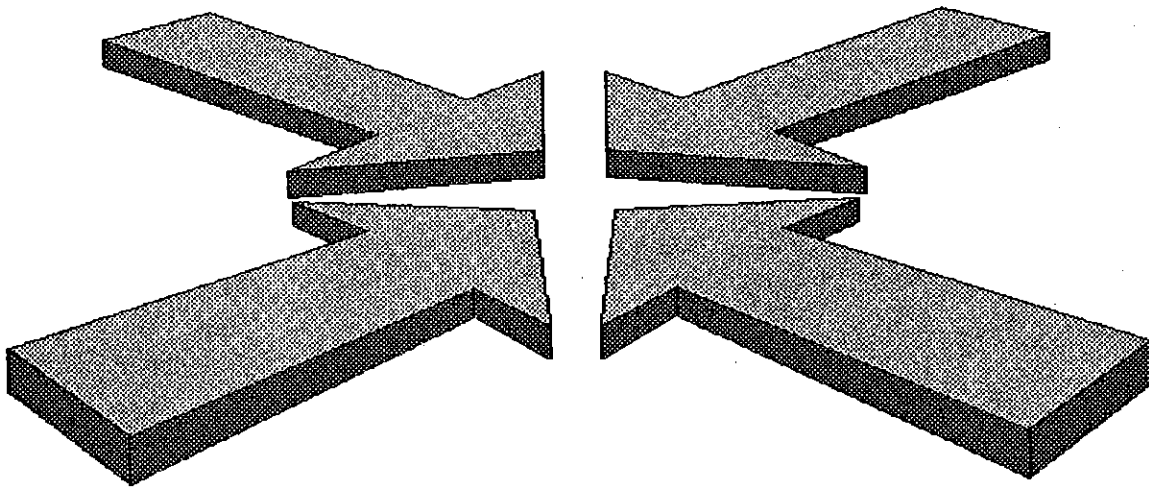
- Readings
- Outlines
- Handouts
- Lists
- Diagrams
- Pictures
- Videotapes
- Demonstrations
- Observing others

Auditory learners rely most on what they hear as they learn. Individuals who fall in this category need to hear information in order to process it, whether the information is in the form of facts, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, or ideas. Full understanding is largely a function of verbalization and listening. At a minimum, these learners need to have adequate verbal description or discussion of any topic to take in the information. Auditory learners benefit from the following:

- Lectures
- Group discussions
- Audio recordings

Kinesthetic learners rely on what they can touch and do as they learn. Individuals who are kinesthetic learners will value opportunities that allow them to be physically active. Kinesthetic learners will have difficulty learning if only the more commonly used visual and auditory methods are utilized as these methods do not allow them to be fully involved with their bodies in topics being explored. At a minimum, facilitators need to include activities requiring some physicality. Kinesthetic learners benefit from the following:

- Hands-on practice
- Role plays
- Games
- Group projects
- Artwork
- Rotation around the room



Learning from feeling, watching and listening, thinking, and doing. A second typology used to identify different learning styles is contained in the Learning-Style Inventory. According to this typology, there is a learning cycle, each stage of which is important to learning. Despite the holistic nature of the learning cycle, individuals do have preferences for where they operate in the learning cycle most frequently. As with the previous typology, understanding and addressing the differences individual learners have will help a facilitator reach the greatest number of participants. In this typology, the four stages of the learning cycle are concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In each stage, individuals learn through different means – feeling, watching and observing, thinking, and doing, respectively.

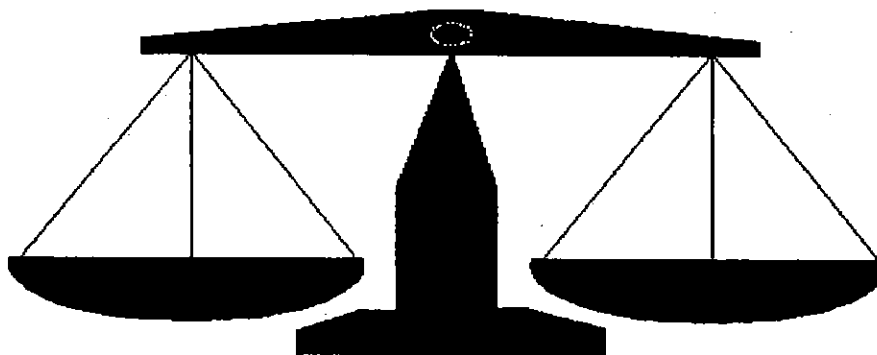
Individuals who favor concrete experimentation learn through feeling. These people learn from personal involvement in specific situations, where they can be attentive to what is going on around them as well as inside of them. In this type of learning, individuals are attune to their own and other people's feelings and reactions in the situation. Workshop activities which are appealing include role plays and small group discussions, where participants are in direct interaction with one another.

Individuals who favor reflective observation learn through watching and listening. They thrive on trying to understand information and situations from different points of view and will practice patience and objectivity as much as possible. Individuals in this stage of the learning cycle are typically cautious before reaching conclusions or making judgments. In workshops, they enjoy lectures, readings, and individual writing activities which allow them the personal space to reach a fuller understanding of the topic.

Individuals who favor abstract conceptualization learn through thinking. Individuals with this preference in the learning cycle try to understand information in the most systematic and analytical ways possible. They remove themselves from personal experience and feelings to look at issues logically and draw conclusions based on an intellectual understanding of the topics or situations. In workshops, these individuals enjoy activities such as brainstorming, group discussions and worksheets that allow them to dissect topics and synthesize information.

Individuals who favor active experimentation learn through doing. Individuals in this category are motivated by hands-on approaches to learning. They want to be actively in the midst of a situation in order to learn rather than looking at it from a distance or with a passive stance. In workshops, these individuals gain from participation in role plays, discussions of hypothetical situations, and practice with using forms and technology.

Step out of your own learning style. Facilitators will be as inclined as anyone else to favor certain methods of learning. Before facilitating a workshop, it is helpful to understand your own learning style. Knowing the key characteristics of your learning style is the starting place for stepping out of your comfort zone as a facilitator. To be effective as a facilitator, you do need to accommodate multiple learning styles by offering a range of learning opportunities, including some that you might not enjoy if you were a participant in the workshop. Practice using different activities will ultimately increase your comfort level and your flexibility in accommodating different learners.



Creating a Learning Environment

Once you have prepared thoroughly and accommodated different learning styles in your workshop plans, you are ready to conduct the workshop. The first thing you need to do in the workshop setting is create an environment where learning can easily take place. This entails creating an atmosphere of mutual respect, acceptance, and trust where a high quality interaction can take place. The following are some of the key considerations in achieving this sort of environment.

Create a comfortable physical environment. The room itself is a central part of the learning environment that is too often overlooked. Participants often form their first impressions of the workshop from their surroundings, and people can be easily irritated and distracted by problems in the physical environment. The following characteristics are important to pay attention to when selecting and preparing the workshop site:

- Room size
- Air circulation and ventilation
- Temperature control
- Lighting
- Quality of the furniture
- Outside noise

On the day of the workshop, the most important feature that the facilitator can control is the arrangement of the room. For AFS workshops, circular seating generally works best because it encourages interaction between participants as well as interaction with the facilitator. For adult learners, circular seating also creates a more egalitarian atmosphere. The number of seats and spacing of seats are important because you do not want people to feel too crowded or too distant from each other, nor do you want them to conclude that the workshop is sparsely attended because there are many extra seats. Finally, seats and audio-visual aids should be arranged to be complementary, so that participants' views are not obstructed.

Paying attention to all of these factors in the physical environment will help set the mood for the rest of your time together.

Be organized and on time. Though AFS is a multicultural organization, you will most likely be working with participants who have U.S. standards of organization and timeliness. U.S. audiences generally expect facilitators to stick with schedules and agendas in order to cover the promised information in the promised time. Workshop participants will appreciate the following:

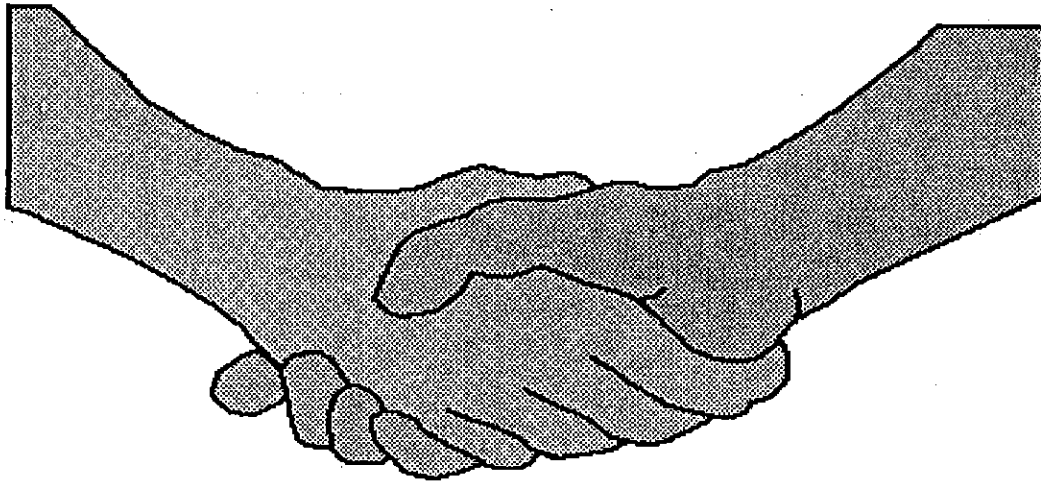
- The workshop starts and finishes on time.
- Breaks take place when they are scheduled.
- The workshop progresses according to the agenda.
- The facilitator is organized with discussions, materials, and activities.

If there are real or perceived problems with organization and timeliness, these can become a source of frustration and therefore an interference to learning. Organization and timeliness are simply part of the profile of professionalism that adult learners appreciate.

Use effective introductions and icebreakers. At the beginning of the workshop, you need a way to open which will help develop the atmosphere that you want. Typically, facilitators start with introductions and/or icebreakers. The following are important principles to follow in designing the introductory piece of the workshop:

- Ensure introductions and icebreakers are a comfortable, safe, and fun.
- Help participants get to know each other and feel comfortable with each other.
- Tie introductions and icebreakers to the subject matter in the workshop.
- Design introductions and icebreakers to be relatively brief (10-20 minutes), or you face the dilemma of not having time to cover the workshop content.

A detailed list of ideas for introductions and icebreakers can be found in “Resources for Facilitation” at the end of this section.



Encourage participation. The most effective workshops are those in which participants are active learners. People who voluntarily come to workshops hope to be engaged by the topic, get to know other like-minded people, and learn something new and worthwhile. It is the facilitator’s role to help participants achieve these ends, which starts with getting them involved. Learning activities that encourage participation are a major factor in creating an interactive environment. The facilitator is the other major factor. Though you will not be able to coax every individual into being equally participatory, a helpful approach is one that conveys “I welcome your thoughts and opinions, I encourage questions, I hope someone else might be able to illustrate this point as well as I can”.

Balance individual participation and group needs. You can be assured that some people will participate more than others. In an interactive workshop, those who participate will usually have a greater influence on the course of learning. You will therefore need to be aware of when an individual’s participation is helpful and when it is detrimental to the

group. In some cases, the most active participants will be quite useful because their input will reinforce the learning that you hope will take place. In other situations, there are individuals who may intentionally or inadvertently use the workshop as a forum for their own agendas or who may dominate discussion to the extent that little time is left for others. As the facilitator, you will need to be keenly aware of how the participants are reacting to each other when they are interacting. You need to be prepared to exercise leadership to maximize the positive effects of participation and minimize the potentially harmful effects. The group will look to you to be "the keeper of the gates," and learning will be enhanced when you use this role to make sure individual participation and group needs are in balance.

Share in the learning experience with participants. As the facilitator, you are also a learner. Participants will appreciate a facilitator who is open to learning along with them. Though they will expect you to have more expertise overall, they will value when you are open to new information that they as individuals may bring or they as a group develop. Additionally, you will be learning about facilitating in the process of leading the workshop. Checking in with participants and being open to feedback on the learning activities as you do them will demonstrate your desire to learn. The overall atmosphere of the workshop will be better when everyone in the room believes that there is always room for growth and acquiring new skills and knowledge.

Act as a role model. At all times, role modeling the behavior that you would like to see from participants is central to creating the learning atmosphere that you want. If you want an atmosphere of mutual respect, then you must always find respectful ways to address the participants, even the most difficult ones. If you want a safe and trusting atmosphere, then you must do nothing which violates participants' willingness to take risks. As a facilitator, your behavior and attitudes will be observed carefully by the participants, from your words to your tone to your expressions. The examples you set may be the examples that other people follow, so focus on making them positive examples.

Communicating Effectively

Effective interpersonal communication is a key component of any workshop. It is central to creating an atmosphere where people want to be and where they can learn. It is also the primary method of delivering the content that you want the participants to absorb, understand, and later use. This section will cover aspects of communication that are important skills for facilitators to develop.

Visualize the style you want to have. Everyone has hopefully experienced a great workshop or classroom. The facilitator or teacher is the primary person responsible for creating that environment, and much of the success is related to the quality of interpersonal communication. As a starting place for analyzing effective communication, think about the communication you have experienced in a great learning setting. In your experience, what characterizes a great facilitator's communication style? Consider both verbal and non-verbal skills that you have seen successful facilitators use. Also consider which communication techniques seem particularly effective in reaching an adult audience. Your personal recollections and reactions are very useful because you are looking at facilitation from a participant's perspective. If you have the time, ask other people to share their thoughts on the subject to get input on effective communication from multiple perspectives.

Once you have considered what makes a facilitator great, begin to visualize yourself taking on those characteristics. When it comes to facilitation, it is not sufficient to know the rules of good communication. You need to start living the part, and this begins in your own head. If you can visualize how you would respond in different situations based on how you believe great facilitators respond, then you will be a step closer to being a great facilitator yourself.

Convey respect, confidence, and enthusiasm. Part of visualizing your style is knowing which personal traits you want to convey as a facilitator. Three of the most important traits that will enhance a positive learning experience are respect, confidence, and enthusiasm. First, participants want to be assured that they will be respected and therefore safe in the workshop. It is part of the facilitator's role not only to make mutual respect an explicit expectation in the workshop, but to practice respectful communication in every interaction. Second, the participants want to be led by a facilitator who shows confidence in his or her own knowledge, experience, and skills. Workshop participants will not, however, want to be led by someone who communicates overconfidence and therefore little openness or even defensiveness to other people's thoughts. Third, the participants will be energized and therefore more open to learning when the facilitator is enthusiastic about the subject matter and the opportunity to be leading the workshop. As a facilitator, there may be other traits that you want to convey. Respect, confidence, and enthusiasm are simply good starting points for all facilitators.

Effective non-verbal communication. A great deal of communication takes place without a word being said. In fact, many studies have concluded that 70-80% of communication between people occurs at the non-verbal level. As a facilitator, you will be in front of several participants at a time, and they will be paying attention to your non-verbal behaviors. The following are some suggestions for honing your skills:

- Maintain eye contact with participants when you are interacting with them.
- Be aware of the impact that facial expressions can have on communicating your attitudes and opinions, both positive and negative.
- Stand or sit depending on the type of interaction you hope to create.
- Maintain an upright and alert posture to show involvement.
- Move around the room and use your proximity to participants to keep them engaged.
- Use gestures and other demonstrations of physical energy.
- Reign in nervous habits so they do not become distracting.

What facilitators physically do helps to set the tone of the workshop, guide the interaction of participants, and convey interpersonal messages. Given the extent to which communication is non-verbal, it is important to invest the time and energy it will take to develop these skills.

Effective verbal communication. In any setting where people are interacting, verbal communication has two components. The first component is speaking, when people are using "sending" skills. The second component is listening, when people are using "receiving" skills. As a facilitator, you will need to develop both the sending and receiving skills which make the workshop a great learning environment.

Sending skills. Workshop facilitators are continually relying on their sending skills when working with participants. Whether lecturing, leading a discussion, giving instructions for an activity, answering questions, or interacting informally, there are several valuable sending skills for workshop facilitators:

- Communicate thoughts or themes clearly and completely.
- Illustrate points by using examples, anecdotes, and hypothetical situations.
- Guide discussions logically and guard against getting lost on tangents.
- Distinguish between facts, opinions, and conjecture.
- Use varied language and vocabulary.
- Modulate your tone and volume to emphasize points and keep the participants alert.
- Incorporate input which participants offer to the discussion.

Receiving skills. In order to facilitate participant involvement, you will also need to rely on your receiving skills. The following skills are essential in the process of creating an interactive learning environment:

- Use encouragers such as silence, head nods, and smiles to draw out participant input.
- Listen attentively to the content, tone, and indirect meanings in what participants say.
- Paraphrase participant input to make sure you and others have heard it correctly.
- Help participants clarify their thoughts and reframe their words when they are having difficulty communicating.
- Encourage participants to listen to each other by role modeling the above skills.

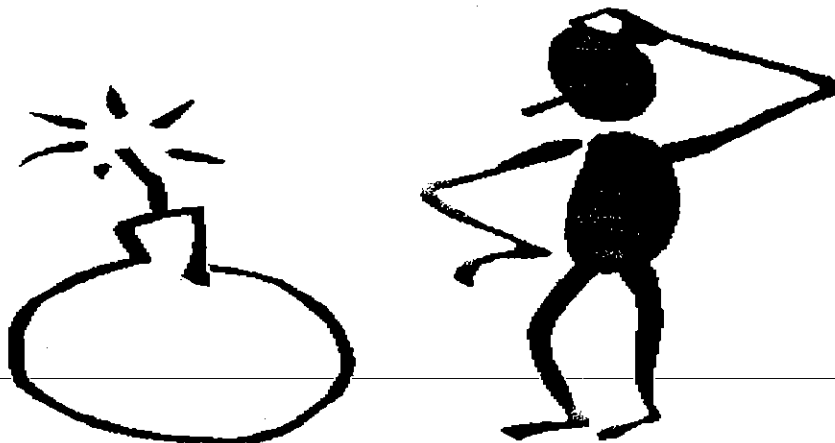
Achieving the Desired Outcomes

Thorough preparation, an understanding of learning styles, the creation of a learning environment, and effective communication are essential but still not sufficient to guarantee a successful workshop. The final step in facilitating a workshop is making sure that you accomplish the learning that you set out to cover.

Remember the goals and time constraints of the workshop. Early in the process of designing the workshop, you established learning goals and timelines. You determined what knowledge and skills you wanted the participants to have after attending a workshop of a certain length. As you focus ensuring the environment is conducive to learning, remember what it is you wanted the participants to learn in the time allowed. The goals and timelines helped anchor the workshop when you designed it, and they still help anchor it when you are facilitating. Changing the goals midstream or lengthening the workshop to accommodate changes will not sit well with at least some of your participants nor will it necessarily fulfill the training needs of AFS. Effective workshop facilitation requires closure around the learning goals that you and the participants set aside time for.

Potential hazards on the way to achieving goals. Facilitators need to be aware of several possible obstacles to achieving the learning goals of the workshop. Dealing with these potential hazards can be challenging, but also helps build your experience and spontaneous problem-solving skills.

Unplanned discussions. Part of the fun of facilitating a workshop is watching it take on a life of its own, but this can also be part of the challenge. Discussions among participants can become quite animated, learning activities can become more involved and involving than originally planned, and new topics may emerge which deserve some attention. All of these are positive signs that the participants are engaged in learning. At the same time, you run the risk of dealing with tangents rather than the central themes of the workshop and/or simply running out of time to cover everything that now seems important. Finding a balance between what was planned and what was not planned will require that you find ways to channel or perhaps curtail certain worthwhile discussions simply because there is not enough time to cover everything.



Challenging participants. On a less positive note, you may have one or more challenging participants who divert the workshop from its purpose. Excessive talkers, storytellers, and experts can take far more than their share of discussion time and can impose their own agendas on the workshop. While remaining respectful of everyone as an individual, you will need to develop methods or regaining control of the workshop from participants who knowingly or unknowingly subvert its purpose. Other participants will greatly appreciate your efforts to reign in those individuals who do not practice much self-restraint or to reframe what is being said so that it ties into goals of the workshop. For further information, there is an article on challenging participants in "Resources for Facilitation" at the end of this section.

Interpersonal conflict. You may also be faced with a situation of excessive conflict between participants or between yourself and participants. A certain amount of disagreement and conflict creates healthy discussion and exploration of a topic, but an excessive amount turns the focus of the workshop to the people themselves. When your own or other people's defenses are raised, it is a good time to step back and take on a more objective role. Identifying the conflict that is taking place is part of the solution because it allows the people in conflict the space to step back. Reframing what the conflict is about may also be helpful because sometimes word choice is at the heart of a disagreement. Inviting the people in conflict to resolve the issue during a break or after the workshop may also be an appropriate tactic. Whatever the method, it is important to reestablish a safe and respectful learning environment so that the goals of the workshop once again become the focus of your time together.

Disruptions and distractions. Finally, you may be faced with environmental obstacles to staying on track. For example, audio-visual equipment can fail, someone outside of the workshop may interrupt you or the participants, room temperature and air circulation could create conditions which are not conducive to learning, and food might take longer to serve or eat than originally planned. It is safe to assume that you may have to deal with at least one such issue in any workshop. Since you will still want to accomplish your goals, it will be helpful to have the flexibility to alter the agenda or learning activities enough to accommodate unforeseen occurrences.

Be flexible within the limits. In any workshop, there needs to be room to maneuver and make adjustments when something unexpected happens. Effective facilitators are flexible enough to seize learning opportunities rather than rigidly adhering to a detailed plan. Without changing the central goals or the timelines, you might consider adjustments to your learning activities to accommodate unforeseen circumstances. Throughout the workshop, monitor your progress towards the desired outcomes. Don't be afraid to pause momentarily between activities or use official breaks to do some reassessment and make appropriate changes. Flexibility can enhance the environment and the learning that takes place.

Evaluating the Workshop

As with other aspects of organizing a workshop, you will want to evaluate your facilitation thoroughly. Evaluations fulfill several important purposes – they allow you to see if learning has occurred, they help you to learn about your strengths and weaknesses, they offer ideas for improvement, and they allow participants to say what they want to say about the learning experience they just had. All of the student-family liaison modules in this manual contain evaluation tools, which are designed to incorporate different methods of evaluation. The methods are discussed below to help you make the choices that will be most helpful to you as a facilitator.

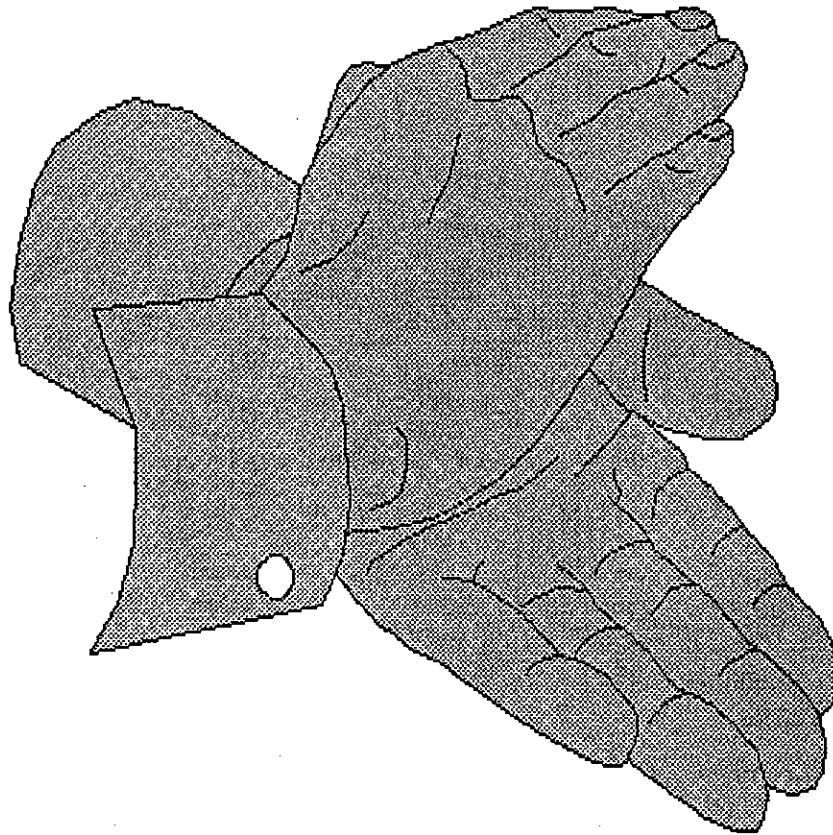
Facilitator evaluations. The most common form of workshop evaluation is one that asks participants to give feedback about the workshop design and the facilitator's abilities. At the end of any workshop, this sort of evaluation is essential. Without it, facilitators would have a difficult time learning about their own presentations and subsequently improving them for future audiences.

Learning evaluations. Another form of evaluation focuses on whether the participants have learned what you planned for them to learn. While this type of evaluation is commonly used in an academic classroom through tests and papers, it is less frequently used in a volunteer organization like AFS. Yet it is helpful to know if the learning goals you established have been accomplished and what learning the participants themselves found most meaningful. Facilitators will benefit as much from learning evaluations as they will from facilitator evaluations.

Written vs. oral evaluations. With both facilitator and learning evaluations, you will need to make a choice whether to use a written or oral format. Though the evaluations provided in this manual are in written form to be completed by individual participants, they can easily be modified. Some facilitators find oral group evaluations to be more useful than written individual evaluations. In groups and in discussion, participants will tend to be more expansive with their feedback, suggestions, and newly acquired knowledge than they will be filling out a form at the end of the workshop. The downside is that some participants may be intimidated by this format and therefore give less input than they would on a written form. Also, there is a tendency towards "group think" with oral evaluations, so there may be less variety of opinion expressed than on written forms. If time allows, a combination of oral and written feedback can capture the best of both methods.

Formative vs. summative evaluations. Depending on the length of the workshop, you may want more than one evaluation period. Formative evaluations are those which take place in the middle of the workshop. By monitoring participant knowledge or getting feedback on the workshop itself, the facilitator can evaluate the learning environment that exists and make modifications if necessary. Summative evaluations are the more traditional evaluations which come at the end of the workshop.

Self-evaluation. Take some time give yourself feedback as a facilitator. Whether you do this before or after the participants give feedback, it is helpful to reflect on your own thoughts, feelings, and reactions to the workshop and your own performance. Your perspective as the facilitator is a unique one and therefore worth considering.



Resources for Facilitation

I. Icebreakers

II. Brainstorming

III. Role Playing

IV. Challenging Participants

Icebreakers

The Interview: Break the group into two person teams by having participants pick partners that they know the least about. Have them interview each other for about five minutes. You can prepare questions ahead of time or provide general guidelines for the interview. They need to learn about what each other likes about their job, past jobs, family life, hobbies, favorite sport, etc. After the interviews, reassemble the group and have each team introduce their team member to the group.

Who Done That: Prior to the workshop, make a list of about 20 questions relating to the participants in the group. For example, you could include some of the following:

- Who is a parent?
- Who has taught a class?
- Who speaks three or more languages?
- Who was an exchange student?
- Who has volunteered with AFS for 10 years or more?

Type all of the questions on a piece of paper with a space next to each large enough for a signature. Give all of the participants a copy of the list and have them find someone who can sign one of the lines. Allow about 15 minutes for the activity. The activity ends when one person becomes the first to collect signatures next to every question. Go through all of the questions with the group to reinforce the information they now know about each other. Have a prize for the first person completed.

Marooned: You are marooned on a island. What three items would you have brought with you if you knew there was a chance that you might be stranded? Have participants write down their responses and also why they would choose these items. Ask the participants to introduce themselves to the group by discussing what items they chose.

Finish the Sentence: Go around the room and have each person complete one of these sentences (or something similar):

- The best volunteer role I ever had was...
- The most memorable journey I ever took was...
- The riskiest thing I ever did was...

If you can add a visual element to the exercise, it will be even more effective. For example, have participants draw a picture of the riskiest thing they did or have them mark a map where they took their most memorable journey.

*Adapted from "Big Dog's Leadership Training Outline" by Don Clark, 1998.
<http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/leader/icebreak.html>*

Brainstorming

Discussion, analysis, and problem solving all depend on developing divergent views around a topic. Groups suffer when they do not develop a wide variety of ideas that can be contrasted with each other. Before groups can converge on a creative course of action, they must develop the diversity of possibilities to be explored. Brainstorming is a method to help groups accomplish this end.

Brainstorming is a procedure in which group members are asked to produce as many ideas as they possibly can in an uninhibited way. It is a free association activity in which all group members can participate and in which many ideas can emerge in a short period of time. In order to optimize creativity, group members need to accept and abide by certain ground rules:

- Withhold criticism and evaluation of each other's ideas during brainstorming – ideas are simply placed before the group.
- Practical considerations are not important at this point – “wild” ideas are expected in this spontaneous and freewheeling exercise.
- The quantity of ideas is the most important goal – a great number of ideas will increase the likelihood that the group will find good ones.
- Build on the ideas of others when possible – pool your creativity and combine ideas.
- Focus on a single problem or issue – do not try to address a multiple or complex problems in a single brainstorming activity.
- Promote a congenial, relaxed, and cooperative atmosphere.
- Make sure all group members, no matter how reluctant, have a chance to contribute their ideas.
- Record all ideas and record them in the words used by the group members.

After the period of brainstorming, all ideas are categorized, and the group critically evaluates them for possible use or application. Priorities are selected and the best ideas are applied. The rationale behind brainstorming is the belief that many ideas are never born or are quickly stifled by the dominant members of a group. By going through the brainstorm process, all members will have an opportunity to contribute and all ideas will be considered.

Adapted from Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills by David W. Johnson and Frank P. Johnson, 1997.

Role Playing

Role playing is a tool for bringing a specific skill and its consequences into focus. It is a way in which you can experience concretely the type of interaction under examination. It is a vital tool for experiential learning.

In a role play, an imaginary life situation is set up in which you act and react from an assigned perspective. You are asked to adopt certain assumptions, beliefs, and character traits. The outcome of a role playing situation is not determined in advance, and the situation is not rehearsed. Initial instructions are given, and the role players determine what happens within the confines of their roles. You do not need to be a good actor to participate in a role play. You simply need to accept the initial directions and let your feelings, attitudes and behavior change as the situation evolves and the circumstances require. You should not look at your role instructions once the action has started. Try to act as naturally as possible within the role play. Because role playing can simulate real life situations, it becomes possible for you to try new ways of handling situations without suffering any serious consequences if the methods fail.

The facilitator of the exercise should help involve the role players in the situation by introducing it in such a way that the players are emotionally stimulated. Using name tags and asking players questions to help them get a feeling for the part are helpful. Introduce the scene to the role players and to the observers. Always de-brief after the role play has ended.

Adapted from Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills by David W. Johnson and Frank P. Johnson, 1997.

Challenging Participants

In most training groups, the majority of participants will be interested in the subject, open to learning, and respectful of both the facilitator and the group. However, there are usually a small minority of participants who present challenges to the workshop facilitator. The following are brief descriptions of common challenging personalities and some strategies for engaging them constructively.

Storytellers: People who want to talk about their own experiences and who take group time to do so. Besides taking time to tell their stories, they may also lead the group on a tangent or inspire other participants to tell their own stories. Some possible strategies:

- Build the training around a single case study, which encourages all participants to discuss the same situation rather than tell their own stories.
- Respond by restating the point of the story and how it ties in with the topic being discussed by the group.
- Remind group of the limited time available and the need for every participant to have a chance to talk.

Experts: People who believe they already know everything they need to know about a topic. They often see the value in others learning about the topic, but exclude themselves. In some cases, they may appoint themselves the facilitator's assistant in facilitating the workshop. Some possible strategies:

- Check out their level of knowledge in an individual interaction to better understand and acknowledge their experience and information.
- Incorporate their input during the workshop without surrendering the facilitator role.
- Ask them privately to listen carefully during the workshop and offer you feedback when it is over.

Arguers: People who continually find a way to contradict what the facilitator or another participant is saying. These people may have had different experiences, they may believe it is helpful to point out other viewpoints, or they may simply enjoy challenging others. Some possible strategies:

- Acknowledge their points or experience by saying, "you make an interesting point" or "yes, there can be exceptions."
- Incorporate what they are saying into the point you are making by acknowledging it as part of the larger picture you are trying to create.
- Ask other participants for their input on the subject being debated to broaden the discussion beyond a two-person debate.

Quiet Participants: People who seem to be engaged, but who do not add their own input. Sometimes these people are hesitant to participate because they do not believe they have anything worthwhile to add, and sometimes they are shy or reticent personalities. Some possible strategies:

- Construct workshop activities in a way that ensures all participants add their input, such as small group discussions and going around to each person in the room for their ideas.
- Approach them during a break, solicit their ideas individually, point out the value in their ideas, and supportively encourage them to offer their input during the workshop.
- State that you would like to hear from people who have not yet talked and allow silent time while before they respond.

Disinterested Participants: People who send a message that they would rather be somewhere else than in the workshop. They often feel the workshop is not relevant to their needs. Though they are usually quiet, they are not engaged and are often sending negative non-verbal messages. Some strategies are:

- Engage them in conversation individually and take an active interest in finding out more about their background, their interests, and their motivations.
- Discuss how the topics in the workshop may have multiple applications in the participants' lives.
- Use humor to help break down their wall of resistance.

Chatters: People who make side conversations. They are a distraction to the facilitator, to the people sitting nearest to them, and often to the entire group. Some strategies are:

- Call them by name and ask if there is something they would like to add to the discussion.
- Draw their attention back to the person who currently has the floor.
- If there is more than one side conversation taking place, stop the action and point out the need for everyone to remain focused on what is happening in the workshop.

