



What is the role of a facilitator?

The most effective facilitator is a neutral person who does not have a vested interest in the content. The facilitator is responsible for the processes the group uses to achieve their goals. It is their role to create the atmosphere and supply the tools to help the group. The facilitator should make this clear at the beginning of the session, especially where group members are used to seeing the facilitator in another role.

A facilitator:

- Helps the group decide how they will work together
- Helps the group decide what their goals are
- Helps the group focus its energies on a task
- Leads the agreement on methods and approaches
- Gathers but does not evaluate ideas
- Helps find win/win solutions
- Creates an environment of respect and safety where everyone can contribute freely.
- Takes responsibility for exploring ideas of discomfort or confusion

Sometimes facilitators are also:

- A resource: to bring specific information and ideas to the group.
- A mediator: when individuals become conflicted over an issue.
- A challenger: who may suggest that a group might try to go beyond what they have achieved and attempt a more difficult task or reach a more difficult goal.

Characteristics of a facilitator

An effective facilitator:

- Understands and accepts the facilitation role
- Is bold enough to take risks to achieve outcomes
- Is positive
- Addresses situations without being confrontational
- Is comfortable with disagreement
- Is an effective listener
- Is not afraid to make mistakes and can own and learn their mistakes
- Has high self esteem and is self confident
- Is sensitive to group dynamics¹, the needs and culture of the group and the needs of group members in various stages of group development (see Helpful Models and Tips: Tuckman's 5 Phases of Group Development).
- Encourages all participants to contribute in their own way
- Understands group problem-solving processes
- Understands how to build consensus and strengthen relationships
- Is an advocate for process and progress; focuses on the outcomes sought by the group and has a flexible approach.
- Is comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty
- Is trustworthy and can build trust and maintain confidentiality
- Respects both group and individual capabilities; can tap into the wisdom of any group
- Guides discussion, provides the right questions and promotes two-way communication
- Is a reflective and active learner who is prepared to look at their own behaviour

¹ Group dynamics is the scientific study of group behaviour to advance our knowledge about the nature of groups, group development and the interrelations between groups and individuals, other groups and larger entities.

Please note: these resources are a compilation of our individual and collective knowledge and research. Every effort has been made to reference resources. Please notify Community Waikato should you identify any referencing omissions.