



Fact Sheet

How a facilitated conversation can help resolve workplace conflict

This factsheet provides all Commonwealth parliamentary workplace (CPW) participants with information about facilitated conversations, the role of facilitators and how it may be used for matters that arise in the context of their employment.

What is a facilitated conversation?

A facilitated conversation is a flexible process that provides practical assistance to parties to understand, organise and communicate their own needs and expectations, in relation to conflict or interpersonal tensions. Engaging assistance in the form of a facilitated conversation is aimed at preventing issues from escalating and empowering employees to tackle difficult issues in a pro-active and respectful way.

Facilitated conversations use the principles of mediation to support productive dialogue between two parties but remain flexible enough to be adapted to the specific needs of the parties and the nature of the conflict. The process is voluntary and requires the parties to participate and engage in good faith. The outcomes from a facilitated conversation are non-binding.

How does it differ from mediation?

Facilitated conversation and mediation have some similarities such as being voluntary, confidential, and collaborative processes that aim to improve relationships and outcomes. However, they also differ in scope, role and outcome.

A mediation process is highly structured and is more applicable to a direct dispute or disagreement about a particular matter. Mediation may be more appropriate if an issue has been longstanding, and where parties need a documented agreement, as part of the resolution outcome.

A facilitated conversation is more fluid in nature and does not need to result in any written agreement between parties. A facilitated conversation can be more empowering for both parties and reduces the need for more formal escalations.

What is the role of the facilitator?

In most cases, the facilitator will be a member of the PWSS Wellbeing Support team. The facilitator is a neutral party and does not impose solutions or make any judgements.

Instead, they set ground rules, ask questions which will assist conversations, listen actively, and summarise key points.

What is the process?

Before the meeting

Both parties will be consulted to identify an appropriate date, time, and place for the facilitated conversation to occur.

In preparation for the facilitated conversation, both individuals will have an opportunity to have an initial conversation, separately, with the facilitator to outline their key issues and ideal outcomes (if any), discuss the process, and ask any questions.

Parties are welcome to bring a [support person](#) to the pre-meeting as well as the facilitated conversation, which can include a colleague, family member, professional, friend, union representative or a member of the PWSS Wellbeing Support team.

Where necessary, the facilitator may ask the parties (including the support person) to sign a confidentiality agreement. It is important to note that this is determined on a case-by-case basis and is at the discretion of the facilitator.

Once both parties have had their separate discussion with the facilitator, the facilitator will decide whether the facilitated conversation will proceed. A facilitated conversation may not proceed if the facilitator determines:

- One or both parties do not intend to engage in good faith,
- One or both parties do not intend to move toward or find a resolution, and/or
- The matter may be better addressed through an alternative process.

Timeframe

The duration of a facilitated conversation can vary and depends on the nature of the issues the parties would like to discuss.

As a guide, a facilitated conversation will likely be between 30 and 60 minutes in length, with breaks as required.

The facilitated conversation

The following provides a general guide as to how a facilitated conversation may occur; however, each process can differ depending on the needs of the relevant parties.

- The parties will meet on an agreed-upon date to engage in a process led by the facilitator.
- Ground rules are set to establish a respectful environment - mutual respect, courtesy, listening and any other ground rules suggested and agreed to by both parties.
- Both parties then openly and constructively speak to each other about the key issues.
- When all the issues have been discussed, both parties should focus on problem solving and resolution actions.
- The facilitator will check-in with both parties and provide clarification about next steps.
- If agreed, the facilitator will separately undertake a check-in with both parties to determine whether any further conversation and/or actions are required.

Follow up

Approximately 4 weeks after the facilitated conversation, the facilitator may conduct an informal check-in with each of the parties, separately, to ascertain if there is a need for a further conversation to work through any new or unresolved issues.

In the event a further facilitated conversation is required, the facilitator will arrange this in consultation with both parties.

Record keeping

Records from the facilitated conversation will be retained by the PWSS Wellbeing Support team and saved on a secure client management system in accordance with the [Privacy Policy](#).

In some cases, the facilitator may need to share information about a facilitated conversation with other relevant parties. The facilitator will inform the parties as soon as practical if/when this occurs.

For example:

- Where a facilitated conversation is initiated at the request of an employing parliamentarian, the facilitator may provide the employing parliamentarian with a high-level summary of the facilitated conversation.
- Where it is required by law, such as (but not limited to) when there is an imminent threat to someone's safety, where a workplace health or safety risk is identified, or during criminal investigations or court proceedings.

Our issues still aren't resolved, what can we do?

In the event one or both parties continue to have concerns or issues after a facilitated conversation process, the individual should raise the concerns with their manager or employing Parliamentarian, and/or contact the PWSS for further guidance and support.

The PWSS may suggest other resolution pathways, such as mediation with an external provider. The PWSS may also recommend other strategies, such as a targeted learning and development workshop or executive coaching.

A complaint can also be made in writing to the Independent Parliamentary Standards Commission. Further information is available on their [website](#).

Get support from the Parliamentary Workplace Support Service

All people who work in CPWs can access confidential, trauma-aware support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Contact the PWSS via:

- phone: 1800 PH PWSS (1800 747 977)
- SMS: 0487 112 755
- email: support@pwss.gov.au
- in person: M2.105 at Parliament House

The PWSS also provides MOP(S) Act staff and parliamentarians with [HR advice](#), [professional development](#), and [work, health and safety support](#) during business hours.

Alternatively, you can access free, professional and confidential counselling through our [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\) provider](#).

 **24/7 Support** 1800 747 977

 **Text the PWSS** 0487 112 755

www.pwss.gov.au