Tips for Trainers

Trainer role as a facilitator:

- Offer a variety of group facilitation and dialogue tools, which the participants can employ especially in difficult moments.
- Be a 'time-keeper' and remind the group of the amount of time remaining.
- Help the group to decide what ground rules it wants to follow and remind them of these when they are not followed.
- Remind the group of the objectives and principles.
- Set up a safe environment where all the participants feel comfortable contributing ideas.
- Guide the group through the process designed to help them listen to each other and create solutions together.
- Ask open-ended questions that stimulate thinking.
- Tentatively paraphrase individuals contributions to check understanding and ensure they are heard by all the group.
- Tentatively summarize recent parts of discussions
- Record agreements reached in large script on the wall so all can see and agree on the wording.
- Record the current issues within the group in large script on the wall using phrases agreed by the group.
- Offer a possible wording for an unspoken question that may currently beset the group.
- Ensure the group doesn't settle for the first thing that they can agree on because they find it painful to go on disagreeing with each other.

Effective meetings

- In the first meeting:
  - ask team members to discuss their previous experiences. What worked for them and what didn't? Why?
  - use an icebreaker to help them feel comfortable with you and each other. You could try a name game to help people remember names

    (ie. Ask the participants to break into pairs, and get information from each other, as each member of the pair will introduce the other)

  - Articulate clear aims and steps for each group session.

- o Experiment with different structures and activities – for example, impromptu or organised debates, oral reports, brainstorming sessions, and so on.
  - o At regular points ask for anonymous feedback on group processes and group dynamics – members of the team could note a couple of points and drop them in a box as they leave the room. This can help to identify and address any problems.

- Make the most of the physical environment. If possible:
  - o rearrange the room to encourage maximum communication – a circle or
  - o semicircle of chairs is most effective
  - o change seating positions in every meeting
  - o control disruptive external factors, such as noise, heat, light, and so on.

- At the end of small-group learning and teaching sessions:
  - o use minute papers to gain feedback on level of understanding. At the beginning of the next meeting take five minutes to follow up on outstanding issues.
  - o summarise the main points at the end of each meeting, better still, ask team members to summarise.

Ideas for better communication and participation in small groups

- If your group feels too large to accommodate full and equal participation from all members, consider:
  - o splitting it into subgroups for certain tasks or topics
  - o using a pyramid structure – begin by asking members to consider an issue individually, then ask them to form pairs to discuss it, then groups of four to summarise ideas, and so on.

- **Make it safe.** People won't feel comfortable sharing their ideas if they feel they may face retribution or ridicule. Create an environment where everyone feels safe when contributing.

- **Create a "blame-free zone".** Make sure that you are looking for ways of improving a process rather than assigning blame to a person or department. The focus should be positive, not negative.

- Monitor how much everyone contributes to discussions.

- Assist team members to communicate with each other by:
  - o asking each other questions
  - o clarifying each other's points
  - o building on each other's contributions
  - o giving examples of other people's ideas.

- Encourage team members to think for themselves by:
  - deflecting their questions to you. Instead of answering, say, "What do others think?"
  - not correcting them straight away if they're not on the right track. Instead, try saying something like, "Are there other ways you could think about that?" "How does that fit with what you were saying earlier?" "What about x consideration?" "What do others think of this proposition?"

- Handle an overly dominant team member by:
  - using non-verbal communication to discourage this person – for example, look or turn away
  - glancing around the whole class – this opens the conversation to everybody and allows you to monitor the reactions of others
  - overtly encouraging or asking other team members to contribute
  - asking the team member to wait while the group hears from others
  - asking the team member to take the minutes of the meeting
  - establishing rules for contributions –team members must wait for a certain number of contributions before they speak again or they can only speak for a certain number of minutes at a time
  - speaking to the team member outside class about her/his behaviour – this is probably a last resort.

- Handle a team member who does not participate by:
  - using non-verbal communication to encourage this person– for example, draw her/him in with hand gestures
  - watch the team member for responses – for example, "Jai, you shook your head then what were you thinking?"
  - positively reinforcing answers the team member gives
  - breaking the class into pairs or subgroups, which the team member might find less intimidating.

- Use questions appropriately:
  - try to avoid overly complex questions at the start of a meeting
  - try to avoid loaded questions that suggest you have a particular opinion
  - ask questions that encourage team members to engage in higher-order thinking – for example, "How does that relate to what Jo was saying before?"
  - use closed or convergent questions when you want straightforward, factual answers.
  - use open-ended or divergent questions when you want to encourage

- Team members to elaborate or further pursue their ideas

- Acknowledge the team members effort and make the most of their contribution.