

## Facilitation Skills – Holding Effective Conference Calls

As the Facilitator, and as the Participant

Effective Conference Calls	
As the Facilitator:	Description of Action:
<b>Prepare thoroughly</b>	Organize the same way you would for a regular meeting.
<b>Initiate the call</b>	Plan to call other participants at least 5 minutes ahead of the start time.
<b>Check-in</b>	Briefly establish how participants are doing and make sure everyone has the needed documents in front of them. If you have time, do a check-out at the end of the call.
<b>Be an attentive and animated listener</b>	If you do a good job of facilitating a phone conference, you'll likely be tired afterwards. Conference calls have the disadvantage of using only one of our five senses, we need to overcompensate in listening/hearing and speaking effectively.
<b>Keep the pace</b>	Anticipate when a speaker is finished and ask for the next speakers input, reactions from the group, or move forward with the agenda. If the facilitator leaves lag time between each speaker, people may become uneasy wondering who is going to speak next and whether it's OK if they do. It is the facilitator's responsibility to eliminate these lags or silences that, when added up, take time and make people feel like they may be wasting theirs.
<b>Be a "verbal listener"</b>	Indicate through yes's, un-huh's, and mmm's that the talkers' points are heard. Others on the call may or may not do this—but the facilitator must. This helps to make up for the lack of non-verbal communication on phone calls.
<b>Be clear, concise and realistic</b>	Encourage participants to do the same. The amount of work completed during a one-hour conference call is generally less than that conducted in a one-hour in-person meeting. Therefore, plan your agenda with fewer items than you would for an in-person meeting.
<b>Review highlights and decisions made</b>	Meeting review is a good practice in all types of meetings.

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As the Participant

Effective Conference Calls	
As the Participant:	Description of Action:
<b>Be clear, concise and direct</b>	Use the same points as above.
<b>Identify yourself</b>	Introduce yourself a few times until people get used to your voice. In a large group (six or more), it is a good idea to always identify yourself since there will be many voices and you may not have much time to talk.
<b>Help the facilitator</b>	Be an active listener and participant. Help to build upon ideas and come to decisions/conclusions regarding agenda items.

Adapted with permission from *Soil and Water Conservation District Outreach: A Handbook for Program Development, Implementation and Evaluation*. Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Soil and Water Conservation, 2003.