Facilitating Constructive Contributions
Dealing with Difficult Behaviors, Helping People Share from a Better Place
Welcome

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California State Library
Libraries are serving as community hubs
  • Librarians often asked to assume role of facilitator
  • Most are “learning by doing”

High level of interest in more training to build facilitation skills

Today is second of two webinars for more experienced facilitators (Feb. 7 topic was Multi-Dimensional Listening)

Exploring cross-cutting skills that serve a library’s internal and community-facing purposes
Susan Stuart Clark
Founder & Director of Common Knowledge Group (www.ckgroup.org)

• Community engagement trainer, consultant, researcher
• Research Deputy with Kettering Foundation
• Board member National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (nccd.org) which is leading Libraries Transforming Communities project with ALA
• Recently designed and conducted Libraries Lead the Way community engagement and facilitation skills program
Poll Questions

• **Question #1**  Which common behavior in meetings do you find most challenging as a facilitator?

  a)  Dominates, won’t share air time
  b)  Rambles; wanders off topic
  c)  Negative about everything
  d)  Silent
  e)  Other
Poll Questions

• Question #2
  What is your experience facilitating difficult behaviors in community meetings?

a) I’m pretty comfortable with what comes up
b) I’ve had a mix of good and bad experiences
c) I’m too nervous to try
Facilitating Constructive Contributions

I. Shifting your perspective
II. Designing for inclusive participation
III. Preparing to facilitate
IV. Supporting the dialogue

Then: Q&A about specific examples
What many of us are afraid will happen.
Shift Your Perspective

Difficult people
Difficult behavior
Shift Your Perspective

Difficult people
Difficult behavior

Fearful or frustrated contributor
Foundational premise: Everyone has something valuable to contribute
Featured Librarians

**Eileen Labrador**, San Diego Public Library
- Supervising Librarian, Area III
- System-wide lead on Harwood Community Conversations, San Diego STEM Ecosystem and Out of the Shadows Program
- Chair, Emergency Operations Committee

**Patrick Remer**, Contra Costa County Library
- Senior Community Library Manager
- Facilitating community process for new Pleasant Hill Library building
- Advisor to CSL’s Early Learning with Families (ELF) Initiative and Touchpoints in Libraries Community Level Trainer
Examples of collaborative learning

• “Harwood”-style community meetings
• Libraries Lead the Way
• Touchpoints training sessions
• Informal group encounters in the library
## Facilitating Constructive Contributions

| Meeting design       | • Purpose/Framing  
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<th>• Structure</th>
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| Preparing to facilitate | • Understanding your role  
|                      | • Understanding your audience |
| Supporting the dialogue | • What you do  
|                      | • What the group does  |
“Recipes give us confidence, but we have to cook with the ingredients we have.”

Patrick Remer
Designing for Inclusive Participation

• Purpose/Framing
• Structure
## Comparing Debate and Dialogue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Debate</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two Sides</td>
<td>Multiple perspectives</td>
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<td>Listen to enhance position</td>
<td>Listen to learn and connect</td>
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<td>Winners and losers</td>
<td>Exchange for mutual understanding</td>
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<td>Stressful; can easily trigger reactivity</td>
<td>Opens path to new possibilities</td>
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Today’s focus: Planning & facilitating Group generated learning experience that develops shared understanding about a situation of common concern
Designing for Constructive Contributions

1 – Framing the conversation as an inclusive dialogue
   - Set expectations that the purpose is to learn
   - There are no right or wrong answers
   - Jointly developing a shared understanding about the situation
The “Arc” of a Conversation

- **Invite Perspectives**
  - Divergent

- **Shared Understanding**
  - Of key issues and each other

- **Narrow Choices**
  - Convergent

- **Decision or action**
Designing for Constructive Contributions

2 – **Structure** with multiple occasions and multiple formats for sharing

- When people walk in the room
- Icebreaker; get people talking with a few others as soon as possible
- Mix of large group and small group
- Provide chances to reflect and write solo before sharing
- On sensitive topics, comments can be drawn out of a box
Preparing to Facilitate

- Your role
- Your audience
Librarian Service versus Facilitation

Familiar Roles

• Enforce rules of conduct
• Moderate tightly scheduled programming
• Teach a class
Librarian Service versus Facilitation

Familiar Roles

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Different Role

• Create a sense of shared purpose
• Enlist the whole group in the learning experience
• Encourage contributions from all kinds of participants
Beginning facilitation

Facilitator as “traffic control”; at the center of the group

More advanced facilitation

Facilitator helps people in the room engage with each other
Understanding Yourself & Your Role

What is your starting point?
- Mindset of authentic facilitation
- Vulnerability and transparency
- Touchpoints: “Recognize what you bring to the interaction.”
Understanding Your Audience

Be Curious About Your Participants

• How many will know each other?
• Will they bring more positive or more negative experiences with past meetings?
• What cultural and generational variables do you anticipate?
• Are there recent developments to be sensitive to?
Mapping the Participant Journey

1. Invitation received from trusted source
2. Personal phone call to follow up on invitation
3. Food and childcare are available
4. No greeting or support to get settled
5. Conversation guidelines create feelings of safety
6. There are numerous opportunities to share
7. Prompt “thank you” with next steps
8. No follow up within the next few weeks
Supporting the Dialogue

- What you do
- What the group does
Sample Conversation Guidelines

- Treat each other with respect
- Listen to learn
- Help make sure everyone has a chance to share
- Assume good intentions
- Your questions are valuable
Key practice: Aligning group expectations

• Recognize that we all bring a variety of expectations
• Clarify meeting purpose; create space for people to adjust their expectations
• Create early opportunities for people to contribute
• Consistently model inclusion
Key practice: Navigating uncertainty together

• Encourage persistent curiosity
• Embrace the messiness of the process
• Create opportunities for participants to share reactions
• Allow the group to drive the meaning-making
Modeling Authentic Facilitation

Someone dominates?

• Give them a different way to share (e.g., via worksheet)
• Find out what they feel has not been heard so it can be captured
• Refer back to the guidelines and the benefits of learning together
• Make the challenge transparent: “What I’m struggling with is wanting to hear what you are sharing while also needing to hear multiple perspectives to get to shared understanding”
• If needed, suggest a separate conversation after the meeting or have a “designated listener” take them out in the hall.
Facilitating Constructive Contributions

Meeting design
- Purpose/Framing
- Structure

Preparing to facilitate
- Understanding your role
- Understanding your audience

Supporting the dialogue
- What you do
- What the group does
Question & Answer
Resources for Facilitators

- Recording of Feb 7 webinar: Facilitating Multi-Dimensional Listening  
  vimeo.com/254771490
- Habits of Mind elf2.library.ca.gov/how/resources.html
- Harwood Public Innovations for CA Public Libraries  
  www.library.ca.gov/services/to-libraries/harwood/
- Libraries Lead the Way northnetlibs.org/libraries-lead-the-way/
- Libraries Transforming Communities -- ALA & NCDD:  
  www.ala.org/ltc-models
Thank You!
Resources

Habits of Mind: A Toolkit

This Habits of Mind Toolkit grew out of the Touchpoints in Libraries training experience in California. It is intended as a bridge between the full Touchpoints in Libraries training and more informal group discussions regarding the foundational "habits of mind" or skills that underlie Touchpoints, as well as any approach to effectively interacting with others. The Toolkit includes an introduction and seven sections. Each section highlights a different habit of mind, and includes a one-page overview about the skill followed by a series of short, interactive exercises designed to provide a springboard for group exploration and discussion.
Create the conditions for learning

Calm: Ready to listen, learn and participate

Flooded: Anger or fear, fight or flight