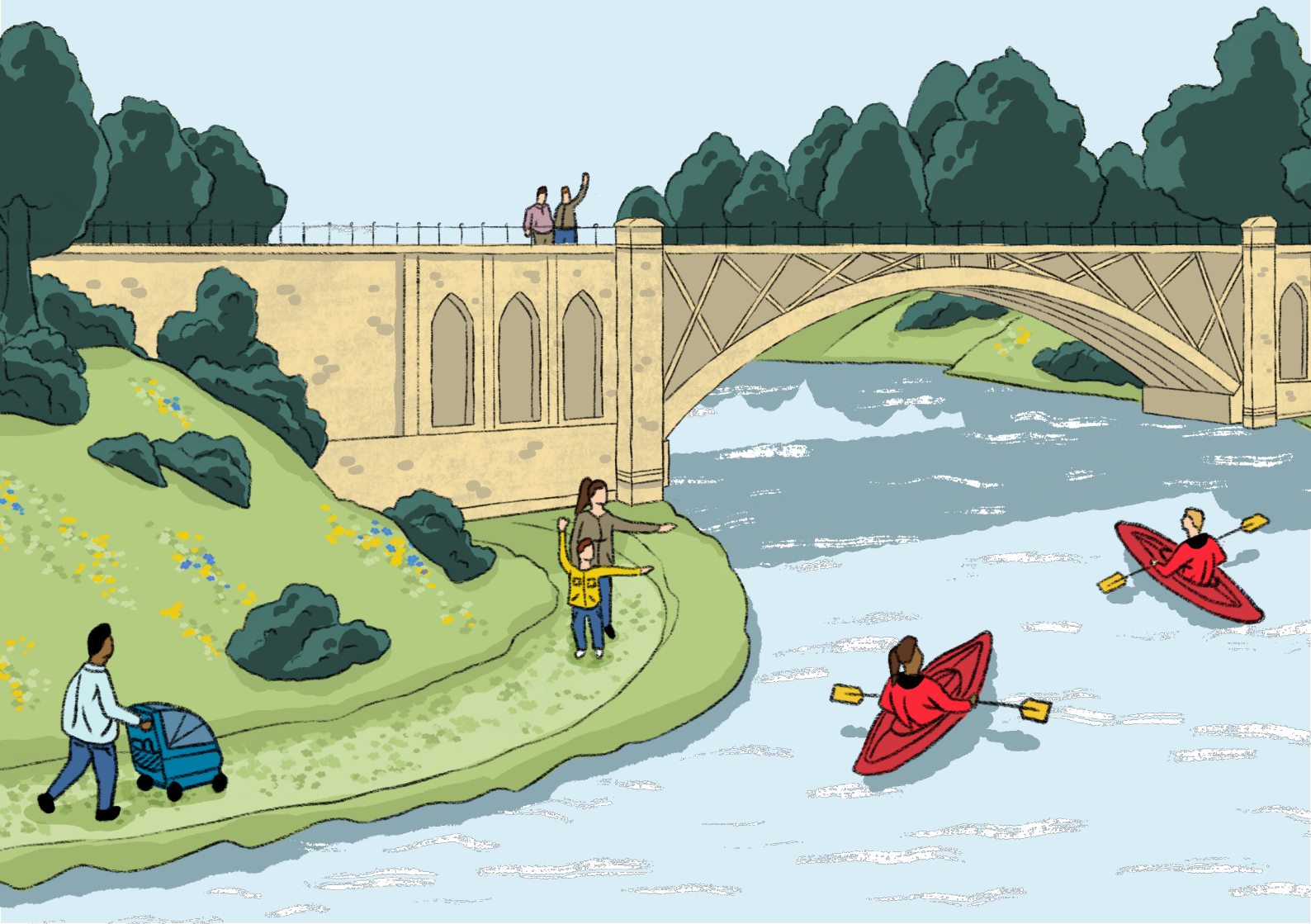


Introduction to facilitation



What is a facilitator?

A facilitator is someone who supports a group of people to work together towards a shared goal. They create the conditions for people to share their views and explore ideas together.

Unlike a teacher or presenter, a facilitator is not there to provide answers or lead people to a predetermined outcome. Their role is to guide the process — helping conversations stay focused, making sure different voices are heard, and supporting the group to reach its aims.

Facilitation is particularly important when working with people with lived experience. People may be sharing personal insights, opinions, or experiences that matter deeply to them. A skilled facilitator helps create an environment where people feel safe, respected, and valued, so they can contribute in ways that feel right for them.

Facilitators often describe their role as “holding the space”. This means paying attention not only to what is being said, but also to how people are feeling, how relationships are developing, and what the group needs to work well together.

At Barnwood Trust, facilitation is connected to our values. It is about sharing power, valuing lived experience, and making sure involvement is meaningful.

What does a facilitator do?

Bring the right people together

- The facilitator needs to be involved in the recruitment process. Involvement and participation is not just about hearing people; it's about hearing the right people.

Create a plan considering:

- breaking the overall task down into parts
- the number of sessions needed to work through each part
- what methods might be used to help people share their views (A great resource is *The Art of Co-design* by Kerr et al, BIS Publishers)
- the venue being appropriate for the group and the methods
- having space to work as one group, in small groups, or one-to-one
- how feedback from any small group discussions is handled
- having a detailed plan for each session, including aims and objectives, methods, timings, and resources needed

Manage the process

- Keep the group on task and on time.
- Be prepared to change approach if needed
- Anticipate what might not work or go wrong and how can this be avoided

Manage group dynamics

- Quiet the more vocal and amplify the quiet by managing conversations when needed
- Help the group to understand that different opinions are okay
- Support positive relationships and dynamics in groups

Help the group to achieve its aims

- Everything the facilitator does must align with the set aims

Value people

- Thank people for their contributions
- Check what people have shared has been understood
- Let people know what will happen with what they share

Create a group working agreement

- Provide core ground rules such as listening, respect and confidentiality
- Ask the group to add to these. This helps to set the tone for sessions and gives the group ownership about how it wants to work together. Specific requirements and support needed from one another can be included here too.

Set and manage clear expectations

- Everyone involved needs to be clear about the scope of the work, its purpose, what output is being worked towards, and who will make decisions.
- People should be clear about what the work is about before coming together
- They also need to be clear about the purpose of each session and what they are being asked to do step by step
- The facilitator will probably need to remind the group of these at times

Guide the discussion

- Everyone can go off at a tangent. The facilitator needs to keep the conversation on task and make sure it progresses to cover what's in the session plan

Foster inclusivity and collaboration

- Make people feel welcome
- Help people to appreciate that their different skills, opinions and experiences, are needed for the good of the project

What are the qualities of a good facilitator?

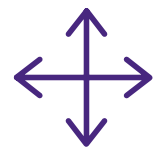
Organised

- Have a good plan in place and share it with any colleagues working with you
- Think about the most appropriate methods to help people share thoughts and ideas
- Gather the resources you need
- Make sure everything is working, such as technical equipment, catering facilities, etc.



Intentional but flexible

- Be focused on the plan but be prepared to give something more time or deviate if what people are sharing feels significant to the work



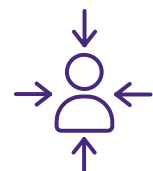
Able to 'read the room'

- How are people reacting and feeling?
- Do you need to change something, take a break, or increase the energy?



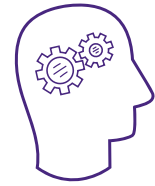
Approachable

- You want people to feel confident to share their views in a large or small group, but they may also want to speak with you one-to-one



Self-aware

- A good facilitator is aware of the way their words and actions impact a group and what they might need to change to help a group be productive



Inclusive

- You need to hear from everyone and that means everyone in the room feeling welcome and safe to share their views and ideas. Think about needs relating to personal identity such as culture and religion, disability, mental health and personality. This also means being non-judgemental.



Confident

- The facilitator 'holds' the room and the process. This means managing group dynamics, bringing people back from individual or small group exercises and breaks, and making sure that people feel the facilitator is keeping the group on track.



Assertive

- Keeping on track can mean having to stop an individual or the group talking about something which is not relevant. You may also have to manage inappropriate language or behaviour, in a straightforward and compassionate way.



Good listener

- People need to feel they've been heard, and that what they've heard has been considered and valued.



Curious

- Digging deeper into what someone has shared can really help the process. It can be important to develop understanding among the group and draw out what lies behind what has been shared.



Empathetic and kind

- People may be sharing something from their personal experience or the subject matter may be highly emotive. Be aware that this may trigger an emotional reaction and be prepared to offer support.



Open and honest

- Always be clear with people about the process, including what is (and is not) in scope, and how what they share will be used.



Maintain boundaries

- Be sensitive and don't ask people to share more than they're comfortable to
- You may need to stop people 'over sharing'
- Be clear about roles and responsibilities.



Reflective

- Being a facilitator is an ongoing learning process, with no two sessions, projects or groups being quite the same. Taking time out to reflect on your practice as a facilitator is important. Keep thinking about techniques that work well for different situations and for you.

