

COMMONWEALTH DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE

SES training | Representational Skills

PROJECT DETAILS

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade identified an opportunity to enhance the way its senior executive service (SES) Band 2 leaders represented the Department at the highest levels of government and the parliament.

While the Department acquitted itself well in these fora the Secretary saw an opportunity for SES staff to continue to build their representational skills. This was an ongoing professional development need given the complex and challenging matters dealt with by the Department, often involving issues of national security. SES staff were encouraged to undertake a program of training that ran as a series of workshops throughout the financial year. Each session built on the learnings of the previous session.

The program was run in Canberra in the client's training rooms. The contract was valued at about \$xxx annually and ran for two years.

WHAT WE DID

Michelle Henderson was the lead consultant for this project, responsible for program design and delivery.

Design of the program required a very good understanding of the operations of the parliament, its committees and the federal budget cycle. It also required a genuine understanding of the responsibilities of SES band 2 leaders, particularly their roles as senior representatives of the department.

We took a co-design approach to program design. This involved working with the parliamentary engagement team, the media team and the office of the Secretary. It also included regular meetings with the Secretary. This enabled us to design a bespoke program which:

- ⚙ targeted specific departmental responsibilities; and
- ⚙ delivered capability uplift in line with the Secretary's expectations.

The program was delivered as a series of workshops specially designed to the unique needs of senior cohorts. Special techniques included:

- ⚙ engagement by the facilitator with the cohort prior to each workshop

- ⚙ video footage used during workshops to enable discussion about what works and what does not work in these fora;
- ⚙ tailored mock question and answer sessions with each participant;
- ⚙ provision of expert and peer feedback at the end of each question and answer session.

The Secretary participated in private deliveries of the program.

One of the challenges of working with such senior cohorts is the demands on their time. To accommodate this, the workshops were short (just one and a half hours) and capped at low numbers to enhance individual learning.

To help participants manage their commitments, several workshop times were available at each session. This provided participants with flexibility around their attendance. We also engaged with Executive Assistants to help with diary management and offered additional workshops in special circumstances.

RESULTS

- ⚙ The program was well received by the Department.
- ⚙ Attendance in the program was high.
- ⚙ All participants attended each session run throughout the financial year.
- ⚙ The Secretary participated in private deliveries of the program over both years.
- ⚙ Newly promoted SES staff were actively encouraged to participate in the program.
- ⚙ Media reporting of the Department's parliamentary skills was very positive during the term of the program.
- ⚙ As SES staff move to other Departments, Michelle has been asked to deliver versions of the program for the new Department.