



# The Art of Facilitation

The ability to navigate difficult conversations can produce better ideas and better outcomes

By Jonathan C. Zur '08

For the past several years, I have had the honor and responsibility of facilitating a portion of the Leadership Quest opening retreat focused on dialogue and debate. Following the exercise last September, a class member pointedly asked me, "Why in the world did you do that?" I put the question back to the class, and the conversation that emerged focused not just on the need for class members to engage in behaviors that support learning, but also on the importance of strong facilitation to help groups grapple with important issues.

On a regular basis, my colleagues and I at the **Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities** are asked to facilitate dialogues on some of the hardest topics facing our Commonwealth. We have

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seen unprecedented demand over the past two years, including a 1,300% increase in requests after incidents of bias, bullying, or discrimination. At a time when contentious issues dominate the news cycle, the work of facilitators seems critically important. Think about the topics that come up throughout the Leadership Quest year, or recent local disagreements around issues such as Monument Avenue, public transportation, Shockoe Bottom, school zones, and more. How would our local meetings look and feel different if they were guided by trained facilitators? What new outcomes and ideas might emerge?



To advance the quality of facilitation in the region, Leadership Metro Richmond and the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities have been collaborating to offer facilitation skills trainings over the past year. Feedback has been so positive that we are now taking this partnership to the next level by launching a new Facilitation Skills Certification

program. Participants will learn concepts and practice skills over the course of several sessions. As last year's Quest class learned, participants will be equipped to play a critical role in supporting a more connected, educated, and inspired RVA.

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