

## The Secret to Preparing: Understand the Five Ps

As the old saying goes, if you fail to plan, you plan to fail. So what does it take to plan for a facilitated interaction? Whether you are preparing for strategic planning, requirements gathering, conflict resolution, or team building, the secret to preparation is the same: you must achieve a clear understanding of the "Five Ps."

- **Purpose** - Why are we holding this session?
- **Product** - What do we want to have when we are done?
- **Participants** - Who will be attending the session and what are their perspectives?
- **Probable Issues** - What are the probable issues that will need to be addressed?
- **Process** - How will we go about achieving our desired results?

The *Purpose* explains the overall aim of the session. The *Product* describes the session deliverables - the items that are produced to achieve the purpose. The *Participants* and *Probable Issues* give an idea of the potential roadblocks to be faced. The *Process* details the steps that will be taken to create the product.

Of course there are numerous other steps in the preparation process. But we recommend focusing on these five elements to gain a clear understanding of what is to be done and how. In fact, it is important to decide the Five Ps in order: Purpose, Product, Participants, Probable issues, and Process. Purpose always precedes process. If you create an agenda without having agreement on the purpose or product, your session may be unfocused and ineffective.

### Gathering the Five Ps: The Sponsor Interview

If you are leading a task force or facilitating a meeting for someone else, it is important to have the Five Ps answered by the session sponsor. If you are the sponsor, make sure you can answer the questions below before planning your agenda. Not all of these questions are appropriate for every session - select those most relevant to the session you are facilitating.

<b>Purpose</b>	<p><b>1. Why are you having this session? What is the purpose?</b></p> <p>2. What is telling you that this session is needed? What are the problems you are trying to solve?</p>
<b>Product</b>	<p><b>3. What do you want to achieve from this session? What specific product or deliverable should be created?</b></p> <p>4. How will you know you have been successful?</p>
<b>Participants</b>	<p><b>5. Who will attend the session? What are their perspectives or concerns?</b></p> <p>6. Will the attendees know each other? Are there participants who are not in favor of holding the session? Are there people who are on unfavorable terms? Do you expect dysfunctional behavior to occur?</p>
<b>Probable Issues</b>	<p><b>7. What are the potential problems or issues that may surface?</b></p> <p>8. Are there specific topics you feel should not be discussed in the session? Is there anything we need to specifically declare out of scope?</p>
<b>Process</b>	<p><b>9. What are some of the steps that you feel we should consider taking during the session?</b></p> <p>10. What types of facilitated activities has this group undertaken in the past? What were the results?</p>

Along with the Five Ps, there are several logistical questions that should be answered in your preparation, such as:

- Where will the session be held?
- What are the start and end times?
- What is the dress code?
- Who will kick off the session? How will the facilitator be introduced?
- What materials need to be distributed prior to the session? Who will distribute them?
- What materials will be needed during the session? Who will bring them?
- Who will document the session?

One of the keys to a successful facilitated session is the work involved in preparation. Used consistently, the Five Ps and the questions listed above can serve as a guide to help ensure your success in the future.