



## FACILITATION TIPS

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**Facilitator:** *someone who contributes structure and process to the conversation so the group can function effectively. A helper and enabler whose goal is to support others.*

### Your Role

- Share overall goal of the day - Educate and Empower. Help people understand why they're here.
  - This is a time that it's appropriate to talk about the growing percentage of women who are managing their land.
- Manage time appropriately - use your agenda
  - Give participants the overall structure for the day.
- Guide any discussions to make sure they stay on track.
  - Possible solution: "This is clearly an interesting topic, and something that's important to several of you, but it doesn't really fit within the structure of this meeting. Let me make a note about the interest and perhaps we can (schedule another meeting/I can find someone to provide information) about this topic."
- Take notes to help you remember landowner stories and points to come back to later on.
- Encourage participants to ask questions and test any assumptions they might have.
- Help the participants make good connections to access resources from other partners.
- Create a positive, interesting, safe environment where all participants enjoy the experience.

### Behaviors and Tools

- Stay neutral
- Listen actively
- Ask questions
- Paraphrase
- Give and receive feedback
- Collect ideas
- Repeat options and resources available
- Create an open, trusting atmosphere

### General Thoughts

- Coordinate with the co-facilitator and resource professionals in advance of the meeting, either with a phone call or prior to participants arriving. Make sure all of the professionals at the meeting know the format, the goal, and the tone of the meeting. Everyone should be unified related to the contents of this document, on how to conduct the meeting.
- Introductions are the most important part of the day.
  - Encourage the landowners to recognize each other as experts.
  - Encourage respect of differing opinions. "All agriculture has its place, all agriculture has room to improve. We all can be doing something to improve our land, farm or operation."
  - I like the Annie's Project phrase, "Everyone has something to learn and everyone has something to teach."
  - Remind them of the power of doing/facing things together. O
  - Leave plenty of time (3 to 5 minutes/ person).
- Watch body language of participants, especially landowners who may have limited experience with this kind of information and/or the decision-making process for their land, to make sure people aren't getting overwhelmed.

- Remember your role is to keep things moving, and create the connection between women landowners and the resources they need.
  - As you become more familiar with the different agencies and the services and programs they offer, don't hesitate to initiate conversation if the agency person doesn't bring something up. For example, NRCS provides free conservation planning and has financial assistance programs.

### Listening

- Active listening is critical to your role as a facilitator. Listening helps you gauge participation levels and adjust your style to fit the needs of the women in the room.
- Take notes about the type of landowners in the room. If you have a diverse group, i.e. women who have been part of the decision-making process vs. those who have no idea what's going on with their land, it will be important to try to meet some of the needs of both groups.
- There are many free on-line courses if you decide you need to brush up on your listening skills.

### Intervention

- You **MUST** be willing to intervene if there is a dominant personality in the room.
  - Possible solution: "Thanks, Lynn. I'd really like to hear from some of you who haven't had a chance to share yet." (This is the subtle method)
  - Possible solution for someone who may not "get" the subtle solution: "Lynn, I'm noticing that you've shared a lot of ideas. Since we have a limited time for discussion and a lot of people here, we need to make sure everyone gets a chance to share information."
- If a landowner is wildly wrong about something factual - and it does happen - it's extra important to work at being diplomatic in your response. The rest of the women may clam up if your answer is perceived as harsh to the one who is wrong. You will also need to watch for this if another conservation professional responds harshly. Male culture more often values challenging, or direct confrontation, but women may not react as well even though they will want accurate information and secretly be glad you stepped in.
  - Possible solution: I know how you feel, I felt the same way about XYZ, and then I found out ABC.
  - Or if you never would have felt that way, perhaps "I know (or understand) some people feel that way, until they find out..."
  - Planning for how you can provide an indirect correction is important if that's not your natural style.
- At least a couple times during the course of the day, make sure to ask the quiet ones directly for comments.
- Facilitating can be very intense as you watch carefully and balance the need to get accurate information out on a topic with the knowledge base of your participants. You may feel a tension between not giving enough resources and in giving too much information. The women highly value the information they learn from each other, and if you have fostered their discussion, you've probably done the right thing. The more often you facilitate the better you will become at listening and guiding discussions.
- Facilitating can also be exhausting so get a good night's rest prior to the day.

### Lesson Learned the Hard Way

- Keep your personal passion and opinions in check - view yourself as a servant of the group's needs
  - In all likelihood, the reason you're helping as a facilitator is because you have a personal stake in creating more opportunity for good stewardship of the land. However, if you become any kind of authority on a topic, instead of being the authority for the process, you can stymie the conversations of the landowners, and/or the landowners and conservation professionals
  - This is hard to do but as a facilitator you must do it and remember it is worth the effort!