

# LWG Meeting Facilitator Guide

*For district staff, supervisors, and NRCS employees running LWG meetings*

You don't have to be Ray Ledgerwood to run a good LWG meeting. You just need to keep the conversation locally led, make sure everyone is heard, and end with clear next steps. This guide gives you the principles, the agenda, and the language to do that confidently.

## 1. Before the Meeting

<input type="checkbox"/>	Send agenda at least 3 days in advance - including action items from last meeting
<input type="checkbox"/>	Confirm location, time, and any materials needed
<input type="checkbox"/>	Review each district's project status and action items so you can prompt effectively
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ask yourself: what does success look like at the end of this? Be specific before you walk in
<input type="checkbox"/>	Know how decisions will be made and what the fallback is if the group can't reach a consensus
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ask the district manager: what are potential challenges or difficult people to watch for?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Decide how detailed meeting notes need to be and confirm who is taking them
<input type="checkbox"/>	Prepare 1–2 discussion questions in case conversation stalls
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have a visible way to capture action items (whiteboard, flip chart, computer, or shared doc)
	Consider bringing timecards (10 min, 5 min, 1 min) to hold up during discussion to keep things on track without interrupting the conversation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bring copies of the Meeting Agenda Template for notetaking

## 2. The Five Principles of Good Facilitation

*Keep these in mind before, during, and after every meeting.*

<b>1</b>	<b>Your job is to serve the group, not lead it</b>
	<p>A good facilitator creates the conditions for locally led conversation. You're not there to be the expert or drive the agenda. You're there to keep things moving, make sure everyone is heard, and help the group find its own answers.</p> <p><i>"What does the group think?"</i> <i>"Has everyone had a chance to weigh in?"</i> <i>"Where does the group want to go with this?"</i></p>
<b>2</b>	<b>The agenda is a guide, not a script</b>
	<p>Come prepared with a structure but hold it loosely. If a conversation is productive and the group is engaged, let it breathe. If it's going in circles, redirect. The meeting serves</p>

the mission, not the other way around.

*"We're running a little long - should we keep going or move on?"*

*"Is this the right time to dig into this, or should we put it on the next agenda?"*

### 3 Silence is okay - don't fill it too fast

When you ask a question, give people time to think. Nervous facilitators fill silence with more talking. Resist the urge. Count to five before rephrasing or moving on. The best answers often come after a pause.

*"Take a moment to think about that..."*

*"Anyone else want to add to that?"*

### 4 Make sure everyone is heard

Watch the room. Notice who hasn't spoken. Invite quieter participants in. Redirect when one voice dominates. Locally led only works if local voices are actually in the room, and actually speaking.

*"[Name], you know this area - what's your take?"*

*"Before we move on, did anyone else want to add something?"*

### 5 End every meeting with clear action items

This is non-negotiable. Every meeting should end with specific commitments: who will do what by when. Without this, meetings feel productive but nothing changes. Go around the room and ask people to name their action item before closing.

*"What's one thing you're committing to before we meet again?"*

*"Is that realistic given your timeline?"*

### \*Key Technique: Think, Pair, Share

For bigger or harder questions, or a group who doesn't want to talk - use this three-step approach:

#### 1. THINK

Give everyone 1–2 minutes to write down their own answer individually. No talking yet.

*"Take a minute and write down your answer - just for yourself."*

#### 2. PAIR

Share at your table. Discuss, build on each other's ideas, find common ground.

*"Now talk it through with your table for a few minutes."*

#### 3. SHARE

Open it to the room. Tables report out. People share as a group, not alone.

*"What did your table come up with?"*

**Why it works:** People who freeze up answering alone in front of the room are much more comfortable sharing after talking it through with their table. The group becomes a shield, you're not putting yourself out there, you're reporting what your table said.

**Good questions to use it with:** "What is the biggest conservation challenge in your area?" • "What does success look like for your district in two years?" • "If money, time, and red tape weren't a problem - what would you want your district to work on?"

### 3. Running the Agenda

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Time estimates are for a one-hour meeting. Adjust as needed.

0-5 min	Welcome & Introductions
<i>Facilitator Tips</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Greet people by name as they arrive.</li><li>• Set simple ground rules upfront: all ideas are valid, one person at a time, respect each other, no side conversations, focus on issues not people, be part of the solution. Post these visibly. Once agreed to, managing conflict is as simple as referring back to them.</li><li>• Avoid acronyms, not everyone knows EQIP, RCPP, or LWG. Offer to explain any technical terms.</li><li>• Ask each person to share their name, what they do, and one word describing their conservation priority.</li><li>• Set the tone: this meeting is locally led - the agenda serves the group, not the other way around.</li></ul>

5-15 min	Review of Last Meeting Action Items
<i>Facilitator Tips</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Go around the room. Ask anyone who committed to an action from the previous meeting to give an update.</li><li>• Celebrate follow-through out loud.</li><li>• If someone is stuck, ask the group: "Who can help?" Don't problem-solve alone.</li></ul>

15-30 min	District Project Updates
<i>Facilitator Tips</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Give the district 3-5 minutes. Keep it focused: progress, barriers, next step.</li><li>• Ask: "Who has something to share?"</li><li>• Encourage districts to learn from each other, not just report out.</li></ul>

30-40 min	Barriers & Support Needed
<i>Facilitator Tips</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Normalize talking about what's hard. This is a safe space.</li><li>• Ask: "What's in the way? What would help?"</li><li>• Look for patterns - if multiple people have the same barrier, that's a system issue worth flagging.</li></ul>

40-45 min	Partner & Resource Updates
<i>Facilitator Tips</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask: "Has anyone connected with a new partner this quarter?"</li><li>• Share relevant program deadlines, funding, or news.</li><li>• Keep this tight, this isn't a program overview, it's an exchange of useful intel.</li></ul>

45-55 min	Open Discussion
<i>Facilitator Tips</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leave real space here. Some of the best ideas come from open conversation.</li><li>• Ask: "What's happening in your community that the group should know about?"</li><li>• Don't fill silence too fast. Let people think.</li></ul> <p>Periodically check in: Are we on the right track? Are we headed in the right direction?</p>

55-58 min	Next Steps & Action Items
<i>Facilitator Tips</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go around to district staff, board members, and partners or even individual people, and ask each one: "What are you committing to before we meet again?"</li> <li>• Write them down visibly so everyone can see – name, task, and due date.</li> <li>• Ask: "Is that realistic before we meet again?"</li> </ul>

58-60 min	Next Meeting Date & Location
<i>Facilitator Tips</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirm before anyone leaves.</li> <li>• Rotate locations when possible, hosting builds ownership.</li> <li>• Send a follow-up email within 48 hours with action items and the next meeting date.</li> </ul>

#### 4. Handling Difficult Situations

Every facilitator runs into these. Here's how to handle them without losing the room.

If this happens...	Try this...
<i>One person dominates the conversation</i>	Thank them and redirect: "Great point — I want to make sure we hear from everyone. [Name], what are you seeing?"
<i>The group gets stuck on one topic</i>	Acknowledge it and move on: "This clearly matters — let's put it in the parking lot." Keep a visible list so people know it won't get lost and always follow up on parked items at the next meeting.
<i>Someone is disengaged or silent</i>	Invite them in naturally. Reference something they mentioned earlier or their local knowledge. "You've been dealing with this in your area - anything you'd add?" If they pass, let them. Don't push.
<i>Tension or disagreement between participants</i>	Name it calmly: "It sounds like there are different perspectives here. Let's hear both." Don't take sides. Redirect to shared goals.
<i>The meeting runs long</i>	Give a 10-minute warning before the end. Ask: "What do we absolutely need to cover before we close?" Then protect action items — never skip them.
<i>No one has made progress on their action items</i>	Don't shame anyone. Ask: "What got in the way?" Use it as a conversation about barriers, not performance.

#### 5. After the Meeting

<input type="checkbox"/>	Send a follow-up email within 48 hours with action items and next meeting date
<input type="checkbox"/>	Note any barriers or patterns to flag to SDACD
<input type="checkbox"/>	Check in individually with any district that seems stuck or disengaged

Update the Between-Meeting Action Tracker for your own commitments

Reflect: What went well? What would you do differently next time?

### Facilitator Notes / Reflections

*What happened? What worked? What's worth flagging?*

***A good facilitator doesn't have all the answers, they help the group find their own.***