



Learn practical strategies to facilitate a successful network meeting.

Who can Facilitate a Network Meeting?

It doesn't have to always be the Network Coordinator who facilitates the meeting. Other network members can take on this role on a rotational or ad hoc basis. The opportunity to facilitate a meeting may provide a development opportunity for practitioners who may not have had this experience before.

General Facilitation Guidelines

In the MHPN context a facilitator is the person who works with the group to help them achieve the meeting's objectives.

The facilitator's focus is often on helping to create a collaborative culture within the group where people share and communicate readily, where different perspectives are valued and where it is safe to have opposing views.

General tips:

- Start the meeting with an Acknowledgement of Country or Welcome to Country as appropriate.
- Welcome any new members. Perhaps ask them to introduce themselves to the group.
- If meeting face-to-face, take a minute to let people know where the bathrooms are, and confirm when the meeting will finish.
- When filling in the Attendance Sheet, remind attendees to:
 - tick the attended column of the Attendance Sheet.
 - If they don't, they won't receive a Statement of Attendance. Note – Statements are sent within four weeks of MHPN receiving the Attendance Sheet.
 - sign the attendance sheet if they want their contact information, profession and fields of specialty to be shared with other network members via the Network Directory.
- If you need help tidying up at the end, ask for someone to volunteer at the start of the meeting.



Managing Challenges During Group Discussions

Meetings often involve a group discussion. The following table provides some suggestions on how to overcome some common challenges in facilitating group discussions.

Challenge	Tip
Straying off topic	Bring to group's attention by making a statement like, "We agreed to meet to discuss the case study. By talking about [alternative topic] we aren't doing that. Perhaps we could talk about [alternative topic] in our next meeting. What do others think?"
A particular avenue of discussion is upsetting or alienating some participants	Stop the session briefly and address what's happening. For example, "It looks to me like some people aren't comfortable with the current discussion. What would you like to happen so you feel more at ease?"
Dealing with dominators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind the group that everyone is encouraged to actively participate. • Ask other people in the group for their opinion/experience.
Time management	Set an agenda that clearly allocates time for different parts of the meeting/discussion. Set a timer on your phone to alert everyone when there's for example 10 minutes left in the discussion.
Conflict resolution	Acknowledge the conflict and ask the group how they'd like to proceed.
Involving quiet participants	Make eye contact with a quiet participant when you are asking a direct question of the group.

The following tips are particularly relevant for meeting held online:

Challenge	Tip
Cameras off	Kindly remind members that it's an expectation that members have cameras on to help provide a collaborative environment.
Lack of participation	Acknowledge sharing can be daunting, but everyone at the meeting has made an effort to come and should utilise this limited time to participate. The facilitator could contribute to the initial discussion and then ask others to follow suit.
One person is having significant technical issues	If a simple fix doesn't work, we recommend carrying on with the meeting. Contact your Project Officer during business hours to seek guidance.

Tips for Facilitating Hybrid Meetings

i.e. people in both a “real” and “virtual” room

Consider the following:

- Use as large a screen as is available to show the online participants.
- If there are a lot of people online, mute them at the start.
- Encourage the online participants to turn their cameras on.
- At the start of the meeting explain how the online participants can attract attention if they want to contribute or ask a question. This may include you setting a protocol that throughout the meeting, as facilitator you will ask just the online participants if they have something to add at key points.
- If online participants are muted throughout the meeting, ask them to put their hand up if they have something to add, so they can be given permission to speak.
- Pre-arranging another network member to liaise with the online participants throughout the meeting and let you know if they want to contribute. This could be via the Chat Box. Your Project Office can help reach out to attending members who could take on this role.



Network Ground Rules

Developing some general agreements or ground rules that will provide a safe and open environment for network participants to engage with each other during meetings.

The network coordinator, as part of their role may lead the group in formulating the ground rules.

What are Ground Rules?

Ground rules set the behaviour and participation expectations that the group has of individual participants. Having clear and shared ground rules aims to encourage productive involvement by all group members.

Benefits of Ground Rules

Within the MHPN meeting context, establishing and agreeing on ground rules may have a number of benefits, including:

- helping to provide a comfortable environment where every person feels safe in sharing and listening
- assisting to establish healthy boundaries
- agreeing on an acceptable standard of behaviour
- sharing the responsibility of managing behaviour amongst all group members, rather than this task becoming the sole responsibility of the network’s coordinator
- developing a process to help resolve any issues that may arise within the group.

When should Ground Rules be Set, Reviewed and Communicated?

While it's probably preferable to set ground rules as part of the first meeting, this task can be undertaken at any time.

Groups may decide to review the rules annually, monthly or at each meeting –there's no right or wrong answer.

Once the rules are agreed it is important that they are made available to all current and future members. This can be done by placing a print out of the rules next to the Attendance Sheet, attaching the rules to the meeting invitation or by noting them at the beginning of each meeting.

Contact MHPN



1800 209 031



networks@mhpn.org.au



www.mhpn.org.au