

# Facilitating and Participating in Meetings (Roleplay)

## Background Story

After a fruitful round of one-on-one outreach, we have decided it is time to move to the next phase of our campaign. We have organized a few meetings with small groups of residents of the building. However, facilitating such a meeting is not always easy! Especially when you have to achieve consensus between people with different backgrounds and different points of view. In each meeting there will also be one disruption that the facilitator and other participants will have to deal with in order to keep the meeting on track.

## Facilitator Instructions

1. Divide the room into 4 groups. The first three groups need exactly 6 people, and the last group can be home to the rest of the participants.
2. Each of the first three groups is assigned one scenario. Distribute one role to each member of the groups and give them a few minutes to “get into character.” (It would also be helpful to give people their [description of the character from day two](#) as background.)
3. The fourth group is told they are the “observation and feedback team” and that it will be their responsibility to watch and give thoughts on what they saw.
4. Run the meetings one after the other allowing everyone to see each performance.
5. Each meeting has the same meeting agenda (see below)--write it up on flip chart paper and post it on the wall for everyone to see.)
6. Once the scenario has run its course, do a feedback session with the observation and feedback team leading the way.

## Goal of the meeting

Achieve a consensus among your group on two key problems that you think need to be addressed to improve the situation of residents in your building. For the purposes of this exercise, you can only have two problems--so you will need to work together as a group to identify your top priorities.

## Meeting agenda

1. Introductions – who are you, and why did you come to this meeting
2. What would we like to see improved in our building?
3. Taking a first step – identify one issue we can all agree upon to bring to the larger group meeting.



## Scenario #1 – Side conversation

**Objective: stop the side conversation, and bring the group back into focus.**

*Organizer tactics –*

- *Acknowledge that there is a side conversation happening and that it is making it hard to hear what is being said to the group.*
- *Remind the group of the Agreements not to have side conversations.*
- *If necessary, directly address the people having the side conversation by name.*
- *Ask the person speaking to start over.*

### **Meeting Participants:**

**Organizer** - you have organized this meeting and you will be facilitating. It is ultimately your responsibility to achieve the objective of this meeting, which is to **identify and write down one consensus issue** that your group feels needs to be addressed in your building.

**Manuela** – You came to this meeting because the organizer who visited you at home found out that you are concerned about the ever rising costs of your apartment, especially the way your landlord keeps increasing the service costs. You were curious to find out more. You are pretty much inseparable from your boyfriend Tino, and since the meeting was happening on a day you both had off, you brought him along with you.

**Tino** – You adore your girlfriend Manuela, so when she invited you to the meeting you of course said yes, even though you had no real interest in going yourself. As a result, you are more interested in holding a side conversation with Manuela during the meeting than you are listening to what others have to say. Sure it bugs you that your landlord charges you fees to pay a gardener even when the grounds around the building still look terrible, but you generally feel people tend to get too stressed out over the “little things,” and you are rather dismissive of this or any issue you are hearing people bring up in the meeting.

**Jörg** –You know Tino from around town, and you go to the same pub down the street. Like Tino, you tend to feel life is pretty good, but unlike Tino you aren’t quite as dismissive of other people’s concerns. In fact, it does actually bother you that you and your wife Susanne—who is also at the meeting—are having a harder and harder time making ends meet, even though you have a good paying union job. The thing you hate most about meetings is, well, meeting. You hate sitting around and “just talking,” and you are impatient to just “do something already!”

**Susanne** – You came to this meeting after speaking with the organizer during your homevisit. She sparked in you a sense that it was actually not right that every year it seems to get harder and harder to make ends meet. Even though your husband Jörg—who is also at the meeting—has a good job, you are struggling. You also see that lots of other people are struggling because you interact with them (and see what they buy) working as a cashier at the Aldi down the street.

**Wolfgang** – To those who first meet you, you might seem aloof. You don't say much, and you tend to keep your distance. Even though you have lived now as a shut-in for quite a while, something about being in this meeting has awakened your instinct for organizing—something you forgot you had. You are listening carefully, and noting who you think are the leaders in the group. At the same time, something about Tino's carefree attitude in the meeting is really bugging you; you are thinking to yourself, "here is a working class guy who doesn't know how good he has it." You are fighting the urge to tell him to shut up and pay attention to what is going on in the meeting.

## Scenario #2 – Two people doing all the talking

**Objective: to try to get other people to participate more and to curb the participation of the 2 who have talked the most.**

*Organizer tactics –*

- *State what you are observing happening in the group*
- *Tell the two people that you want to open up the conversation and hear from someone you haven't heard from yet.*
- *Try re-framing the question in a way that engages other members to want to participate.*

### **Meeting Participants:**

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**Elizabeth** - You are here with your husband Konrad. Something about the passion of that “nice young organizer” who came to your door moved you to say yes to coming to a meeting. Because it is in your way, you decided to reach out to Hildegard, someone from your building who you know, but have not seen in a long time. Though it is in your general nature to defer to your husband in public, in private you pushed him hard to join you at the meeting, something he did despite his strenuous objections.

**Konrad** - You are married to Elisabeth and came to this meeting at your wife's insistence. However, once you got there you found a debating partner in Ulf. Ulf is nothing like you--unemployed by choice and someone you would generally refer to as a “young punk” if you saw him walking down the street. But something about him has caught your interest and you feel compelled to engage in philosophical conversation with him—and *just* him. It is getting to the point where you are not letting anyone else talk because you are directing all of your comments and questions to just Ulf. As far as issues go, you think the discussion is a pointless waste of time, and you are resisting the organizer's efforts to focus on the task at hand.

**Hildegard** - You were invited to be at the meeting by Elizabeth, and due to your history together you decided to come, even though in your older years you have started to shy away from getting out in public. You are particularly annoyed with Konrad in the meeting because he “acts like a know it all,” and you tend to deal with that annoyance by just closing your mouth and not participating. You invited your next door neighbor Ulf to come to the meeting. You and he are not close, but you have a quiet respect for one another based on a shared sense of being outsiders. For you the single most important issue is the fact that you received a letter from the Job Center telling you that you are paying too much in rent according to their formulas on allowable expenses.

**Ulf** - When your neighbor Hildegard invited you to the meeting, your first question was, “will there be free food?” You decided on a whim to come to the meeting out of curiosity, and based on your history of getting involved in activist projects. When you got to the meeting, you immediately found a debating partner in Konrad. You generally disagree with him on most everything, but you enjoy sparring with him, and you are keen to find ways to get under his skin.

**Rico** – You have some free time now because your daughter is with her grandparents for the summer, so when you heard about the meeting you decided to check it out. Because of your background as an educator you are good with people, and you have an empathetic personality. Just like when you notice if one of your students is holding back, you have an instinct for knowing when someone is holding something back in this meeting. You sense that Hildegard has something to say, but you don't want to be rude by interrupting Ulf and Konrad's discussion. For you the biggest issue is the fact that you are having a hard time affording all your expenses, and you were not able to take a vacation this year as a result. You are generally not one to bring this up on your own.

## Scenario #3 – A leader in your group makes a racist comment

**Objective: raise the consciousness of the membership.**

*Organizer Tactics –*

- *Acknowledge what has been said.*
- *Tell the group that this is a really important point that has been raised and that you want to take a few more minutes to talk about it as a group.*
- *Ask the group what other people think about what has been said so that you can get a pulse of where the group is at. (see if there is a member who can help to raise consciousness in this moment)*
- *Remind the group about divide and conquer tactics. Agitate about who truly holds power in this city*
- *Find a way to acknowledge the real observations and experience of people. Raise consciousness about the actual history and conditions of the community that is being talked about.*

### **Meeting Participants:**

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**Christine** – Working as a journalist, it was hard for you to ignore the sense of curiosity you felt about this organizing meeting happening in your building. You are not attending this meeting in your official capacity as a reporter, but the habits of your job cause you to approach others in the meeting with a sense of distance—as if you are interviewing them, rather than talking to your neighbors. Personally, you are worried that the neighborhood is losing the “gritty character that attracted you to this area in the first place.” You are political. For as long as you can remember you have voted SPD, but you are considering voting for the Greens in the next election. You are mortified when Christian makes a racist comment in the meeting, and begin to wonder if you should maybe leave.

**Bernd** – Your wife Christine cajoled you to join her at the meeting, saying “do you want to just read about politics, or do you want to go and do something about it?” For you, the biggest complaint you have was not being able to afford an upgrade to a bigger apartment. However, you know from talking to another teacher from your school—who also lives in your building—that others are having a much harder time than that. You are willing to help out and have time to do so. Your background as an educator gives you a more sympathetic view than your wife toward Christian when he makes comments about migrants. You think to yourself that he “reminds me of some of my students.”

**Christian** – You came to this meeting because it instinctively made sense to you when the organizer said we needed to join with other tenants if we want to fix things in our building. Anyone who meets you notices you are a hard worker and that you do what you say you are

going to do. You expect others to do the same. You read the newspaper, but your political viewpoints are not well formed. You generally believe the “little guy is getting screwed” but don’t exactly know by who. During the meeting you are just as likely to blame immigrants or “the corporations” for the problems people in your neighborhood face. Your comments are starting to make people in the meeting uncomfortable, but you don’t understand why. Your first reaction to people telling you to stop talking about migrants is to think to yourself, “if you think this is bad, you should hear what some of the people I grew up with say.”

**Julianne** – You came to the meeting with your boyfriend Stefan. As a self-styled leftist you felt it was your duty to show up to a meeting about “taking on the landlords.” When Christian starts making comments about migrants you also feel it is your duty to correct him. The more he dismisses your critiques, the more agitated you become. It is getting to the point where you are on the verge of getting very angry.

**Stefan** – You came to this meeting with your girlfriend, Julianne. You are quiet by nature, and though you do have an issue that you’d like to talk about, you hesitate to bring it up. You had hoped to be able to live alone, but the cost of your apartment made that impossible. You are afraid to mention this issue because you know it will make Julianne upset to hear you talk about it. When Christian makes his comments about migrants you don’t know what to do—so you just freeze.

## **TASKS FOR A FACILITATOR**

### **1. BE PREPARED**

- Be on time so you are able to be relaxed. Review the agenda, plan for the activities involved and objectives/outcomes.

### **2. CREATE A COMFORTABLE SPACE**

- Be welcoming and encouraging. A good mood is contagious. Appear energetic and enthusiastic. As facilitators, we should keep the morale of the group supportive, and upbeat and/or hopeful.
- Try to refer to people by their names.

### **3. ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION**

- Everyone has an important voice. *Encourage everyone to speak, but avoid pushing people if they are unwilling.*
- Ask questions. Don’t lecture.
- Affirm responses. *How we treat one person will have an impact on others.*
- Share airtime. *Be mindful of individuals who are dominating the conversation. Remind folks that there is limited time and we should try to hear from everyone.*
- One mic. *When one person is speaking, encourage everyone to listen (discourage side conversations).*
- Facilitate; don’t dominate. *Use your role to encourage people to speak and listen to each other. At times, you may want to contribute to the discussion. If so, be mindful of time, and the importance of prioritizing the voices of members of the community who have never been in a space like this before.*



#### **4. MOVE THE DISCUSSION FORWARD**

- Pay close attention to who is speaking and what they are saying. *Just calling on people may result in a feeling of disorganization/confusion because a lot of different important points are being raised but there's no space to discuss them or ask questions. Our role is to find ways for people to have an opportunity to ask questions or comment, AND to move the discussion along.*
- *If points are being repeated, acknowledge it and ask for 'other' points.*
- *Find opportunities to sum up what folks are saying (i.e. "It seems that there are 3 main issues...would anyone like to comment on the first one?")*
- *Find opportunities to move the discussion along (i.e. "Do you feel like we should move onto the next point?")*
- Balance individual with group needs. *When possible, help to transform individual stories so they are relevant to the group.*
- Follow the agenda and time breakdown. *We should also be flexible when necessary. In the end, how the women feel leaving the group will determine whether they come back.*

#### **5. RAISE CONSCIOUSNESS**

- During meetings there are often comments that reflect the ideas, questions and contradictions that we all have internalized around racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. *A conscious facilitator is able to see those moments as an opening to offer a different perspective and share politics, without shaming people for what they have said.*

### **GUIDELINES FOR HELPFUL PARTICIPATION IN MEETINGS**

#### **Follow the Facilitator:**

- Trust the process and go with it. You can always evaluate or offer suggestions later, but too many cooks in the kitchen' keeps anything from getting cooked.

#### **Stay on Topic:**

- Leaders are critical to helping a facilitator move through the agenda for a meeting successfully. Very often in meetings an idea will come to us in the middle of a discussion and we will feel drawn to put that idea out quickly before we forget it. *Write it down* and bring it up later when there is a break in the agenda.

#### **Follow the Group Agreements:**

- Leaders often set the tone for how new members understand the organization. If leaders raise our hands to speak, respect translation, step up and step back, it helps the whole group function well together.

#### **Listen to other members:**

- Listening will help you not to repeat what other people have said, and allow you to make observations or offer new ideas based on what you are hearing from other members.

#### **Raise Concerns or Excitement:**

- When a proposal has been made, it is really helpful to hear from leaders whether you think it is a good idea or something you have concerns about. But it is also important that leaders raise their ideas in ways the *help the group move forward*. If you have a concern, try to put out a suggestion for how it might be resolved or ask for help from the group to think together for how it could be dealt with.

#### **Offer Proposals:**

- If there are a few ideas that the group is considering and you notice that the group seems to be coming to a place of agreement and you think people are ready to make a decision, it can be very helpful to put out a proposal. Based on your proposal, you can see if there is in fact agreement or if the group still needs some more time to come to unity.

**Be Flexible and Respectful:**

- In organizations, our strength comes from our collective unity and our ability to work together. We learn from each other, respect each others opinions, evaluate and learn lessons together from our experiences. If we put pride of place on our own ideas or opinions, we can hold back our process of listening and learning from the group. Leaders in an organization are key to model flexibility and openness to try new ideas and respect the decision that they group makes as a whole.

**Help Keep Spirits Up:**

- We know that the struggle we are waging is long and to win we have to make it through many challenges and difficulties along the way. We get sick, we lose loved ones, we struggle to make ends meet. Leaders can often read where the group is at and see times when people need support, compassion, and inspiration. We can offer this through poems, chants, songs, agitation, closing prayers, and sharing stories from our lives of the things that help to carry us through when things are hard.

## **STARTING POINTS FOR THE FACILITATOR**

- Make sure people are clear on the goals and agenda of the meeting
- Watch the time
- Keep a stack
- Make sure the ground-rules are followed
- Get everyone involved, participating
- Keep the meeting on track, keep the group on track
- See what the point of each item is
- Identify reports, discussions, evaluations, and decisions to know where you are going with your point, and what action should be taken
- End each point and move the meeting forward

## **TASKS FOR A FACILITATOR**

1. Be prepared.
2. Create a comfortable space.
3. Encourage participation.
4. Move the discussion forward.
5. Raise consciousness.

