

# The facilitator's "toolkit" of skills

## Communication skills

It is a key task of a facilitator to help to make the communication within a session as effective as possible.

Effective communication is:

- Interactive and balanced: no one person dominates discussion and all group members have the opportunity and encouragement to participate fully
- Respectful: communication does not target the mistakes, errors, weaknesses of group members but focuses on issues, problems, opportunities, possibilities and goals
- Concrete: communication is clear and easily understood
- Relevant: what is communicated relates directly to the purpose at hand



The following communication skills/techniques are useful for facilitation.

## Active Listening

Be genuinely interested in other people's thoughts and feelings. Listen intently – we will typically hear more if we maintain an attentive stance. Make appropriate eye contact (be aware that in some cultures eye contact is disrespectful). Reflect feeling; empathise. Practice listening without evaluating or judging what is said; just concentrate on understanding what is said.

## Modeling

Practice behaviour that you want reflected back to you. Watch your nonverbal messages. Remember to keep your sense of humour.

## Summarising

Use paraphrasing: Re-state in your own words what you have heard to clarify it or check your understanding with the group.

## Focusing attention and pacing

Keep the group on the topic. Take care to limit or reduce repetition.

**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.

## Recognising progress

Example: "Nice job! We just brainstormed 36 items in that 4-minute period."

## Waiting or using silence

Remember that at times the hardest thing to do is nothing. Make sure you hear it all. Give people time to process and consider what is being said – this allows the more reflective people in the group to contribute.

## Scanning/observing

Listen for what is not being said. Nurture full participation from the group and watch non-verbals in the form of body movement, facial expression, gestures and the way people say what they say (para-verbal communication).

## Constructive questioning

To question people constructively you need to understand:

- the different types of questions that can be used; and
- the responses that are likely to result from particular types of questions.

To question constructively you need to:

- Be clear about what you are trying to achieve in asking your questions.
- Prepare a question-plan that will enable you to achieve your objective.
- Get the mix of open and closed questions right. Closed questions will elicit a "Yes" or "No" answer. Open questions require the respondent to provide more information (*see Helpful Models and Tips: Constructive Questioning*).
- Prepare some follow-up questions to increase the quantity and quality of your information.
- Use the language of the person to whom you are posing the question. Avoid unfamiliar words or phrases.
- Listen to what the person is trying to communicate in response to your question. Take this response into account when posing the next question.
- In general you should try to avoid asking leading/boomerang questions where you may, intentionally or otherwise, be pre-empting a certain answer. However, a leading- question can be a useful way of confirming or clarifying a group's opinion on a topic: it can be used as a way of reflecting back information.

**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.