

Peer session facilitation

What's involved in facilitating a peer session

Each peer session needs a *facilitator*.

Ideally the facilitator has some knowledge or experience of the topic, *but this is not required*. The facilitator is responsible for finding a scribe if no one has yet volunteered, keeping the group focused on the topic, ensuring the group runs smoothly, and making sure that everyone has an appropriate chance to contribute and ask questions.

Peer session facilitation—step by step

Start on time.

Make sure there's a scribe for the peer session; ask for a volunteer if no one has yet volunteered.

Title and circulate the peer session attendance sheet so the scribe can then record who is present.

If the peer session is a presentation or panel, have the presenter(s) [which may be you] go ahead, and moderate subsequent questions and discussion.

If a presentation format isn't appropriate (this is generally the case):

use a *quick* go-round the group (30-60 seconds per person) to home in on what group members want to discuss, and any relevant experience they possess.

briefly summarize the go-round and get a quick consensus on what will be discussed.

moderate the ensuing discussion.

End on time.

Peer session facilitation—tips

Facilitation is an art not a science. Here are some tips that may help you.

Keep a go-round short! Don't spend more than 25% of your time on a go-round.

Note the themes brought up in the go-round and make time for each of them as appropriate.

Have your scribe or another volunteer use a classroom whiteboard or flip chart to keep track of ideas if necessary.

Model the way you'd like to see the group interact. People will follow your lead.

Keep the peer session on-topic. If the topic wanders, check to see if the group wants to go there.

If you have contributions to the group discussion, that's fine. But be careful: as facilitator it's easy to monopolize the conversation.

Don't allow people to monopolize the discussion. Ensure all who wish to contribute can. It's OK to gently interrupt someone who's talking too much – that's your job!

Encourage participation. Watch for quiet attendees and check if they have something to say or questions to ask.