

Facilitating Meetings: Tips for Garden Leaders

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Core Values of Participatory Decision-Making (p. 2)

Learning from Experience

Think of the most satisfying meetings you've attended? What are the practices and behaviors that led to their success?

Some Best Practices

BEFORE THE MEETING

- Agenda "Design": topic/outcome/method/time (p. 3-4)

AT MEETINGS

- Group Agreements (p. 5-6)
 - Basics for a one-time meeting (rather than an ongoing group):
 - Help create space for everyone to participate
 - Help stay on topic and on time – use the Parking Lot (or Compost Pile)
 - Please turn off cell phones
 - What else? (Check for agreement)
- Parking Lot (or Compost Pile): respect off-topic ideas without changing the agenda
- The Round: slowing down; seeking the range of thinking; testing for agreement (p. 7)
- Check-out or Evaluation: learning and improving together (p. 8)

AFTER MEETINGS

- Use the check-out/evaluation to reflect and plan the next meeting

Resources

Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making (Sam Kaner et al, Jossey-Bass)

10 Steps to Successful Facilitation (ASTD Press)

PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING CORE VALUES

FULL PARTICIPATION

In a participatory group, all members are encouraged to speak up and say what's on their minds. This strengthens a group in several ways. Members become more courageous in raising difficult issues. They learn how to share their "first-draft" ideas. And they become more adept at discovering and acknowledging the diversity of opinions and backgrounds inherent in any group.

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

In order for a group to reach a sustainable agreement, the members need to understand and accept the legitimacy of one another's needs and goals. This basic recognition is what allows people to think from each other's point of view, which is the catalyst for developing innovative ideas that serve the interests of all parties.

INCLUSIVE SOLUTIONS

Inclusive solutions are wise solutions. Their wisdom emerges from the integration of everybody's perspectives and needs. These are solutions whose range and vision are expanded to take advantage of the truth held not only by the quick, the articulate, the influential, and the powerful, but also of the truth held by those who are shy or disenfranchised or who think at a slower pace. As the Quakers say, "Everybody has a piece of the truth."

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

In participatory groups, members recognize that they must be willing and able to implement the proposals they endorse, so they make every effort to give and receive input before final decisions are made. They also assume responsibility for designing and managing the thinking process that will result in a good decision. This contrasts sharply with the conventional assumption that everyone will be held accountable for the consequences of decisions made by a few key people.

Agenda Design Worksheet - the single meeting, with rolling agenda
post group agreements

Identify Topic <i>check priorities</i>	Clarify Outcome <i>check fit within overall goals</i>	Choose Process <i>select best practices</i>	Time
Welcome/Check-in			
Agenda review			
Check-out/evaluation			
Rolling Agenda (priority topics for future meetings) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 			

Tips for Facilitators:

Approaches to Collaborative Group Work

When the desired outcome is to:	... select appropriate tools & methods:
Generate ideas	<p>Brainstorm to capture the full range of ideas. <i>All ideas are welcomed. More is better!</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • present a focus question • allow thinking time for individuals or in groups of 2-3 • collect ideas in round-robin fashion, one idea/person
Evaluate ideas	<p>Organize & analyze the ideas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cluster related ideas • create categories • make concept maps • “dot vote” to reveal trends or relative importance • develop & apply criteria • compare alternatives
Select ideas	<p>Reach closure.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poll for agreement • dialogue to move toward consensus • use a pre-determined decision process • agree to disagree
Act on ideas	<p>Plan for action.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Who will do what by when?</i> ▣▣▣▣ month ▣▣▣▣ quarter ▣▣▣▣ year ▣▣▣▣ decade • include a plan to evaluate and adapt



Tips for Facilitators: Group Agreements

Purpose: Group Agreements make members' expectations of one another explicit. They put a group in a proactive position to be successful. Conflicts and frustrations are often a result of unstated assumptions and unfulfilled expectations. When members know what to expect of one another, their energy can be directed towards their work and trust is reinforced.

Preparation: Group Agreements are written to be specific to the needs of a group. If members come from a history of effective group work, the statements may be very succinct, and many expectations may exist as unwritten understandings. For new groups or groups that have been troubled by conflict, the agreements will be more comprehensive. See the checklist on the next page to work with your group to establish agreements that will help you build and sustain a healthy work group.

Sample Group Agreements

- start and end meetings on time
- help create space for all to participate
- one person talks at a time
- no side conversations
- help stay on task
- complete between meeting assignments
- state the clear purpose and expected outcome for each agenda item
- make decisions by consensus



Group Agreements: A Checklist

Consider the following topic areas when developing your Group Agreements. Transfer your final guidelines onto a working list that is posted and/or available at meetings and conference calls. All members are responsible to help make sure the agreements are followed.

TOPIC AREA	SUGGESTED GUIDELINES	FINAL GUIDELINES
Attendance		
Participation		
Meeting agendas & records		
Rotation of routine chores		
Confidentiality		
Conversational courtesies		
How decisions are made		



Tips for Facilitators: The Round or Talking Circle

The Round, or Talking Circle, is used to explore a topic in an egalitarian and non-confrontational manner. The practice helps a group slow down, listen for the total range of thinking on the topic, listen for areas of agreement and disagreement, and lay the groundwork for creative, win-win solutions.

- Clarify the topic or focus question and how the “round” will work.
 - ✓ Speak honestly and truthfully from the heart
 - ✓ Speak to the topic
 - ✓ Be brief
 - ✓ Listen attentively
- Allow each person to speak, one a time without interruptions or questions.
- If someone passes, be sure to check in at the end of the round to see if they wish to speak now.
- After completing one round, consider:
 - Would another round be helpful?
 - Are we ready to open the floor for continued conversation?
 - Are we ready to make a decision?
 - Do we need to wait for more information or let the topic rest for today?
- Summarize observations and consider the next steps for the topic.



Tips for Facilitators: Evaluation - "Taking the Group's Pulse"

Basic check-out questions for informal evaluation.

- What went well for you today - and why?
- What didn't go so well - and why?
(Be specific about what might be improved next time).

More questions to consider in a more detailed evaluation.

- What parts of our agenda have been accomplished? What is undone?
- Do we have a clear purpose and well-defined goals and expected outcomes?
- In what ways are we managing short-term work effectively?
- In what ways are we making progress in terms of the big picture?
- Are we following our Group Guidelines? If not, what needs improving?
 - Was there balanced participation? If not, why not?
 - Are we sharing the responsibility for our work?
 - Etc.



Group Process Evaluation

1. We encouraged full participation by all members of the group.
Always Often Some of the time Rarely Never

2. We sought mutual understanding of each other's ideas, perspectives, and needs.
Always Often Some of the time Rarely Never

3. We worked toward inclusive solutions that acknowledged multiple perspectives and focused on a win-win approach.
Always Often Some of the time Rarely Never

4. We have a shared understanding of who is responsible for implementing any decisions that we made, i.e., we know who will do what by when.
Always Often Some of the time Rarely Never

5. What supported our process today?

6. What got in the way of effective process today?

7. How can we improve our process?