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Facilitator Guide and Tips

**Overview**

This facilitator guide is a tool to support facilitators as they prepare for and lead the conversation for community members As a facilitator, it will be important that you approach these conversations impartially and focus your efforts on leading the participants through the conversation. While you may have your own feelings about the content being discussed, your role in this discussion is to help others identify and process their thoughts in a way that is productive for the group and achieves the goals outlined. As a valued community member, you are free to add your own thoughts and comments in the notes and on-line tools and surveys.

**Preparation Tips**

***Mind & Body***

Understanding that facilitating these discussions may be demanding, it will be important for you to be calm and grounded before you begin. We have provided the following tips for you to consider as your regular facilitation preparation process. Remember the goal of this session is for participants to feel comfortable enough to share their input on their communities most pressing health needs.

1. **Take a breath**. If you and the participants are so inclined, it might be helpful to do a mindful minute meditation before starting the conversation to get everyone grounded. Ask participants to pause and everyone take a deep breath. “Let’s take a moment to give ourselves permission let go of everything else we’re juggling in order to truly be here, together.”
2. **Slow down and listen**. It will be very important to truly listen to what people are saying and confirm that you have heard. Ask participants to love every comment for at least 30 seconds before providing your own perspective.
3. **Be compassionate**. This is important particularly for participants who may believe that they have not been heard. Each participant will come to the conversation with different perspectives. You should encourage everyone to be open to these perspectives and demonstrate empathy.
4. **Create a positive context** **for the conversation**. It will be very important that you start off the conversation in a positive light. “I’ve been looking forward to hearing from you all.” “This is an incredibly exciting opportunity before us here today.”
5. **Be yourself**. While the expectation is for you to be an impartial facilitator, we also want you to be authentic and true to yourself. This is the best way for you to be able to connect with your discussion participants and for them to trust you with leading this process.
6. **Rest, Nest, and Hydrate**. These discussions can be both mentally and physically draining, so you should ensure that you get a good night’s sleep, prepare the space where you will be hosting the conversation, ensure you have all the snacks and drinks you will need for the 2 hours.

***Technology***

Be sure to check all your technology devices and tools to make sure you will be ready for a smoothly run conversation. Here’s a quick list for you to reference:

1. Join Zoom at least half an hour prior to your session with your co-facilitator to review the agenda, roles, talking points, etc. before other participants join the meeting.
2. Call in to Zoom for audio rather than using your computer audio. You have a better chance for your audio and video feeds to remain stable throughout the session.
3. If you do not usually use Zoom, become familiar with the features such as the chat, reactions, etc. and be sure to communicate to your participants how they should be used.
4. Ensure that the location where you will be positioned for the session has good lighting. Light from in front of you is better than a light source from the side or behind. Shadows can be distracting for your viewers. Choose a location with limited background noise or other distractions.
5. If you are the Breakout Scribe, be sure to have your Breakout Discussion Worksheet open and ready to begin typing into.
6. Be sure your devices are fully charged and properly connected to Wi-Fi.

**Best Practices to Keep in Mind:**

* Embrace the silence
* Remember that the experts on the community are the participants in the room
* Pay attention to non-verbal communication
* Encourage everyone to participate

**What to keep in mind to cultivate safe space:**

* Don’t call people out for comment.
* Silence does not necessarily equate with lack of participation.
  + Instead, review the various ways people have to participate (chat, confidential Participant Feedback form provided at end, participating in the anonymous online feedback tools, raising hands, etc.).
  + This may help alleviate feelings of anxiety for those unfamiliar with Zoom or who are perhaps uncomfortable sharing in front of others or being overheard in the present surroundings.
* Remind participants they are the experts on what is happening in their community. You are here to help them express their observations and concerns.