

# The Role of Facilitator

**A** facilitator is a subject matter expert responsible for leading a group of individuals in a guided discussion about a specific topic. A facilitator, unlike an instructor, is not the source of information, but one who uses the expertise found in the group to derive the relevant information. ([www.virtualcampus.usace.army.mil/whatis.htm](http://www.virtualcampus.usace.army.mil/whatis.htm)).

The following facilitation guidelines will assist you in making a positive impression each time you are asked to be a moderator or facilitator at a meeting or in a discussion.

## A Good Facilitator Should:

- Introduce the topic and provide the timeframe for discussion.
- Remain neutral.
- Maintain order—allow only one person to speak at a time.
- Steer the group in a positive direction. Keep the conversation relevant to the topic. If the discussion is getting off-track, no matter how interesting the *new* conversation is, the facilitator should bring the conversation back to the intended topic.
- Remember that the group/audience is not there to hear the facilitator speak!
  - Avoid answering questions — direct the questions back to the group or expert panel.
  - Summarize points that are made for clarification and understanding.
  - Ask questions to stimulate discussion, if necessary.
- Encourage participation from all attendees or several depending on the size of the group.
  - Frame questions and comments to focus on understanding a viewpoint and not judging it.
  - Encourage different viewpoints.
  - Recognize that every opinion is important—none are *right* or *wrong*.
- Thank participants for offering their opinions.
- Listen without interrupting.
- Bring in humor to lighten up a tense situation.
- Observe non-verbal messages and the impact they have on the discussion.
- Be a proactive timekeeper. Keep the discussion moving and within the allotted time.

In a sentence, a facilitator should be flexible, adaptive, proactive, responsible, and resilient!

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