

# MEDIA IN ACTION



# G.A.P. WORKSHOP PRINCIPLES & FACILITATION TIPS:

## Best practices for creating a dynamic workshop and setting the stage for collective work

As a facilitator, you will be faced with the challenges of directing a group with diverse personalities and personal histories. Your job is to foster a safe space for the young people to both voice their thoughts and opinions and listen to each other and develop through their collective experience. A good facilitator listens to the ideas that flow and skillfully challenge the group to think deeper and more critically about the subject matter. By using affirming language, kicking back questions to the group, paraphrasing and using open-ended questions, the facilitator orchestrates the flow of conversation so that everyone is heard and hopefully, full of new ideas by the end of the workshop. The facilitator should ask questions and guide the young people so that they can come to conclusions as a group. It's important to approach the conversation as a collective process so that the young people can support each other in their learning. If the group comes to an answer on their own, it will resonate stronger than if they were simply told something. In addition, the facilitator should have their pulse on the mood and focus of the participants and conduct exercises that address group needs and have a clear objective and goal. For example, if the group comes in and everyone looks tired, an energizing activity would be advisable. We strive to provide as interactive a format as possible. Allow humor and excitement to thrive in the space. Be fun!

Most importantly, it is crucial to be aware of ones "teaching model." Traditional forms of educating young people tend to take a "talk down" approach; this implies that the educator has more knowledge and experience than the young person they are teaching and that they have all the answers. Remember that you are working with young people from all walks of life who may experience much more than you when it comes to daily life and histories. As a facilitator, welcome your ability to learn and grow from the conversation that you will engage in with young people.

At G.A.P. we believe that the media product is exceptional when youth are engaged in a well-thought out process guided by an experienced facilitator who provides a safe space for the needs, concerns, goals and objectives of the group.

**Processing:** Steps for successful facilitation Processing is the act of asking provocative questions to help the young people derive greater meaning from the experience. It involves intensive focus and active listening. Good processing questions can make the difference between a mediocre and dynamic workshop. It takes practice and focus to find the right phrasing to bring out the most in an experience. Processing well is the most difficult part of the facilitator's job. The facilitator listens carefully to what is said (or not said), and affirms, paraphrases, and asks follow-up and kick back questions to keep the flow of conversation going. We recommend that you take time to write out some processing questions in advance, and the questions you want the group to be thinking about to further the goals and objectives of the workshop. After completing an activity, the facilitator can begin processing by asking, " why do you think we did this? What purpose does it serve? What did you learn"?

Note: Recall instances in your youth as well as now (if you're an adult . . . but who's counting) where you were able to gain new knowledge, as well as turn it into something useful. This can help you frame the processing.

## Processing Behavior

- 1. Active Listening:** Demonstrate that you are focused by responding to youth comments and nonverbal body language. Demonstrate understanding and acceptance through voice tone, facial expression, eye contact, posture and gestures. By using writing, talking, acting, artistic, and other forms of expression each individual has an opportunity to engage.
- 2. Ask Questions:** Ask questions to draw out information from participants and to spark dialogue. Do not pass judgment on participants' answers, or use your own feelings to influence participants. Be present, focused and involved. Youth are more likely to take ownership of their video if the answers and ideas come from them. The facilitator may also ask questions that encourage more serious discussion and personal exploration of issues such as "Could you relate that to anything in your lives?"
- 3. Affirm youth:** Affirm the feelings and ideas of participants to build an atmosphere of trust. Encourage everyone to share and be represented in the video. Use language such as "good point", or "excellent idea", and affirm those who have taken an unpopular perspective, or take risks, which isn't always easy in peer groups.
- 4. Paraphrase and Kick-Back:** The facilitator should briefly rephrase participants' comments and feelings. Paraphrasing affirms people's feelings, facts and needs. It also helps clarify people's points and keeps conversation active. It is helpful to follow-up a paraphrase with a kick back question.

Example:

Youth: *"It's easier for young white people to get into college than young people of color."*

Facilitator: *"So what you're saying is that there is less opportunity for young people of color to further their education because of certain obstacles?"*

Youth: *"Yeah, because our schools don't provide the support."* (Clarifies and adds more information)

Facilitator: *"You're right!" "So, what support would you like to see in your school?"* (Affirms and kicks back)

Whenever possible, direct questions back to the group as a follow-up question. Participants learn more when they try to answer their own questions instead of having the facilitator give them an answer.

Example:

Youth: *"Why did the journalist take that point of view?"*

Facilitator: *"Anybody else know, why do you think the journalist focused on that perspective?" "Who owns this paper?"*

- 5. Use Open-ended Questions:** The facilitator should get conversation moving and by avoiding "yes" or "no" questions and asking questions that require a more thoughtful response. Closed questions begin with: Is, Do, Who. They often need to be followed up with open-ended questions. Open questions begin with: why, what, explain, tell me about, How,

Example: Instead of "Is making peace easy? Say: *"What do the people in the film do to promote peace?"*

6. **Put Closure on Discussions** – When dealing with sensitive topics, try not to leave dialogue unresolved, even if the resolution is simply to say we don't have all the answers, we will have to explore this again next time. It may be necessary to approach certain individuals after the workshop is over to engage in additional closure. Also, dare to be transparent with the participants; if your not sure about something, welcome them to do some research.

7. **Break into small groups or pairs** – It's important to break up the format of a workshop. Sitting in a large group for the entire time can be tedious, and allows people to dominate. When discussing personal or controversial issues, certain youth feel safer sharing in pairs or small groups first. This is a way to get all youth to contribute.

8. **Choose the appropriate level** of low, medium, or high-risk activity, depending on the specific group: their age, their experience in this arena, how much contact they have had with each other, and how well-bonded they areas a group. Listen to your gut on this one.

## **G.A.P.'s Critical Facilitation Checklist** **Facilitating knowledge production and critical literacy**

Critical facilitation involves using the knowledge, life experiences and realities of your group as a point of departure for further exploration.

In addition to mastering the basic techniques of facilitating a workshop, here are some questions to ask yourself as a facilitator of the overall process. Critical facilitation should be applied whether your group is producing a video, a website, a blog – and any genre – whether documentary, fiction, experimental, etc.

- Am I energizing the group to question, to learn, and to actively develop their own perspectives and knowledge?
- Does my own preparation include seeking people and information that challenge dominant discourses and mainstream assumptions?
- Am I addressing systemic issues and power dynamics in the issues that we are exploring?
- Am I helping the group to contextualize the issues they are exploring (Who are the players? Who holds what kind of power? What are the historical, political and social contexts? What are the root causes of injustice?)
- Am I seeking to relate the material to the participants' own lives?
- Am I connecting this local issue to global struggles that might mirror it or to global politics that help shape it?
- Am I challenging the group to use media as a learning tool? (through analysis, community-based interviews, screening and dialogue, etc.)
- Am I bringing in guest speakers and other sources that speak to various perspectives of the issue?
- Am I preparing the group to create questions and act as facilitators when guest speakers come, and when they interview people for their video, so they help direct their own learning?
- In preparation for a shoot, are the young people prepared with their questions, are they knowledgeable about the context, and do they know their roles?



# PEOPLE POWER



global  
action  
project

4 w. 37th street, 2nd floor  
nyc, ny 10018  
p. 212.594.9577  
f. 212.594.9574  
[media@global-action.org](mailto:media@global-action.org)