

Case Study: Facilitation – Equality & Diversity Conferences for Drug Abuse Professionals

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The Challenge

The Home Office believed that professionals from the many agencies supporting drug abusers would benefit from an understanding of “best practice” in Equality and Diversity. The issue being that people within minority groups may not be able to access drug abuse support, with the consequence that a self-perpetuating drug culture would grow.

A “best practice” approach needed to be developed from the input of several hundred professionals from around the countries.

The challenge was to elicit experiences from these professionals who come from a wide range of agencies and who have a passion of for their subject (and particular approach) and to gain a measure of agreement on “best practice”.

Regional differences together with urban and rural contrasts provided further challenges to the goal of arriving at statements of “best practice”. Previous Home Office experience showed that this would not be achieved without impartial facilitation.

The Solution – Facilitated Workshops

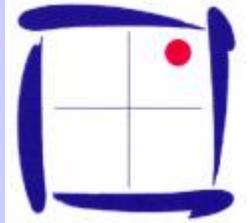
Our approach to workshop facilitation had been observed by the COI during the work we undertook for the National Blood Service. They advised the Home Office to adopt this approach and asked for our suggestions.

As a result, we were asked to facilitate a number of workshops on specific themes for professionals attending each of five Regional Conference organised by the Home Office.

Each of the five regional conferences started the day’s programme with speakers on equality and diversity topics. Refreshment and lunch breaks were incorporated into the programme to allow time for networking between delegates of different agencies within the same region. Over one hundred delegates attended each of these Home Office sponsored days.

Break-out workshops were incorporated into the programme to allow for input from the delegates during facilitated discussions.

These workshops were structured for 10-20 delegates to participate in discussions on specific issues of interest to them. The workshop topics were repeated to allow participation in two topics for each delegate.



What We Delivered

We structured the workshops in the following way:

- Ø A “five minute” scene setting talk from a recognised expert on the subject;
- Ø A facilitated session for delegates to list their own problems relating to the topic and hindering them in the achievement of their own area diversity goals and objectives;
- Ø Gain agreement on the issues to focus on during the remainder of the workshop;
- Ø Discussion eliciting examples of success and best practice that delegates and the speaker have experienced;
- Ø Collection from delegates detailed ideas regarding further support or help they require from the Home Office to achieve their diversity objectives.

In previous years with un-facilitated workshops, it was reported that passions ran high, and little of substance was achieved . To counter this, we used a form of NGT (Nominal Group Technique) where issues were noted in writing anonymously, thereby removing inter-agency issues and personal passion. We grouped similar concerns and facilitated the agreement of those on which to focus.

We were then able to lead the discussion with a positive tone, eliciting examples of success, and deriving consensus on best practice.

The Benefits

- Ø Skilled facilitation enabled 49 out of 50 workshops to be conducted in a positive, productive mode. The one workshop where passions ran high was in the first conference and was the result of a last minute merging of two topics that delegates considered “competing”. The lesson was learnt and the process of delegate topic selection changed.
- Ø In several sessions we witnessed “Aha!” moments where examples of success were recognised by delegates as being applicable to their own circumstances;
- Ø Coordination between our facilitators resulted in the identification of some key “best practices” that the Home Office could promote throughout the diverse agencies that work in drug abuse.