

# Your Facilitator



Jerry Firth, CDO

- BSW, MSW (Leadership in Human Services)
- 15+ years working in the nonprofit and voluntary sector
- 10 Years of experience working in strategy within the sector
- Involved in various Board member roles

A collection of yellow, three-dimensional geometric shapes made of paper, resembling folded paper or origami, scattered across the top half of the slide. The shapes are various sizes and orientations, creating a dynamic, abstract composition. The background is a light grey-blue gradient.

Board Leadership Calgary

April 25, 2026

Presented by: Jerry Firth

Community Development Unit

# Facilitation Fundamentals

Practical Skills for Leading Effective Conversations

*Alberta* ■  
Arts, Culture  
and Status of Women

# Session Flow

---

How we'll spend our time:

- Core concepts (short and focused)
- Tools and practice (hands-on)
- Applying tools to real situations

# Session Outcomes

By the end of the session, you will be able to:

- Describe the role of a facilitator and how it differs from other roles
- Recognize key principles that support effective group discussions
- Apply basic facilitation tools for idea generation, discussion, and decision-making
- Use simple methods to guide conversations toward clearer outcomes

# Working Agreements

To support a productive session:



Everyone has something valuable to contribute

Everyone will hear and be heard

There are no wrong answers

Step up and step back (balance participation)

# Opening Reflection

What frustrates you about meetings?

Think about:

- What doesn't work well?
- What feels unproductive?
- What gets in the way of good discussion?

# Core Concepts

---

# Roles in Meetings



## Presenting

Sharing information or expertise



## Training

Building skills or knowledge



## Chairing

Managing agenda, time, and decisions



## Facilitating

Guiding the process so the group can do its best thinking

# Role of the Facilitator

A facilitator:

- Remains neutral (does not push their own opinions)
- Focuses on how the conversation happens
- Encourages participation from all members
- Helps the group stay focused and productive
- Supports the group in reaching its own conclusions



# The Practice & Art of Facilitation

Facilitation is both a skill and an art:

- There is no perfect way to facilitate
- Skills develop through practice and experience
- The goal is to help groups think more clearly
- The facilitator does not need to have all the answers
- Success depends on the group – not just the facilitator



# Process v Content

Two things happening in every meeting:

## Content (What)

---

- Topics, issues, decisions
- Information being discussed

## Process (How)

---

- How the group works together
- How ideas are generated and discussed
- How decisions are made

# Start with Outcomes

Effective facilitation begins with clarity:

What do people need to leave with?

- A decision?
- A list of ideas?
- A shared understanding?
- A clear next step?

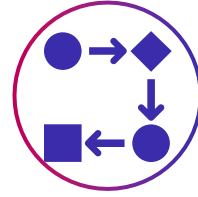


# Designing a Session



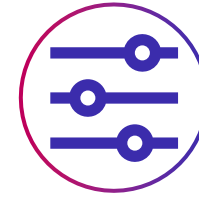
## People

- Who needs to be involved?
- How will they participate?



## Process

- What steps will guide the conversation?
- What tools will you use?



## Things (Logistics)

- Room setup / virtual tools
- Time, materials, flow

# Tools & Practice

## Block 1

# Powerful Questions

Strong facilitation starts with strong questions

Good questions are:

- Open-ended (not yes/no)
- Clear and focused
- Thought-provoking
- Connected to the desired outcome



# Question Design

## Activity

---

Create a strong facilitation question:

- “How can our board improve engagement?”

Refine your question:

- Make it clearer
- Make it more open
- Make it more focused

# ORID Framework

A structured way to guide discussion

- O – Objective (facts, data)
- R – Reflective (reactions, feelings)
- I – Interpretive (meaning, insights)
- D – Decisional (actions, next steps)



# ORID in Practice

## Activity

Apply ORID to:

- Why meetings are ineffective

Work through

- What do we see happening?
- How do people feel about it?
- What does it mean?
- What should we do differently?

# Tools & Practice

## Block 2

# Brainstorming

Brainstorming helps generate ideas quickly

Guidelines:

- No criticism or evaluation
- Focus on quantity
- Build on other's ideas
- Record all ideas visibly



# Brainstorm

## Activity

---

What makes meetings ineffective?

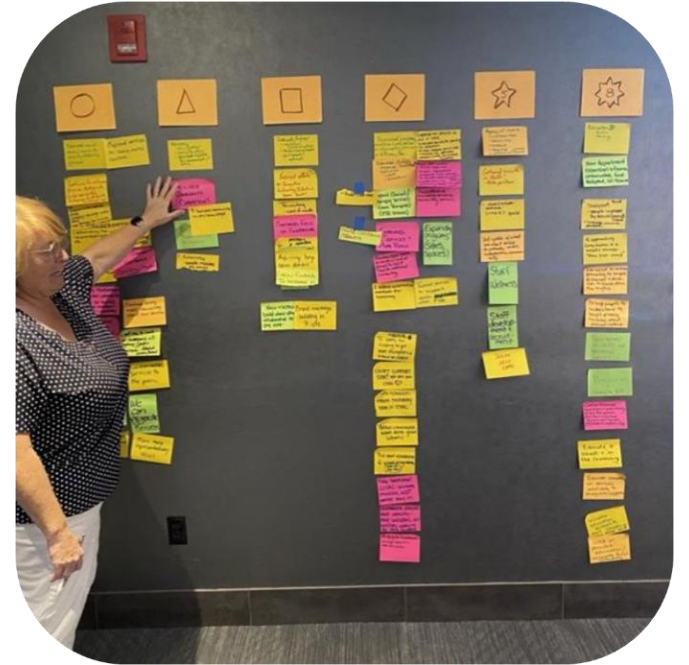
Think broadly:

- Structure
- Participation
- Clarity
- Decision-making

# Affinity Clustering

Organize ideas into meaningful groups:

- Look for patterns or similarities
- Group related ideas together
- Do this silently at first
- Avoid overthinking



# Affinity Clustering

## Debrief

---

What did grouping the ideas help you see?

- 
- Patterns
  - Common themes
  - Areas of focus

# Dot Voting

Prioritize what matters most:

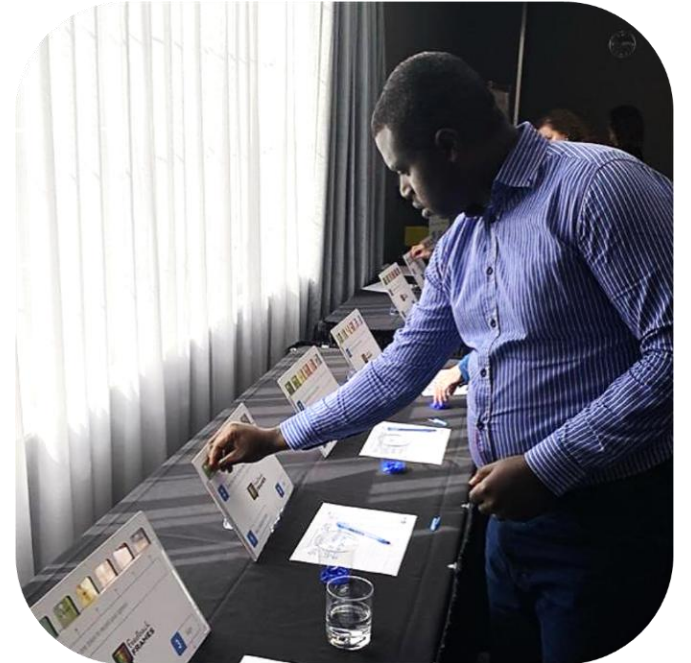
- Each person gets multiple votes
- Vote on the most important ideas
- Identify top priorities quickly



# Gradients of Agreement

Test alignment without forcing consensus:

- 1 - Fully support
- 2 - Support within minor concerns
- 3 - Can live with it
- 4 - Have concerns
- 5 - Cannot support



# Alignment Check

## Activity

---

Should our board focus more on strategy than operations?

- 
- Choose your level of agreement
  - Be prepared to explain your position

# Wrap-Up

---

# Dot Voting

---

Effective facilitation requires:

- Clear outcomes
- Strong questions
- Structured process
- Active participation

# | Reflection

What is one tool or idea you will use  
in your next meeting?

# Final Thought

Facilitation creates the conditions for better thinking and better decisions

**THANK YOU!**

---

Any final questions or reflections?