

Roles and Responsibilities

Resource type: provisional guidance

Last updated: January 2016

There are several roles and responsibilities that can play out in an online discussion. We have tried to capture some of the main ones below and outline the types of attributes, activities and skills associated with each. Please note: these are by no means comprehensive; roles and responsibilities can overlap and vary from one event to the next.

Convenor:

- Well placed among the participants to bring them together around the project purpose and activities.
- Has the reputation-level required to entice individuals to have a closer look at the proposition, and the intellectual and contextual awareness to be able to relate the project to participants' own agendas.
- Able to reach out effectively to named individuals in advance and during the event and convince them to play a role.
- Supports facilitator and inputs on thread summaries during the event.
- Has a strong understanding of the thematic area and the key actors
- Is able to quickly digest each contribution, unpick how that relates to the context of the contributor, and consider the implications of each post for the discussion more widely
- Is able to contribute substantively on the subject but picks a handful of moments carefully to nudge or prompt the discussion
- Can rapidly synthesise a thread in a lucid and considered manner, introducing a layer of their own commentary and relating salient issues to a wider context

Facilitator:

- Plays the role of 'party compare' or 'participation generator'
- Knows how to engage participants to help them reach shared goals; identify common challenges; and bring out their perspectives and experiences.
- Provides timely prompts to direct discussion, keeps the discussion to the agenda and to time, as well as highlighting other logistical aspects
- Can sympathise or empathise with participants without bringing their own perspectives (or at least keeping them peripheral)
- Is sensitive to politics, disagreements, power or conflict among participants and is able to assist the group to understand and legitimise differences of perspective that cannot be reconciled
- Embodies respect for others and a watchful awareness of the 'real experience' participants in the group may have
- Can make more space and draw out quieter individuals, and build confidence among them to participate
- Can intervene in a way that adds to the group's sense of 'community' rather than taking away from it

Moderator:

- Support the discussion and participants behind the scenes.
- Has some awareness of the technical aspects of the online platform e.g. how to add threads, edit, delete, move postings etc.
- Manages the day-to-day smooth running of discussion threads, including liaison with others in the project team.
- Is able to intervene to highlight inappropriate activity/statements/contributions in an appropriate manner.
- Can effectively liaise with technical support about issues and solutions.
- Is a generalist whose understanding of the discussion is enough to be able to respond with occasional prompts but not in substantive terms

Event and user support:

- Provide pre-emptive resources and reactive assistance to enable users to access and engage in the discussions.
- Respond to logistical and technology-related questions and resolve issues (by email or by phone) within a rapid time-period, to minimise the impact on the event.

Technical support:

- Provide advice, services and problem-solving expertise for both users and the project team in relation to the IT hardware and software required to deliver the platform.
- Enable users to engage in the event.

Event manager / advisor:

- Provide oversight for the project and the event.
- Bring the team together and facilitate its progression from initial idea to delivery, evaluation and downstream linkages.
- Provide advisory input to event strategy and approach, as well as real-time tactics and crisis-management.
- Ensure pragmatic expectations for the event are established and then met.

Project Coordinator:

- Convene, organise and support the wider project team to deliver the event.
- Monitor work-streams and liaise with individuals playing critical roles.
- Co-ordinate external contracts, meetings and administration.

Synthesis and communications:

- Discuss, design and deliver a pragmatic yet purposeful written output that provides a handy reminder for participants about the event and supports / encourages them to share the key messages with their own key contacts and networks.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

- Set out the overall purpose and objectives of the event.
- Articulate success factors and plan, prepare and deliver activities that enable accurate and reliable measurements to be taken in relation to indicators identified in advance of the event.
- Provide a short report in good time to the project team about the findings and future recommendations.