

THE JOYS AND PERILS OF CO-FACILITATION

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CO-FACILITATION DEFINED: Facilitation of a meeting or other group process by two or more persons in a cooperative, collegial manner

WHAT STRATEGIES SUPPORT GOOD CO-FACILITATION?

- Take turns:** Two or more facilitators take turns in the lead role.
- One Leader:** To simplify communications, designate one person as the contact person and leader of the co-facilitation team.
- Clarify Roles/Tasks:** Co-facilitators should meet well before the meeting to plan how they will work together. Who will facilitate first? What tasks will the others perform when not facilitating? How often will we exchange roles? What unobtrusive signals will we use to communicate our needs to each other during the meeting? If the facilitators are being paid, how will the money be divided?
- Teamwork: Assist, taking other roles.** When not facilitating, the other facilitator(s) assist by taking other process roles such as minute taker, scribe, timekeeper, vibes watcher, gatekeeper, etc. Having skilled people in these roles frees the lead facilitator to focus on the discussion.
- Post Meeting Evaluation:** Get together after the meeting to discuss what went well and what could be improved in the future.
- Spirit of service:** Be humble. Pay attention. Serve the group well.

BENEFITS OF CO-FACILITATION

- Diversity:** Collaboration between facilitators of different gender, ethnicity, nationality, age, etc. sends a positive message about the value of diversity in leadership and brings a broader perspective to the group's process.
- Stress management:** Rotating the facilitation duties is a good way to care for yourself and your group.
- Letting go:** If you tend to believe that "I have to do it all myself, or it doesn't get done right," practicing co-facilitation may help you break this pattern of control.
- Backup:** If one facilitator becomes overwhelmed, ill, injured or is called away for an emergency, the meeting can continue with the other facilitator(s).

Source: International Institute for Facilitation and Change (IIFAC) – www.iifac.org

- Build confidence:** Working with a more experienced facilitator, watching how they work and anticipating what you can do to make his/her job easier is a good way to gain confidence, especially in potentially intimidating situations, such as large or conflictive meetings.
- Joy:** Working in a team can be a great experience.

WARNINGS ABOUT CO-FACILITATION

- Don't co-facilitate with a stranger:** At a minimum, meet with the person in advance to get to know more about his/her experience and facilitation style. Discussing roles and mutual expectations can avoid unpleasant surprises for both the two of you and the group.
- Don't take over:** If you are a very experienced facilitator working with a relative newcomer, resist the temptation to jump in and take over. Simply serve as the assistant and, if you coach the person during the meeting, do so quietly.
- Don't trade off too often:** It is important that the group have a sense of stability and continuity during the meeting. Changing facilitators too often can be confusing, especially if their styles are very different.
- Never publicly criticize or argue with your co-facilitator during the meeting:** This behavior will only serve to damage your relationship and lose the trust of the group. If necessary, talk to the facilitator at a break or quietly ask them to take a break so you can discuss an issue.