

Facilitated Discussion

What is a facilitated discussion?

A facilitated discussion 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 discussion is aimed at empowering employees to tackle difficult issues in a pro-active and respectful way and preventing issues from escalating.

Facilitated discussions 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 discussion are non-binding.

How does it differ from mediation?

Facilitated discussion 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.

The 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 result in any written agreement between parties. The 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 Case Coordination 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 discussions, 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 discussion to occur.

In preparation for the facilitated discussion, both individuals will have an opportunity to have an initial discussion, 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 discussion, which can include (but is not limited to) a PWSS Case Coordinator.

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 discussion will proceed. A facilitated discussion may not proceed if the facilitator determines:

- One or both parties are not intending to engage in good faith.
- One or both parties are not intending on finding or moving toward a resolution.
- The matter may be better addressed through an alternative process.

Timeframe

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

As a guide however, a facilitated discussion will likely be between 30-60 minutes in length, with breaks as required.

The facilitated discussion

The following provides a general guide as to how a facilitated discussion 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.
- The 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 will have an opportunity to share their views on the key issue/s.
- 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 discussion and/or actions are required.

Follow up

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

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

Record keeping

Records from the facilitated discussion will be retained by the PWSS Case Coordination Team and saved on a secure client management system.

In some cases, the facilitator may need to share information about a facilitated discussion with other relevant parties. The facilitator will inform the parties if this is to occur.

For example:

- Where a facilitated discussion is initiated at the request of an employing parliamentarian, the facilitator may provide the employing parliamentarian with a high-level summary of the facilitated discussion.
- Where a facilitated discussion is initiated as a result of a complaint being made to the PWSS, the facilitator may provide the PWSS Workforce Strategy Team with a high-level summary of the facilitated discussion.
- 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 facilitation discussion 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, which can be done in a 'shuttle' format where parties are in separate rooms and the mediator goes back and forth between the parties.

The PWSS may also look at recommending other initiatives, such as a targeted learning and development workshop or conflict coaching to assist in the office and all staff adhering to shared values and behaviours, for example.

Where there are allegations of serious misconduct, the PWSS may consider commissioning a [Workplace Review](#).

Contacts and further information

For further information on facilitated discussions, please contact the PWSS Case Coordination Team on 1800 112 755 (option 1) or support@pwss.gov.au.

Support

The PWSS provides independent and confidential support to all Commonwealth parliamentary workplace participants who have experienced, witnessed, or are managing staff who have experienced escalated or challenging workplace interactions. PWSS Case Coordinators are readily available 24/7, and can provide information and workshops specific to the needs of your office.



www.PWSS.gov.au



24/7 Support: 1800 747 977



SMS: 0487 112 755