promoting the power
of facilitation worldwide

International Association of Facilitators

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To learn more about the IAF contact office@iaf-world.org or visit iaf-world.org

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide facilitators and the buyers of facilitation services with:

- an overview of the role of the International Association of Facilitators (IAF)
- a Statement of Values and Code of Ethics for professional facilitation
- a Core Facilitator Competencies framework which form the basic set of skills, knowledge, and behaviours that facilitators must have to be successful facilitating in a wide variety of environments
- an overview of the levels of endorsement or certification the IAF provides its members to recognise their mastery of the six core competencies and contribution to the field of facilitation.

About the IAF

Professional association

The IAF is a participatory organisation with members in more than 65 countries. As a professional association, we set internationally accepted industry standards, provide accreditation, support a community of practice, advocate and educate on the power of facilitation and embrace the diversity of facilitators.

If we were to use just one sentence to describe what the IAF does and stands for, it would be "enabling powerful change". Every meeting or process that is facilitated has an impact on the individuals and the groups of which they are a part. Good facilitation can change the way people think and act, and ultimately support them to positively change the world around them.

The IAF was formed in 1994 and has a rich history of participatory development. From our past has emerged some of the foundational tools of the facilitation profession, including the IAF Statement of Values and Code of Ethics and Core Facilitator Competencies.

Today, the association is growing worldwide, fuelled in large part by the growth and activities taking place within national and local IAF chapters and virtual special interest groups.

Our members

We welcome everyone with an interest in facilitation and its widespread use in helping people work together effectively.

IAF members vary in their facilitation practice. Some are new to the field, while others have years of experience. Our members work in government, corporate, non-profit, education, community, and international development sectors, to name but a few. Some work in-house, others operate as external consultants.

Our vision

Our vision is to see professional facilitation used throughout the world to address the challenges faced by people in their groups, organisations and communities.

Our mission

Our mission is to grow the community of practice for all those who facilitate, establish internationally accepted professional standards, build credibility and promote the value of facilitation around the world.

Our value proposition

The IAF is a worldwide community of facilitators promoting excellence in the use of professional group process facilitation to create engagement and impact.

We enable our members to thrive by growing their skills, their network and their career.

We are a home for anyone who wants to learn about facilitation and for those who make facilitation their profession. Together, we set the internationally accepted standards for facilitation and promote the power of facilitation.

Our values

- Inclusivity
- Openness
- Global perspective
- Professionalism
- Leadership
- Excellence

We are an inclusive organisation with members from all walks of life and different ethnic backgrounds. We are open to different views, perspectives and approaches to facilitation, with a focus on process facilitation.

Our members ensure we have a global perspective on how we facilitate. How we operate is grounded in professionalism. As facilitators, we are leaders in our field and strive for excellence in everything that we do.

Statement of Values and Code of Ethics

The IAF adopted its Statement of Values and Code of Ethics in June 2004, after extensive consultations and discussion with IAF members worldwide.

This statement recognises the complexity of our roles, including the full spectrum of personal, professional and cultural diversity in our membership and in the field of facilitation. Members of the Association are committed to using these values and ethics to guide their professional practice. These statements are expressed as broad principles to guide ethical practice; they provide a framework and are not intended to dictate conduct for particular situations. To reinforce the use of these principles by our members, the IAF has a complaints resolution process.

Preamble

Facilitators are called upon to fill an impartial role in helping groups become more effective. We act as process guides to create a balance between participation and results.

We, the members of the International Association of Facilitators, believe that our profession gives us a unique opportunity to make a positive contribution to individuals, organisations, and society. Our effectiveness is based on our personal integrity and the trust developed between ourselves and those with whom we work. Therefore, we recognise the importance of defining and making known the values and ethical principles that guide our actions.

This Statement of Values and Code of Ethics recognises the complexity of our roles, including the full spectrum of personal, professional and cultural diversity in the IAF membership and in the field of facilitation. Members of the IAF are committed to using these values and ethics to guide their professional practice. These principles are expressed in broad statements to guide ethical practice; they provide a framework and are not intended to dictate conduct for particular situations.

Statement of Values

As group facilitators, we believe in the inherent value of the individual and the collective wisdom of the group. We strive to help the group make the best use of the contributions of each of its members. We set aside our personal opinions and support the group's right to make its own choices. We believe that collaborative and cooperative interaction builds consensus and produces meaningful outcomes. We value professional collaboration to improve our profession.

Code of Ethics

1. Client Service

We are in service to our clients, using our group facilitation competencies to add value to their work.

Our clients include the groups we facilitate and those who contract with us on their behalf. We work closely with our clients to understand their expectations so that we provide the appropriate service, and that the group produces the desired outcomes. It is our responsibility to ensure that we are competent to handle the intervention. If the group decides it needs to go in a direction other than that originally intended by either the group or its representatives, our role is to help the group move forward, reconciling the original intent with the emergent direction.

2. Conflict of Interest

We openly acknowledge any potential conflict of interest.

Prior to agreeing to work with our clients, we discuss openly and honestly any possible conflict of interest, personal bias, prior knowledge of the organisation or any other matter which may be perceived as preventing us from working effectively with the interests of all group members. We do this so that, together, we may make an informed decision about proceeding and to prevent misunderstanding that could detract from the success or credibility of the clients or ourselves. We refrain from using our position to secure unfair or inappropriate privilege, gain, or benefit.

3. Group Autonomy

We respect the culture, rights, and autonomy of the group.

We seek the group's conscious agreement to the process and their commitment to participate. We do not impose anything that risks the welfare and dignity of the participants, the freedom of choice of the group, or the credibility of its work.

4. Processes, Methods and Tools

We use processes, methods and tools responsibly.

In dialogue with the group or its representatives we design processes that will achieve the group's goals and select and adapt the most appropriate methods and tools. We avoid using processes, methods or tools with which we are insufficiently skilled, or which are poorly matched to the needs of the group.

5. Respect, Safety, Equity and Trust

We strive to engender an environment of respect and safety where all participants trust that they can speak freely and where individual boundaries are honoured. We use our skills, knowledge, tools, and wisdom to elicit and honour the perspectives of all.

We seek to have all relevant stakeholders represented and involved. We promote equitable relationships among the participants and facilitator and ensure that all participants have an opportunity to examine and share their thoughts and feelings. We use a variety of methods to enable the group to access the natural gifts, talents and life experiences of each member. We work in ways that honour the wholeness and self-expression of others, designing sessions that respect different styles of interaction. We understand that any action we take is an intervention that may affect the process.

6. Stewardship of Process

We practice stewardship of process and impartiality toward content.

While participants bring knowledge and expertise concerning the substance of their situation, we bring knowledge and expertise concerning the group interaction process. We are vigilant to minimise our influence on group outcomes. When we have content knowledge not otherwise available to the group, and that the group must have to be effective, we offer it after explaining our change in role.

7. Confidentiality

We maintain confidentiality of information.

We observe confidentiality of all client information. Therefore, we do not share information about a client within or outside of the client's organisation, nor do we report on group content, or the individual opinions or behaviour of members of the group without consent.

8. Professional Development

We are responsible for continuous improvement of our facilitation skills and knowledge.

We continuously learn and grow. We seek opportunities to improve our knowledge and facilitation skills to better assist groups in their work. We remain current in the field of facilitation through our practical group experiences and ongoing personal development. We offer our skills within a spirit of collaboration to develop our professional work practices.

Core Facilitator Competencies

The IAF is the worldwide professional body established to promote, support and advance the art and practice of professional facilitation through methods exchange, professional growth, practical research and collegial networking.

The Core Facilitator Competencies framework was developed over several years by the IAF with the support of its members and facilitators from all over the world. Tested over time, the six competencies form the basic set of skills, knowledge, and behaviours that facilitators must have in order to be successful facilitating in a wide variety of environments.

A Create Collaborative Client Relationships

A1 Develop working partnerships

- Clarify mutual commitment
- Develop consensus on tasks, deliverables, roles and responsibilities
- Demonstrate collaborative values and processes

A2 Design and customise applications to meet client needs

- Analyse organisational environment
- Diagnose client need
- Establish stakeholders' roles and level of involvement.
- Create appropriate designs to achieve intended outcomes
- Predefine quality outcomes with client

A3 Manage multi-session events effectively

- Contract with client for scope and deliverables
- Develop event plan
- Deliver event effectively
- Assess/evaluate client satisfaction at all stages of the event or project

B Plan Appropriate Group Processes

B1 Select clear methods and processes that:

- Foster open participation with respect for client culture and participant diversity
- Engage participants who have different approaches to learning and ways of processing information
- Achieve quality outcome that meets the needs of the client

B2 Prepare time and space to support group process

- Arrange appropriate space and logistics to support the purpose of the meeting
- Plan effective use of time
- Provide appropriate atmosphere to support the purpose of sessions/meetings

C Create and Sustain a Participatory Environment

C1 Demonstrate effective participatory and interpersonal communication skills

- Apply a variety of participatory processes
- Demonstrate effective verbal communication skills
- Develop rapport with participants
- Practice active listening
- Demonstrate ability to observe and provide feedback to participants

C2 Honour and recognise diversity, ensuring inclusiveness

- Encourage positive regard for the experience and perception of all participants
- Create a climate of trust and safety.
- Recognise barriers to participation and ways to address them
- Accept all ideas without judgment
- Create opportunities for participants to benefit from the diversity of the group
- Cultivate cultural awareness and sensitivity

C3 Manage group conflict

- Help individuals identify and review underlying assumptions
- Recognise conflict and its role within group learning/maturity
- Provide a safe environment for conflict to surface
- Manage the range of behaviours demonstrated by group members
- Recognise and address the value of tension and conflict and its impact in arriving at a group decision
- Be sensitive to cultural factors regarding conflict

C4 Evoke group creativity

- Draw out participants with various approaches to learning and ways of processing of information
- Encourage creative thinking
- Use approaches that best fit needs and abilities of the group
- Stimulate and tap group energy

D Guide Group to Appropriate and Useful Outcomes

D1 Guide the group with clear methods and processes

- Establish clear context for the session
- Clarify and summarise to elicit the sense of the group
- Manage small and large group process

D2 Facilitate group self-awareness about its task

- Vary the pace of activities according to needs of group
- Identify information the group needs, and draw out data and insight from the group
- Help the group to make sense of the underlying issues in their discussion, clarify patterns, trends, root causes, frameworks for action
- Assist the group in reflection on its experience

D3 Guide the group to consensus and desired outcomes

- Use a variety of approaches relevant to achieving group consensus
- Use a variety of approaches relevant to meeting group objectives
- Adapt processes to changing situations and needs of the group
- Assess and communicate group progress
- Recognise and clarify tangents in order to refocus on the task
- Foster task completion

E Build and Maintain Professional Knowledge

E1 Maintain a base of knowledge

- Knowledgeable in the theory and practice of group process facilitation and related knowledge about people, organisations, groups and processes (e.g. organisational development, psychology, conflict resolution, dynamics of change, learning and thinking theory)

E2 Know a range of facilitation methods

- Understand a range of models and/or processes that may help groups generate ideas, solve problems, prioritise, take decisions and plan
- Understand a variety of group methods and techniques
- Know consequences of misuse of group methods
- Distinguish process from task and content
- Learn new processes, methods, models and technologies in support of client's changing/emerging needs

E3 Maintain professional standing

- Engage in ongoing study/learning related to our field
- Continuously gain awareness of new information in our profession
- Practice reflection and learning
- Build personal industry knowledge and networks across our field

F Model Positive Professional Attitude

F1 Practice self-assessment and self-awareness

- Reflect on behaviour and overall outcomes
- Maintain congruence between actions and personal and professional values
- Modify personal behaviour/style to reflect the needs of the group
- Cultivate understanding of one's own values and their potential impact on work with clients

F2 Act with integrity

- Demonstrate a belief in the group and its possibilities
- Approach situations with authenticity and a positive attitude
- Describe situations as facilitator sees them and inquire into different views
- Model professional boundaries and ethics (as described in the IAF Statement of Values and Code of Ethics)

F3 Trust group potential and model neutrality

- Honour the wisdom of the group
- Encourage trust in the capacity and experience of others
- Vigilant to minimise influence on group outcomes and the content of the discussions
- Maintain an objective, non-defensive, non-judgmental stance

Professional Development Path

Being a facilitator is a unique opportunity to help groups work together by creating effective processes that foster participation and achieve results. While there is no single, universal approach to facilitation, there are certain values, ethics, skills and behaviours that support effective facilitated processes.

The IAF works to establish international standards, build credibility and promote the value of facilitation worldwide. Central to these objectives is providing support and recognition for the professional development of our members.

Our Professional Development Path, which has been designed to support the professional lifecycle of our members, includes the following levels.

IAF Member

A member must commit to the IAF Statement of Values and Code of Ethics. Our members can invest in continuous professional development to improve their facilitation skills by:

- using our online knowledge centre which includes publications and a methods library
- participating in our global mentoring programme
- learning from others and sharing experiences by participating in IAF conferences, webinars and meetups.

IAF Endorsed™ Facilitator

To achieve this credential, a member must pass an examination to demonstrate they understand the core facilitator competencies and how to apply them in a wide variety of environments.

IAF Certified™ Professional Facilitator
(CPF)

To achieve this credential a member must go through a rigorous certification process which includes an in-depth peer review and practical assessment of their experience, knowledge and skills.

CPFs have demonstrated their ability to practice the core facilitator competencies. In the past 20 years the IAF has certified more than 1800 facilitators worldwide.

IAF Certified™ Professional Facilitator | Master
(CPF | M)

To achieve this credential a member must:

- have held the CPF credential for at least 8 years
- go through a rigorous assessment process to demonstrate they have distinguished themselves in the development of our profession and actively contributed to the life of the IAF community.

IAF Certified™ Professional Facilitator | Emeritus
(CPF | E)

This credential is given to a member who:

- has been assessed as meeting the CPF Master criteria
- is almost at the end of their active professional career.