



Options for facilitators with an ‘interest’

The facilitator’s primary intention must always be to make it easier (facilitate) for the group to have the open, honest, authentic conversation they need to have to meet their aims for the meeting.

If you have an interest in the subject being discussed (that is, it’s something you work on or are involved in as a stakeholder), it is harder for you to create the safe environment of trust that is needed for the group to have those conversations.

You may – consciously or unconsciously – steer the conversation such a way that it addresses your own needs and concerns, rather than those of the participants.

Participants may suspect that you are not acting in good faith, and feel let down or manipulated.

Where the meeting is likely to include conflict, this is particularly sensitive.

So what are your options, if the conversation is about something in which you also have an interest?

- **Don’t facilitate** the meeting. Explain your conflict of interest and ask the meeting’s convenor, host or planning group to find an alternative facilitator.
- **Ask someone else to attend the meeting as a participant**, who you know will ensure that your own interests are represented. For example, a colleague.
- **Step out of role**. If the conversation unexpectedly begins to cover topics in which you have an interest, tell the group that this has happened and ask their permission to temporarily step ‘out of role’ as facilitator. Have your say, and then clearly step back into role.
- **Flag the role conflict and ask the group to help you stay independent**. Tell the group that your intention is to be a neutral facilitator, and that you positively welcome them flagging it up if they think you are not behaving in a neutral way.