Massachusetts: Facilitator Tips and Tricks

Facilitator Role:
- Set the context (purpose of engagement)
- Create a safe and hospitable place for communication (may be done through ground rules or modeling/personal storytelling)
- Explore questions that matter
- Encourage contributions of every member of the group
- Connect and link diverse perspectives (identify commonalities in what you hear)
- Share group learning and seek agreement

Facilitator's Role is NOT to:
- Over-manage the process
- Fix the problem for the group
- Predetermine an outcome or expectation
- Take over the conversation
- Make the conversation about them

Strategies:
- Set ground rules (e.g., speaking one at time; active listening; speak openly and take risks but also be respectful of each other's opinions; remain attentive; participate boldly; respect confidentiality; speak in the first person; challenge ideas, issues, and problems, not people)
- Refer to ground rules when somebody is asking in a way that is inconsistent with what the group agreed on
- Acknowledge/validate the perspectives and expertise in the room
- Manage expectations and don't make promises
- Model active listening: clarifying and confirming understanding by hearing what someone says, repeating back your understanding of what was communicated, and affirming that the information is correct
- Model all of the behaviors that you would like participants to follow
- Ask questions that further your understanding or the understanding of others
- Ask people to participate even if they do not raise their hand (without putting anybody on the spot)
- Pay attention to different learning and speaking styles
- Make connections among comments
- Create a safe place for people to be themselves without judgment
- If somebody says something that you do not understand, ask for clarifications or to repeat the comment
- **Don't allow the conversation to be stuck in identifying problems – Create a focus on positives and/or solutions to problems**
- Add humor where appropriate

Process the Experience
- Ask participants what worked, what didn't work, and what could be improved
- Allow participants to reflect on what they can do to advance a specific topic or point of advocacy
- Identify the resources or lack thereof to further the purpose of the conversation
- Make sure participants know next steps, including timeframes