



FACILITATION GUIDE: POSITIONALITY MAPPING FOR COLLABORATION

Why this guide was developed

Our research participants shared many experiences around unequal power dynamics, tokenistic forms of inclusion and exploitative collaboration practices. This facilitation guide will help you to see power imbalances before any collaboration starts, giving everyone a chance to recognise and address them.

Who this guide is for

This guide is for activists, organisations and networks who want to find ways to collaborate in fairer and intentional ways. It is especially useful for groups that want to deepen their understanding of how power, identity and lived experience shape the ways they work together.

Whether you are starting a new partnership or trying to strengthen an existing one, this facilitation guide offers a shared space to reflect on expectations, responsibilities and potential areas of tension.

It is also suitable for facilitators who support movement-building, coalition work or cross-issue collaboration who want practical exercises to help groups recognise and address power imbalances.

This guide is part of a wider toolkit. The toolkit also includes a glossary of terms, a summary of our research about collaboration and more tools. You can explore the tools and resources [here](#).

How to use this guide

When activists or their organisations are considering working with other activists or organisations, this guide can be used to build trust and explore potential collaboration opportunities and obstacles. The idea is that if we take time to understand each other better, we can plan for better collaboration.

This guide is about exploring different experiences and perspectives in the world. The exercises

in it will help participants reflect on their lived experiences, institutional roles and sources of authority. All these things shape collaboration. Because all collaborations involve people, even organisational collaborations, the guide explores the relationships between people and the roles they might play throughout the collaboration. Activists and organisations wanting to collaborate should work with trusted facilitators to work through these exercises together.

All participants are required to sign confidentiality forms before starting the exercises.

“Activists with disabilities, [have] the feelings of, if these people we collaborate with them they will get our ideas, then because they have the upper hand, they can use that idea to fundraise. And then, because nobody knows us, because we do not have as many connections as them, we will continue attracting low funding because our ideas have been done; they are gone with other people.”

Disability activist, Kenya

RULES FOR FACILITATION

The facilitators must:

- have proven experience in participatory facilitation and the ability to guide conversations without lecturing
- have training on safeguarding and be able to uphold clear boundaries and safe-practice standards
- be skilled in inclusivity and accessibility, with the ability to adapt sessions to different access needs
- have experience managing group dynamics, navigating power dynamics and be able to respond to emotions with empathy.

We understand that it might not be easy or possible to find facilitators with the above training and experience.

Here are some tips on how to find a skilled facilitator:

- Start with your networks: Many skilled facilitators already exist within disability, advocacy or civil society networks. Recommendations from peers can help you find the right people.
- Create partnerships with groups that offer training: Organisations working in inequality spaces, such as human rights, gender, safeguarding or community organising, may provide facilitation training.
- Build internal capacity: Organisations can identify members or staff with strong people skills and support them to take short, low-cost training.
- Use lived experience: Pairing someone with lived experience and someone with technical skills to co-facilitate can fill gaps and strengthen the process.

Introduction



This facilitation guide is not about creating shame over unearned advantages or competition over who has the most disadvantages. It is about being clear and open, recognising the systemic power imbalances and inequalities we live with every day, and thinking about our part in those on an ongoing basis.

Ice breaker

Facilitators lead a short activity to energise the group and set the tone for the exercise.

An example: Each person shares a fun fact about themselves or something that has surprised them recently.

SECTION 1

Step 1 – Who am I? (Individual exercise, 10 minutes)

Each person writes down identity markers relevant to the collaboration.

- Facilitators work with participants to determine markers that are relevant to the nature of their collaboration.
- Participants put answers on sticky notes and put them in a box/pot for anonymity.
- Participants write down identity markers on a template as the facilitator reads them aloud.

Examples of identity markers:

- Disability identity/lived experience/caregiver
- Organisational role, organisational affiliation, organisational focus
- The type of organisation or advocacy you are involved with (e.g., grassroots, NGO, union, coalition)
- Professional background (e.g., legal, social work, economics, healthcare, caregiver)

- Socioeconomic class, education, race, gender, geography
- Other factors important to you

Please see appendix one for a useful example to help you with this exercise. This can also be printed out as a template.

Step 2 – Identifying disadvantages and challenges (15 minutes)

Each person is asked to identify one example which disadvantages them in their life.

These should be unearned disadvantages, which means they are not related to anything the person has done but are something they have no control over. For example, their physical appearance or place of birth. Some disadvantages may be invisible to others, such as a health condition.

An example: Due to my accent or inability to speak English, people might assume I am less capable or dismiss me.

Participants should be encouraged to call out or write down their disadvantage in turn. However, participants should not feel under pressure to expose very personal things and should only share what they feel safe to share. This can also be done anonymously, where participants write on sticky notes and put them in a box.

Participants are encouraged to actively listen to what others say without judgement or discussion at this point. Participants are also encouraged to think about how other people's experiences are the same or different to theirs.

Participants are asked to notice their individual response to what other people say and think about the emotions it brings out in them. For example, surprise, anger, sadness, outrage, recognition.

Step 3 – Identifying privileges/ unearned advantages (15 minutes)

In the same way that disadvantages can be hidden or unspoken, our unearned advantages or privileges can also go unnoticed.

They are like a set of tools and resources we carry around unknowingly. They are available to us and ready to use, yet we often take them for granted and rarely think about them.

Each person is asked to identify an example of a privilege or unearned advantage in their life. This means it is not related to anything they have done, rather it is something they have no control over. For example, the family in which they were born into. Some privileges/unearned advantages may be invisible to others, such as studying in private institutions.

Again, participants are encouraged to actively listen to what others say without judgment or discussion at this point. Participants are also encouraged to think about how other people's experiences are the same or different to theirs.

Participants are asked to notice their individual response to what other people say and think about the emotions it brings out in them.

Step 4 – Facilitated discussion on disadvantages and privileges/ unearned advantages (30 minutes)

Facilitate discussion about what was learned, reminding participants that this is not about shame over unearned advantages, or competition over who has the most disadvantage.

The discussion is about being clear and open, recognising the systemic power imbalances and inequalities we live with every day, and thinking about our part in those on an ongoing basis.

Example facilitation questions:

- What is it like to talk about and hear about these experiences of unearned advantages and disadvantages?
 - What was surprising?
 - How aware were you of your privileges and disadvantages?
 - Is it easier to be aware of the disadvantages?
 - Is it uncomfortable to recognise privileges/ unearned advantages?
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Step 5 – Take a break (30 minutes)

Breaks are important. Do not be tempted to work through the break because you need to catch up on time or want to leave early.

Remember to consider access needs. Our accessible activity checklist can help.

Breaks provide the following things:

- Time to rest, refresh and refuel. This is important for everyone. It can be especially important for people with psychosocial disabilities or for people who find talking strenuous.
- Time to reflect on what was just discussed and address any feelings this might have brought up.
- Opportunity to connect with other participants in an informal way, perhaps to recognise points of connection or acknowledge something new that was shared.

SECTION 2

The exercises in this section work best if framed around building shared understanding, not assigning blame.

The outputs help shift focus to structures of power rather than personal shortcomings. They are designed as a follow-on to Section 1 and should be done on the same day, or very close to when Section 1 was done, and with the same participants. Participants will need the worksheets they started filling out in Section 1 to complete Section 2.

Step 6 – Influence and power reflection (Individual exercise, 10 minutes)

Each person reflects on their identity, disadvantages and advantages.

They should identify:

- What gives me voice, credibility or decision-making power?
- What additional privileges or unearned advantages do I hold, like my job position or age?
- What makes it harder for me to have influence?
- How might the influence I hold become a barrier to our collaboration?

Step 7 – Mapping relationships (Individual exercise, 15 minutes)

This step is to help us with power mapping by examining our relationships with the people and organisations we work with.

You will find a template for this exercise in appendix two.

First, list all the stakeholders you work with or that are relevant to your issue. (For example, organisations of people with disabilities, inequality organisations, government departments, funders, communities, media.) You can add as many stakeholders as are relevant to you.

Next, think about whether each stakeholder has low or high power, and whether they have low or high influence.

Put yourself on the power map in the template provided, thinking about your power and influence.

Now add the stakeholders to the power map, and think about who has low or high influence and who has low or high power.

Finally, draw lines connecting the different stakeholders that may have a relationship to each other, or to you.

Highlight where your influence and power may create tension or trust in collaborations.

Step 8 – Paired sharing (20 minutes)

In mixed pairs (e.g., a disability activist with a social justice activist) share parts of your map.

Discuss: What surprised you? Where are the power imbalances? Where are the shared commitments?

Identify two ways your influence could unintentionally create inequality (e.g., tokenising, assuming expertise and not valuing lived experiences).

Discuss what you would like to achieve from collaboration. Choose five key words that you would like to apply to collaboration.

Look at your five key words about collaboration. Pick two that you agree on then turn them into statements to show how you could apply them in practice.

Step 9 – Implications for collaboration (30 minutes)

Do the following as a group:

- Share emerging themes
- Name tensions openly (e.g., funding timelines, community processes)
- Name points of connection (e.g., addressing inequality)
- Discuss practices that can be adopted in the collaboration to address some of the challenges identified or to build on areas of connection
- Identify shared principles to support future collaboration (e.g., Nothing about us without us, co-defining success)



REFERENCES AND FURTHER RESOURCES

Exercise adapted from Peggy Macintosh's *Invisible Rucksack of Privilege* (1989). It was reviewed and revised in October 2025 with inputs from activists taking part in the Connecting Disability Justice and Inequalities research project in Ghana and Kenya. We thank everyone for their input into this guide.

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Activists and organisations are welcome to adapt the guide to meet their needs. Please note that the guide may need to be updated as time passes and circumstances and local contexts change.

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APPENDIX 1. EXERCISE COMPLETION TOOL

Step 1 – About me

Write down the identify markers important to you. This could include: lived experience of disability, organisational affiliation, family background, etc

Your response

Step 2 – what disadvantages me?

Write down the factors that disadvantage you. This could include your appearance, your accent, where you were born, a health condition, etc

Your response

Step 3 – what advantages do I have?

Write down some of the privileges you have which give you advantages. This could include being fluent in different languages, having a secure job.

Your response

Additional notes:

APPENDIX 2 - EXAMPLE POWER MAP

