Facilitating your program will be one of the most fun and potentially challenging parts! Your role as a facilitator can be simplified to three main steps, which will be expanded upon below:

1. Use your knowledge to ask meaningful questions. Approach everything from a place of curiosity.
2. Create a space that is engaging and allows everyone to feel welcome.
3. Design and set up activities that will be fun and leave participants wanting more.

It is important to remember that facilitation is a skill that everyone builds and grows over time. So, you should expect to make mistakes and learn from them along the way. The “Impact and Reflection” section offers a tool you can use to help with your reflective practice. In this section, we will focus on:

// SETTING EXPECTATIONS
// CREATING A WELCOMING SPACE
// FOSTERING A GROWTH MINDSET
// INCREASING ENGAGEMENT
// PREPARING AN IMPLEMENTATION TEAM
SETTING EXPECTATIONS

Setting expectations in the beginning of your program will get everyone on the same page about the culture of the space you are creating together. If something goes wrong or feels challenging throughout the program, you will have these expectations to refer back to as a “reset.” To engage participants the most, have them create expectations with you as a group. Let them know you want to ensure that a space is created where everyone is respected and can contribute at their best; group expectations or agreements can help with that. Let participants brainstorm first, then make suggestions based on what you have heard and also what you need for the program to be successful. Below are examples of expectations you might want to suggest.

• **Do your best to show up on time and ready to participate.** Discuss what “on time” means with your group, and be open to and aware of factors (such as transportation issues, reliance on others, cultural understandings) that may influence the expectation.

• **One person speaks at a time when meeting in a large group.**

• **It is OK to disagree and each person’s experience is valid.**

• **Cell phones are put away during meeting time.**

• **Challenge by choice.** Encourage participants to challenge themselves, however that looks for them. For example, some participants who talk a lot may challenge themselves to step back and give space for others to share.

• **Challenge stereotypes.** Commit to creating a space where participants and facilitators can challenge each other to not reproduce stereotypes and discrimination. Support participants in focusing on what is wrong/what can change in the system (schools, workplaces, laws, etc.) rather than individual people or groups. To assist with this component, be sure to check out the following resource on [stereotype threat](#).

• **Be fully present and engaged in the program.**

• **Ask questions.**

• **Be open to new ideas, experiences, and ways of doing things.**

• **Listen actively and with the intent to understand.**

• **Share and take turns.**

• **Use “I” statements.** Encourage participants and your team to use “I” statements as opposed to “we” or “you” and speak from their experience rather than assuming others feel similarly or have a similar experience.

• **Have fun!**
CREATING A WELCOMING SPACE

Your program should be a place where all participants get to have fun and see themselves as a part of the IT/coding community; ensure that your facilitation style supports that goal!

If participants feel included, validated for who they are, and like they belong, they will be more engaged. They will learn more, have more fun, and be more likely to participate in another computing experience. So how do you make this happen? You can start by reflecting on your own identities, experiences, and values. Consider the unconscious and conscious biases you hold. Consider the stories you’ve been told and how they affect you and your perceptions. Do your best not to recreate stereotypes, make assumptions, or communicate stories that limit your participants. Your experience is important, but it might not be the experience of your participants or experiences they will have.

Think about a time when you were certain that there was a right way to do something. Maybe you saw someone eating a particular way or communicating in a way that wasn’t familiar to you. Then, you thought, “That’s not the right way to do it,” or “That doesn’t make sense.” We were all taught ways to do things, from talking and eating to dressing and learning. And oftentimes we forget or choose not to see that other people were taught different, but equally valid, ways of doing the same things. It’s important to recognize these biases and discuss them with your team.

Another key factor is to use an intersectional approach. Intersectionality is the idea that we all have multiple identities, including things like race, gender, age, sexuality, ability, etc., that intersect to make us who we are. You are not just one thing, and neither are your participants. And when you reflect on it, you probably have parts of your identity that you really connect with and others that you do not. This will be the same for your participants. You want to encourage participants to show up as who they are and not create situations where they feel like they have to hide parts of their identity. If you think about intersectionality when creating your program, you will include identities beyond gender so that everyone feels represented.

In the United States, our systems, schools, businesses, government, etc. have been set up to discriminate against certain communities based on their identities. Your role is to recognize the flaws in these systems and work to change them by creating a space where everyone is included and empowered. All of your participants are capable of technological innovation. They all have a place in computing and belong as a part of this community.
FOSTERING A GROWTH MINDSET

A growth mindset means believing that talents can be developed through hard work, good strategies, feedback, and support from others. On the other hand, if you have a fixed mindset, you believe you are born with the talents you have and that does not change. When learning something new, and especially something challenging, a growth mindset can support you in persevering. Supporting participants in developing a growth mindset can be impactful in them developing skills and pursuing IT/coding opportunities in the future. Below are examples of what a growth mindset looks or sounds like versus a fixed mindset.

**FIXED MINDSET**
- Skills are something you are born with
- Challenges should be avoided
- Effort is unnecessary
- Feedback makes me defensive
- This is too hard
- I’m not that smart
- I quit
- They are better than I am

**GROWTH MINDSET**
- Skills can always be improved
- Challenges are an opportunity to grow
- Effort is essential
- Feedback makes me better
- This may take some time to figure out
- I can learn how to do this
- I won’t give up
- I’m going to learn from them

The feedback participants receive from you, your team, and other participants is an important part of supporting them in developing a growth mindset. Focus feedback on participants’ progress, strategy, persistence, and effort. You want to avoid comments that imply a participant is doing well because of their “natural” ability; rather, it is because of the effort they are putting in that is reflected in the quality of their work. Communicate high standards and express your confidence in participants’ ability to reach those standards. On the following page are some tips and examples of feedback that will support a growth mindset, adapted from an NCWIT resource.
1. EXPLAIN THAT MENTAL EFFORT ACTUALLY CHANGES THE BRAIN AND INCREASES ITS CAPACITY.

The brain responds to mental effort the way our muscles respond to exercise. When participants understand that fact, they are more likely to persist in the face of challenges. Let them know, “I really appreciated your effort today and want you to know that your brain is now ready for the next challenge.”

2. FOCUS FEEDBACK ON PARTICIPANTS’ PROGRESS, STRATEGY, PERSISTENCE, AND EFFORT.

Use specific comments like, “Great improvement on x; you’re ready to move on,” or “Good progress; you need some more practice with x.” Make no comments implying that performance is based on “natural” ability. Note the quality of the work, not the quality of the participant.

3. RECOGNIZE THAT PREPARATION AND ABILITY ARE NOT THE SAME THING.

Participants who appear “smart” have usually had more useful exposure and experience. Those who catch on less quickly usually have less preparation, not less potential. Give these participants the foundation and practice to hone the new skill or understand the new knowledge using examples more closely aligned with their own backgrounds. Let them know that “There is a place for you in IT/coding/computer science.”

4. FEEDBACK SHOULD OFFER SPECIFIC GUIDANCE ON HOW TO CHANGE.

Make clear what needs to be different about participants’ work by breaking the task into small steps and identifying their specific missteps. Have them practice each step until they are comfortable with it before moving on to the next step. Initially, give participants support to guide them through their practice, and gradually remove the support as they get each small step down cold. Let them know that “It is OK to make mistakes and take risks, that is how we learn.” And always offer the opportunity to discuss your feedback.

5. DO NOT LOWER STANDARDS FOR SUCCESS.

Participants are more likely to make the necessary additional effort if you clearly explain that you are holding them to high standards, that your corrections identify where they have not yet met those standards, and that your suggestions tell them more about what work at those standards looks like. Finally, and very importantly, clearly express your confidence that the participants have the capacity to reach those standards. Try phrases such as: “I expect you to try your hardest, and I know your hard work will help you achieve your goals,” or “This may be challenging, and I believe you can get it.”
INCREASING ENGAGEMENT

Have you ever been at a class or an event where you sat quietly while someone talked at you the entire time and didn’t ask any questions? How much did you learn from that experience? Likely you were completely bored, distracted, and learned very little. In other words, you weren’t engaged.

What if the facilitator had started by asking you to think of a situation in your own life that related to what they were teaching? For example, let’s say you were learning about roads and highways, perhaps a topic you didn’t initially care much about. And the facilitator asked you in the beginning: What is the best road you’ve ever driven on? Then, all of a sudden, you were daydreaming about a drive you took, picturing the car you were in, and the trees along the sides of the road. Then, the facilitator set you up in groups with a variety of materials and told you to build the perfect road. You and your team began discussing and debating and ultimately creating a road. This is the kind of experience we want to create for participants: where they are involved, contributing, and learning.

The key is to connect what participants are learning to their lives and experiences. There should be very little sitting and listening, and much more doing, exploring, and creating. You want participants doing something hands-on and discovering the point rather than just being told what it is.

It’s important to note that engagement can look different for everyone. Personality type, age, learning style, and life experience can all affect how we engage. You may sense participants are not engaged based on their behavior, but instead of assuming, do your best to let them show you or tell you if they’re engaged or not. For example, you can ask a question. In other words, “get curious, not furious.” If a participant or multiple participants are not engaged, rather than assuming they are doing something wrong, think about what you could do differently. Better yet, ask them to come up with some ideas and brainstorm together on activities or ways of completing activities that may be more engaging for them.
When you sense participants are feeling distracted or not engaged, try the following ideas to re-engage them:

- Take a break
- Lead an icebreaker / energizer (better yet, have a participant lead one!)
- Go outside if weather / space permits
- Let participants lead and involve them in making decisions
- Give participants an opportunity to share what is distracting them; validate them; and then move on
- Ask a question
- Move! Dance, stretch, take a walk
- Encourage drinking some water or eating a snack
- Stop what you’re doing and change to a new activity; it is OK to move on from something if it just isn’t working
- Personalize the activity; connect it to the social issue / participants’ personal experience
- Celebrate what is working / what has worked
- Change the way you are facilitating an activity: pair participants up, put them in groups, move them to something individual, etc.
- Have participants get up and share their work with each other or talk through a project
- Give participants 5-10 minutes to recharge; have them decide as a group what activity they want (lay their head down with the lights off, listen to music, doodle, write, etc.)
PREPARING AN IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

Depending on how you structure your program, you may be the only facilitator, or you may have a volunteer or peer mentor working with you. It is important to talk with anyone facilitating with you about your expectations and how they may be different from what they are used to seeing in a traditional classroom. For example, being a facilitator is not about being an expert or having all the right answers. Rather, a facilitator creates an experience for participants where they get to explore, discover, and experiment. The most engagement will happen when you are learning and discovering alongside participants. Sometimes, facilitators need to get a little goofy or silly or talk with more enthusiasm or energy than you normally would. If this is something that doesn’t come naturally to you or your team, it’s okay. The more you practice, the more comfortable you’ll feel with being uncomfortable.

Here are some common roles that facilitators take on. Work with your team on developing skills in each of these areas:

- Invite and welcome everyone
- Ask meaningful questions and avoid doing an activity for a participant
- Notice when participants are disengaged and try new strategies to re-engage them
- Support participants in connecting activities to their lives
- Be flexible and notice when things like changing the agenda or offering a break would be helpful
- Give thoughtful feedback and responses to participants that promote a growth mindset

Keep in mind that as a facilitator, you are seen as a role model. This is particularly true for any peer mentors that are close in age to your participants. This means that you want to model behaviors that you want the participants to adopt when it makes sense. It is important for anyone facilitating to talk about their passion for the topic and their path to get to where they are today.

The biggest challenge we faced was keeping our campers focused for long periods of time. We found that it was best to give periodic breaks to play games or spend time on different activities.

- Program Facilitator