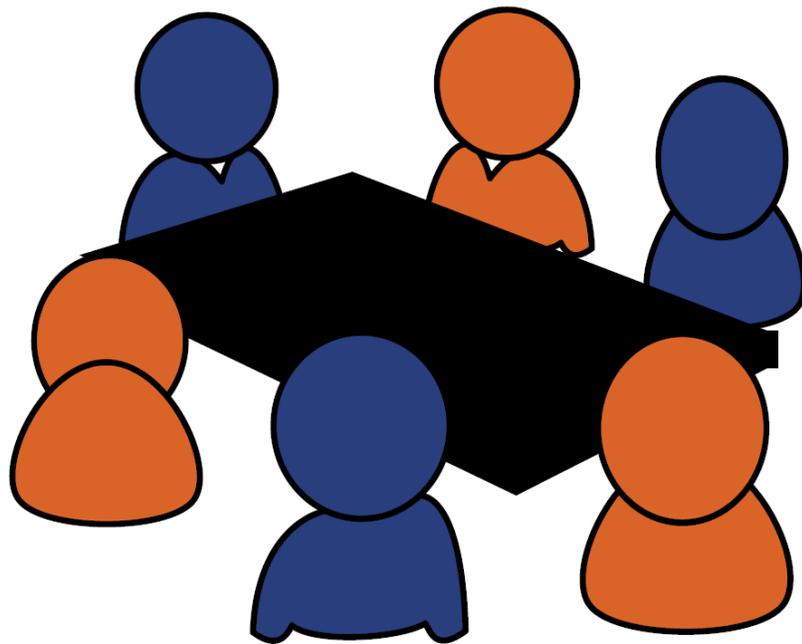


Owning Your Organization: Working With Advisors and Facilitators





How To Use This Tool

This resource gives you tools to work with a facilitator or advisor.

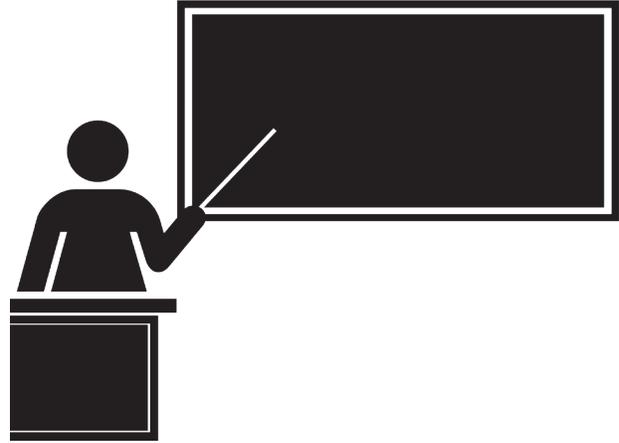
This tool will show you the difference between a good advisor and a bad facilitator.

Then, you'll learn how to work with your organization's advisors, avoid problems, and keep control of your organization.

Next, the tool will give you examples of good and bad facilitators and talk about what to do in different situations.

What Does a Good Facilitator or Advisor Do?

A facilitator or an advisor is someone who helps your self-advocacy organization in different ways. Different organizations might call this person an “advisor”, “helper” or a “facilitator.” We will use all terms. Often, self-advocacy groups have an advisor who is not a person with a disability.

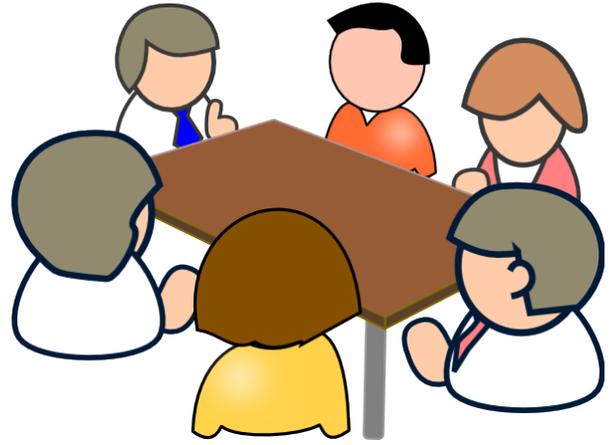


A good facilitator or advisor partners with an organization. Advisors do not create goals for the group. They help the group complete their goals. It is the group’s job to determine and vote on their goals and to develop plans to meet their goals.

A good advisor help groups create plans and manage different tasks. For example, if a group wants to pass a bill to increase public transportation, the advisor would help the group work out a plan. Once the group has made a plan, the advisor can help make sure that the plan is put into action. If the plan is complicated, the advisor can help make sure that all of the group’s goals are met and that no one forgets a task.

A good advisor makes sure meetings are run the way the group wants. If not, the group changes the way meetings are run.

A good advisor helps the group understand new or complicated information. If the group wants, an advisor might translate information into easy to understand language, or complicated concepts, ideas and information down into smaller, easier to understand steps and words.



A good facilitator or advisor helps the group. The advisor makes sure everyone has a chance to speak. The facilitator also makes sure that the group feels welcoming and that everybody feels included.

A good facilitator does not take sides during a debate. For example, if Bob has an idea that is different from Joe's, the facilitator will stay neutral and ask the rest of the group what they think.

A good facilitator or advisor manages the group. The facilitator helps manage the group's goals, monitors online discussions, and help manage conflict. For example, if a group's members aren't getting along, the advisor can step in and help solve the conflict.

A good facilitator or advisor supports the group's projects. They provide help and act as a resource guide.

Who Is In Charge?

The leaders of the organization are in charge. The facilitator or advisor does not lead the group.

A facilitator is not the group's president, chair person or leader. This person is in the forefront leading the meeting. Facilitators generally take a back seat to members during meetings, however they may be invited to sit at the table if a member requests additional support.

Facilitators do not vote on important issues and should avoid expressing their preferences to the group. This is difficult for most people to do. You should expect to have to train your facilitators not to do this. It can help to have a script ready for when you need to remind your facilitator not to share their opinions, like "Stick to facts ma'am, simply the facts." Reminders like this can help facilitators become aware of how often they gave personal opinions instead of factual information.



Examples of a Good Facilitator or Advisor

Peggy is an advisor for a self-advocacy group. When one of the group members has a problem, Peggy helps the member find a solution. Peggy also helps make sure everyone sticks to the agenda that they made before the meeting.

Steven is a facilitator for a self-advocacy group. He makes sure each member has a chance to speak. Steven helps the group to meet the goals that they want to meet. He helps keep the group on-topic during meetings.

Pepper is an advisor for a self-advocacy group. When the group members discuss ideas for a project, Pepper takes clear and organized notes that all the group members can see.



Examples of a Bad Facilitator or Advisor

Bucky is an advisor for a self-advocacy group. He brings a bill from the state legislature to share with the group. The bill uses legal language that the group members could not understand. When the group asks Bucky to bring in a plain language version of the bill, he does not bring it.



Brainstorming

1. Why is this a problem?
2. How can the group fix this problem?
3. How can the group prevent this from happening in the future?

Natasha is a facilitator for a self-advocacy group. She has an idea for the group. When Natasha talks about her idea at the next group meeting, she only calls on people who support her idea. She thinks only her idea should get attention and does not give all of the group members a chance to speak.

Brainstorming

1. Why is this a problem?
2. How can the group fix this problem?
3. How can the group prevent this from happening in the future?

Nick is an advisor for a self-advocacy group. He spends too much time focusing on the little things, like getting snacks ready. This leaves the group with not enough time to take care of more important things, like getting ready for their big conference.

Brainstorming

1. Why is this a problem?
2. How can the group fix this problem?
3. How can the group prevent this from happening in the future?

Bruce is a facilitator for a self-advocacy group. He makes some of the group members his friends. Bruce does this so that when he wants the group to do something, the members will be on his side.

Brainstorming

1. Why is this a problem?
2. How can the group fix this problem?
3. How can the group prevent this from happening in the future?

Recognizing Who is in Control



Shayera is the facilitator for a self-advocacy group. The group wants to plan a community give back project. All year they have sold refreshments at their meetings to fund this goal. Two ideas were brought to the table by group members. Shayera tells the officers that neither plan is possible because they require too much work and are not fun. She encourages them to forget about the community project and spend the money they raised to have a pizza party for the group instead.

Brainstorming

1. Who has the power here?
2. How can the group fix this problem?
3. How can the group prevent this from happening in the future?

Dinah is the facilitator for a self-advocacy group. At the new officer retreat, the officers work on a plan for a community give back project. At their next group meeting, Dinah tells the group they need to start the brainstorming process and come up with ideas even though the group already made a decision. After both ideas are mapped out she encourages the group to talk about and vote on which project they want to commit to.

Brainstorming

1. Who has the power here?
2. How can the group fix this problem?
3. How can the group prevent this from happening in the future?

Lex is the advisor for a self-advocacy group. The group members set a goal to raise money for a community give back project. Lex has a plan on how the group should do this. He tells the group that they should sell refreshments at their meetings. Some members expressed an interest in making cookies before the meetings. Lex ignores their comments and volunteers to make the bake sale easier on the group by stopping by the store on the way to meetings to pick up cookies and sodas.

Brainstorming

1. Who has the power here?
2. How can the group fix this problem?
3. How can the group prevent this from happening in the future?

How to Deal with Bad Facilitators and Advisors

A good interview process will make sure that your group does not hire a bad advisor or facilitator. Group members should have clear ideas about what kinds of help they want from their facilitators.

Your group can use the tools in this guide to help you decide what kind of help you need.

During the interview, explain the purpose of your group, (your mission statement, values, bylaws and current goals) and what kind of help you need. You should also talk about your rules for the group and the rules for facilitators.

If your group has trouble choosing between applicants, consider inviting prospective facilitators to attend your next group meeting. That way officers can observe the way they interact with group members.

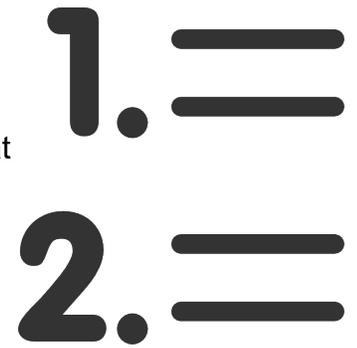
Sample Questions to Ask in an Interview

1. How will you help the members get along?
2. How will you make sure that all of the members have a chance to speak?
3. If a group member does not understand something, what will you do?
4. How will you make sure that everyone in the group has a say in how the group is run?
5. If the group has a problem with how you are facilitating the group, how will you react?
6. What will you do if you have an idea and the group doesn't want to do it?
7. What will you do if you think the group is making a bad choice?



Making Rules for Facilitators or Advisors

Your group should talk about the kinds of support you need both individually and as a group to be successful. Then write a list of rules for the facilitator that help you get the support your group needs. In your rules set up a time every year or so to review and talk about how your facilitator is doing.



For example, some of your rules might be:

- Let the group and its members talk.
- Listen to members' thoughts. Ask for the group's opinions
- Make sure the group understands ideas.
- If the group has a problem, work with the group members to come up with a solution.

Come up with clear rules at the start. That way, it is easy to tell the facilitator or advisor know if they are not meeting these rules. If you don't have rules for your advisor, talk with your group about what the rules should be, and then have a meeting with your advisor about the new rules. Don't be afraid to add more rules later if problems come up or you forgot something.

If your facilitator or advisor is not following the rules, speak up!

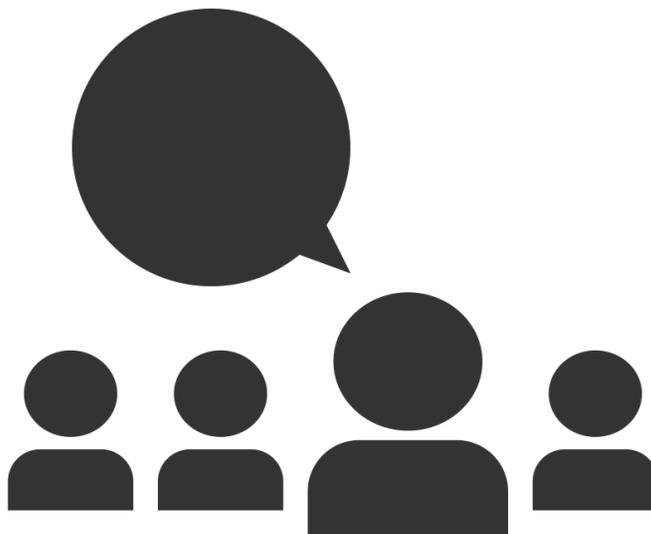
Here are some scripts you can use:

- "Ron hasn't spoken in a while. Let's see if Ron has something he has to say."
- "Can you explain this document? I don't understand what it is saying."
- "You're speaking a little too fast. Can you slow down?"
- "I feel like you're not listening to us. We just said that we don't want to do that."

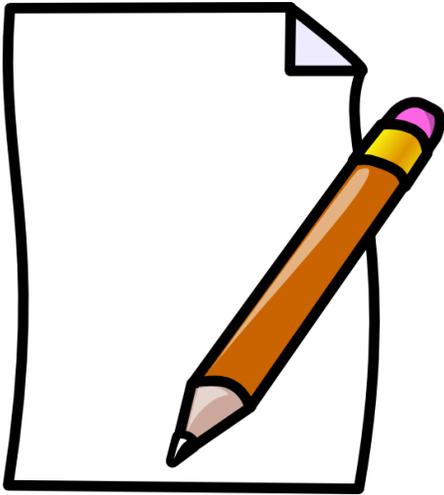
If your advisor still isn't following the rules, it might be time to confront them as a group.

Tips for Meeting with your Facilitator as a Group

- Choose a neutral location for your meeting. This way anybody can leave the conversation safely at any time. Some good neutral spots are coffee shops, a park, the library, or another meeting space besides the one you usually use.
- Go as a group. This shows that more than one person has the same concerns.
- Plan out what you're going to say ahead of time. You don't want to forget anything important, or not get your point across clearly. You can all take turns sharing your concerns. Some people might be better at different parts of the conversation.
- Have a plan for what you're going to do if something goes wrong. Be prepared for the meeting not to go as expected, and know what you're going to do. Talk about what you will do if the facilitator gets upset or interrupts you.
- Role playing can also help people practice talking about difficult topics.
- Confronting someone can be hard, uncomfortable, and scary. But it is an important part of advocacy. It's okay if the facilitator gets upset with you--it doesn't mean you did anything wrong. It is important that self-advocates have control of your group. It is good that you are speaking up about the problem.



Scripts to Use When Confronting the Facilitator or Advisor as a Group



- “We feel like you aren’t helping us to meet the goals that we came up with as a group.”
- “We feel that our ideas aren’t being valued equally and that you’re trying to change our organization.”
- “We feel like you don’t respect the accommodations we need.”
- “We agreed to these rules. When you try to change our minds, like you did last week, you aren’t following them.”

If Things Do Not Get Better

After you talk to the facilitator or advisor, if things do not get better, it might be time to find a new advisor. First, talk as a group about the problems you are having with your facilitator. Then, the group should tell the advisor that they need to find a new person who will be better at supporting them.

Self-advocates can be facilitators or advisors too! One way to find a good facilitator is to pick a group member who the group thinks has or can learn the skills to be a facilitator or advisor.

You can learn more about how to be a good facilitator or advisor by reading [Fantastic Facilitation: Leading Effective, Inclusive Meetings](#).