

Facilitating Professional Learning

Facilitating Professional Learning – Small Group Discussions

Small Group Discussions:

Groups of three to six people offer the best opportunity for truly effective group discussions. Perhaps the most important consideration in facilitating a high-quality group discussion is the selection of a relevant topic that engages the interest of the participants. A major challenge that one might face in trying to facilitate a productive group discussion is the degree to which the group has acquired a set of basic meeting participation skills. If one or two people dominate the discussion or if they provide negative verbal or non-verbal feedback, then the potential for an effective discussion can be seriously hampered.

At times, it might be that one or two people dominate the discussion, or people are pushed into silence by those who are very opinionated about a particular topic. In other situations, it might simply be that people do not really know how to participate in authentic, meaningful discussions in professional settings. However, experience has shown that allowing a group to consider a set of group participation guidelines can enhance the quality of group discussions. As described in the document, [Developing Meeting Participation Guidelines](#), giving group members an opportunity to develop their own set of group participation guidelines has proven to be very effective in enhancing the quality of discussions during meetings.

In fact, it is strongly recommended that groups that meet on a regular basis develop their own set of group discussion guidelines. In doing so, people in the group are reminded of practices that they should follow; at the same time the process of developing the guidelines encourages increased group ownership of them. Most importantly, when the person facilitating the group needs to remind someone that they are not following the guidelines, it is not the leader who is requesting co-operation, but the entire group who has sanctioned it. Click on the following link for access to an example of a set of [Suggested Meeting Participation Guidelines](#).