



# FACILITATING WITH EASE

Thank you for participating in the Community Futures on line training program as a facilitator. In your role as a facilitator, you will help the participants to learn, explore and change using the materials provided. We hope the following tips enhance your ability to increase the group's effectiveness and empower participants to learn.

## **General Tips on Facilitating for Success:**

- Relax. Use your presence to set the mood and tone for the session. If you are hopeful, the participants will be hopeful. If you are calm, the group will be calm. Remember, your nervousness is more apparent to you than others.
- Prepare. Be prepared for the session. Know the course material, the exercises and their learning objectives, and the timing of the day.
- Professionalism, Self-Confidence and Authenticity. Demonstrate a positive self-image, exude self-confidence and be authentic in your role as a facilitator. Be genuine in your interaction with the participants whether it be setting them at ease, probing for answers, encouraging insight, being silent or sharing advice based on personal experience.
- Create the right environment. Ensure that the room is set up so that everyone can be comfortable and people can engage with each other easily and focus on the course. Arrange tables and chairs so that participants can communicate with each other effectively and so that face to face participation can be maximized.
- Make everyone feel comfortable. Introduce yourself first. Make sure all participants know each other by name, using roundtable introductions if needed. Use name tags if appropriate.
- Look after physical needs. Make sure participants know the location of the bathrooms. If you are providing food, check whether there are any specific dietary requirements.
- Schedule breaks. Tired people do not work well. At a minimum, have a fifteen minute break every two hours.
- Set ground rules and ensure all participants agree to them. Typical ground rules include: all ideas are valid; have your say and listen to others; all participants are equal; and no cell phone use during the session.
- Focus. Ensure participants know the purpose of the session and the items that will be covered in the allotted time. Stick to objectives but focus on facilitating conversation and exploration.
- Assume responsibility for the group journey. Be willing to assume responsibility for the process, the overall objective and tasks of the session, the participants' learning experience and the outcome of the session.

- Engage. Throughout the session, ask questions, summarize what has been said, and make observations or comments to help people to add the different aspects of reflection.
- Balance. Balance the process with the results of the process. Match the needs of the participants with the total demands of the task.
- Be flexible. Work at the pace of the group and respond to questions and issues as they arise. This might involve moving off the initial subject and returning to it. Don't try to cover too much ground in the session.
- Evoke participation. Encourage all participants to listen to what others have to say. If the session splinters into separate discussion groups, halt them politely and ask them to deal with one discussion at a time. Watch for signs that people are not involved. Be aware of any participant keeping their head down, doodling, or showing similar lack of engagement. Some people may be soft spoken or so quietly spoken that they are susceptible to interruptions by others. Encourage everyone by asking them their opinions and comments.
- Actively listen. Listen to the participants' actual words, accept silence with understanding, maintain eye contact with the speaker, paraphrase comments and summarize discussions. Push for clarity and probe vague answers if needed to help you and others respond more effectively and gain insight.
- Support and encourage. Reference comments and opinions positively. Affirm the wisdom of each person and acknowledge and celebrate the work that the group has done.
- Don't get sidetracked. As facilitator, you must be attentive to what is happening at all times. Do not get side tracked into long discussions with individuals.
- Contain where necessary. When exploring tensions in the group, sensitive questions or issues where people have strong feelings, you may have to contain the discussion. Balance encouraging honesty and challenge with ensuring that the environment remains positive and the session continues to be a safe place for dialogue and exploration.
- Lead by example. Encourage cooperative behaviour by behaving in a way that is at all times honest, open, respectful and non partisan.
- Allow reflection. Allow people to take stock, identify any goals and what they need to commit to, and do, to achieve those goals. This is ideal after completion of exercises and at the end of the session.
- End effectively. Thank people for participating in the group/session. Acknowledge what has been achieved.