

The Value of Group Work

Julie's passion for group work began in the mid 1990s whilst on a personal voyage of self discovery. Initially her journey led her to stress management groups, self esteem program, women's retreats, gestalt workshops, art therapy groups and finally weekly re-birthing sessions along with half a dozen other brave group participants. She realised very early in her journey, the synergistic effect that occurs when groups work well is a powerful force that accelerates personal growth and fast tracks positive change.

Whilst studying Rehabilitation Counselling at Cumberland College (Sydney University) she was employed as a casual group leader through NSW Health and facilitated self esteem and stress management groups. Her experience as a group participant provided her with a wealth of insight as to what makes groups work successfully. Since those early days she has been in a variety of group work contexts and for the past 10 years has worked with the Relationships Australia as a group leader, group program designer and group supervisor. In recent years she has been employed by the Australian Institute of Relationship Studies (AIRS) as a trainer in the Diploma of Counselling and Group Work. She is also the current Secretary for the Institute of Group Leaders Board.

Impetus for this article arose through the facilitation of groups outside an organisational setting. Individuals working in this area are faced with the dilemma of quoting a fair and reasonable fee that insures they are awarded for their work. This consideration is also balanced with desire to be paid a decent amount that incorporates the time they put into developing a quality product, using the skills acquired through past experience designing and facilitating groups.

This article is a general reflection about the range of training/facilitation fees available in 2010 and is based on anecdotal evidence. Nonetheless, this paper opens the way for greater debate around the value of group work and introduces some guidelines that facilitators could employ when attempting to quote for group program design and facilitation.

Current recognition of group leadership skills

In the process of writing this article, numerous facilitators and trainers were consulted who worked in a range of government and non-government organisations or as an independent trainer. Evidence suggests that group program design and facilitation is a massively deregulated area and the reasons for this are complex and numerous. This article will attempt to outline some of the factors that contribute to this ambiguity.

Who hasn't heard the manager ask 'Who would like to run a group for the clients?' not 'Who has experience and training in facilitating groups and feels able to successfully design and facilitate a group for the clients?' There seems to be a general understanding that anyone in the 'helping profession' regardless of their orientation can run groups. This mindset results in the profession not being given acknowledgement of the skills involved in professional facilitation, and is also one of the factors that contributes to the low rates many facilitators are being paid in many not for profit and other community organisations.

Another consideration is that group facilitators come into the profession with a range of professional qualifications. Facilitators can come from a range of backgrounds; social work, psychology, teaching, nursing, community welfare, art therapy, community development, human resource management, counselling and rehabilitation counselling. Whilst the eclectic nature of the profession brings a richness and diversity to our skill set, it also has the capacity to dilute who we are and what we do. Hence the importance of a body such as the Institute of Group Leaders (IGL), that can act as an umbrella to all of us with a passion for group work.

A further consideration around value and recognition occurs regarding identification as a trainer or a group facilitator. A constant theme that emerged through research is that 'trainers' make much more money than 'group facilitators'. One facilitator stated that 'it was a given that they would be paid more because they are identified as a trainer'.

Being a trainer or group facilitator? What is the difference and why should there be such disparity?

An experienced trainer/facilitator stated that she refers to herself as a trainer, when delivering material that is balanced towards an outcome or is competency focused and she refers to herself as a facilitator when she is working with material that is directed towards creating change in the individual and is more process oriented. It could be argued that psycho educational groups are a combination of these two elements. Whilst psycho-educational groups do not evaluate whether the participant has reached a certain competency they do aim to assist them to integrate new skills that assist them to make positive changes within themselves.

Trainers generally work in an organisational context. The trainer arrives to a set up training room, the participants are known and they are accountable to the organisation; hence compliance is more likely than in community based programs. They are generally working with a specific program with pre-determined skills or competencies that need to be attained. Trainers may have specific expertise in an area in which the organisation functions and it is understandable that they should be paid accordingly, however there are many trainers whom provide training in areas that parallel programs provided in the general community by group facilitators. The main difference is that the programs have been adapted to fit the workplace, such as managing difficult customers/clients/people, stress management in the workplace or managing change communication in the workplace etc.

Group facilitators working with psycho-educational groups offer similar programs, however the content is less outcome focused than it would be in a training context. Psycho-educational facilitators generally work in a community setting where the clients may or may not be known. Beyond the workshop content group facilitators too, grapple with issues such as mandated clients, varied skills level of participant's, literacy concerns, mental health issues or possible drug and alcohol issues. Community based groups can be around domestic violence, anger, addiction or grief and loss. None of these groups are for the unskilled facilitator. Regardless of these factors group

facilitators are paid less than working as 'trainers' delivering set material to a known audience in a contained environment.

Another significant difference is that people who identify themselves as trainers generally work full-time in this capacity, either as a sole-trader or within a training organisation. Group facilitators however tend to work part-time, as an extension to their current job role or life choices.

Fee for service?

Ultimately the inequity comes down to money. Organisations are required to provide a certain number of hours training for their staff. The training is tax deductible therefore companies are willing to outlay the money necessary to meet their requirements. Hence facilitators who offer group work to organisations are better placed to quote a more realistic fee than if they were offering a similar workshop in the community setting.

In a community context, clients are asked to pay a small amount or no money for the services received. There is little or no profit in it for the organisation and the rate of pay received by the facilitator is often a reflection of this.

Therefore the first questions to ask when giving a quote to design and deliver a group program would be: -

Who am I quoting for?

The fee quoted to deliver a stress management program to a professional organisation would be considerably more than to offer a similar program to a small not-for-profit community group. A further consideration is who are the individuals in the group that you will be working with? If you are working with a senior management team you would quote more than if you were working with the general staff.

How much do I want the work?

The fee charged will be balanced by situational factors at the time. A quote may be adjusted for the following reasons:

- You may be establishing your business and you need to get a foot in the door.
- You may offer a better rate for repeat business
- You may already have a program written and the only fee you are charging is for your time on the day.
- You may really need the work and are willing to work for a nominal fee.
- You may feel lacking in some way and are prepared to work for a nominal fee.
- The relationship you have with the organisation may be ongoing and you charge them a discounted rate.
- You may feel altruistic and are willing to work for a nominal fee.

- Alternately you may have a quality product and you expect to be paid a certain rate regardless.

Whatever the situation, you need to consider the bottom line that you are prepared to accept and work up from there.

How much work is required to write the program?

The quoted price will also reflect if the program is already developed and will just be facilitated, or if the program has to be developed from scratch.

- As previously mentioned the program may already be written, and the only fee is for your time on the day.
- Alternately there may be several days or possibly weeks work required to research the program and write it up.

Is there a formula to work out the quote?

Several facilitators interviewed have indicated that they use a formula, however given its breadth it can only be used as a guideline.

A general rule of thumb is a one day face-to-face course would take anywhere between 2 – 4 days to design. This will be dependent on the amount of research and new work required to get the workshop to a marketable stage. The amount you would charge for the design preparation would be 75% of your face-to-face rate.

Therefore, for a one-day workshop the cost would be;

4 days @ 75% of your daily rate preparation + 1 day at 100% of your daily rate face to face.

Also included would be **administrative costs** such as workshop manuals multiplied by the number of participants.

Travelling time and other costs if out of town also need to be factored in.

Plus 10% GST

However, the question 'But how much do I charge?' can still be asked at this point. No matter what figure is prepared, it will be viewed as too little or too much depending on your orientation.

The high end of the spectrum

An experienced university trainer who contracts trainers/facilitators to facilitate in house workshops on anything from customer service, through to conflict management for senior staff stated that her consultants (another term for facilitators /trainers) charge between \$2,000.00 - \$2,300.00 per day, plus GST. For program design, they charge around \$1,500.00 per day plus GST'.

She also said 'If the workshop is already written and they just need to prepare, an experienced trainer only needs half a day to prepare for a simple course, e.g. customer service, so preparation would be \$750.00 + GST. This would be on top of their day rate to deliver the program. On average my trainers earn around \$3,000.00 a day to run a pre written course'.

These statistics would be shocking to community workers; however another experienced trainer who works for a large training organisation gave similar figures.

This trainer stated that she would be paid \$1,500.00 a day to deliver the training. The company she works for would charge the client triple that amount (\$4,500.00 plus GST) for the day. Alternately If she was working with her own material as an independent facilitator she would charge anywhere from \$3,000.00 to \$5,000.00 a day. She stated 'I wouldn't quote any higher than that, as I don't have the same overheads as my employer.'

The Real World?

These rates for anybody not in corporate training would appear to be unattainable. There is significant inequity across the sector which is astounding. In a shift from one end of the spectrum to the other it becomes apparent that extremely experienced and skilled group facilitators can be paid \$22.00 per hour to facilitate groups within their organisation. Despite having the same skill sets as the corporate facilitator, their rate was similar to working in the lower end of retail. This inequity is frightening and legitimate guidelines need to be established so that facilitators can go to their employer and say that it is not good enough, that the minimum rate per hour is 'x' according to the Institute of Group Leaders Guidelines.

There truly does not appear to be any standardised rate across the sector and these needs to be addressed. Through discussion with managers a fair rate was developed;

\$250.00 @75%(x 4 days) = \$750.00 to develop a workshop + \$250.00 a day face to face

Plus **administrative costs, travel time** etc \$100.00 + 10%GST

Total = Approx \$1,200.00.

A rate of \$1,200.00-\$1,500.00 to deliver a specially designed program is a fair and reasonable rate. Several of the Community Forums have indicated that the high end of their payment for trainers fall within these parameters.

However, this calculation is still challenged by the standard training rates used by a large well known community training organisation. Their payment guidelines are:

- Facilitators who have between 0-5 years continuous service are paid between \$520.00 - \$625.00 per day
- Facilitators who have between 6 – 8 years continuous service are paid between \$650.00 - \$700.00 per day
- Facilitators who have between 8 + years continuous service are paid between \$725.00 - \$875.00 per day.

Groups with 16-18 participants receive a further \$100.00 per day and groups with 19-20 participants receive a further \$100.00 per day. All of these rates involve workshops you facilitate using your own material!

It is unlikely that many trainers will have been delivering training with this organization for five consecutive years, so the majority of trainers would be on the base rate. Therefore a group facilitator with expertise in his or her field whom has written a program will earn a maximum of \$625.00 for the day unless they have over 16 participants.

As a peak training organisation, there are many trainers who are prepared to be on their calendar for these training rates. For many people, they will think these rates are fair and appropriate. However, these rates involve not just one day's income. This one day training workshop includes many days spent designing the program, years of experience facilitating groups to be a competent enough facilitator and the long term commitment to providing this program on the training calendar on an ongoing basis. Facilitators, who are prepared to deliver workshops for these contracted fees, often make the decision based on the rewards reaped in other ways. Being on the training calendar promotes your workshops, you as a facilitator and the development of consultancy training as the calendar has a wide distribution. The quality of the product offered is high and has the potential to enhance your reputation as a facilitator. Due to the wide marketing, the workshop is likely to succeed with a strong potential for future work. Nonetheless the base rate appears very low in light of the skill set required to do the work.

Conclusion

Unless trainers/facilitators are given the acknowledgement they deserve it will be challenging for the sector as a whole to have the courage to demand to be paid what the service is truly worth. If IGL as an organisation can develop some firm guidelines around rates and possibly canvas these peak bodies it will go a long way towards shifting the inequity that exists. Without guidelines, the day facilitators and trainers will be paid their true worth is far off.

There is a need for trainers and facilitators to have the courage to quote a fair and reasonable rate for their product in the knowledge that they have something important and of value to offer. If this conviction is stood by, there is the potential to demand the acknowledgement that has been so lacking in regards to the group leadership profession and will ultimately force the rates into something that can be deemed fair and reasonable.

Julie Holt
julieholt@optusnet.com.au
(Sept 2010)