

## GUIDE FOR WORKSHOP FACILITATORS

The dictionary definition of a facilitator - “a person who makes an action easier by providing indirect or unobtrusive assistance” scarcely begins to describe the pivotal role played by facilitators in the life of the Academy. For more than 25 years, they have imagined creative topics of inquiry, delved into the research, assigned reading lists, communicated and socialized with workshop participants, and skillfully monitored discussions. Along the way, they have learned on the job and seen the value of sharing experiences with their peers. There is no “right” way to be a facilitator - what follows is a compendium of practical information and suggestions to assist those who are new to the job and to hopefully inspire old hands with new food for thought.

### **I’ve got an idea for a workshop. How do I carry it forward?**

At the end of the fall semester, the Curriculum Committee solicits proposals for new workshops to form part of the following year’s calendar. You are asked to expound on your concept, and give some examples of the texts to which you will be referring. It may be helpful to consult previous years’ calendars on the website to see what topics have been covered in the past. [Click here to access the calendars in the archives.](#) A key part of your proposal will be to describe your topic and workshop content in approximately 100 words. Once approved by the Curriculum Committee, this short statement will be used to “market” your workshop in the calendar and give prospective participants a clear idea as to how much reading or other preparation will be required.

You will also be asked to submit a short bio for publication in the calendar which should provide relevant background information on your interest in, and knowledge of, the topic.

### **I would welcome the help of a co-facilitator. How do I go about finding one?**

Notify the Curriculum Committee if you are unable to find someone to work with, and specify what kind of help you need. Do you require someone to help with the development of course content or, do you need someone to take care of administrative details and contact with participants? Perhaps you need someone to moderate discussion time? The Curriculum Committee will seek to find someone who is the right fit.

### **I’ve received word that enough registrations have been received to make my workshop viable. When do I get my list of workshop participants?**

This will be available after randomization in May. This list is preliminary and will likely not be finalized until after your first workshop. If your workshop is oversubscribed you will be advised of how many are waitlisted. You will be kept informed of changes over the summer by the Membership Committee and they will also provide a list of participants and their contact information for distribution to the group either before or at the first session.

### **How do I proceed with designing my workshop?**

By the end of May you should hopefully have organized all your workshop content and resources. Given your theme for the year, will you choose a narrow focus with in-depth coverage? Or will you set your sights more broadly? The next step is to break your subject down into 24 workshop length sessions. You can make a significant decision at this time: will you assign a set number of topics or will you offer a number of topics from which workshop participants may

choose? If the latter, there is the risk that some important topics may be left unclaimed and uncovered. If the chronological development of a theme is important to you, this will probably require the establishment of fixed presentation dates and prescribed topics.

Develop a reading list if there is background or contextual reading that you wish to share with the group.

### **What should I include in my first contact with the group?**

This is the exciting moment when you get to welcome fellow travellers on your learning adventure! It's also an opportunity for you to expand the description of your theme beyond the "potted" version that appears in the calendar. You may wish to offer some background reading or links to other resources to provide an enriched context for the development of your subject.

Include, and explain, your list of workshop topics for the academic year. May participants choose from a list of possibilities? May they co-present? May they select portions of an assigned text? Encourage members to select topics from the presentation schedule as early as possible to ensure they get what they want.

You may post information on your workshop in the form of Facilitator's Notes by sending the material in pdf format to [website@allto.ca](mailto:website@allto.ca)

You may also wish to offer some practical guidance by referring them to the website's [Guide for Participants](#) and [Guide for Presenters](#)

### **I've been advised by the Membership Committee that there are new members in my group. How to proceed?**

In the case of members who are new to the Academy, a welcoming phone call is always a good idea. In the likely event that they are new to a peer-learning model, a brief outline of what is involved could be helpful. Suggest that they select a presentation date later in the academic year so they can benefit from seeing the presentations of other more experienced participants. Offer to help them in working up their presentation ideas and suggesting resources.

### **What else should I be doing before the fall semester begins?**

Keep the presentation schedule updated and confirm participants' selections. Send out an interim schedule as a reminder to those who have yet to select a topic and date.

Consider organizing a casual get together for your group - a coffee date in a central location, for example - in the week before the semester begins. Even if many are missing, introductions are made, topics discussed and questions raised in a casual setting that breaks the ice.

### **First workshop session - what do I need to know?**

Your presentation schedule is more or less complete and you have lined up a couple of experienced presenters to set the tone and get the semester off to a good start - well done!

There are some housekeeping issues to be dealt with on the first day. The Membership Committee maintains a file box in each of the two classrooms containing a hanging file folder for each

workshop scheduled in the room. At the beginning of the semester each file will contain an attendance sheet, an up-to-date class list and tent cards and markers for name tags. This hanging file is the way that updated class information will be shared with you during the academic year - remember to check its contents from time to time.

Circulate your workshop's attendance sheet and ask your group to indicate their attendance that day and to enter "A" for any dates they plan to be away (snowbird departures, etc.) as soon as they are known. You can then be in touch with waitlisted members (in order of priority as noted on your list from the Membership Committee) to ask if they would like to join the workshop when space becomes available. Facilitators often find they can accommodate all their remaining waitlisted members by the beginning of the spring semester.

The attendance sheet should be circulated at the beginning of every session. Take time to review it every so often. Persistent un-notified absences may warrant contacting the member by phone or email. The Membership Committee should be informed if it appears that a member has withdrawn; this is especially important if there is a waitlist for the workshop.

Occasionally, participants may ask if they may bring a guest to the workshop, or a presenter may ask if he/she can bring a guest speaker. And, as the facilitator, you may wish to invite a wait-listed member to attend as a guest. Such practices are entirely at your discretion.

### **What are my responsibilities for opening up and closing down my classroom?**

If you arrive to find your classroom locked, you should ask the Knox College receptionist for assistance. At the end of the day, AV equipment should be powered down and microphones returned to their storage spaces. The receptionist will lock the classroom doors. The Academy has experienced theft of equipment in the past, so it is essential that classrooms are left secured.

### **What should I be aware of regarding classroom etiquette?**

At the end of your session, please return the attendance sheet and name tag cards to the hanging file, ensure any display items are removed and check that the room is left clean and tidy for the next group (coffee cups and food items must be cleared away).

Please encourage your group to wrap up their discussion and leave promptly so the next workshop can start on time. A good rule of thumb is to end the workshop 5 minutes before the hour.

If necessary, remind participants that strong scents should not be used and that the only animals permitted are service dogs.

Knox College is a shared facility - encourage your group to continue their conversations in the Common Room rather than the corridors. Similarly, keep the noise level in your classroom to a reasonable level. Food and drink may be brought in for end of semester celebrations and other special occasions, but alcohol is not permitted in Knox College.

### **What are my responsibilities with respect to audiovisual equipment in the classroom?**

A listing of classroom equipment is available at <https://allto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Tech-Frequently-Ask-Questions-v1.00-2018-01-30.pdf>

As a facilitator you are not required to be competent in all aspects of its operation, since this responsibility will be assumed by the tech rep in your group.

If you need support, your workshop's tech rep should be your first point of contact. If further action is required, he/she will take the issue to a member of the Tech Team.

The Membership Committee keeps a record of all past and present tech reps. This database is used to identify potential tech reps for each workshop before the beginning of the academic year. For the first two weeks of the semester, a member of the Tech Leadership Team will be at Knox every day to work with the facilitators from each workshop in identifying and appointing a tech rep to provide support. If unsuccessful, the Tech Team will ascertain if a participant is willing to undergo training.

If your tech rep is absent or no longer available to perform their duties, please contact a member of the Tech Team to identify a replacement.

### **What are the responsibilities of the tech rep?**

The tech rep is responsible for ensuring that the microphones (one wireless headset and two wireless handheld microphones) are functioning properly. A supply of batteries is available if they need to be replaced. Batteries have a life of about 8 hours, but performance may be affected once the indicator shows remaining time of less than three hours. Batteries are cheap and are recycled - they should be replaced whenever performance begins to suffer. See *Handheld Microphone is Not Working* <https://allto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Tech-Frequently-Ask-Questions-v1.00-2018-01-30.pdf>

If the presenter has prepared a slideshow or is showing a video, the tech rep is also responsible for setting up the classroom laptop and projector. Detailed instructions in this regard are provided in *How to Set Up Classroom Equipment - Power on Procedure* <https://allto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Tech-Frequently-Ask-Questions-v1.00-2018-01-30.pdf>

The tech rep is also of assistance in troubleshooting if problems arise during the presentation. If your workshop comes at the end of the day, the tech rep will help ensure that all equipment is powered down.

### **I am facilitating a workshop at an offsite location. Is there a portable sound system that can be used?**

Yes - the procedure to pick up and set up the wireless microphones and portable speaker system and return them after use is set out in <https://allto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Tech-Frequently-Ask-Questions-v1.00-2018-01-30.pdf>.

### **How to be a good facilitator?**

Every facilitator has his or her own unique style, but there are certain qualities that are shared by those who achieve success in their workshops. The attitude and behaviour of the facilitator is critical in ensuring a worthwhile learning experience for all members of the group.

One of the most important tasks for a facilitator is to *foster a sense of cohesion* - a feeling of acceptance or belonging. Once established, this comfortable milieu gives members the confidence and trust that they can freely express contradictory ideas, without any loss of respect or acceptance from their fellow participants. You can help build cohesion by suggesting a get together

before the semester starts, asking workshop members to introduce themselves to the group at the first session, and organizing opportunities to socialize. During discussion time, ensure that everyone has an opportunity to express his or her views, especially those who may be more timid. Skillful moderation of the discussion will demonstrate respect for the opinions of all participants. Mandatory use of microphones will also ensure that everyone, including those with hearing impairment, feels included in the discussion.

**Preparation** also contributes to success. Preparation is essential for facilitators in planning their program, for presenters in planning their presentations, and for participants in being prepared to discuss the issues. Some facilitators find their discussions are enriched if they send out a quick reminder between sessions, noting the subject of the next session, and after consultation with the presenter, offering links to relevant articles or videos. (This needs to be handled judiciously as some members might feel overburdened.)

Help presenters be better prepared by referring them to the presenters' guidance material on the website and let them know you are willing to assist or to suggest a co-presenter if they are in need of some support.

Since discussion time trumps presentation time in Academy workshops, communicate with your presenters to ensure their material will provoke debate.

Be prepared with questions to help segue into the discussion and have further questions on hand should the conversation lag.

Well prepared facilitators also have a back-up plan in the event that illness, bad weather, or other unexpected life events prevent their scheduled presenter from showing up. A good YouTube video, a Ted Talk, a film, or an already prepared presentation on a related subject can all save the day.

If you have some advance notice that a presenter or a participant will be unable to attend the Academy, it may be possible to set up videoconferencing with an off-site location. Contact a member of the Tech Team for more information <https://allto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Tech-Frequently-Ask-Questions-v1.00-2018-01-30.pdf>.

Be **flexible and open to innovation**. While the majority of workshops will follow the traditional pattern of presentation followed by discussion, it is good to be open to other possibilities.

Ask that presenters run their idea by you first but the use of guests, field trips, games, debates, interviews and panels can all add variety and value to the program.

**Recognize the efforts of your presenters**. Some facilitators will make a personal call to thank each presenter, while others will send out a group email highlighting the strengths of the presentation. The latter has the additional benefit of helping the group understand the elements that make for a good presentation.

If someone in your workshop makes an exceptionally interesting presentation, please speak to the Talks Committee so they can consider including it in the Presenting the Presenters forum held in the fall.

***Be attentive to feedback.*** A skillful facilitator will sense the mood of the group and will be attentive to body language and other signals. Are people getting bored, frustrated, and angry? Does the conversation need to be set on a new path? Are some people feeling excluded from the discussion? Be attentive to a good discussion-generating comment that might be worth lingering over. When you hear one, ask for additional input and comments before moving on to a new topic.

You will also receive more formal feedback from the Members' Survey by the end of the first semester. Pay particular attention to the write-in comments for suggestions on changes you might incorporate in the following semester.

***Communicate and share experiences with other facilitators.***

Talking over issues with a more seasoned facilitator can be of great practical help. You will also have the opportunity to provide feedback through the Facilitators' Survey at the end of the academic year. The Facilitators' Forum held in April hosts roundtable discussions on various topics to promote the generation of new ideas.

**Do I need to be concerned about copyright issues?**

Most of the material that Academy workshops duplicate or circulate falls within the bounds of "student use" and its distribution does not infringe on copyright rules. However, images and information cannot be posted on the website unless they are password protected. Consult the webmaster at [website@allto.ca](mailto:website@allto.ca) for assistance in this regard.

If you, or your participants, are regularly circulating large quantities of copyrighted material, it would be prudent to seek the advice of the Board.