

Facilitator role in Community Engagement Studios

In general, the role of the facilitator is to:

- Set a friendly and comfortable tone.
- Create an open environment in which people feel comfortable to express their perspectives.
- Greet each member and develop rapport; encourage cross communication with the group by introducing members to each other and engaging them in conversation.
- Take charge of the room.
- Be familiar with the agenda.
- Direct the discussion at a pace that allows all agenda items to be addressed thoroughly.
- Be flexible (rephrase) and move things on the agenda as needed.
- Make quick judgments about when and how to interject.
- Solicit input from all present.
- Assess when an item has been thoroughly discussed and identify the appropriate time to move on to the next agenda item.

A skilled facilitator:

- *Invites a wide range of commentary* by asking participants for experiences, thoughts, and definitions.
- *Uses silence to his/her advantage.* Give members a chance to think about the questions, and do not be afraid to wait until someone speaks.
- *Limits his/her own participation* once the discussion begins. After going through the introductory material, sets the stage by posing a question and allows the participants to react for a few minutes with limited direction.
- *Encourages participation while maintaining control.*

When posing questions to the group, the facilitator should:

- Ask one question at a time
- Remain neutral
- Verify unclear responses
- Ask open-ended questions

The facilitator should participate very little in the discussion.

Some specific techniques:

- Use reflective listening
- Summarize what you've heard when preparing to switch gears
- Lead into questions with previous examples or a descriptive phrase (e.g. The wearable devices are not waterproof, but their maintenance is pretty minimal. Are these important considerations for you? What other aspects of the wearable device are important to deciding whether to participate in the study?)
- Use participants own words; Don't paraphrase with synonyms
- Use a "parking lot" if necessary for conversations gone astray
- If no one has any ideas about a question that's been posed, offer some suggestions to consider to help spur some ideas