

Forum of Young Alaskans Facilitation Guide

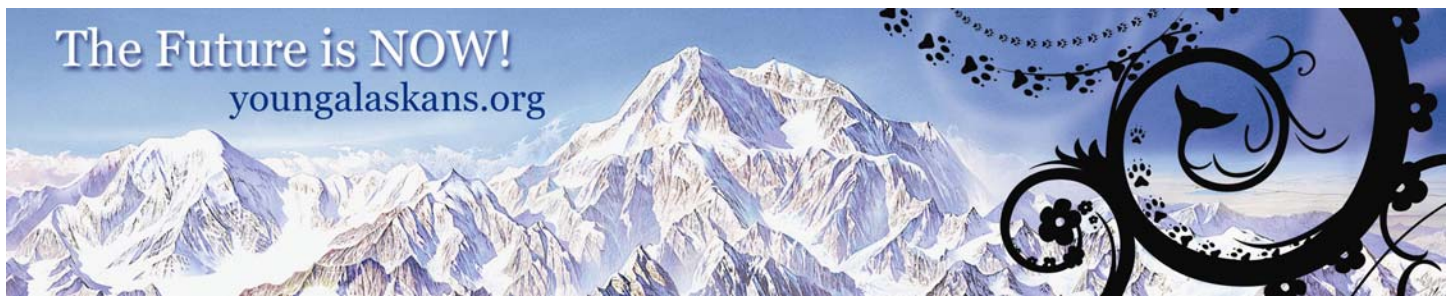
What is Facilitation?

The word facilitate comes from the Latin word “facilis” meaning “easy to do.” To facilitate, then, is literally to make something easier. In group process facilitation, your job is to make the process easier, guiding participants to help them meet their goals and the goals of the event. The goal of a facilitator is to make the process run a little better without interfering, allowing the group to come to its own conclusions. When the process is difficult the facilitator is there to help, but when a group is working well the facilitator can be less obtrusive.

Forum Facilitation

Group facilitators will be playing an important role at the Forum. Your basic duties are:

- ❖ **Easing table introductions.** On Saturday from 12 to 1pm we'll be randomly seating hundreds of young Alaskans who are participating in the Forum. The Forum participants come from diverse backgrounds and a pretty broad age range; many of them may be uncomfortable about sitting at a table with strangers. As facilitator you should be proactive in introducing yourself as participants are finding their seats and getting settled. This is an opportunity to present yourself as a “friendly face,” chat with them a bit about why they're there, and help them relax a bit. This also gives you the ability to introduce them to others sitting at the same table. The table facilitators at your event should figure out how to best work together in the room, whether that's divvying up tables, roving, or something else.
 - **Example:** You see a participant looking for their table number. “Hey, I'm Chris, I'm one of the table facilitators here to help you guys today. It looks like you're at table 12, which is right over here.” “Oh, thanks, I'm Joe.” “Welcome Joe, what brought you to the Forum?” “I'm really passionate about alternative energy development.” “Awesome, that's definitely a hot topic right now; do you know Andy? He's here at table 12 also, and was just telling me about his internship at BP this summer. Andy, this is Joe.” Then you can make your exit and find the next lost looking wanderer.
- ❖ **Clarifying Tasks.** At the beginning of each segment, make a quick stop at each of your tables and make sure they're all set. This is especially important on the first topic as it will be their first time going through the process. Introduce yourself to the table if you haven't met everyone there. Ask them if they understand the task or if they have any questions. Ask if someone will volunteer to be the reporter during the group synthesis section, and you can also ask if someone wants to be the timekeeper. If there are group dynamics you want to work with this is also a good time for that. For example, if you have someone who seems to be dominating the conversations, you might ask that person to help make sure everyone's voice is heard. “There's a lot of energy and opinions on this topic, can you help monitor the group and make sure everyone is getting a chance to speak?”



- ❖ **Monitoring table discussions.** Your primary job is to monitor the table level discussions for key triggers that suggest the table might need some assistance.
 - **Body Language:** Are participants withdrawn or engaged, slouched, or upright, leaning back, or leaning in?
 - **Voice:** Is the group involved in discussion? Is everyone talking or are some people quiet and others commanding the discussion? Is the group listening to everyone, or are some being “shot down?” Raised voices aren’t necessarily negative, but indicate you should be paying attention in case the conversation escalates in a negative way.

If you think a table is in need of assistance, position yourself within view of at least a few of the participants and give them the opportunity to wave or ask you over. Lack of discussion could mean the participants don’t really understand what they’re supposed to be talking about, or could indicate there are some group dynamic issues; either way you want to make yourself available to the group, but without intruding. Generally it will be pretty clear if a group wants your assistance or if they are making progress.

Approaching a Table

When you do approach a table, there are a few things to keep in mind.

- ❖ **The Forum is a “youth driven” event.** Your primary role as a facilitator here is to help the participants take ownership in the event and lead themselves, as a group, through the process we’ve set up.
- ❖ **You are a guest at their table.** Try not to dominate the table, help where you can, but give the group authority to come to their own conclusions.
- ❖ **Facilitator body language.** Use body language that minimizes your intrusion into their group. When you approach a table where the participants are seated, bring yourself to their level. When you stand over a table you put yourself into a position of authority, encourage them to look to you as a leader, and emphasize your intrusion. When you approach a table and drop to one knee you’re silently communicating that while you’re there to help, you aren’t there to be their leader.
- ❖ **Most importantly, have fun!** If you’re relaxed and having fun, your energy will be communicated to the participants you’re helping.