



# AFP SMART

*Facilitator's Guide*

November 2015

# INTRODUCTION

*The AFP SMART Facilitator's Guide is intended to help advocates plan, execute, and evaluate an advocacy strategy session.*



Effective advocacy requires the time and commitment to map out the policy landscape, set a focused objective, identify the principal decisionmaker, and select the most appropriate messenger. It also requires a facilitator working behind the scenes to inspire a local group of passionate stakeholders to take action.

Managing stakeholder groups with wide-ranging backgrounds, views, and expectations takes subtlety and diplomacy. This is especially true for face-to-face meetings when facilitating consensus and local ownership can so often make or break an advocacy initiative.

However, these skills can be sharpened with the Advance Family Planning (AFP) SMART Facilitator's Guide, a companion piece to the *AFP SMART: A Guide to Quick Wins*.

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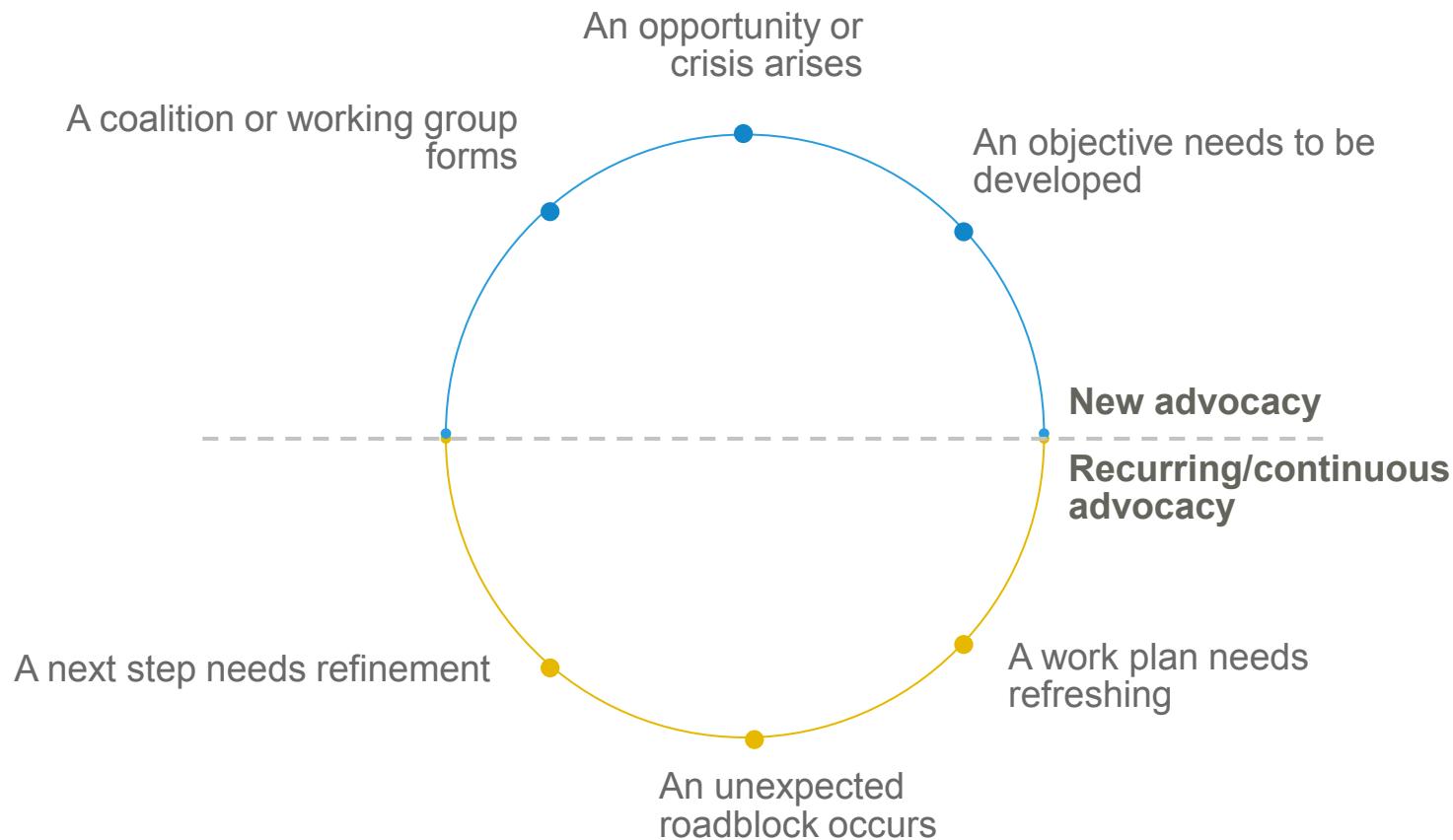
*+ Prepare for your session*

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01

# PREPARE FOR YOUR SESSION

*When is a strategy session needed?*



# PREPARE FOR YOUR SESSION

## Form a facilitation team

Identify at least two facilitators who will guide the strategy facilitation process. Typically, at least one will be an advocate experienced in the *AFP SMART: A Guide to Quick Wins*.

Use or undertake a landscape assessment to identify the potential advocacy objective and any background materials (examples: costed implementation plans, recent data).

## Identify potential participants

Invite instrumental, relevant stakeholders needed to push forward your issue. Participants should be able and be supported by their organization to take action.

Think outside of your usual coalition—focus on those who are specifically needed for the objective (e.g., communities, businesses, and religious leaders).

When possible, keep the group small: your context can inform the number of invitees, but 10–15 participants is recommended. Invite only those who are willing and able to implement the advocacy strategy.



# PREPARE FOR YOUR SESSION



## Decide how to approach the SMART objective

Anticipate your objective, but leave room to adapt it or adopt a new suggestion to ensure group buy-in.

Focus on one objective per strategy session. If more than one is necessary, schedule a follow-up session or split participants into groups.

Prior reading of advocacy landscape assessments to inform the session is suggested.



## Assess participants' experience

New or inexperienced groups will need more time; existing coalitions and experienced advocates will need less.

Customize the AFP SMART PPT slide deck and agenda according to participant needs. Which steps should be included and which could be dropped? Is a technical presentation needed to inform the context? Is a presentation to define advocacy vs. activism needed?

The most important steps are to set an objective, select the right decisionmaker, identify effective messages and messengers, and create a work plan.



## Develop agendas

Set aside 2–3 days for a strategy facilitation; for a facilitation that includes a review of evidence, 4–5 days is best.

If your group is more experienced with the AFP SMART approach, you may need only 1.5 days.

Develop an internal agenda specific to facilitators that is separate from the participants' agenda. It should include all exercises and responsibilities.

Assign who will give report-outs and lead icebreakers. Select a notetaker.

# PREPARE FOR YOUR SESSION

## Inform invited participants

Share the agenda and strategy session expectations with participants in advance.

Sending invitations signed from a local partner or prominent local leader can help create buy-in to the session. Think of the invitation as a SMART ask in and of itself: who is your messenger (signatory)? How should you frame the ask (the letter)?

If you are unsure of the name of the person to invite from a particular organization, describe the job responsibilities of the recommended type of participant in your correspondence and why his or her participation is critical to moving forward.

Remind participants to bring relevant data and information, if necessary.

Be prepared to advise on per diem and travel reimbursements.



# PREPARE FOR YOUR SESSION

## Logistics Checklist

### HANDOUTS

- ✓ Agenda
- ✓ AFP Advocacy Portfolio
- ✓ Sign-in sheet
- ✓ Certificates for participation
- ✓ Other background materials
- ✓ Evaluation forms

### LOCATION

- ✓ Wi-fi
- ✓ Air conditioning or heat
- ✓ Seating arrangements
- ✓ Bathrooms
- ✓ Electrical outlets

### SUPPLIES

- ✓ Projector
- ✓ Microphones
- ✓ Laptop
- ✓ Flip-chart and markers
- ✓ Post-its and stickers
- ✓ Camera
- ✓ Refreshments
- ✓ Extension cords

### LOGISTICS

- ✓ Visa application information, if foreign travel involved
- ✓ Transportation details
- ✓ Lodging
- ✓ Emergency contacts
- ✓ Dietary restrictions

## Meet for final preparation

- + Set aside one full day for final preparation with the facilitation team.
- + Review the agenda and background materials and refine the objective, if necessary.
- + Tailor the AFP SMART PowerPoint slide deck to the audience and objective, including local photos.
- + Agree on who will write the strategy session report.
- + Review the logistics checklist, and assign one person to take the lead on logistics (usually not the facilitators).
- + Decide how you will evaluate the session and tailor the AFP evaluation materials.

+ *Facilitate challenging  
steps*

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02

# FACILITATE CHALLENGING STEPS

If your strategy session falters, how will you as the facilitator intervene to help the group get back on track? Many groups using AFP SMART encounter similar obstacles for the most challenging steps (2, 3, 6, and 7).

The following slides offer a series of prompting questions and guidance to overcome those obstacles.

## *Common Obstacles*

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- + Lack of specificity
- + Confusing goals and objectives
- + Activities proposed instead of SMART objectives
- + Inability to prioritize one objective
- + Failure to gain consensus on one objective
- + Thinking too big—the wrong decisionmaker
- + Selecting an ally or messenger instead of a decisionmaker
- + Not enough knowledge to complete the message box
- + Ask unrelated to family planning
- + Struggling with the message box
- + Participants suggest campaigns or other behavior change activities instead of advocacy activities
- + Not everyone responsible for the work plan is present

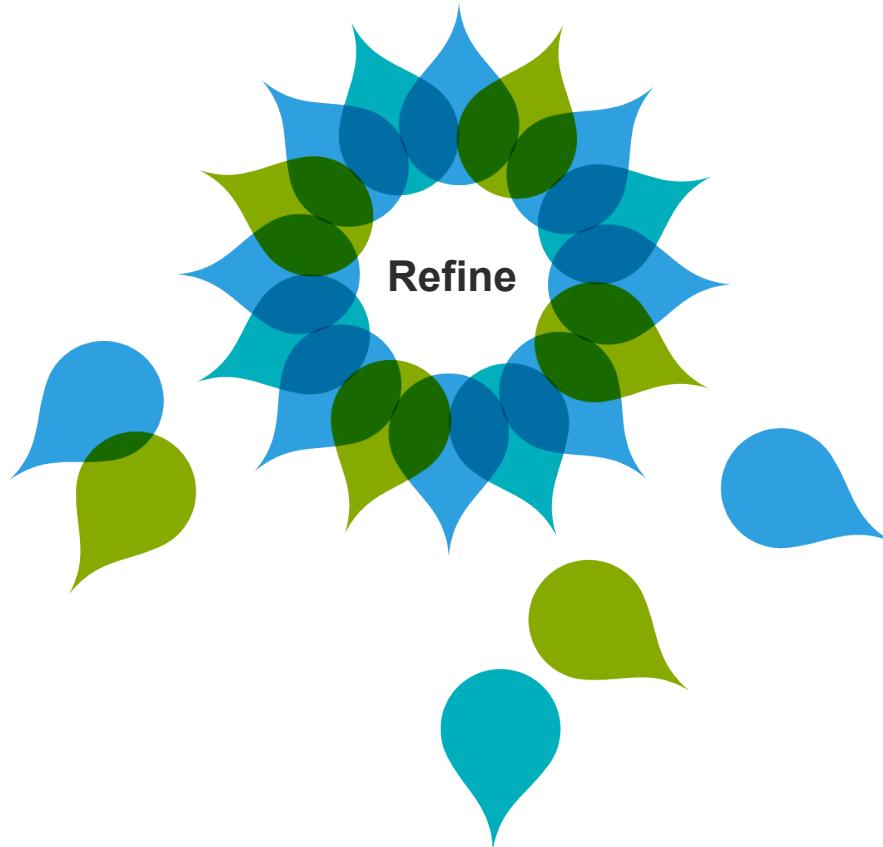
# STEP 2: SET SMART OBJECTIVES

## *Lack of specificity*

- Ask:**
- + “Would a stranger understand what you are trying to achieve? Is your objective explicit and precise?”
  - + “Does the objective state a key outcome, a timeframe, and a decisionmaker who can make it happen?”

**State your objective as an outcome so that you will know definitively when your strategy succeeds or you need to regroup.**

**Make sure the decisionmaker is specific enough; “the government” is not a decisionmaker. Who in government makes the decision?**



# STEP 2: SET SMART OBJECTIVES

## *Confusing goals and objectives*

- Ask:**
- + “What can we achieve now to contribute to our long-term goal?”
  - + “What are important incremental steps toward reaching our goal?”

**Imagine that your goal is to make your community safe for children. What possible first steps in advocacy would you need to take? What would your first, second, and third objective be?**

## *Activities proposed instead of objectives*

- Ask:**
- + “How will this activity contribute to the broad goal? Our SMART objective?”

**Describe a successful advocacy effort and the specific outcomes of example activities.**



# STEP 2: SET SMART OBJECTIVES

## *Inability to prioritize one objective*

- Ask:**
- + “Are any of the objectives you have set more important than others?”
  
  - + “If all are equal, how will you coordinate parallel efforts and what kinds of resources will you need?”

**Describe some ways in which multiple objectives may be more difficult to manage. More challenging objectives can be addressed in future strategy sessions.**

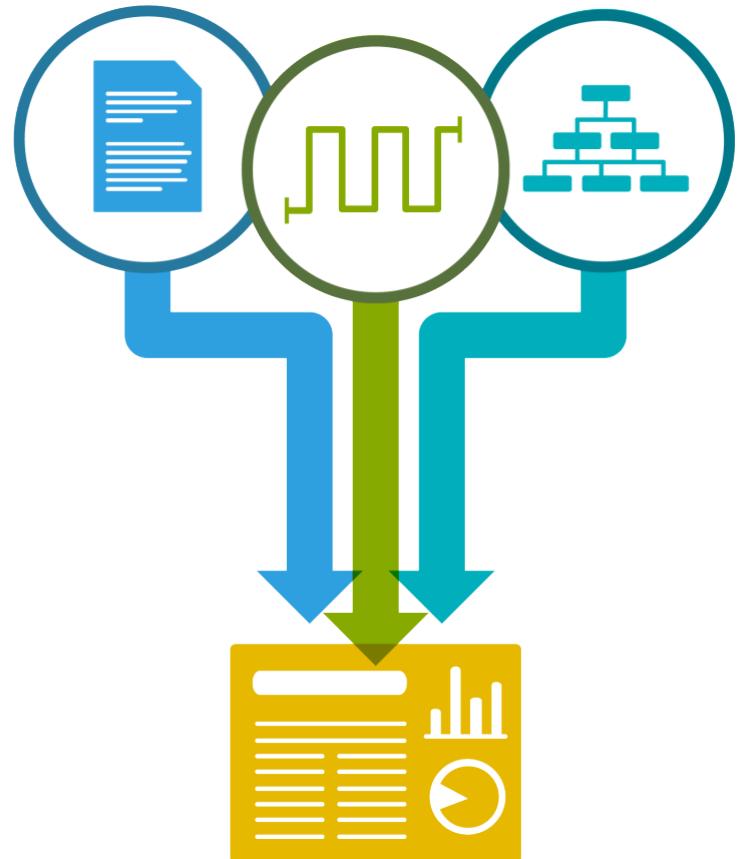


# STEP 2: SET SMART OBJECTIVES

*Failure to gain consensus on one objective*

- Ask:
- + “From the list that has been developed, which of these will have the biggest impact?”
  - + “What can be achieved in the near term?”
  - + “How can we balance both impact and our timeline in choosing one objective?”

**Assess objectives according to the most impactful and near term. Record secondary objectives for additional strategy sessions.**



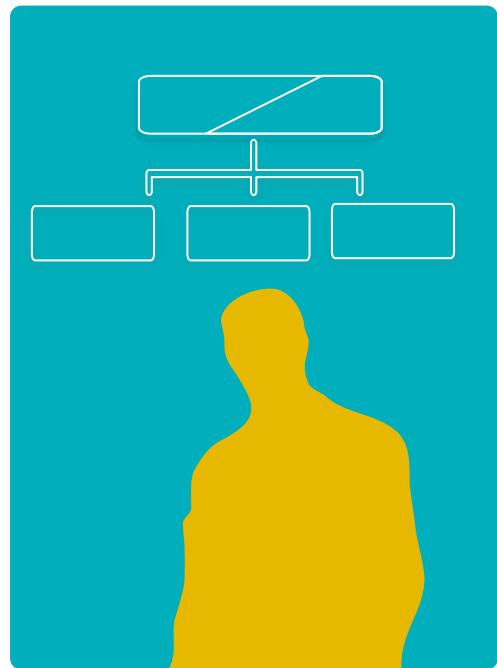
# STEP 3: IDENTIFY THE DECISIONMAKER

*Thinking too big—the wrong decisionmaker*

Ask:

- + “Who really takes the first step in drafting a policy or budget?”
- + “Which decisionmakers are critical to approving a policy change and who influences them?”
- + “Are a series of sequential decisions (and decisionmakers) involved?”

**Map the power structure related to your objective and the group's access to each decisionmaker. Consult someone who knows the local decision-making process. Identify a primary and secondary decisionmaker.**



# STEP 3: IDENTIFY THE DECISIONMAKER

*Selecting an ally or messenger instead of a decisionmaker*

- Ask:
- + “Did we identify the decisionmaker or an ally?  
The decisionmaker may be an ally but not all allies are decisionmakers.”
  - + “Did we identify the messenger?”

Discuss categories of decisionmakers and analyze several options: legislators and their affiliated groups and ministries, providers, etc. Consult a stakeholder network map if available. Reaffirm the chosen decisionmaker in Step 4: Review the context.



# STEP 6: DETERMINE THE ASK



*Not enough knowledge to complete the message box*

- Ask:**
- + “Do we need more information before we can decide to take this forward?”
  - + “Can we obtain the information now by making a phone call? By other means?”

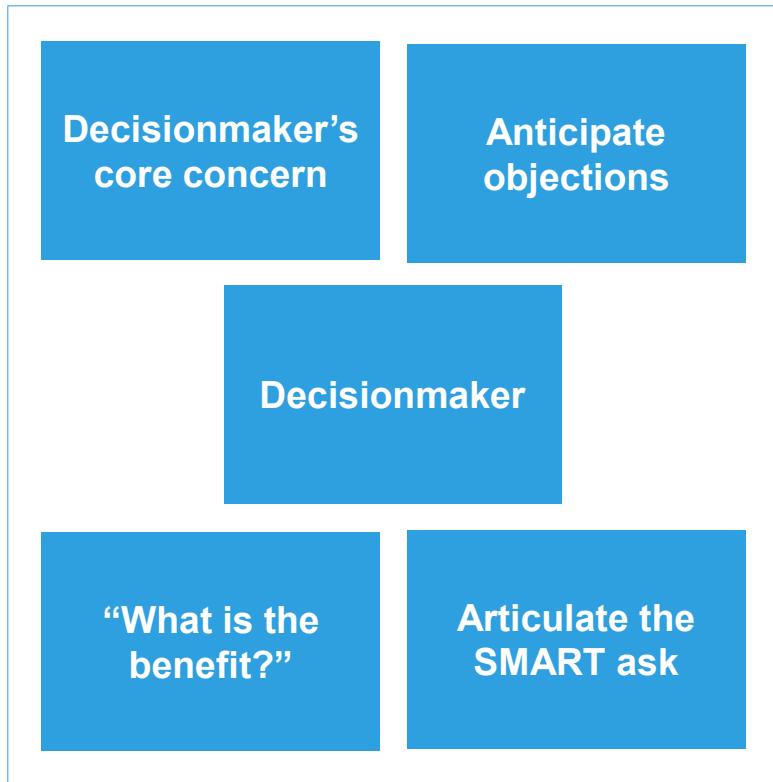
**Assign one participant to find out more information.**

*Ask unrelated to family planning*

- Ask:**
- + “Will this objective help reach our broad goal (e.g., increasing access to contraception)?”

**Revisit the purpose of the meeting and goal you are trying to achieve.**

# STEP 6: DETERMINE THE ASK



## *Struggling with the message box*

- Ask:**
- + “Is this the group’s core concern or our decisionmaker’s?”
  - + “Does our messaging align with what we know about the decisionmaker?”
  - + “Is our ask truly SMART?”

Gather everyone’s ideas before prioritizing and editing messages. Refer to elements of SMART posted on a flip-chart. Use the SMART objective in developing the ask statement, and remind participants there are many ways to frame a request. Where you have evidence, use it to anticipate objections/state benefits.

# STEP 7: DEVELOP A WORK PLAN



*Participants suggest campaigns or other behavior change activities*

- Ask:
- + “Does this activity target our decisionmaker?”
  - + “Why is this activity needed to achieve our SMART objective?”
  - + “Is this activity worth the time and cost?”

**Remind participants the differences among activism, behavior change, media work, and advocacy.**

*Not everyone responsible is present*

- Ask:
- + “What are the best estimates of the time and resources needed to implement our strategy?”
  - + “Do we need a follow-up meeting to validate the work plan with all involved parties?”

**Schedule a follow-up meeting with all relevant stakeholders. Alternatively, share your draft with others needed to implement your strategy.**

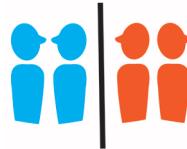
+ *Avoid common traps*

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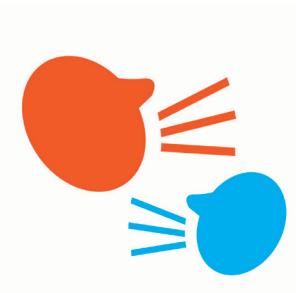
03

# 10 MOST COMMON FACILITATION TRAPS



1. Setting the wrong tone 
2. Not allowing the group to work it out themselves 
3. Focusing on problems rather than solutions 
4. Moving the discussion too quickly 
5. Making too many suggestions 
6. Jumping to conclusions 
7. Assuming consensus 
8. Exhausting participants 
9. Exhausting facilitators 
10. Losing direction 

# 10 MOST COMMON FACILITATION TRAPS



## *1. Setting the wrong tone*

**Setting out rules of engagement at the beginning can help establish a constructive dialogue.**

- + Urge participants to be bold and creative.
- + Recognize their expertise and knowledge on family planning and health policy, especially if participants do not consider themselves to be advocates.
- + Stress that the discussion should be open and respectful, but will not be reported in the media.
- + Encourage sharing of successful advocacy efforts or tactics as an icebreaker.
- + Rotate the job of noting outcomes of the discussion to foster ownership of the process and outcome.

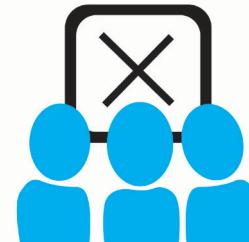
# 10 MOST COMMON FACILITATION TRAPS



## *2. Not allowing the group to work it out themselves*

Following the AFP SMART approach to develop an advocacy strategy is about building consensus and local ownership around objectives and their implementation.

- ⊕ Ensure that all participants are part of the process and make room for differing opinions and debate. The role of the facilitator should be to guide, not to lead, the discussion.

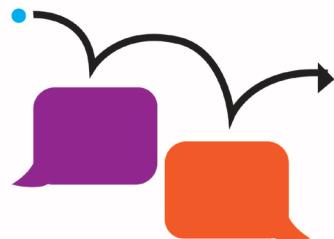


## *3. Focusing on problems rather than solutions*

Increasing access to family planning is not easy, and the consequences of not having access can be dramatic. But the group should not dwell too long on problems and instead focus on what can be accomplished by working together.

- ⊕ Devote a brief period of time to the context and problems by providing a factsheet with basic statistics or with a quick exercise where everyone shares their opinions.
- ⊕ Recognize that the problems are well-known to your group and the meeting is not an evaluation of performance. The AFP SMART advocacy approach is one way to address the problems.

# 10 MOST COMMON FACILITATION TRAPS



## *4. Moving the discussion too quickly*

Two components of the AFP SMART approach typically take the most time:

- + Deciding on an objective and making it SMART
- + Identifying and tailoring messages for a specific decisionmaker

**Do not rush the process: each step builds on another. Gaining agreement throughout is critical to having ownership over the resulting work plan.**

If you anticipate that there will not be enough time in your session to make it through all three phases of AFP SMART, prioritize time for developing a work plan and set up a follow-up strategy session to refine the work plan and messages.

# 10 MOST COMMON FACILITATION TRAPS



## 5. Making too many suggestions

Providing suggestions when the participants do not seem engaged or discussion is not forthcoming is tempting. Even if there is a long period of silence, trust your participants. They may simply need time to think before talking.

- + Make guiding suggestions selectively. Prompt ideas with questions. Your primary job is to facilitate engagement of all participants.
- + If plenary discussions are not working, consider dividing participants into groups.



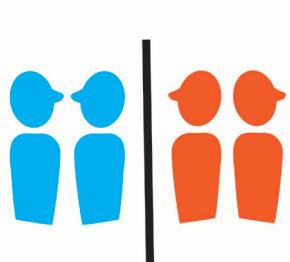
## 6. Jumping to conclusions

Do not assume all your participants will pick up on emerging themes or understand technical details. Periodically summarize the discussion and note down important points.

**Keep discussion going:**

- + Encourage discussion—*That's interesting, tell me more.*
- + Restate contributions—*In other words, what I hear, what you are saying is.*
- + Challenge assumptions—*Is there a downside? What do others think? Is there another perspective we have not yet considered?*

# 10 MOST COMMON FACILITATION TRAPS



## 7. Assuming consensus

**It is important to check whether there is agreement throughout the AFP SMART process.**

**Gauge agreement:**

- + By asking—*Are we all in agreement, is there anyone with a different point of view?*
- + Prioritizing ideas/suggestions—*with stickers or checkmarks on flip charts*
- + Taking a vote (a last resort)—*privately on paper, passed to the facilitator*

**Mediate disagreement—*What assurances would you need to make the idea acceptable to you? What does the evidence say?***

# 10 MOST COMMON FACILITATION TRAPS



## *8. Exhausting participants*

- + Consider when the group will be most energetic, and set the most substantive steps for those times (e.g., steps 2 and 6).
- + Divide into groups to work on key questions.
- + Take an unscheduled break or move an existing break earlier.
- + Inject an energizer or icebreaker.



## *9. Exhausting facilitators*

- + Select more than one facilitator.
- + Divide facilitator responsibilities by step.
- + Match the most experienced facilitators with the most challenging steps.
- + Keep to time as much as possible. Ask for the group's input when you need to adjust the schedule.

# 10 MOST COMMON FACILITATION TRAPS



## *10. Losing direction*

- + The human brain can only hold a few items in its short-term memory. Help participants keep from repeating themselves or moving forward by referring to captured information.
- + Avoid digressing to points that are not relevant to the discussion or long-winded examples or stories by placing them into a “parking lot.”
- + Remind participants of the rules of engagement.

+ *Ensure follow-through*

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04

# FOCUS NEXT STEPS



## *Schedule an immediate debrief with the planning team*

- + Act quickly to build on momentum of the session.
- + Collect and finalize the draft work plan (or plans if you have multiple groups in a session), develop a brief SMART facilitation report, and share all materials used during the session with participants.
- + Answer questions that came up during the facilitation.
- + Draft and send thank-you letters, highlighting key takeaways and next steps. Share photos and videos if taken.

## *Evaluate strategy session and facilitation*

- + Share the evaluation form with participants and ask for feedback, if appropriate.
- + Within your facilitation team, ask: What could have gone better and why? What facilitation strategies were successful and could be repeated?

# CONTACT US

Bill & Melinda Gates Institute for Population and Reproductive Health  
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health  
615 N. Wolfe Street  
Baltimore, MD 21205 USA  
Phone: +1 (410) 502 8715  
Email: [jhsph.afp@jhu.edu](mailto:jhsph.afp@jhu.edu)  
[www.advancefamilyplanning.org](http://www.advancefamilyplanning.org)



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