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**THE Quaich INC.**

Consulting & Marketing of Health Innovations

**TEL** (902) 894-3399  
**FAX** (902) 626-3221  
**E-MAIL** [info@thequaich.pe.ca](mailto:info@thequaich.pe.ca)  
**WWW** [thequaich.pe.ca](http://thequaich.pe.ca)

25 Bolger Drive  
Charlottetown  
Prince Edward Island  
C1A 7T2, CANADA

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## 1. Introduction

This facilitator guide is designed to give you, as a community leader, more information and guidance on leading and facilitating groups. It expands on the information and tips that are given in the ALCOA Community Leaders Guidebook.

## 2. Facilitator of Communication

As a Community Leader, you will be a facilitator of change, a facilitator of a program and possibly a facilitator of groups in your organization. As a facilitator, it is essential that you are seen as open to diverse perspectives and positive with intentions. To be an effective facilitator you must be able to:

- relate to others,
- communicate effectively,
- facilitate and manage group dynamics,
- value differences,
- validate knowledge from experience and education,
- believe that those most affected by a problem have ideas on how to solve the problem, and
- analyze and conceptualize.

### 2.1.1. Relate to Others

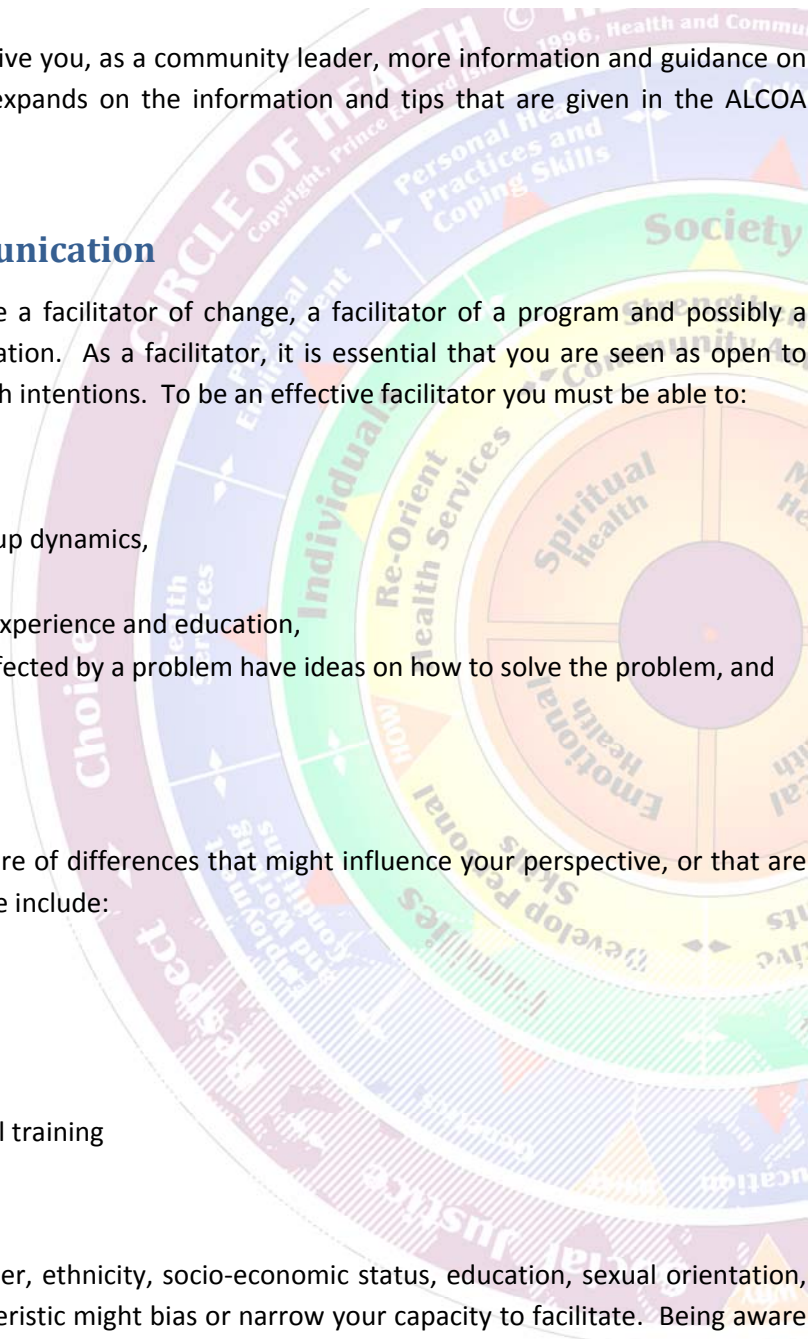
To relate to others you must be aware of differences that might influence your perspective, or that are important to people's identity. These include:

- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Socio-economic status
- Sexual orientation
- Education and professional training
- Religion, and
- Other differences

In each of your characteristics: gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, education, sexual orientation, religion, consider how these characteristic might bias or narrow your capacity to facilitate. Being aware of your own bias and being open to learning about others, is the most important factor in relating to others.

### 2.1.2. Communicate

Communication is the key to facilitation. As a facilitator your job is to manage the process of understanding for an individual or group, and once you understand another's perspective, you may need to add your own perspective or knowledge. The most important skill to express your point of view is the use of the "I" message. These skills balance cooperative communication with assertive



communication. Assertive communication focuses on getting the job done or task achieved, and cooperative communication focuses on building relationships. In any communication it helps to have two goals: tasks and relationships. This is especially important in group dynamics. As a facilitator you will be:

- listening to understand individual perspectives;
- helping others in a family or group to understand each other's perspectives; and
- asserting your own interests in managing the process, or adding new information appropriately.

Many organizations offer training in communication skills.

### 2.1.3. Active Listening

Active listening involves three parts:

- Body posture
- Tone of voice, and
- Words

Words make up less than 10% of what we “hear”. Make sure that your tone of voice and your body language match your words.

Practice a “listening stance” - an open posture, soft eye contact, and encouraging comments. Encouraging comments are as simple as: “Mhmm”, or “Tell me more about that.”

When other people are upset, you may need to name the feelings before they are ready to move on:

- Put yourself in the other's shoes and imagine what they might be feeling.
- Name the feeling word for them; for example, “You seem frustrated with . . .”

Your goal with active listening is to validate feelings and help the person to tap-into their own resources for problem-solving. If someone is very emotional, this may take back-and-forth dialogue of listening and naming feelings before you see or hear a change that indicates a person is ready. For example, the person may begin to talk about solutions, or ask for help toward solutions. Be careful not to jump into facts or solutions when someone is emotional, they won't ‘be able’ to hear you.

### 2.1.4. Active Questioning

Asking questions helps listening by guiding the person to increase their own understanding and to give you the information you need to understand. Open questions that can't be answered by “yes” or “no” are the most helpful.

To know what question to ask, think about what the person is saying and what you need as a listener to understand. Do you want to:

- know the bigger picture, ask “What happened?”;

- clarify a word or statement, ask “How did that affect you?” or “What does that mean to you?”;
- know what is most important to the person, their needs and values, ask “What is important to you about . . . ?”;
- explore ideas for solutions, ask “What other ideas do you have?” or “How else could you do that?”;
- consider the outcome of an action, ask “What will happen if you do that?” or “How will that affect . . . (your family)?”.

“What” or “how” questions are most helpful, because they focus people on the present or future. “Why” questions focus on the past, and can be heard as blaming.

### 2.1.5. Acknowledge Understanding

Let the person know you understand by summarizing. You

- say in your own words the main things you have heard, and
- let the person know that you are listening to understand.

When you are working with groups, it will also be important to summarize the group. Summarize an individual comment for example: “That doctor gave me this prescription that costs \$120. I don’t have that kind of money. I can’t afford to get well”. Let the person know you have understood by saying: “Because you can’t afford that prescription you worry that you won’t get better.”

### 2.1.6. Reframe

Sometimes when you summarize, you will want to help the person move from a negative thought to a more positive thought - to put a different frame around a statement. This will make it easier for the person to move to problem-solving. It will also make it easier for other people to listen if the person has been blaming.

To reframe you

- put yourself in the other person’s shoes,
- think about what they need or value, and include that in your summary.

For example, using the summarizing example:

“You are upset that the doctor gave you such an expensive prescription. You want to get better and enjoy good health.” The shift from “You worry that you won’t get better” to “You want to get better and enjoy good health” helps the person think in a positive way about how to meet their needs.

When summarizing group information, you will want to include the highlights of all perspectives, and reframe perspectives in a way that identifies what is important to people, not their solutions. For example, meeting with a group representing different community organizations you may have heard:

- we have to build a community clinic in this area;

- we need to spend our money on keeping kids in school;
- jobs are what we need;
- we have to end family abuse.

Summarizing exactly what you have heard from the group can get people stuck in their solutions, so you will need to think about what the solution would achieve – what is underneath, and put that in a reframed summary.

For example:

“It seems that you all want to make sure that this community has resources to help everyone achieve and for families to be supported.”

### 2.1.7. State Your Interests

Stating your interests lets people know what is important to you. Others are more able to listen if we talk in ways that do not blame others and that says what we need. One way to talk about what is important to you, especially if you are upset, is to use an “I” message. An “I” message keeps you from blaming others and helps you to take responsibility for your own feelings, say why you feel as you do, and clearly request what you want. When you are facilitating, an “I” message is especially helpful if one person is making demands or doing most of the talking and you need to get the group back to the topic or goal.

#### 2.1.7.1. Steps in an “I” message:

- Step 1: Describe what you observe (what anyone would see, hear or notice).
- Step 2: Express your feelings (your feelings are based on your past experience and how you react to a situation).
- Step 3: Give information (you have needs and concerns and people need to know what is important to you).
- Step 4: Make a request (say what you would like to have happen as a request for what you want; not a demand).
- Step 5: Now listen.

For example: “When you say this group is a waste of time and we should end the meeting (Step 1), I feel concerned (Step 2), because I haven’t had a chance to hear from other people (Step 3), so I would like to hear from others before we decide if this meeting is worthwhile (Step 4).” Listen to the reply (Step 5).

### 2.1.8. Recognize Barriers

In real life there are things that get in the way of effective communication. Communication will be harder if:

- there are strong feelings (angry, resentful),
- strong beliefs (I’m right/you are wrong; big value clashes),
- unresolved personal issues (between two people, or within a person),

Excerpt: Circle of Health Facilitator Handbook Section 4 - Facilitation Skills

- power is used over others (because I'm stronger, you will do it my way), and
- people dig into positions (there is only one way).

When people are in crisis or there is a conflict over priorities, there will be communication barriers. A facilitator's job is to help people communicate through these challenges.

Use:

- Active listening when there are strong feelings.
- Active questioning when there are strong beliefs.
- Active questioning and "I" messages for unresolved issues.
- "I" messages when you use your authority as a facilitator.
- Reframing and active questioning when people are stuck.

### 2.1.9. Analyze and Conceptualize

The skills of analyzing and conceptualizing are essential to facilitating groups. You need to be aware of how you and others process information. Your own preference for learning or processing information will influence how you facilitate. There is no right or wrong way of learning, just differences. Whatever your learning style preferences, you can learn techniques that will help you to think, plan, and be creative in working with groups. Make a plan on how you will facilitate with the following people:

- Reflective and sequential preference
- Active
- Intuitive and verbal

## 3. Facilitating Group Dynamics

In any group of people there are dynamics at play. People may have history together, or people may have assumptions about themselves and others that contribute to dynamics. Similar to the goals of getting the job done and building relationships, there are two main functions in groups:

- Task Functions focus on the work to be done, issue to be solved, or goal to be achieved.
- Maintenance Functions focus on the participants.

### 3.1.1. Task Functions

- Summarizing
- Recording Information
- Managing Time
- Clarifying
- Coordinating
- Giving Opinion
- Giving Information

- Seeking Opinion
- Seeking Information
- Initiating

### 3.1.2. Maintenance Functions

- Providing Recognition
- Exploring Feelings
- Managing Conflicts
- Build Cooperation
- Set Norms (Guidelines)
- Supporting
- Encouraging

A facilitator recognizes balance within and between the task and maintenance functions, encouraging all participants to contribute to different functions, and not get stuck in one - giving opinion for example. A facilitator uses communication skills to listen, understand and reframe to expand participation, and may use an “I” message to remind a participant that others have important information to contribute.

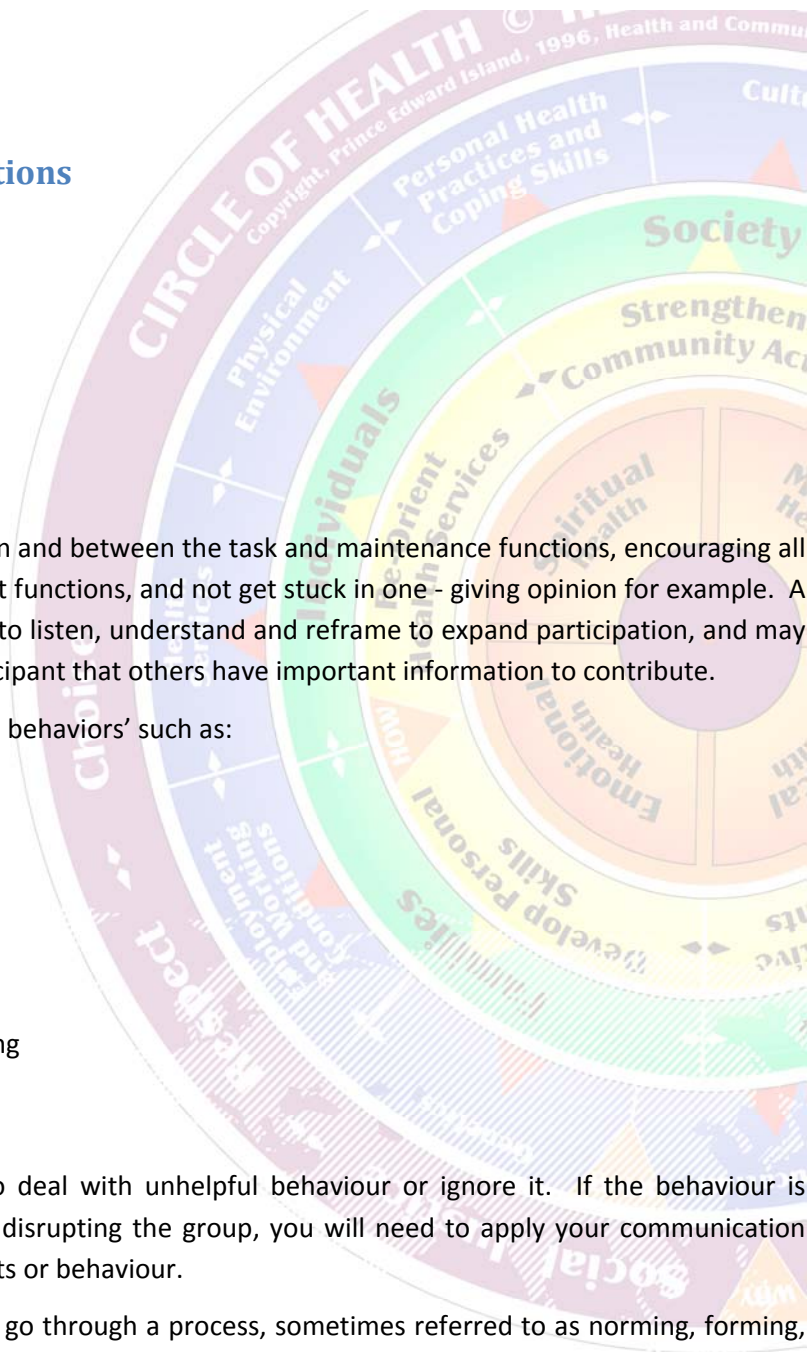
You may notice non-functional group behaviors’ such as:

- Blaming/aggression
- Blocking
- Generalizing
- Challenging the facilitator
- Seeking sympathy
- Speaking for others
- Horsing around/interrupting
- Recognition seeking
- Withdrawing

You will need to decide whether to deal with unhelpful behaviour or ignore it. If the behaviour is focused towards another person or disrupting the group, you will need to apply your communication skills to deal with unhelpful comments or behaviour.

It is helpful to recognize that groups go through a process, sometimes referred to as norming, forming, storming, and performing.

- Norming - individuals have different ideas about how they want to see the group run, bringing those ideas into the discussion and deciding on group norms (guidelines) will help the group to form.
- Forming - people want to belong and their behaviour is cooperative.
- Storming - when people begin to feel comfortable and express themselves, the group enters a challenging time where there are lots of different perspectives and ideas.





- Performing - ideas come together and direction is set so that the group carries out its objectives.

Recognizing the group process will help you to relax and use skills to assist the different group processes.

## 4. Managing Group Process

The facilitator's job is to manage the process. Members of the group are the content experts from their own experience. Sometimes you may also be a content expert, and it will be important to be clear when you are managing the process or when you are involved in content. You need to be clear on your role, and to tell the group about your role. If you have two roles, that is okay, but you will need to be clear when you are performing which role.

### 4.1.1. Plan

Whether you are meeting with an individual, family or group you can make a plan or agenda for the meeting. It is important to think of this agenda as a draft because you will want to include the other person's needs as well. Before you meet with a person or group, you can ask them what they want to accomplish and include that in the agenda. In preparing an agenda you can think about the two purposes:

- Tasks
- Relationships, and the characteristics of the person or group that might be important:
  - Learning styles
  - Literacy level
  - Gender, culture, language

### 4.1.2. Using Activities

Activities are tools to help learning. Activities can be used with individuals or groups. When choosing activities for groups it is important to think about:

- the number of people,
- time available,
- characteristics of people,
- purpose of activity in relation to group goals, and
- physical space.

### 4.1.3. Steps to Successful Group Activities

There are three steps to an activity:

1. Introducing and explaining the activity.
2. Participating in the activity.

3. Discussing the results of the activity.

**4.1.3.1. Introducing the activity:**

- Explain the purpose of the activity.
- Describe how it's done - step by step, and the time allowed.
- Ask if everyone is clear on what to do, check for understanding.
- Distribute materials needed.
- If the activity is in small groups, give ideas on how to divide, and suggest work spaces for small groups.

**4.1.3.2. Participating in the activity:**

- People work at the activity individually, in pairs, small groups or whole group, depending on the activity.
- The facilitator is available to answer questions and coach.
- The facilitator keeps track of time, reminding people, for example, when half the time is used, or when there is a minute or two left.

**4.1.3.3. Discussing the activity:**

- Give people a chance to share their feelings or learning from the activity.
- Facilitator asks questions that help people name what they experienced, look for connection, and add other ideas.
- Facilitator can summarize the outcome of the activity.

## 5. Types of Group Techniques

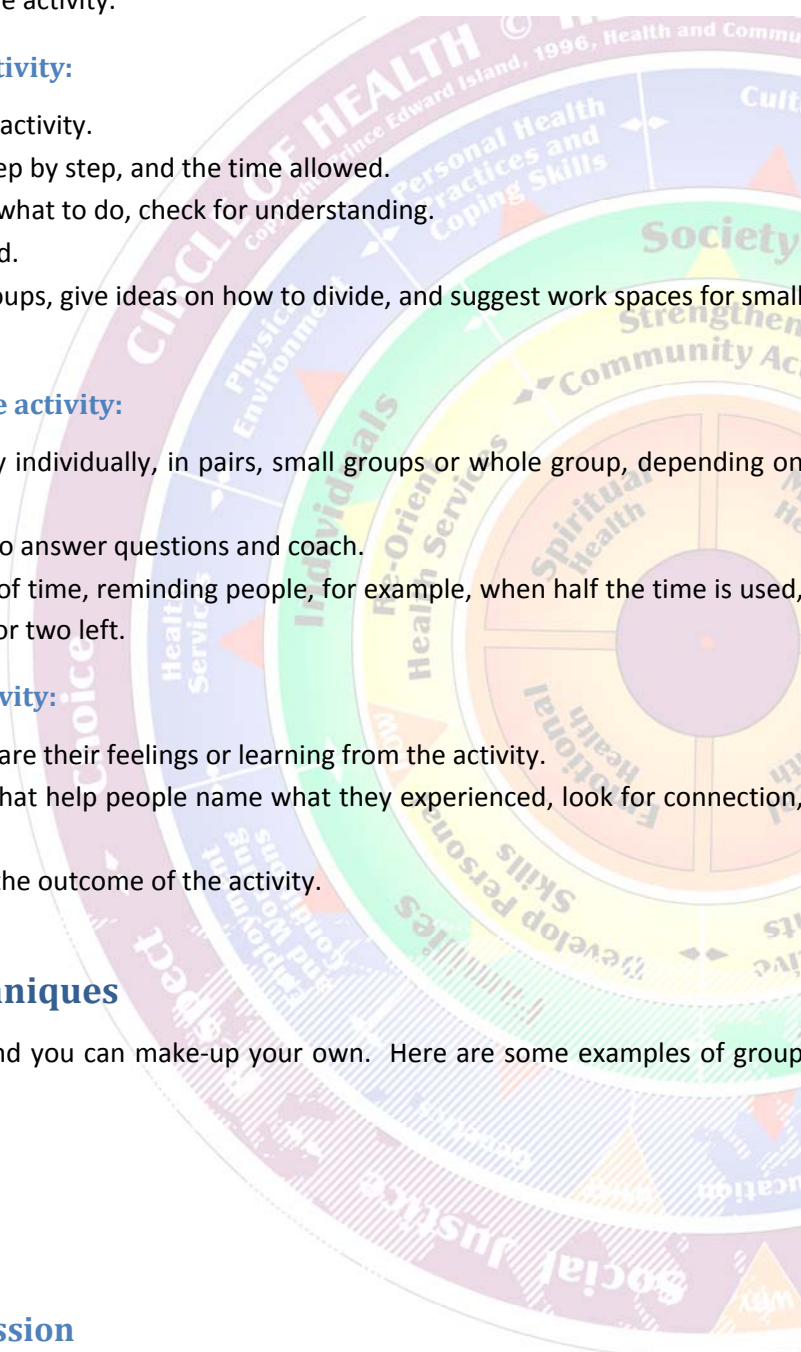
There are many group techniques and you can make-up your own. Here are some examples of group techniques:

- Small Group Discussion
- Brainstorming
- Creative Roundtable

### 5.1.1. Small Group Discussion

When facilitating large groups, having small group discussions are effective because they allow more time for each person to speak and for group consensus to develop. To facilitate small group discussions:

- Divide participants into groups and give clear instructions about the task, time-period, and result/presentation expected.
- Small groups may be divided by an identity; for example, where there is a known difference of opinion, groups with different perspectives of a problem may meet to clarify their perspectives and interests.



- Small groups to brainstorm options to address issues should be mixed groups where people who have different perspectives work together to solve the problem.
- Small groups usually assign one person to tell the highlights of their discussion to the whole group.
- When small groups are discussing information that needs to be included in the record of a meeting, you may want to provide worksheets with clear questions for the group to answer.

### 5.1.2. Brainstorming

Brainstorming can be done with an individual, in large or small groups.

- For creative thinking, problem-solving or evaluation, brainstorming can be used to quickly create a list of ideas.
- Set a time-limit (5 - 10 minutes) on the length of brainstorming and welcome all ideas.
- Encourage "wild & crazy" ideas and building on other people's ideas.
- Be clear that no judgment or debate about ideas is allowed.
- If decisions need to be made about a list, the ideas can be evaluated at the end.

### 5.1.3. Creative Roundtable

The purpose of this activity is to interrupt the habit of group members to become fixed in one role. It can be useful in finalizing solutions.

For a specified period of time, every member talks from one focus-

- every person says what they LIKE about an idea, then
- every member says how they FEEL about it (from the heart, not the head), then
- every member says one CONCERN about the idea, then
- every member says what they would do to IMPROVE the idea.

When all the information has been heard, the group can use the information to improve on options and reach agreement.

If the creative round table is combined with small groups, you may want to provide worksheets or make sure people record responses under the headings for sharing with the large group, or for including in a record of the meeting.

## 6. Evaluating Meetings

Evaluating meetings brings closure to the meeting, provides feedback on what went well and what can be improved, and shares the ownership of the group with all participants.

Use flipcharts and ask for feedback on what was positive, and what can be improved. Ask people to give concrete examples. In areas that can be improved, ask the whole group for suggestions.

## 7. Receiving Feedback

- Receive feedback with the attitude - "I'm willing to learn".
- Think of feedback as information about the other person's experience.
- Don't react to feedback - look for patterns in the information you receive and adjust your approach.

