

## Tips for Facilitating an Advance RI-CTR Studios

### Before Discussion Begins:

- The chairs in the room should be arranged in a u-shape so that all participants can see each other and the facilitator (if needed a projector)
- Display a ground rule with the following items:
  - Participate as much as possible.
  - Respect other opinions.
  - Listening is as important as talking.
  - Differences of opinion are good.
- Review ground rules at the beginning of the meeting and ask if there are any additional rules that should be added.
- Assure participants that we are here to hear from them and learn what their thoughts are
- Direct the participant to where the restrooms are located and that they are welcome to get up when ever needed to get snacks/dinner or use the restrooms.

### During the Discussion:

- Focus on facilitating the Studio discussion, not on leading or directing it.
- Be comfortable with silence. Give people time to reflect on a question silently for a moment before responding out loud.
- Ensure that more talkative people do not dominate the conversation.
- Watch for nonverbal behaviors.
- When trying to encourage discussion, try the following probes:
  - Would you explain further?
  - Would you give me an example of what you mean?
  - Would you say more?
  - Tell me more.
  - Is there anything else?
  - Please describe what you mean.
  - I don't understand.
  - Does anyone see it differently?
  - Has anyone had a different experience?
- **Participants tend to lose focus on the question after 2-3 other participants have responded to it, so repeat key phrases from the question to help keep people focused.**
- Don't ask more than one question at a time, even if the questions go together. Participants usually cannot remember several questions at one time, and asking multiple questions makes it hard for

them to know where to start.

- Be sure that you validate participants' responses. Be aware of when a participant's words may have been misinterpreted or when they may not have had the chance to complete their thoughts.
- It can help to rephrase a participant's statements to make sure you are interpreting their words correctly. This can also encourage them to expand on their ideas.
- Try to promote discussions among the participants, not between you and each participant.
- Keep the conversation on track but give more reluctant speakers time to respond.
- Remember that the process is more important than the result. The point is not to reach consensus- it's to explore a topic through dialogue.

#### **Creating a balance of participation:**

- Try to build rapport with participants through small talk before the Studio session begins.
- Establish the room as a safe space where everyone's input will be respected.
- Assure participants that the point is not to agree on everything or figure out the "right answer," **but to explore different perspectives and experiences.**
- Use an opening activity to generate participation or talk about the study/research in hand.
- Encourage people with different opinions to share. Ask a question like, "Has anyone had a different experience?" or "Does anyone see it differently?"
- Always remain neutral and express interest in every participant's contribution. Validate each person's responses.
- Be sure that your introductory question will avoid responses that highlight the varying levels of experience/education/ influence that participants have, so as not to elevate the opinions or perspectives of any one person in the minds of participants.
- Participants often defer to others who are perceived to have more experience or are better informed on a topic. It is important to stress that everyone is an expert and all participants have important ideas that need to be expressed.

#### **If one or two speakers are dominating the conversation:**

- Say something like, "I know you have some great experiences to share with us, but I want to make sure I hear from everyone in the group."
- Remind the group that it is important to get a variety of perspectives on the topic.
- Avoid eye contact with the dominant speaker.

#### **If a participant is quiet:**

- Try to encourage input from less vocal members. Ask a question like "Is there anyone who hasn't said anything yet who has something to contribute?"
- Watch for nonverbal cues that a person might have something to say.
- Direct a question to the quiet participant--ask if they have something to add.
- Engage in eye contact and other nonverbal cues to signal that you're interested in hearing from them.
- Do not try to force participation- do not judge people who remain quiet.

**If someone is disrespectful:**

- Refer-back to ground rules. Remind participants that all opinions count and that there is no right or wrong answer.
- Remind the group that it is not important for people to agree, but that participants should be respectful of differing perspectives.

**If the conversation is getting off-track:**

- Thank the participant for their contribution but steer them back to the question. Say something like, “Thanks, that’s good background information. What’s your opinion on this question?”
- If a participant begins to ramble, discontinue eye contact within 20 to 30 seconds. When they pause, be ready to jump in with a segue to shift the conversation.

**If no one responds to a particular question:**

- Be comfortable with some silence. People may need time to think through their response first.
- At the beginning of the discussion, participants might not feel comfortable speaking. Work to put people at ease. Back up and ask an easier question.
- Participants may not have understood the question. Try rephrasing your question and try to minimize your use of jargon.
- You may have asked a sensitive question that people are afraid to respond to honestly. Remind participants that you want to explore all sides of an issue, and that the room is a safe space for expressing ideas. You can also rephrase the question. If this does not work, try moving on to a different question and revisiting the topic later if you sense that people may be open to it.

**Wrapping up the discussion:**

- Following the discussion, the facilitator and Advance CTR group should set aside some time to summarize,
- Debrief with the note taker and make sure all-important themes/insights have been adequately captured.