Tpas Virtual Action Learning Sets: Spring 2021 Programme

What is it?

An Action Learning Set is an independently facilitated process where a group of participants are supported to explore current issues through open questioning and active listening whilst avoiding offering advice.

Action learning is all about self-empowerment in a supportive environment and by taking them onto Zoom, we have made them virtual to meet the needs of our members, especially in these newly uncertain times. These sessions enable relationships to develop, conversations to deepen, challenges to be unpicked, solutions to be identified and action to be taken.

Who can take part?

The Spring 2021 VALS Programme is aimed at housing staff of all levels and a wide range of roles and responsibilities. Participants may have specific aims to improve performance or develop personally and professionally.

When is it?

A pre-scheduled Programme of sessions starts with a 2-hour Introductory session aimed at building the group, establishing ways of working, learning about the process and running through a trial Action Learning Set.

The initial session is followed by the first of a series of five full Action Learning Set sessions which run for 4 hours every 5 weeks to give participant time to progress their actions between the sessions. Once completed, a 2-hour Evaluation session is scheduled 2 weeks after the final session which is the Programme wraps up with a final 2 hour Follow Up session 5 months later.

We are hoping to run two VALS set concurrently, starting from early February through to July 2021. The evaluation sessions will be held in December 2021.

Each set will run within the same week and dependant on which set you have been allocated to, will either be a Tuesday or Thursday – a full programme schedule is available to view.

How does it work?

Each Set will have 4 participants, each representing a different organisation and holding a wide range of roles and responsibilities. The diversity of Action Learning Sets is one of the processes strengths. The Facilitator holds the process from the start through to the end of every session which will enable all participants the opportunity to present and work on an issue for 40 minutes that they're grappling with at the time. Once the issue is clarified into a question, the group then asks a series of open questions to the Issue Holder aiming to neither advise or lead the Issue Holder to a certain conclusion.

The Facilitator enables a series of breaks during each session and always starts each session with an informal check in/warm up to help relax and focus the group. The Action Learning Set experience is intense, exhilarating, highly process driven and can be exhausting. It takes participants into new ways of problem solving and supporting others. It's not like conventional training or learning at all and requires a leap of faith into the unknown but is well held by an independent Facilitator who is responsible for sticking to ground rules and timings.

The process is based on the Issue Holder finding their own solution to their key question. Each Issue Holder session concludes with actions being noted to be worked on between sessions. Reflection is a big element of Action Learning with plenty of opportunities built into the process to look back in practice to improve the experience. Each session runs for 3.5 hours and is followed by an optional 30 minutes 'white space' session to discuss wider matters of interest.

It's essential that each participant commits to each session in a comfortable and private space and is prepared to present an issue and play an active role in the group through asking questions and offering reflections.

All sessions are held in confidence with issues and actions only captured for the benefit of the group, where the Facilitator follows up each session with an emailed summary of issues and actions so as to keep the group on track. At the start of the next session, participants offer an action update to share progress with their colleagues.