

# The Connection Project

## FACILITATION PROGRAM

r6

26/5/2025

### 1. Introduction

The project has created a unique peer led program for the training and accreditation of facilitators. This program is 52 weeks long and comprises small intakes of 6-8 participants. Applications are now open for the 2025/26 pilot intake, expected to start in July, once a group has been assembled.

In essence the program comprises three core components. First, participants create and facilitate practice sessions for their trainee group, (learning by doing). Trainees also create and deliver theory presentations (learning by teaching). Thirdly, both practical works attract systematic and skilful peer feedback that informs progress.

The program leans also on a comprehensive curriculum, and a group mentor (a previous graduate who attends sessions with the program group). However the true cornerstone of the program is the peer group's own collaboration. Each participant brings part of the picture. For leadership, by leadership.

Because the program is self directed, or more accurately, peer directed, there is no financial cost for being in the program.



IMAGE CREDIT: LIFEbeautifulMAGAZINE.COM

### 2. Committent

The program is open to people who qualify as project members. Being in the program fulfils the pod participation requirement of project membership. It is recommended that applicants have 100+ hours of AR practice under their belts.

Please note that because of the small group sizes, a special committent is required of participants. The no-financial-cost design presents something of a dilemma to intake groups. The dilemma is this: participants dropping out upset a delicate balance. Group sizes less than 6 risk losing critical mass. Conversely, because there is so much practical work, group sizes larger than 6 risk prolonging the program beyond the 1 year target duration.

To maintain the target group size of 6, recommended solutions are to start with 8, or, to have a couple of people in reserve in case someone withdraws in the first 4 weeks. However each group may find their own creative solution.

Our goal is to provide just enough structure to maintain momentum, so, each group may choose their own session times, holiday dates etc. The program, like the project, is all about collaboration. So participants, particularly so in the pilot offering, get to help shape the program.

### **3. Program outline**

The program currently operates online. It consists of two stages.

#### *Stage One*

- 26 weekly sessions of 2.5 hours each, comprising:
- 4 sessions which introduce the program (feedback, trial presentations, nervous system friendly practice development etc).
- 8 sessions focus on the project's "big four" (the practice imperative, getting their world, non-verbals, and session management).
- 12 sessions where participants design and facilitate sessions for their program peers.
- Each participant hosts 4 of the regular program sessions (the mentor hosts the first and last session). The session curriculum is delivered using the rotating peer host and with the support of the group's mentor.
- Plus, each participant also creates 3 one hour theory presentations, which are offered to the wider project audience.

#### *Stage Two*

- 26 weekly sessions of 2.5 hours each.
- Participants design and facilitate practice sessions for the wider project audience (6 sessions per trainee).
- This stage mostly involves peer support on the project offering work, reviewing feedback, and fine tuning weak areas.
- The curriculum support for this stage includes some facilitation specialisations. Stage two is more self structured, again with a rotating peer host.
- Refine and/or further develop the training curriculum.
- After which, program graduates return to their home pods.

#### Total time commitment:

- Weekly program session, 2.5 hours for 52 weeks.
- Plus 6 x one hour practice sessions as project offerings (plus suggested attendance of 75%+ of the other trainees' offerings).
- Plus 3 x one hour theory presentations as project offerings (plus suggested attendance of 75%+ of the other trainees' presentations).
- Trainees are recommended / expected to maintain a total of at least 2 hours of general practice per week (on any AR platform). There is no substitute for seat time.
- Reading list and some session homework.
- One graduate from each intake serves as mentor for the next intake.

### **4. Assessment**

The program utilises a unique peer feedback assessment system. All theory and practice offerings attract peer feedback, using a purpose built, nervous-system-friendly design. The purpose of the feedback is to highlight areas where core competence has been achieved and to gently indicate where further work may be required. Trainees get to learn from feedback and to focus their study and practice accordingly. Each trainee is ultimately responsible for meeting feedback targets to ensure graduation and accreditation as a project facilitator.

## **5. The program's genesis**

Some of the project's participants have practiced on a number of AR platforms, and it was these experiences that started us down a path of enquiry about the potential for a new model of facilitation training.

Some of the key things which we noticed are:

1. Facilitation, like most arts can't really be taught. We learn it best by doing it.
2. Trainee facilitators are often released out into the world without as much practice as they could optimally benefit from. This requires guinea pigs. Lots of them.
3. Without suitable feedback, trainee facilitators can not know how they are progressing, or where to focus their attention.

That's it in a nutshell, learn facilitation by facilitating, and, create a path for feedback.

The question is how to resource getting that much practice facilitating? The obvious solution is to practice on each other. In doing so, not only do we capitalize on the diverse skills and wisdom of the group as a whole, but this model entirely supports our collaboration driver.

So in our program, in the first instance the practice environment is the trainee peer group. The entire program gets facilitated, on a rotating basis, by the program participants themselves. Once each participant has achieved feedback targets they can expand their practice to the wider project community, and finally out into the world.

Now, when it comes to feedback, there's feedback and there's feedback. If Julie and John Gottman taught the world anything it is that offering 20 times more appreciation than 'helpful suggestions for improvement', correlates strongly with relationships that endure. So, the feedback system we have developed is based on things we learned from nervous system science as well as from AR. Basically, it is this: focus feedback on the things that we liked, and just let the shortcomings wait until the capacity develops over time. This is what we are calling nervous system friendly feedback.

By removing the expensive 'expert' training provider from the equation, we create a situation where there is the possibility to offer this program at no cost. This is pretty unique, because in case you haven't noticed, traditional facilitation training is really expensive. And we consider that cost to be a significant limiting factor in the growth of this movement.

But to reiterate, this no-cost model creates what we are calling the commitment problem. Without the potential loss of a course sign up fee, there is less incentive to follow through to complete the program. Because of the small group size that we believe is most effective (6-8), even the loss of one or two participants has a significant impact on the group's functioning. We don't currently have a solution for this, other than emphasising how important it is to only sign up with a robust sense of commitment to the program. If there is something you need in order to find that resolve, then do let us know how we can help.

## **6. FAQs**

### **Is the program in pilot mode?**

It is. The 25/26 intake is the first intake, and as such it will run without a previous intake mentor. It will therefore provide lots of room for your feedback to help shape the program for subsequent intakes. So if that experimental nature is actually interesting to you, then that's especially great.

### **What is meant by the 100 hrs practice requirement?**

Having a AR practice history, on any platform, makes the program easier to integrate, and gives trainees a why for embarking on this journey. Facilitation is hard enough without also having to learn AR. However, perhaps you have extensive experience in related fields such as psychotherapy, more traditional group facilitation or mediation. Perhaps you were just blessed with a gift for this work. So, bearing in mind the impact on the group, we invite you to make your own assessment on this matter. If you need more guidance see the pop quiz below. In the future we may offer a version of the program without the practice requirement.

### **How do i sign up?**

Right now we are collecting expressions of interest. You can do that by writing to our email address. The program runs on a first in, first served basis. Time is somewhat of the essence, and if you are interested in the program then attending to the membership requirements should be where your focus lays.

### **Do i have to be a member?**

Yes. The facilitation program is created by project participants, for participants. This means that if you want to join the pilot program you do need to become a 'member', what we call a Participant. The project is membership based, its how we create alignment, its how we make decisions collaboratively. Some not-for-profit community groups create alignment by retaining the right to approve new members. We adopted the alternative pattern, which is self-select with hurdles. The 'hurdles' are just steps whose purpose is to slow down the process of joining enough for newcomers to be sure they are in the right place. And because each newcomer has to integrate gently into the collective, it's important they understand the existing culture before adding their particular gifts, talents and ideas. Group consensus is a carefully curated package involving so much more than just passing proposals. The foundation of group decisions includes particularly the membership process, some policies and procedures, and our statements of purpose and values.

### **What does membership involve?**

Becoming a member is a self select process involving a few different steps, explained at <https://theconnectionproject.nz/?view=get-involved> The most time consuming of these steps is the 5 weeks of introductory practice sessions. These steps culminate in the signing of the Participation Pledge. This framework is documented in full at <https://theconnectionproject.nz/?view=resources> (which we know is verbose, perhaps as a cost of clarity). Digesting this material is one of the hurdles! The short version is something like this: maintaining membership involves attending your weekly pod gathering and helping with its tasks, being part of the decision making process and attending periodic practice. For clarity, the facilitation program is it's own pod, and for the duration of the program you don't need to be in another pod as well, unless of course you want to. Pods are a big part of project life, offering social support as well as providing participants an anchor to the project.

**When does it start?**

We are aiming for mid July 2025. The exact date will depend on the intake group coming together, and the various timezones / holiday periods of the intake group. There is a probability of this date slipping into August to allow people to get through the steps.

**Should i be excited?**

Absolutely. In that light, we would love it if you can tell anyone you know that loves AR, and who might make a great part of this pioneering social (r)evolution.

**7. More info**

For enquiries and more information about enrolment please contact [info@theconnectionproject.nz](mailto:info@theconnectionproject.nz)

**Pop Quiz:**

"If you can confidently define three quarters of these, you're probably good to go."

1. Setting context
2. Weaving shared reality
3. Three levels of conversation
4. Posture and collapse
5. Hold my identity lightly
6. Presencing struggle
7. Meta awareness
8. Skilful projection
9. Titration
10. Incremental reciprocal self-disclosure
11. Unconditional positive regard