

What do facilitators do?

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(based on material from the Groupwork Institute. See groupwork.com.au)

- The primary role of the facilitator is to help a group achieve its aims.
- Facilitators are responsible for the process, not the outcome.
- Good facilitators help create the container and 'hold the space' in which the wisdom of the group flourishes and magic can happen!
- Facilitators need to be self aware, able to facilitate themselves so they can facilitate others. If somebody or something is pushing your buttons, you need to be aware of this, and work through it with yourself!

Things facilitators do

- Help the group to identify what it wants to achieve whenever it is meeting. What is the reason for each discussion? How much time do they want to spend on it?
- Clarify confusing statements
- Organise and summarise ideas – reflecting back to the group where they are at
- Identify common themes – notice connections, and make links between different people's views
- Balance participation – watching and checking that people who want to speak get a chance. This can be done through a speaking list, or doing 'rounds' or more informally
- Encourage people to speak who haven't said much. Remember that people don't have to be articulate and self confident to have something worthwhile to contribute
- Help people to hear each other – listen until there is understanding – not necessarily agreement
- Keep the group on track towards its purpose, but be flexible and open to appropriate 'detours', if that's where the group wants to go
- Notice and point out when the group is going off track. Ask whether they really want to explore this tangent? If so it's going to take up time – how are we going to deal with that?
- Check in on how people are going – do we need a break? Are we all still focused?
- Identify decisions, test for agreement, ensuring everyone is heard
- Keep track of time. Ask the group what it wants to do if they are running out of time
- Notice things that are going on in the group (eg unproductive conflict, going off track, tiredness) and bring this without judgment to the attention of the group. Ask what they want to do about it.
- Acknowledge when things are tough, and validate that yes, this is really hard going, but we are getting there (That is, if we are making progress. If we're not, then take stock – name it that things are not going well and ask the group what they want to do about it.)
- Seek feedback and shared responsibility for the group process
- Encourage the group to have fun along the way

Ways of working

- Be succinct, rather than hogging the floor! You have to have presence and hold the space, but should not be centre stage
- Listen with the heart – validating the individual's truth, while acknowledging there are other truths
- Hold the individual while holding the group – validate and honour each individual's perspective while keeping the group together. This means that as a facilitator you can't take sides – if you do you can't stand by and hold, and be seen as non judgmental by people that take the opposing view
- Stand by and supporting people who are expressing what is difficult to say in the group, whilst also standing by those for whom it is difficult to hear. Everyone is important!
- Be there – "sitting in the fire' with people with emotions that may need to be processed
- Be aware of, and honour, diversity and difference
- Trust in the groups wisdom and resources
- Relax – enjoy the unfolding of the group's journey – we are not perfect , we will make mistakes