



## Section 3. Facilitator Preparation and Practices

Sexual and gender harassment and assault can be embarrassing, triggering, and make for very difficult topics to discuss. There may be resistance by some who do not understand various terms or the conduct's negative impact on individuals' opportunities and advancement. Some may fear changes to longstanding conduct, climate, and culture in the field. This facilitation guide is intended to support productive conversations around these difficult topics and to further the education of all key stakeholders so that we can better foster professional, ethical, inclusive, and equitable conduct, climate, and culture, where all talent can thrive for excellence and integrity.

**Aims of Facilitation.** This facilitation checklist aims to help a facilitator to put participants at ease as much as possible, help them “stand in the shoes of others,” and guide them through the case study to:

- (1) Encourage discussion about sexual, gender and intersecting race-based harassment and its impact on individuals and communities, including elevating understanding of what conduct is harmful and what conduct is inclusive.
- (2) Explore the impact of power dynamics among different roles.
- (3) Raise awareness about how targeted individuals and groups can navigate difficult situations to protect themselves and others in the moment and help advance desirable conduct, climate, and culture.
- (4) Highlight how bystanders and allies can elevate expected inclusive vs. prohibited harmful conduct and help prevent further harm.
- (5) Guide and encourage IHEs and societies to adopt and implement policies, procedures, and norms of conduct that help prevent harm and mitigate its effects when it occurs.

**Each case study can be used in small group discussions or workshops (virtually or in-person), as well as for self-directed study.** Potential audiences include a broad range of roles at a society or institution. One way to use a case study is to focus on a bite size chunk of “Pause & Process” questions in a 1–2-hour session; or combine a larger chunk of “Pause & Process” questions to discuss more issues in a 2–3-hour session (suggestions for which fact segments to combine for longer discussion sessions can be found at the beginning of Section 2 of each case study). These time-limited sessions can be combined into a workshop series; or any one such session can be delivered as a stand-alone workshop. A society or institution may want to start using the case study with a limited audience, choosing one or two leadership, student, or early career stakeholder groups from those listed below, and then expand use of the case study to other stakeholders.

Examples of stakeholders/uses include

- New and annual board and ethics and other committee member training
- New board and committee chair training
- New and existing dean and department head training
- Meeting or activities planners training
- New or existing faculty orientation
- Student orientation
- Student leader orientation
- Post-doctoral scholar and resident orientation
- Ally or bystander orientation
- Training for those who design policies and processes—or who serve as contacts or in other roles in the informal or formal resolution process

**Facilitator Qualifications and Authority.** Facilitators must be knowledgeable on and comfortable with the topic, aware of the issues that are raised in the case studies and equipped to address the range of concerns that may come from participants. But individuals with experience facilitating conversations, generally, can prepare by (1) using the case study’s analysis in Section 2 (which includes suggested “Responses” and “Action” steps for each “Pause & Process” question), and cited resources (under the heading “Review”); (2) this facilitation guide (Section 3); and (3) the other resources in [Section 4](#) and [Section 5](#). Facilitators should also be prepared to provide referrals to relevant institutional and other resources and offices for additional assistance, as needed. Some national resources for individuals are available in [Section 6](#).

### **Facilitator Preparation:**

***Self-Awareness.*** In advance of any facilitated group learning experience, it is essential for a facilitator to consider their own biases, as well as triggers, around the issues to be discussed. Improving a facilitator’s self-awareness muscle can help them to listen with genuine curiosity to others’ viewpoints and respond thoughtfully. Strive not to provide the “correct” answer, but to enable others to hear what you are saying. Prepare to approach difficult conversations from a place of respect, understanding, and humility.<sup>1</sup>

***Norms of Conduct.*** At the beginning of a session, the facilitator should explain the respectful and inclusive norms of conduct for everyone, as well as the facilitator’s role to interject at any time when needed to assure the norms are being observed:

- (1) make suggestions and pose options, or explain how someone’s comment made **you feel** when you don’t agree with a point, but do not attack or criticize individuals. By internally acknowledging your right to your feelings, you will be able to move through your emotions in order to reflect with an open mind, and respect, about someone else’s reaction;<sup>2</sup>
- (2) listen carefully to what others are saying; reflect before responding—don’t interrupt others;
- (3) make room for all voices—let others speak before you speak (each time)—be succinct—be aware of your potential dominance (e.g., based on your position, authority, experience, role, or identity) and proactively avoid dominating the discussion;
- (4) if you observe that someone is upset by something you or someone is saying, stop the cause and enable the facilitator to intercede;
- (5) also exercise self-protection, as the topics discussed can be triggering—if you need a break, let the facilitator know and step away (a facilitator will check in with you).

***Sensitivity to Serious Topics and Nondisruption.*** Before, during, and after the facilitation, it is crucial that the facilitator take the topic and issues that are raised seriously. Facilitators should maintain a calm and firm (but not angry) demeanor, support the seriousness of the issues raised and emphasize the importance of inclusive and respectful norms within the conversation and for all participants. Facilitators must be prepared to diffuse participants who tell jokes or belittle the process by calmly re-emphasizing a “no joking matter” message to the group. (E.g., explain up front: “People sometimes make jokes when

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<sup>1</sup> See National Conflict Resolution Center (NCRC), “10 Tips for Managing Conflict.” <https://www.ncrconline.com/>

<sup>2</sup> See *Id.*

facing a tough subject. But this is a safe place for honest discussion. So everyone please be aware of the natural tendency to joke when we're uncomfortable and avoid doing that. What we're discussing is no joke for those who are experiencing harm.") If needed, that message can be amplified to offenders privately (in person or by directed chat).

Plans should be made in advance about how to require a person to leave if they are disrupting the conversation and making it difficult for others to participate, despite the facilitator's efforts. Assure that the facilitator or another preassigned role in attendance has authority to act and that they know how to notify a disruptor and communicate with participants. Governing boards should authorize a senior leader to require a person to leave an activity and to delegate that authority to facilitators, when either determines that requiring a person to leave is best for the aims and conduct of the training. It is an effective practice for the society or institution to give notice of this authority as part of registration for the activity, and to require participants to give an acknowledgement as a condition to registration. Following up with an expelled person is also important to elevate their understanding and attempt to engage them in learning.

**Facilitation Techniques.** Facilitators are encouraged to consider asking participants to engage in **situational role-playing** (e.g., assuming the roles of people in the case study) and to switch roles for multiple experiences. Situational role playing – particularly when people assume roles different than their own—is an effective strategy to help participants empathize and internalize others' experiences and needs.

Facilitators might consider using a **"fishbowl" technique**, which provides for those playing a role to do so, uninterrupted for a period of time, while other participants observe and listen carefully. Then, observers ask purely clarifying questions, without judging or responding to the role players (e.g., about what a performer meant, how they felt, or why they chose a particular action), which role players answer. And, finally, observers avoid criticizing the role players but offer how they felt and provide their suggestions to build on what the role players did or to offer possible alternatives and additional options, while the role players listen. A debrief at the end can enable a facilitator to elicit key take-aways from all participants and to emphasize some key points not raised by the group. During this process, facilitators interject to remind participants to stick to protocol (e.g., asking only clarifying questions when that's called for—or to make suggestions in a way that offers options and builds on what was done by the role players without criticizing individuals).

The facilitator is encouraged to use the **"stop and process" points** which segment the case study, as well as other opportunities that arise in discussion, as opportunities to "freeze-frame" the role-playing scenario and encourage dialogue among participants, using the fishbowl technique. Keeping discussion groups small encourages everyone to participate and enables more individuals to assume different roles. This can be achieved using breakout groups, if needed, although each group will need a facilitator. At the end of each segment—before continuing to the next stop and process segment, and as a debrief at the end—the facilitator can also describe additional facts that are not included in the case study but may change participants' perspectives about experience and outcomes or add to an understanding of the role they are assuming.