

# What does facilitation mean to us?

Reflections from POC youth





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# Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that this work is taking place on the ancestral, traditional, unceded and occupied Indigenous territories of the Coast Salish Peoples, and in particular, the **hə́h̓qə́m̓iṇə́m̓** speaking **xʷməθkʷəy̓əm** (Musqueam), **səl̓íl̓wə́təʔ** /Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) and Skwxwú7mesh Snichim speaking Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) Nations. By being situated on unceded territory, our working, learning and playing as racialized guests is made political. This workshop, in addressing the topic of facilitation, explores the personal experiences and dedication of POC youth to do work around migrations, solidarity building, decolonization and resistance. As a group of POC youth we wish to recognize the specific, yet diverse, array of positionalities we embody as Asian Canadians. Our individual voices have overlapping messages, themes, and experiences of marginalization, yet together cannot speak for all experiences of POC youth facilitation. In coming together to form this guidebook, we continue to ask ourselves, as racialized settlers, in which ways can we be accountable to decolonial practices within our own community engagement efforts?



# Foreword

For the self-identified and non-self-identified facilitator:

The idea for this workshop on the future of facilitation was born out of hua foundation's Race & Food workshop series in the 2019/20 Winter. In considering the inspiring work and activism of our peers, the concept of this workshop was formed in our desire to support and uphold space for conversations around the struggles and joys and ultimately, hopes for community facilitation work. Therefore, we began by presenting the question "What is a facilitator? And, what is the role of the facilitator?"

In our attempt to define the facilitator, we realized the complexity and richness of what facilitation work encompasses. We arrived with such varied experiences that landing upon a single phrase to define our understandings of facilitation did not seem appropriate nor possible. In gathering with the youth showcased in this book, we came to the conclusion that speaking from our unique knowledge and skill sets could bring light to and honour the complexity of facilitation work.

Showcased in this book is a spectrum of understandings of the role of the 'facilitator' and their practices of 'facilitation'. The book is titled, "What Does Facilitation Mean to Us?" as the authors collectively pondered the big questions that have risen from our current work, how we are navigating these murky waters, and how we are hoping to move forwards. It is not clear cut nor easy, and rather some of us have been worn down by the heaviness that comes with pushing against structures much bigger than ourselves, but somehow we find consolation in the absurd, honest and tender stories we share.

We hope you take what you need from this collection and reflect on how your own facilitation practice.

Cheers,

Joyce and Leilan

# Where are we coming from to do this work of facilitation?

**Joyce Liao | 廖采約**  
**Workshop Facilitator**

My experience with facilitation has been mainly around food work and storytelling. I began facilitating workshops for cooking workshops when I was part of a gardening club at UBC. Along the way, I realized that my racialized identity as a first gen Taiwanese Canadian impacted so much of how I related to food, but found disconnections between academia and my lived experiences. Through informal community and formal work spaces, I've had the opportunity to be surrounded by mentors, aunties, and teachers that have helped me see the complexity of food systems from an intersectional lens. From there, I've been grappled with the power dynamics inherent in all relationships between mentorship, teaching and facilitation in various food spaces. As someone who feels like they are just beginning in their facilitation journey, I find it inspiring and uplifting to be in conversation with fellow youth who are navigating big questions and living into the answers.

**Leilan Wong**  
**Workshop Facilitator**

I am a mixed-race settler of Cantonese and European descent, living, working and learning on the unceded and ancestral territory of the *hən̓q̓əmin̓əŋ* speaking *x̱w̱məθḵw̱əy̱əm* (Musqueam) Peoples. As an undergraduate student at UBC, I began participating in facilitation work through the UBC Resource Groups, in particular, the Women Centre's Consciousness Raising dialogue circle. Throughout my undergraduate degree, my focus has always been to bring awareness and critique to the systems of power and oppression that shape the world we live in. Despite my involvement in Consciousness Raising, I continue to be uncomfortable with the traditional role of facilitator, ie. standing at the front of the room. Therefore, rather than facilitate, I have dedicated my time in both Chinatown and UBC to providing and supporting spaces for conversation and resistance among my peers. Organizing this workshop series for POC youth has strengthened my commitment to Chinatown as a space, and the resilience and thoughtfulness of Chinatown's diverse youth community(ies).





## Audrey Tung

I am a critical human geographer currently completing an MA at the University of Victoria. As a TA, I facilitated discussion-based tutorials for several geography courses. Prior to that, I had facilitated cooking workshops and a youth program for the Richmond Food Security Society. I came across the Future of Facilitation through my previous participation in the Hua Foundation's Race and Food workshop series, which provided me with not only a renewed sense of social-cultural belonging, but also an exemplar of facilitation practices. Going forward, I would like to play a more active role in building the types of spaces that were so beneficial to me.

## villarta

villarta is a second generation filipinx who recently (re)settled on the stolen and unceded Coast Salish Territories. She is a born and raised Vancouverite who spent her formative years in New York City. During her time in NYC, she organized with high school and university students on community issues that they deemed important; these issues ranged from intimate partner violence, rape, sexual assault, and immigration and labour rights. She's grateful for her experiences of developing, implementing, and managing youth-led education/advocacy programs. villarta's grassroots organizing experience aligns with her 5+ years working in the nonprofit sector, where she continues to witness and challenge the complexities of the nonprofit industrial complex.

## **Miley Wee Kee Leong**

梁伟祺

I'm an uninvited settler on Coast Salish territories. My family and I immigrated to unceded Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh homelands in 2008 from Malaysia. My ancestors were part of the Chinese diaspora that settled in Malaysia. I first came into facilitation work as mostly an educational workshop facilitator. Now, I'm finding my facilitation work is not limited to just workshop and educational settings but it's also how I facilitate group space and dynamics, dialogue, and ideation processes. I facilitate in mostly youth-centered (ages 16-29) spaces and I work mostly with racialized youth. My facilitation is rooted in anti-violence, feminist, anti-oppression frameworks.

### **JYY**

My responses in this guidebook are coming from my background experience as a workshop facilitator around topics surrounding sexual violence, creating a culture of consent, and anti-violence in a post-secondary context.

## Crecien Bencio

My mother's name is Concepcion, which she changed to Connie when she immigrated to Canada in 1986. My Father's name is Crispin. My parents are Ibaloi, an Indigenous group in the Philippines that have a long history of farming and cultural traditions. Myself, I am Filipino, I am gay and I am 25 years old. I am a community developer and a facilitator. I was born in Vancouver and I grew up in a low-income, immigrant household where my sister and I learned and lived in the in-between of our two cultures, the Philippines and Canada, the before and the after.

Now that I am older, I am able to recognize that my life is built by absence. My parents never speak about their past, their life as children, or their own parents. We will never speak of it. Until only recently I learned that my mother was adopted (her birth mother gave her up), or that my father quit elementary school to be a child labourer. I did not learn how to speak my mother tongue. Not knowing made me resentful, angry. I don't have a culture based on decadent flavours or gregarious fables. My culture is not based upon wealth, ownership or prosperity. And truthfully, I don't want to know everything

about my parents, their history or their culture. I don't want them to tell me because it is painful. I don't want them to tell me because I find comfort in not knowing.

But it was through working in the community doing facilitation where I understood my culture. My parents lacked the foresight to raise me with the values of the past, but we lived day to day, we worked hard towards a future, we scrimped and saved. They taught me how to bring unending strength into my work, even though it breaks my heart that I can never be honest with them about parts of myself, my mixed feelings towards them or the complications of leading equity work.

They are with me wherever I go. My mother from her village of Ngeville and my father from his village of Kabayan, their strength crosses continents and into this facilitation circle. My name is Crecien Bencio. ~~We will never speak of it.~~

Where are we coming from to do this work of facilitation?

## **Cecilia Federizon**

My main facilitation experience was in the classroom as a teaching assistant leading weekly discussion groups of around 25 students for an Introduction to Sociology course. My personal goal was to lead discussions that encourage students to think critically about the world. Being a teaching assistant was a role in which I was given power over the students. My experience will differ slightly from other folks in this guide because of my positionality in the facilitation space. I have answered these questions based on situational examples and my personal perspective.

A little on my identity: I am a short young-looking Filipinx woman who goes by the pronouns she/her. I'm in my early twenties and working full time in university administration. It is important to me that readers understand where my social and political context and how it influences my outlook on life and my experiences as a facilitator. I refer to this concept a lot in my answers as positionality.

## **Chris Son**

My experience on facilitation is mostly within arts & culture. Two examples are facilitating a panel of meetings for the City of Vancouver Reconciliation & Cultural Redress Artist Calls, and working group meetings for the Vancouver Street Dance Festival in a small non-profit setting. Both aim to curate and present a variety of artists, and visibly represent a community on a quick annual basis. The work often encounters unresolved issues in understanding, policy, and capacity within a community or larger system making for exciting discussions!... and also necessitates careful informed decision making.

## Alan Chen

Thinking back to my moments of political awakening, I remember facilitation spaces to be where I felt most comfortable. I also remember them as moments of awe and stimulation. We gravitate towards spaces like these, I think. I spent more and more time with facilitators, both in and out of their practice. By observing, reflecting, and practicing what I noticed, they became more human, and at the same time I began to shape my own facilitation praxis (i.e. how I practice and reflect on my practice). While facilitation has become a lifelong endeavor, I owe my dedication to the many facilitators who gifted me with their time and their learnings. I hope that I can create similar spaces for those whom I have the privilege to facilitate with/for.

## Kacey Ng | 伍啟詩

I am coming from this work from many years of underestimated, misunderstood, and misaligned with my role and work in facilitation. Formally and informally, I have been doing facilitation work since I have been very young. Oftentimes, the nuggets of facilitation emerged in leadership work, in holding workshops, holding reading groups, or hosting tutorials as a teaching assistant. I have been finding joy in using tactics of facilitation in my everyday life -- perhaps micro facilitation? -- using my toolkit for relationship building and maintenance between friends.

Where are we coming from to do this work of facilitation?

## Gigi

I came to facilitation not really knowing what the word means, or if I've done it before. I think a small voice of mine says, "yes! Of course you have Gigi" but I've only rarely held the title in a professional capacity. So, I come to facilitation with hesitation on whether or not I can really stand with that position. More often than not I find myself thinking: I moderated that discussion, or I got those two people talking to each other on a much smaller and more humble scale than in a workshop or in a paid setting. Informal facilitation is something I think we all find ourselves in whether it is between friends, family, or in workspaces; and for that reason I think we need to be gentle with ourselves when approaching this work and this guidebook. By acknowledging that we will not always come to the table prepared, as our best selves, or from a strictly professional approach.

## William Canero

As a Community Organiser my work focuses on community building, and the galvanization of community to build resiliency on a decolonial basis. I work primarily within my community to bring about change within greater Vancouver as a queer Filipinx. (William Canero)



Where are we coming from to do this work of facilitation?

# What are the challenges we are facing in facilitation?

## **villarta**

I've always found it difficult to de-escalate and be comfortable with handling conflict and points of disagreement that come from a subtle / obvious power struggle from folks in the room (e.g. administrative officials versus students). It can be disheartening for individuals to realize and witness how the folk they thought were their allies are not empathetic to their concerns.

Another tricky aspect is having to read people's moods (people reading) and accurately communicate the perspective from both sides. I sometimes find it hard to sit through conflict because there's an impulse desire to "make things right" ... even though I now know that the best way to do that is to let the conflict-based conversations roll out. Uncomfortable feelings demand to be felt, seen, and discussed! Working through conflict has been one of my best learning experiences as a facilitator – although it's also something that I'm still learning from.

It's also challenging to not be hard on myself as a facilitator.

## **William Canero**

The intent of workshops can often be based on desired outcomes such as fundraising goals, learning goals or production goals. In doing so, facilitators may gloss over the intent of workshops which is to create space for accessible learning. In some cases that may mean allocating: more time, more speaking opportunities, more interaction between participants.





## Alan Chen

I believe that engaging with the challenge of “checking-in and knowing yourself” supports good facilitation praxis. This looks like pausing for a moment or longer to examine the situation, current or past, that you may have had a role to play in and an impact you made. There are many facets to this challenge. For example, acts of reflection take time and energy, sometimes more than one has the capacity for. It can be hard, especially when you are deeply involved in a situation and lack the critical distance to take in the bigger picture. Moreover, checking-in is a continuous and cyclical process because change is a constant and there is always more to understand.

However, if we hope to use facilitation as a tool to change ourselves and the world for the better, we need to examine the

ways that we have internalized various systems of oppression and then work to dismantle them in ourselves. Only then can we manifest our intentions for social change with greater integrity, rather than perpetuate trauma without the awareness for course-correction or reparations.

When we step into a space to facilitate a conversation, each person carries with them their own complexities. We insert ourselves into a multitude of layers; landscapes of power, shifting identities, relationships, histories, all interacting in real time. Knowing one’s self is integral to learning how to navigate your way skillfully within a space, its people and all of its various facets.



## Crecien Bencio

As I operate between community and political systems, I can stand in my power and hold the space as a young, queer person of colour. I can stand in my power because I am usually the only young, queer person of colour in the room. I learned how I can articulate my speech, use big words and manipulate the way that I present myself in a professional setting. I learned how to weaponize my intersecting identities to strongarm a way to have a seat at the decision making table, let alone to be in a facilitation role. Despite this, I carry the burden of consistently trying to stay afloat, and lining up opportunities, resources and funding in my favour to ensure my professional success. This is the art of duplicity. I cannot be too angry, too emotional, too gay, too Filipino. I cannot be too much. In the policy making spaces

where I am invited to weigh in, the risk is too high to be myself so I have to become someone else. This is my “facilitator identity”. I enter the facilitation circle ready to play this game.

I do not identify as a formally educated person. But I succeed in my career because I work hard, I work hard everyday. I am a good facilitator because I make a lot of mistakes and I learn from them. I am a confident facilitator because I have taken 25 long years to learn how to love and accept myself. I learn and I love to learn. I laugh and I love to laugh. I’m myself and I love being myself. I’m myself and I can also be someone else.

## JYY

In my facilitation practice, I have been having difficulties with engaging groups that are more uncomfortable talking about sexual violence or other sensitive topics that they tend to be unfamiliar with. It's not a particularly easy topic to discuss, especially first thing in the morning in some cases, so I think I need to work on ways to ease the tension while still maintaining that the topic is serious. Something that I also find to be challenging is discussing something that has been especially topical these days, with the MeToo movement, it feels like everyone already has a grasp on the basics of sexual violence which is important, but it's adding layers to the discussion that discuss things such as coloniality, misogynoir, race, intimate partner violence, and transmisogyny that are the things that I believe further complicate the issue of sexual violence and are more tricky to discuss with people in a way that is accessible and not triggering.

What are the challenges we are facing in facilitation?

# How do we think about, act upon and plan for equity and anti-oppression in facilitation spaces?

## **Audrey Tung**

I consider equity and anti-oppression to be ongoing processes rather than end states. So entrenched are systems of oppression, so dynamic are mechanisms of hegemony and resistance, and so diverse are its stakeholders that violence may never be eradicated from the spaces over which we preside. It is therefore crucial to avoid complacency with progress, which does not represent a linear path towards justice, but a circular one that periodically turns back on itself. That is why critical reflexivity, or the continual self-examination of individuals, their social contexts, and their actions, is crucial for equitable and anti-oppressive facilitation. It entails the location of one's social position in relation to other participants, including the power dynamics, synergies, and differences

that lie therein. To perceive these relationships, the facilitator must fully attend to the atmosphere, interactions, social cues, circumstances, and perspectives during facilitation sessions. Following observations and reflections, program practices should adapt to power imbalances, discomfort, or other issues that may arise. And then, repeat. Far from being a Sisyphean task, this cyclical quest for justice in facilitation settings is rich with meaning. In these locales, we imagine and perform the alternative worlds we would like to inhabit. However small, their very existence challenges the dominance of oppressive systems at large. As facilitators, we cannot take this transformative capacity of everyday spaces for granted.



## Crecien Bencio

Part of the solution is based on planning and practicalities, i.e. feeding participants, meeting accessibility and transportation needs and ensuring that there are resources and funding to best support full participation. As a practical measure, I advise facilitating with a partner or a team so there is a shared responsibility when “facili-nightmares” (facilitation nightmares) arise.

I also advise in experimenting different ways of learning and doing things in an unconventional way to meet the different learning styles of participants. How can we make our facilitation more creative? How can we embed a culture of experimentation so that participants are courageous in moving their ideas forward? Equity and anti-oppression itself is a courageous thing.

When working with young people of colour, it is important that participants are able to see a reflection of themselves in the leadership and in the facilitation process. This is a constant practice of examining points of power and facilitating opportunities for underrepresented peoples to make decisions in tangible ways. i.e. collaborative budgeting, involving participants in hiring decisions, ensuring that there is proper follow through in the feedback model.

## Chris Son

Applying an intersectional analysis is crucial since gathering a group of people in one oppressed identity often assumes homogeneity, which further perpetuates oppression. Similarly to how white people in parliament are divided, it is the same for a group of racialized people. In most cases it is worse, as a group of oppressed people may not have collectively built extensive understanding or knowledge about the topic. Instead, each individual depends on their own personal experience to make conclusions.

For example, when convening a panel to award funding to Indigenous artists, it is important to convene Indigenous art experts. Indigenous can be interpreted as urban Indigenous, or local Indigenous (a member of the local First Nations). Art experts can vary by profession (artist, historian, curator, etc.) as well as which art communities they associate with. Additionally common factors such as gender, ancestry, ability, and class need to be considered as well.

By applying intersectionality and not assuming homogeneity, you are more likely to convene a more representative group, who can more effectively address the goal for the people.

## JYY

Planning for anti-oppression and equity to me is establishing solid and reasonable community agreements. Community agreements are an excellent tool for ensuring that members of the group are responsible to each other and acknowledge that there is diversity in lived experience. These community agreements are also indicators of what will and will not be tolerated in a space. It is also important for facilitators to know that it's okay to ask people to leave if they're being especially disrespectful or if they're in consistent violation of the community agreements. In these situations, it's important to prioritize the safety and wellbeing of the collective. Being accountable to the group is important while upholding the community agreements; as a facilitator it is part of your role to support participants growth by creating a safe space for people to be vulnerable and contribute their thoughts and share questions. It's also good to have ways to address people when they are in violation with community agreements, if you have the capacity and depending on the situation of course, it may be helpful for everyone's learning if you are able to call people in rather than call them out as a practice for compassion and anti-oppression.



## Cecilia Federizon

For me, anti-oppression and equity is all about access. There are numerous societal factors that have placed barriers on certain folks that prevent them from participating in events and/or workshops. Whether it be from the physical location of the venue, the time or cost of an event. For example, when planning for community events I try to choose a central venue that has easy access to public transportation, keep the event free, and in some cases offer bus tickets.

The knowledge and activities of the workshop should also be accessible for participants to feel welcomed and encouraged to be involved. While I was a Teaching Assistant, I found that giving folks options of activities is a great way to cater to different participant comfort-

levels. I always give the opportunity for participants to opt-out of an activity so that they have the agency to create their own boundaries. Especially for sensitive topics that I had to teach (i.e. sexual assault, inequalities, etc.), a practice I do is giving trigger warnings before the class started. Also, in every workshop, event, or class I lead I make time in the beginning to make a community agreement. This way participants know how others in the room feel and need from each other. To me, anything that makes participants feel comfortable in the space and anything that makes it easier for them to join is my way of planning for equity and anti-oppression.

How do we think about, act upon and plan for equity and anti-oppression in facilitation spaces?

## Gigi

I'm approaching from the context of an informal setting and my experience of learning only afterward that I had actually performed facilitation work. Therefore, I think that there is only so much that you can plan for. Instead, I consider taking time in every day life to approach all your interactions from a lens of equity and anti-oppression. Do your homework on how power and privilege affects you. Where do you hold power and stay humble to that as a facilitator. Recognize your blind spots. Approach these topics as a practice, like music or sports, something you take time to do regularly. When you find yourself at the facilitation station, trust yourself, your experiences, and know that the work you have done is an asset that you will be bringing to the station.







How do we think about, act upon and plan for equity and anti-oppression in facilitation spaces?

# What are three elements that are always in your facilitation toolkit?

## Crecien Bencio

In my culture, feeding people is a priority in showing generosity. When I prepare a space, I do my best to ensure that there is good food and people are well-fed. And when people are well-fed, they can think better and generally feel better.

What makes me work efficiently and professionally is having my “screaming room”. When we have difficult conversations or address challenging situations, I need to be able to go to my circle of friends and complain and cry and troubleshoot about my work. I deeply appreciate that my friends are my “professional listeners.” I can scream in my screaming room and come back to work with a focused and unbiased mindset.

As facilitators, it is important that we learn how to find joy in our work. We can afford to joke and be imperfect. I used to be very invested in how I was perceived by others. But learning how to not take myself seriously has brought me a lot of joy. There is pleasure in the silliness. It's ok to laugh at ourselves and not be the perfection that we aspire to be.

## Cecilia Federizon

Empathy - it allows me to handle conflict and uncomfortable situations. It also makes me aware of how others may feel about the power dynamic between me and the participants and therefore cater to it.

Improvise - Nothing ever goes to plan, so I'm always prepared to think on my feet and react to situations (with empathy!).

Having fun - the best way to facilitate a group, or in my case teach students, was to try and make topics more entertaining, fun and lighthearted. I found that this always opened more discussion and willingness to participate.



## Miley Wee Kee Leong

梁伟祺

1) Community Agreements - No matter what space I'm in, whether it's an hour workshop or a 10 week program, I always make sure to start with a community agreement. A community agreement (aka Group Guidelines, Group Agreements, etc.) is a set of guiding principles that a group agrees on for group engagement. For me, it's important to establish guidelines for engagement because it's a way to hold people accountable for their behaviours and it helps foster a safer space. I also make sure to co-create the list with folks and to emphasize that it's a 'living document', meaning we can always come back to it and revise as needed.

2) Activity that explores connection to self and the group - Even as a facilitator, I don't like icebreakers because most of them are often really awkward or anxiety-inducing. So I try to stray away from the human knots or human bingos and have activities that allow folks to share (without feeling exposed) and find commonalities with each other. An activity that I do often is 'Something Old, Something New' - participants are asked to bring two items (One that they've had for a long time, One

that they've been recently attracted to). Another is 'Our Timeline' - participants are asked to start with the birth year of the oldest person in the group up to the current year and add in dates that hold a significance to them. I usually narrow it down to a couple of categories (e.g. when you met a significant person in your life, a public date that is important to you). These two activities allow participants to choose what they want to share (because consent is important! Even in sharing!) and usually there are happy coincidences that happen where folks are able to find unexpected connections.

3) Verbal and non-verbal participation - Everyone participates and engages differently. I always make sure to incorporate quiet reflection for my groups. Big group discussions are great but that only creates space for folks who are comfortable public speaking so before any group sharing, I always make sure to have at least 3-5 minutes for folks to write down their thoughts and reflect.

## Gigi

1) A land acknowledgement that is grounded and relevant to the discussion that will follow. It is not enough to just say the words, do the work to convey to the participants why a land acknowledgement is necessary and what the acknowledgement means for the way the group will work moving forward. Focus on what it means to be doing the specific work you are planning to do on unceded land, how does it inform the way you act, talk, make decisions, and what you produce.

2) A working understanding of power. As I mentioned in previous responses, practicing and recognizing the work you've done on learning about how power impacts us especially the participants in the room.

3) A sense of humour and curiosity. Give participants the benefit of the doubt. Remember that what you see on the surface might not be what is happening below. For example, even if someone looks utterly disengaged, they might in fact be concentrating very hard. Bring a sense of humour to the work you are doing (of course do so with tact)

## villarta

For me, two key elements are accessibility and having an “anti-oppressive [facilitation] practice toolkit”. I find comfort in reading the work by adrienne maree brown and Octavia Butler as they make me think about how another world is possible and what it means to embed political consciousness in the work we do for our communities.



## Chris Son

**A common goal** - The facilitator and the group should come prepared in understanding or have developed a common goal. The goal needs to be focused and attainable by the participants. Consistently remind the group of the objective and all conversations within the session should be about addressing the goal, or possibly how it can't be addressed with the time and people available.

**Scope down** - Scoping down the goal helps make it attainable. More importantly, it questions whether the goal is even appropriate for the group to address. Is the group speaking on behalf of people it doesn't represent? When entering unfamiliar territory, I often realize there is a lack of expertise

or people represented in a group. This needs to be acknowledged early in the session and scope down as necessary. If the goal is not flexible, then the meeting needs to dissolve and convene when the expertise is sourced. If neither is an option, because time is the issue, then it needs to be acknowledged with the results or further consultation needs to happen.

**Breaks** - It gives the participants a chance to speak personally to one another and have bigger picture conversations that is relevant, but perhaps not focused enough and too open ended when addressing the goal. Get those conversations out of their system. This is when I hear some of the most enriching conversations.



What are three elements that are always in your facilitation toolkit?

## Alan Chen

1) Group Check-ins - This involves going around in a circle and asking people to share personal information to support group work, such as: how they prefer to be addressed (ex. their pronouns, preferred names, etc.); how they are doing today and what everyone can expect of them (ex. “I’m energized and have lots of questions”, or “I’m tired but still excited so I might listen more than speak”, etc.); or why they showed up today. This gives your participants an opportunity to build scaffolding with each other if they’re comfortable doing so, in the hopes that working together comes easier as the group moves forward.

2) Community Agreements - By establishing a set of agreements, a group of people can start off on the right

foot and aspire to work together in a way that works for themselves and each other. These can be worked out together or brought forward as predetermined suggestions depending on how much time is available (a lot of time or less time, respectively).

3) Housekeeping - Timekeepers, notetakers, and breaks; respect your participants’ time, keep records for everyone’s reference, and create a space for people to take care of themselves! These are general supports that help alleviate common concerns or disruptions, giving your participants more headspace to contribute to process and conversations.



What are three elements that are always in your facilitation toolkit?

How can we approach facilitating in environments where we personally feel uncomfortable? And, how do we make an environment for all participants to feel safe and vulnerable enough to participate?

## JYY

In an environment where I personally feel unwelcome or uncomfortable facilitating, especially if I feel like the folks that are participating in the workshop are personally intimidating to me or if there are an overwhelming number of participants, I do a few things or am reminded of a couple of things. If I feel like I'm going into imposter-syndrome mode or if the participants in a workshop intimidate me for whatever reason, I remember that these people chose to participate in my workshop or I've been invited because they WANT this workshop. Moreover, I remind myself that I have the skills and knowledge to address a certain topic that participants may not be as familiar with, even if they are more skilled in other areas. When I'm

uncomfortable, I may also suggest small group discussions or activities as a tool to catch my breath and ground myself. Conversely, to foster an environment where all feel safe to participate, I depend on community guidelines to establish ground rules and expectations that we will have going forward. The guidelines are a step to build a culture of mutual respect and consent, but this can be further amplified by using inclusive language and encouraging group participation by taking comments from participants and elaborating and expanding upon their comments and inviting other people to share their perspectives.





## Crecien Bencio

To come from a place of honesty, there were a number of times when I've cried in the middle of a session in the role of the facilitator. Listening to the truths of participants was so painful that the grief was paralyzing. Sometimes the stories we share become a constant reminder of the injustice of this world and the only response I have is to cry.

In one of my most transformative facilitation moments, I opened a youth leadership training in 2018 with a story of how at a social innovation conference, one of the organizers assumed I was not a participant, but was there to steal a sandwich from the catering table. Sharing that moment felt like drowning in a sea of pain. I was at the center of the circle crying in front of a group of strangers. It was strange to feel this way. It was

liberating.

If we have an expectation that underrepresented participants will learn from their discomfort, then I as a facilitator need to come prepared to this work with my own discomfoting truth. It's my responsibility as a facilitator to demonstrate discomfort and imperfection, pain and how we learn from it and work with it.

I carry the understanding that the basis of my facilitation work is built upon the brownness of my body and the oppressive experiences that have made me astute enough to successfully navigate this oppressive world. This is grief as reciprocity. This is grief as opportunity. This is the honesty of the work.



## villarta

I've facilitated discussions / meetings between students and university administrators, students and high school / university teachers, student-led groups, high school students doing advocacy projects at the United Nations, and nonprofit professionals. For most of the time I've been a "facilitator", I've felt uncomfortable because I was spontaneously appointed / (collectively) nominated for that role. The positive to that is that I didn't have any time to worry about what could happen. However, I also felt many cases of imposter syndrome. Being thrown into the situation as a WOC facilitator is one that comes with (fleeting) power. It's an acknowledgement of being trusted to do the job well; but for me, it has sometimes felt like another case of tokenization – particularly when working with older White folks who don't acknowledge their privilege and/or their mistakes, and then think it's okay to "right their wrong" by having a WOC facilitate the conversation. It's hard not to feel like a fraud in those circumstances and I wish I could bill those individuals for the emotional labor I put into facilitating.

Even though facilitation is supposed to make truth-telling easier, the process

of doing that can actually be quite uncomfortable. People have different definitions on what a safe environment, and/or conducive to constructive dialogue looks like to them – it's impossible to please everyone. To stay calm before and during the session, I acknowledge and accept that those uncomfortable feelings are grounded in valid emotions; but I also use it as a strength to know that I am doing the best that I can and I am not 100% responsible or liable for the outcome of the discussion.

At the beginning of the session, I tell everyone that I don't know what the outcome of the discussion will be, no one has all the answers, we're discussing a tough topic (that has several power dynamics in place – and yes, I mention that because I consider it important to lay out that info to get everyone on the same page), and I appreciate the vulnerability and honesty that everyone brings to the space. I like asking participants to share their ideas for community agreements and have someone write them down.

As someone with introverted tendencies, I strive to find a balance between getting input from verbal participants and those who prefer to communicate through

writing. For that, I like to have pieces of paper and writing utensils available to pass around; I encourage folx to write down additional questions / concerns they have during the session and to give those papers to me during the break. We all have different forms of preferred communication, and it's important to honour that.

## Kacey Ng | 伍啟詩

There are three general items that come to mind in considering comfortable environments in facilitation.

1. Prior to the event — one of the key projects to take on, and this applies generally to all forms of facilitation, is learning more about yourself. Think about where you are positioned in society; from your privileges, how your identities may be marginalized, and how those identities shape your impact in your communities. Depending on the situation, this might help to identify what is making you uncomfortable.
2. Having established an environment that caters a safer space — establish clear boundaries that are clear for participants from the start. Think about whether this discomfort is helpful for continued discussion.
3. Perhaps the person who is creating an uncomfortable environment is actually the person that feels discomfort in the space or within themselves. It is okay to ask folks to leave. You can ask them if they'd like some space to themselves or that they are welcome to leave if the content of the workshop doesn't meet their expectations. However you frame it, do what makes you safest and feel most comfortable.

How can we approach facilitating in environments where we personally feel uncomfortable? And, how do we make an environment for all participants to feel safe and vulnerable enough to participate?

## Miley Wee Kee Leong

梁伟祺

In response to the second part of this question, I don't think it's ever possible to create an environment where every participant feels safe. I also think it's a collective responsibility to foster a safer space since it's an impossible responsibility for one person to hold all of that weight. As facilitators we need to meet our group where they're at and foster a collective safer space.

A couple of strategies I use:

- Before facilitation: I make sure to check-in with the group and invite folks to share any access needs or hesitations they have coming into the group setting. I invite folks to share supports they found helpful in the past and we come up with some strategies together. I also make sure to provide an overview or agenda so folks know what to expect.
- During facilitation: I start every facilitation space with group guidelines. I make sure the spaces I'm facilitating in have name tags where folks are able to put down their names and pronouns. I facilitate with a trauma-informed and anti-violence lens which centers consent and agency. This often looks like providing options for engagement, using language like 'invite' and

'propose', etc. I also invite folks to ask questions about the activities and processes I use. So that the group understands they have choice in what they participate in and they're able to opt out or propose other options.

- Post facilitation: If this is a one-time facilitation, I usually invite folks to provide feedback, with the option of a follow-up conversation if they wish to go more in depth. If this is ongoing, I usually schedule a check-in on a regular basis so that they're able to share what's been going well and what needs tweaking.

I think at the end of the day, there's no check-list or standard way of going about creating safer spaces. Everybody engages differently and every group dynamic has its own different rhythm. It's important to check-in with participants and give opportunities for folks to share with you what supports they need rather than assuming. I found that being accountable and transparent to participants about my own facilitation processes have helped the most to build trust among participants to engage.



How can we approach facilitating in environments where we personally feel uncomfortable? And, how do we make an environment for all participants to feel safe and vulnerable enough to participate?

# How to do conflict resolution/ de-escalation from a place of anti-oppression/being power- conscious?

## Audrey Tung

Empathy may not be the most instinctive response to antagonism, but it is the most necessary one in our justifiably reactionary times. In order to escape the self-perpetuating cycle of anger, in which outrage begets defensiveness and vice versa, we must try to understand where its parties are coming from whether or not we agree with them. Such understanding extends not only to victims of aggression, but also to its perpetrators – roles that are especially interchangeable in situations of conflict. During these times, we must resist the self-indulgent urge to turn what would have been teachable moments into instances of public humiliation (however deserved), to elevate ourselves by tearing others down, to affirm our moral authority over unenlightened members of society.

Clever ripostes, savage takedowns, and high-minded commentary, enjoyable as they are, inevitably represent transactions by which we accrue or detract social capital among justice-minded peers. In this way, righteousness places its subjects in positions of power. Although such power is potentially subversive to systems of injustice, it is nonetheless amenable to abuse, and must be utilized/assumed responsibly. When in doubt about how to wield this power, if at all, the role of facilitators should always be to invite, rather than repel, conversation – even and especially with adversaries.



## Cecilia Federizon

The one situation where I found a conflict arising was the week students were learning about criminalization. For my discussion group, I asked students to hold a mock debate on legalizing marijuana. As the debate went on, the more it became clear that students were using personal anecdotes and taking the debate more personally and emotionally. With the students' voices getting louder, I could tell it was time for me to step in. I decided to handle the escalating tension by stopping the conversation and recapping students arguments that they got from the textbook. I then decided to turn it into a discussion rather than a debate.

To me it takes practice and experience to gain the wisdom to know how to handle conflicts - I for sure still have a lot to

learn. In most of my experiences as a facilitator I had a lot of power given to me because I was labelled the “teacher”, and I had control over students' grades which could potentially affect their lives (i.e. scholarships). With that much power, I try not to be overbearing and instead try to be welcoming, vulnerable, open and accepting. In the classroom, one of the main ways I did that was through making the community agreement with everyone – reiterating the community agreement could've played a crucial role in calming tension before the debate to reassure folks that I'm there for them and a reminder to respect one another.

How to do conflict resolution/de-escalation from a place of anti-oppression/being power-conscious?

## **William Canero**

Workshop space should always strive to prioritise the process of creation rather than the final product or aspirational outcome of the workshop. In this way, the interaction between you the facilitator and they the participant can both address the issue within the room in a dialogue that keeps the power within conversation as a flat hierarchy.







How to do conflict resolution/de-escalation from a place of anti-oppression/being power-conscious?

# What are the protocols we follow in our own communities?

**Kacey Ng** | 伍啟詩

I acknowledge that there are a variety of protocols that are followed in the facilitation process. I speak to a very broad statement in shorter term events or one-off shows, versus meeting as a cohort, especially meeting over a longer period of time.

Generally speaking, I have two that stick out in certain scenarios:

1. In the event of a short or brief discussion, I am interested in making folks feel that they are included and welcome in the space. I believe by actively creating inclusive spaces, and finding commonalities between the other participants, creates access to a willingness to be vulnerable with others. Perhaps in seeing the shared humanity we have in each other, and the identities that we embody, we see that we're not so different after all. When broaching difficult subjects, perhaps the only thing we can hope for is to move at the pace of trust together.

2. In the event that we are having a longer form discussion; whether that is to build community, working together in a cohort, etc. The most important thing for me to address is what the community's guidelines are. It's important to think, especially, of the community guidelines we often take for granted. I.e. "T for Term, 1 diva 1 mic, etc", and think about where the importance lies in these statements and how they impact others in the group as well. What are the specific needs that your community or space may require? How do we use these as pillars for built trust? When we share our community guidelines and our boundaries, we start to gather glimpses of each others values systems and whether they are compatible with our own. As before, these begin -- or continue to build -- on the capacity of trust within the group.



## William Canero

The board of directors at the Kathara Society follow the following protocols:

As performers we are encouraged to learn, understand and abide by the protocols of the lands we are upon. It is encouraged that we aim to have proper consultation and consent to do our work on the Unceded Coast Salish Territories and to practice asking first before conducting actions/events.

We pledge to make Land Acknowledgements at every event. Active inclusion of Coast Salish indigenous

peoples. We aim to provide sponsorship & solidarity with indigenous peoples from across the world. We pledge to meet the expectations of our partners and collaborators. In addition, we strive to stay accountable in instances where our actions have excluded members of minority groups. Our mentorships and professional partnerships must be intergenerational and foster the next generation of indigenous leaders.

# What are the questions we have going forwards?

## **Crecien Bencio**

How do we use facilitation as a tool within the city to shift political power to young people of colour?

How can young people in non-profit organizations re-create a culture of resource sharing and better collaboration, instead of working from a model of scarcity?

## **Miley Wee Kee Leong**

梁伟祺

How might we intentionally create and assert boundaries as facilitators when the work is often emotionally laborious and tied to our personal lives?





