FACILITATING IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

Here are Equitas' top 10 online facilitation tips!

Set expectations with participants

Reflect on how you can make your meeting participatory and let participants know how you want them to engage before you begin your meeting. Make sure you engage them in a meaningful way and that you are able to take their input into account. Consider the number of participants and how they can be involved. Let them know if the conversations will be personal or confidential so they can plan a safe meeting place.

Search for available add-ons on your broadcasting platform (polls, white boards, brainstorming tools, etc.) to ease and diversify participation. Ask participants to mute their microphone, use the chat or "raise their virtual hand".

Have clear objectives and a structured agenda. Share them beforehand, including any materials you would like participants to have on hand. It's helpful to post your agenda in the chat feature of whatever platform you are using so the group can reference it.

Grab a buddy

Having a co-moderator is key. This person can moderate the chat so the presenter can focus on the content. Technical issues will occur! Make sure participants know who to contact when they do have a technical problem.

Ask the co-moderator to manage the turns of speech and to read out questions and comments in the chat.

Practise

Prepare your content as well as the technical features beforehand. Get used to the platform you are using and consult tutorials. Prepare and test out your material with your co-moderator and reflect on how you can adapt your activities to be online friendly.

Offer visuals

Offering visuals is very important to meet the needs of diverse learners. This allows participants to hear you and/or read what you are presenting. Be careful however that your visual support is only a complement to an interactive meeting, and not the main focus.

Find the right visual support. PowerPoint, whiteboards, Post-Its?

Say hi!

It's always nice to start with introductions to know who's in the "room". Ask participants to introduce themselves or start your meeting with an icebreaker.

Find icebreaker ideas here: www.speakingrights.ca/covid-19

Schedule opportunities for participation and mental health breaks

Engage your participants so they stay motivated and connected. Add check-ins or discussion questions throughout your meeting. Make sure your agenda allows the group to participate and create a positive space that encourages participation. Get creative with who answers first to get more engagement.

To encourage participation, you can separate the participants into small groups in virtual rooms or recreate physical spaces such as virtual circles. Also, check out the options available on your broadcasting platform: polls, emojis, filters, etc. Also, try asking participants to answer in order of birth month, or alphabetically for example.

Be mindful of the length of your session and include breaks for participants to stretch, rest or attend to their personal needs.

Use an active voice

Make sure your language is direct and active. Copy your questions into the chat if you are not using a visual aide.

Instead of asking "Does anyone have comments?", try "I will now ask for two examples from each participant." Replace "Is anything unclear?" by "What can I repeat or go over for you?".

Silence is okay

Give people the time and space to respond to your questions and give them time to think about their answers.

If you feel uncomfortable with the silence, you can explain that you are leaving a minute or two for people to think or reflect. Sometimes it can feel awkward to speak up during a video call, so a little bit of extra time is never a bad thing.

Keep your in-person facilitation skills in your back pocket

Just like you would do in person, set boundaries for what happens in and outside of the meeting. If tensions come up, address them right away and let participants know you will follow up after the session. You can create group guidelines if the group meets frequently.

Make a "parking lot" or "community garden" for things to follow-up on later!

Address power dynamics in the meeting – they play out online as well as in person. All youth, regardless of their situation, have something meaningful to contribute to any conversation. Providing them with leadership opportunities and reinforcing their capacities will contribute to empowering them and build their motivation.

Stay positive!

Virtual facilitation may not only be new to you, but to your participants as well! Give yourself time to improve and be patient with yourself and the group!

The people who show up are the right people and the conversations that happen are the conversations that need to happen.