

Facilitation: the gift of structure

A facilitator gives the gift of structure to a group of people so they can become a community of minds.

Pre-session checklist

1) Clarity of purpose: What's the desired outcome? That's the starting point: everything follows from it.

2) Who's coming? Their knowledge? Hot issues, agendas, expectations? Age and special needs? Relationships and personalities? Who's missing?

3) Information and inspiration: How will you excite their minds before they start deliberating?

4) The venue and set-up:

- Microphone needed?
- Seating (5 per table is best)
- Equipment and cables
- Name stickers
- Markers
- Post-it notes
- Flip chart paper
- Prizes
- Vital phone numbers

Key skills

Safety: Protect every participant, without exception. Actively respond when someone is uncomfortable. Working in 2's helps shy people participate.

Reflective listening: Bouncing participants' ideas back to the room checks-off that they've been understood and creates clarity for all.

Checking-off: "Is that OK?"; "Does that work for you?"; "Are we good?" And pause for a response.

When attentions lapse: "Let's move on"; "Let's come back to the topic"; "Find a new partner"; or try a quick quiz.

Use silence: Your silence impels participants to respond. It creates time to think. Practice it often.

Make it active: "Please stand"; "Raise hands if you agree"; "Turn to you partner and..."; "Do this exercise with someone you don't know." Try walking/standing sessions. Have an energiser (brain gym anyone?)

Model facilitation template

STARTING WELL	1) Acknowledgement of country
	2) Be introduced
	3) Introduce yourself
	4) Clearly describe the purpose*
	5) Facilitate participant intros
	6) Describe the running order
	7) Propose ground rules** and check off.
	8) Information and inspiration
GROUP WORK	9) Introduce the question
	10) Give clear instructions, demonstrate
	11) Start the process
	12) Summarise the result
ENDING WELL	13) A final word from all
	14) Thank all (celebrate!)
	15) Commit to the next step

No plan is perfect. It's always good to improvise!

* Elements of a purpose statement

Make sure everyone knows why they're there:

- 1) What's the problem, need or opportunity?
- 2) What's the output from the session?
- 3) How will the output be used, by whom?
- 4) What's negotiable, what's not?
- 5) Check off.

** Setting ground rules

Develop a set of ground rules and propose them at the start of the session. Examples: phones off, respect and listen, be positive, no personal criticism. Remember: it's only a ground rule when they agree, so the format matters: "I'd like to suggest this ground rule. Is that OK?" Then pause for a response.

Anyone can facilitate

It's a learned skill. Start with small groups. Put time into your planning. Confidence comes with practice. You'll be amazed at what you, and your groups, achieve.