

Facilitating Program Assessment Decision-making

Monica’s Top Tips

1. **Prepare an agenda to share and a script for yourself**
2. **Have a desired outcome and process** (place both on agenda and be ready to modify if needed)

Desired Outcome	Process
final student learning outcomes list	by evaluating draft student learning outcomes
narrow a list of commercial tests to best option	by evaluating alternatives and dot voting
understand curriculum coherence and identify gaps	by creating a curriculum map
ways to use assessment results	by brainstorming a list of possible actions
improve the program using assessment results	by prioritizing a list of actions

3. **Use redirection (after validation)**

- a. Bring up previous decision or idea

“Melanie, you’re bringing up the idea of an alumni survey. The committee already decided not to do an alumni survey in fall so we will not discuss that anymore. Do you have another suggestion?”

“Jonathan, here [point to statement] on the notes for today we’ve recorded your suggestion to change admissions standards. Is this recorded correctly?”

- b. Too much detail

“It seems like we’re focusing on too many details right now—like how student names will be redacted from the samples. Can we move back to the larger question at hand?”

- c. Unconnected idea

“Ryan, I hear you saying that the rubric needs to be changed. Can you help me understand how what you’re saying is connected to what we are talking about—the distribution of results?”

- d. Tangential idea

“Christie, sampling seems very important and tangential to this meeting’s focus. Can we put that in the minutes as something to discuss at a future meeting?”

4. **Make contributions visible: Record ideas using markers + flip chart paper or computer + wall projector.**

5. **Decide how to decide.** Options:

- a. *Consensus*: consensus has been reached when everyone agrees the process has been fair, transparent, people feel heard, good information was used to reach a final decision, and people are willing to support—but not necessarily agree with—the final decision. When deciding by consensus, the goal is support, not 100% agreement. *Consensus* is not majority rule. It’s not compromise until the proposal is too watered-down or lacks substance. A consensus decision is one that everyone can support because a collaborative, respectful process occurred. The decision may be, but is not necessarily, the alternative most preferred by all members. Consider framing the question as, *“Is this proposal something you can live with?”*
- b. *85/15 rule*: 85% agreement is enough to pass.
- c. *Super majority*: 67% agreement is enough to pass.
- d. *Simple majority*: 51% agreement is enough to pass. [Not recommended because a 51/49 vote typically hinders implementation.]

6. **Reserve the last 5-10 minutes** to summarize, communicate praise for accomplishments, and state commitments/actions/next steps.

More Facilitation Tips

1. Know desired outcomes upfront; have a product in mind before starting
2. Get clarity about expectations by making sure everyone is comfortable with the agenda
3. If you are a facilitator and part of the group, make it clear when you are facilitating and when you are speaking as part of the group. One method: physically re-position your body so your role is clearer. When speaking as a group member, preface your comment with, *“As a member of this department.”*
4. Ask only those questions you want the group to focus on
5. Role model the behavior you want to see
6. Use active listening techniques to listen as an ally, legitimize immediately and often, and validate every voice: nod, open posture, don’t interrupt, paraphrase what was said (record paraphrase on visible minutes) and get confirmation you understood
7. Provide a safe space for everyone’s contributions so that participants can see their self-interests in the context of others’ interests
8. Get everyone to contribute to the final outcome
9. Be comfortable in chaos
10. Redirect inappropriate responses (especially premature solutions)
11. Invite differing opinions
12. Maintain eye contact with everyone
13. Differentiate content/outcome from process
14. Hold people to speaking for themselves. Encourage “I” messages rather than “we” or “they” messages. For example, when someone says, *“Some people say. . .”*, simply state *“Please let us know what you think of the proposal”* and not record the “some people” idea in the notes.
15. Attend to volume/loudness. Loudness typically signals conflict emerging and people not feeling heard. Simply stating, *“I notice that we are speaking loudly to each other”* is usually sufficient to create awareness and reduce the volume. Don’t diagnose, just state the observation.
16. Attend to the number of interruptions. Calling attention to the issue usually settles it. *“We are interrupting each other and our meeting ground rules state that one person at a time should talk.”* Don’t diagnose, just state the observation.
17. Embrace one minute of silence. If things are moving too fast, not fast enough, if volume or interruptions are increasing, ask people to spend one minute silently thinking about what is being discussed (or one minute jotting down ideas).

Sources consulted:

- Brilhard, J.K. & Galanes, G.J. (1989). *Effective Group Discussion*. 6th Ed. Dubuque, IA: Brown.
- Ching, D.R. (2010). *Facilitative Skills for Collaborative Leaders*. Honolulu: Pacific Center for Collaboration.
- Sanaghan, P. & Gabriel, P.A. (2011). *Collaborative Leadership in Action: A Field Guide for Creating Meetings That Make a Difference*. Amherst: HRD Press.