

Workshop Six

GROUP FACILITATION

Objective

- To understand the process of effective group facilitation and practice skills that support it

Outcomes

- Participants will be able to analyze the effectiveness of local community meetings and assess the importance of the meeting facilitator in running an effective meeting.
- Participants will be able to analyze the qualities of an effective group facilitator.
- Participants will be able to observe and analyze effective group facilitation strategies.
- Participants will begin to learn strategies to help groups build consensus.

Before You Begin

Prior to beginning this workshop, facilitators should pass out individually typed up roles for the two role play exercises that form the core of this workshop.

When passing out roles, let participants know that they are not to share the information about their roles with other group members. In addition, print the roles for the two exercises on different colored paper so that participants can easily identify whether their role is in the first or second exercise. Try not to “type-cast” people when handing out roles. Also, try to choose people who you think will be able to “rise to the occasion” of their role.

I. Welcome and Review of Workshop Five Homework Assignment

(40 minutes)

Welcome group members, check in and see how everyone is doing. Let group members know that this session will focus on discussing and assessing some of the meetings that they have observed since the last session. This discussion will provide the foundation for the focus of the rest of this session’s work—assessing and practicing group facilitation skills. Ask a series of group members to talk about the meetings that they attended. Have them

describe:

- the organization/group whose meeting they attended;
- the overall goals/objectives of the meeting;
- some of the meetings’ strengths;
- some of the meetings’ weaknesses;
- observations about the group dynamics (such as the patterns of communication, how conflict was handled, how decisions were made, whether there were opportunities for input by all group members);
- observations about the level of work accomplished/action taken;
- observations about the facilitation and leadership of the group.

After group members have shared a series of meeting descriptions, draw together some of the lessons that the group learned through its observations. First, summarize the group’s observations, paying particular attention to some of the observations made about the facilitation process of the groups’ observed. Then write the lessons on a flip chart.

POINTER – Consider having some of the less vocal members of the group share their observations first. The structured nature of this assignment may help them feel more comfortable sharing within the group.



This session takes off where the last ended...with the key elements of successful facilitation. Mention to the group that while a well constructed agenda provides the map for a successful meeting, the vehicle that gets you where you are going is effective facilitation.

II. Principles of Effective Group Facilitation: A Brainstorm

(20 minutes)

Based on the first activity have each group member take a piece of paper and make two columns. Ask members to label one column “good facilitation” and the other “poor facilitation.” Next, ask group members to take about five to ten minutes to write down all the qualities that come to mind when they think of a “good” group facilitator and the qualities that come to mind when they think of a “poor” group facilitator. After they have had an opportunity to brainstorm on their own, give group members an opportunity to share their lists, making two master lists in the front of the room. Point out that good facilitation can “make” or “break” a meeting. But good facilitation is a “learned” skill that takes time and much practice. Note that the group will now participate in a series of role plays which will give them the opportunity to both observe and practice group facilitation skills.



POINTER – After the participants have listed their ideas about good facilitation and poor facilitation, it is important to point out that good facilitators are not born, but rather developed. Good facilitators have learned and practiced their skills. Practice is a critical element of good facilitation, but so too is the recognition that the key principles, when utilized, can speed the development of new facilitators.

III. Meeting Simulation to Model Group Facilitation

(15 Minutes)

Point out that even when many of us have learned I-messages and active listening skills, facilitating a group meeting around a “hot” topic often means that some participants will behave in ways that can be difficult to handle. In these kinds of environments, a key skill is the ability to diffuse potentially sensitive situations and model behavior which shows that all participants in the group are heard and respected.

Tell the group that in order to help them get a sense of how this can work, some of the group will now participate in a meeting simulation while others observe. Point out that during this simulation, we will model some of the ways in which the problematic behaviors of group members can be corrected by group leaders in a manner that moves the group forward with its agenda.

Ask those group members who have been assigned roles in this exercise to come forward. Seat the role play members around a table, preferably with other group members sitting around them (a circle within a circle), so that those observing can hear the group interactions.

Tell group members you will be facilitating this imaginary group meeting. (Or you may choose an individual in the group who has exhibited facilitation strengths in the earlier sessions of the training.) Share the meeting issue (described below) with the whole group. Let group members know that their assignment is to observe the role play with an eye toward the facilitation process—particularly how conflict and dissension is handled. Group members may want to take notes while they observe the role play. Allow the role play to continue for about 15 minutes so that participants can begin to get engaged in the group dynamic.

Before beginning, set the following context for the group:

This role play is a meeting of a local neighborhood community action group which has been in existence

for less than a year and has been funded through Foundation dollars. The facilitator is a paid staff member of the project. The group is made up primarily of residents and concerned professionals who live and work in the area and who are interested in improving the quality of life in their community.

The Meeting Issue:

There have been recent acts of violence in front of the local liquor store. In one case, a local resident was badly beaten up by three young adults when he was buying milk and eggs. In the second instance, people were hanging around the store drinking out of paper bags when a fight erupted among a few of the loiterers. The police were called in both instances and arrests were made.

Many community members feel that these events were inevitable since the store has been a problem for years and no one—including the police—has been willing to clean it up. As a result, many community members have been afraid to go to the store or to allow their children near the place.

Everyone is eager to address this problem. However, there are several ideas about how to proceed and consensus has been hard to reach.

POINTER – Remember that group participants should not see or know each others' roles—nor should they share or discuss the roles for the second role play. Be sure to remind group members about this, as much spontaneity will be lost if participants know what to expect ahead of time. Encourage individuals to read their assigned roles carefully and incorporate as much of the information provided into their actions. At the same time, encourage role play members to open themselves to the group process, allowing their actions within the group to “rise to the occasion” of the action, without being afraid of moving beyond the initial descriptions.



As group leader, you are likely to be the facilitator of this simulation. The role play was developed with an eye toward conflict and consensus. Each role in the scenario has a unique perspective on the problem of violence at a liquor store. There is no pre-defined outcome. Each time it is performed, a different result occurs. This is intended to be much like the “real world,” where personalities shape the tone and direction a meeting will take. Depending on the strength of the people playing roles in the scenario, any one of the players could be difficult to handle within the group context. However, there are a few things to watch for in the exercise: First, beware of competing agendas. As the roles have been written, some people want the liquor store closed down while some are uncomfortable with the confrontative nature of community action and would prefer to let the police handle the whole affair. Second, the roles embody very different personalities with distinctive personal agendas. The male leader of an alternative community group will try to derail your ability to move the group forward to keep his power from diminishing. The Pastor of the church is a good person, but sees things from the perspective of a social justice agenda and the liquor store problem as a reflection of larger societal problems. Each of these people could derail your ability to move the group forward if the key principles of facilitation are not practiced. In this scenario your objective is to seek some sort of progress in addressing the liquor store issue. Don't expect to solve the problem; it is simply not possible in 15 minutes. However, do practice the following principles: (1) validate each person's view; (2) stay on task by trying to find a next step toward addressing the problem; (3) acknowledge conflicts, but do not let them derail the consensus-building process; (4) stay positive and non-aligned with a particular point of view; and (5) keep any one person from dominating the conversation; seek feedback from all present.

Stay on your toes and don't let a strong person throw you off course as facilitator. Mistakes are expected and there is no perfect facilitation or “right” outcome.

Group Member Roles for First Role Play

MEMBER # 1—Male, leader of an alternative community group: You are the leader of another grassroots organization in the community. You have heard that this group is planning to get active in the community and has the luxury of a paid community organizer to staff the group. You have worked hard to pull your group together and establish a positive reputation for the group and for yourself. You have had some success in various projects the group has undertaken. Your main concern is that this group will somehow eclipse the work of your organization and eventually members will leave. This is your second meeting and the group is suggesting that it is time to work on the violence issue. The liquor store where the violence occurred is in the geographic area where your group is active.

Your role is to act as a disruptive force in the meeting through constant questioning and expressing of concern about the group's plans and leadership. You should disrupt somewhat quietly so as not to be too obvious—your goal is to undermine the group, not to get people to dislike you. You don't care too much about the violence issue, but feel that it may be better for your group to address it than this upstart group.

MEMBER #2—Respected female grassroots community member: You have lived in the community for over 20 years and know many of the residents in the area. You decided to join this group because you heard that members were serious about "making a difference." You feel pretty confident that you know what is best for the community, but the group doesn't always give your ideas the respect that you feel they deserve.

You are very concerned about the recent violence and feel the only solution is to run this alcohol outlet out of town on a rail. You have been hearing people talk about the problem for a long time and you are convinced that anything short of closing the store is a cop-out. You are committed to seeing your idea adopted as the group plan even if it means forcing other group members to make it happen.

Member #3—Female parent of a child in the local school: You heard about this group through the school. Because you care about the neighborhood and the welfare of your child, joining was an easy decision.

In the first few meetings you attended it was difficult for you to determine what the group planned to do. Meetings seemed disorganized and people seemed to be jockeying for position. You were considering leaving the group when the two instances of violence occurred at the store. The outlet is close to your house and you have found new energy for the group as you feel it is the most promising organization to fix the problem.

You are not very outspoken in a group and as a result rarely speak at a meeting. However, you are resolved that this meeting will be different and you are going to make the point that the police are responsible for allowing this problem to occur. You want the group to force the police into action.

Member #4—Male pastor of the local church: You are very concerned about the escalating violence occurring across the city. In your mind, these incidents are a symptom of a larger societal problem. You are relatively new to the area—you arrived only one year ago, and yet have increased the church congregation by 50 percent during that time. You preach a vision of social justice and have worked to integrate justice principles into the work of the ministry.

Your solution to this problem is to picket the alcohol outlet. You feel that if the group does this then the broader issue of violence will be recognized and could position the group to take a leadership role on the issue as it pertains to the whole city. You are not a pushy person and like to find consensus whenever possible. In fact, you are known for your work as a bridge builder across disparate views. You would like to play this role for the group around the violence issue, but are finding it hard to let go of your own solution to the problem.

MEMBER #5—Female teacher in the local elementary school: You are a well respected sixth grade teacher who lives in the community and also teaches nearby. You have been here for 20 years and are committed to the area. You feel that when you first moved here, the neighborhood was a wonderful place to live—with strong parent and resident involvement and participation in civic events. In your opinion, drugs and alcohol have ruined the community. These recent acts of violence have scared you.

You hold strong beliefs but dislike controversy and conflict. When discussion starts to get “hot,” you pull back and stay out of the line of fire. Since you have been in this group, very few issues have been resolved in the way you would like. But, because of your quiet nature, you have been unwilling to push your agenda. You know that this issue will elicit strong opinions about what should be done and are dreading the anticipated conflict.

MEMBER #6—Female block captain for a neighborhood watch group: You are very concerned about crime and violence issues and joined this group to be sure that these issues were addressed. You have patiently been waiting for the group to tackle a significant social problem and have grown tired of discussing litter campaigns and the like.

Your fear is that the group will get “cold feet” and stay clear of the events at the liquor store. Your main agenda is to make sure that this does not happen. You don’t know exactly what is the best course of action to address the recent violence, but you know the time is now.

You are willing and able to speak up and are prepared to push the group to act—whatever it takes. You don’t know the group members well but you have a sense that a few of them are acting in their own self-interest as opposed to the best interest of the community as a whole. You are resolved to support what is best for the group and not let a few participants control the agenda.

IV. Analysis and Discussion of Group Simulation

(30 minutes)

After the meeting simulation, ask the group to reflect on some of the techniques they observed being used by the group facilitator(s) to maintain an orderly and inclusive meeting. As individuals raise particular facilitation techniques, note them and point out several examples of how they were used during the group. During the discussion, the following themes should be addressed:

- Providing a context for allowing everyone in the room to express their points of view on an issue
- Guiding participants back to the agenda topic if they move off course
- Shifting the focus or framework when the discussion gets heated to depersonalize—by starting to list issues on chart tablet and/or positioning bodies of facilitators to control group members who are beginning to act out
- Affirming points of view as they are expressed, while acknowledging group differences
- Providing an environment in which different views can be raised and then discussed
- Drawing themes out of topics that begin to build consensus
- Providing opportunities for individuals to work on issues that address their own self-interest, while still moving the group process forward

Be prepared for positive and negative feedback. Let the group reflect on and add to your own observations. If the group is negative about your facilitation, try not to be defensive. Your goal is to bring out as much feedback about what people observed as possible. Expect some insightful thoughts about what happened and include them in the list of themes that emerge.

BREAK

15 minutes

V. Building Group Consensus: A Series of Small Group Role Plays

(60 Minutes)

Explain that group members will now have an opportunity to practice facilitation of opposing viewpoints themselves. For this exercise to work, you will need to analyze your group size and composition before the workshop begins. A meeting issue and seven group member roles have been created to structure this simulation. Group members should be broken down into small groups with seven role play members, a facilitator and an observer. (If your group does not break down evenly by nine, you can also form groups that use a smaller number of the roles. If you do this, make sure that you choose a range of roles.) Explain that each small group will now take approximately 15 minutes to act out their role plays. The person designated as the facilitator will practice facilitating in a way that incorporates the principles that the group has modeled and discussed. The observer should note what happens in the group dynamics and some of the challenges observed during the facilitation process.

The following scenario should be shared with the groups to set the context for the group meeting:

Context for the Facilitator:

This community advisory group is comprised of agency representatives, neighborhood stakeholders and residents. It was formed to implement a risk-and-protective-factors approach to primary prevention within the community, though it has, to date, focused on public safety and drug-related crime. The facilitator works for a local foundation-funded agency which sponsors the project and provides technical support to the community group.

Meeting Issue:

The county in which you reside has always had a high level of underage drinking. Youth in the community know where to buy alcohol or know adults who are willing to purchase it for them. Having a few beers on a Saturday night is almost a rite of passage, and many community residents don't seem too concerned.

Recently, however, there have been a number of traffic fatalities related to drinking by teenagers. In the last month, the captain of the high school football team was killed when he and his friends swerved off a country road while they were drinking.

A number of people in the community now feel that it is time to take this issue more seriously. They have come to your group to see if there is any willingness to take action to address this problem.

This role play may evoke some strong feelings from participants. The scenario described is not uncommon in communities across the country. As in the last role play, this exercise is designed to highlight different perspectives on the same problem. But this role play creates a greater range of perspectives which must be reconciled to reach consensus. Again, the strength of the personalities playing the various roles will shape the degree to which the facilitator will need to exercise a delicate touch versus a strong guiding hand to find some common ground.

Remember that each small group should have an observer. After roles are chosen within the small groups, advise the observer to watch for some of the key principles discussed earlier—especially the dynamics between the different roles.

When the full group reconvenes and the discussion continues, look for trends across the groups. See if you can identify some aspects of the group process that were true across all of the small groups—both positive and negative. Probe to see if the facilitators felt that they were active enough in the guiding the group toward consensus. Ask the facilitators what they would do differently if they had an opportunity run the group again. This question is important because it indicates the degree to which facilitators are incorporating the feedback from the group. Remember to reiterate that the skill of facilitation is developed and everyone can learn it with time and practice.

Group Member Roles for Second Role Play

MEMBER # 1—Substance abuse prevention worker at local agency: You have been part of this community group for a few months. Because of your work in the field of substance abuse, you recognize that alcohol is a much bigger problem than drugs in your community, especially among youth. But your experience has been that most folks in the community would like to focus on drugs and gangs rather than tackle the alcohol issue.

You have strong feelings about this issue. You know that you are there representing your agency and, in that context, you should speak as a professional. However, you are passionate about how the focus on drugs has allowed the alcohol problem to go unchecked and you want to make sure that people in the group know how serious the alcohol problems of teenagers in the community really are.

MEMBER #2—Chamber of Commerce representative: You have gotten involved in this group because you are concerned that the influx of drugs into your community will potentially hurt business. Several colleagues have told you that their night business downtown has been hurt by the drug dealers hanging around on neighborhood streets.

While you are sympathetic to any parent who has lost a child in a DWI incident, you don't really think that the group should be wasting its time on something that is just a fact of life—teenagers always drink, they always have, and they always will.

MEMBER #3—Mother of high school football captain killed while drinking and driving: You have come to this group to share your story and to let people know how serious the problem of underage drinking really is in your community. Since your son's death, you have gotten closer to a number of his friends and have learned a good deal about the ways in which teenagers get alcohol in the community. You think that it is very important that the community take action now to stop youth access to alcohol.

A number of people have told you that you should join the local chapter of MADD, but that group has been working primarily on making sure that teenagers choose a designated driver and not on addressing the access problem. You would like to see the access problem addressed more directly.

MEMBER #4—Head of the local community MADD chapter: You have come to this meeting because you heard that the group would be taking up the issue of youth and alcohol. Your MADD chapter has been working on the issue of youth and alcohol for nearly three years now, and you feel that they are really the experts in the field.

You don't think that it is appropriate for this community action group, which has been primarily working on drug enforcement and community policing issues, to be moving into your turf. You have come to this meeting to make sure that members know about all of the good work that MADD has already done on this issue, and to encourage people to support MADD's designated driver program for teenagers.

MEMBER #5—Pastor of local congregation: While you are of course, deeply upset that the community has lost yet another of its youth to a drunk driving accident, you feel that it is the parents' responsibility for not supervising their children more effectively. You feel that parents are giving too much control over to MTV and movies, and not teaching their children the kinds of values that would keep them from using alcohol.

You are here to encourage parents to take back the responsibility that should be theirs, and to try to get families more involved in the life of the church.

MEMBER #6—Liquor store owner: You are here primarily to protect your interests. You have been told that the community might begin to take action against the local liquor stores, and want to make sure that the group hears your side of the story.

While you acknowledge that kids

sometimes buy alcohol when they are underage, you don't feel that you can be held responsible if they come in with fake identification or if they find an adult to buy alcohol for them. You follow the rules, and feel that you have a right to make a profit from your business. You already work under more regulations than almost any other industry. Fair is fair.

MEMBER #7—Police officer: You grew up in this community and have fond memories of the nights that you and your friends used to have a few beers, find some girls, and go out and party. Even though you were underage, it didn't hurt you, and nobody really drank too much. While you know that enforcement of these issues is part of your job now, you're not sure that citizens in the community would really be happy if the underage children of influential members of the town suddenly started getting arrested for buying alcohol. You generally feel that the police have more important things to do, and that this issue really isn't a priority, it just feels like it now because there's been a recent death.

After all the groups have conducted their simulations, give group members an opportunity to talk among themselves. Have the facilitator and observer report their feelings and observations first. Then have other group members join in and give their reactions/feelings about the role play exercise. After groups have had some time to talk among themselves, bring the large group together and continue the discussion, taking time to review the facilitation process systematically. Consider some of the following questions.

- Did the facilitators maintain their neutrality while they were facilitating? How did they handle their desire to enter into the discussion?
- What were the different points of view that were raised and how were they handled?

- What kinds of strategies were used to engage all members of the group in the conversation and to solicit their points of view?
- What steps were taken to begin to summarize and draw consensus?

In your summarizing remarks, it is critical that facilitators emphasize that the role of a facilitator is an extremely active one—that the best facilitators guide groups gracefully, but firmly, helping to shape and structure the group's conversations, and working to build consensus, bring issues to closure, identify next steps and keep a group focused on its outcomes. Refer group members to the Handouts #1–5, which review some of the key principles of facilitation.

Facilitation Strategies to Help Build Consensus

The analysis and summary of this component of the training provides a good opportunity to introduce some facilitation tips on building consensus. Many of these strategies may come up in your discussions (as they may have been modeled in the role plays). Strategies you might want to discuss include:

- Brainstorming options
- Clarifying similarities and differences between opinions
- Eliminating and combining options based upon clarifications
- Multilayered voting on options until group members reduce choices to those on which they can all agree

VI. Closing

(10 minutes)

Ask group members to take a moment to reflect on the last three sessions on group dynamics issues and to share with the person sitting to their left or right the one skill or principle explored which has most enhanced their understanding of groups.

VII. Workshop Six Homework

NO HOMEWORK TODAY!! Take the week off.

If Your Community Action Group Is Already Up and Running

Consider writing meeting scenarios that reflect some of the issues that your group is currently addressing. When writing roles, make sure to create distinctive positions and give enough detail about the role to help a person “enact” it. Also develop opportunities for training participants to practice facilitation during community action group meetings. This can be accomplished by using training participants to cofacilitate small working groups with more experienced group members or by providing opportunities for training participants to take small facilitative roles in community meetings being held. In this way, the skills being learned in the workshops can be practiced and refined in real-life situations.

WORKSHOP SIX

Handouts

Workshop Six – Handout #1

The Three Basic Principles of Facilitation

- ◆ A facilitator draws out the opinions and ideas of group members instead of giving personal opinions.
- ◆ Facilitation focuses on HOW people participate in the process of learning or planning, not just WHAT gets achieved.
- ◆ A facilitator never takes sides.

Adapted from the Community Tool Box Website

Workshop Six – Handout #2

Encouraging Participation

- ♦ Make sure everyone feels comfortable speaking.
- ♦ Develop a structure that allows all ideas to be heard.
- ♦ Make members feel good about their contributions.
- ♦ Make sure that the ideas and decisions are group nominated, not leader dominated.
- ♦ Support ideas and do not criticize anyone for what they say.

Adapted from the Community Tool Box Website

Workshop Six – Handout #3

Being a Good Facilitator

Good facilitators:

- ♦ understand the goals of the meeting and the organization;
- ♦ keep the group and the agenda moving forward;
- ♦ involve everyone in the meeting; and
- ♦ make sure decisions are made democratically.

Adapted from the Community Tool Box Website

Workshop Six – Handout #4

Dealing with Disrupters: Preventions

- ◆ Get agreement on agenda, ground rules, and outcomes.
- ◆ Listen carefully.
- ◆ Show respect for experience.
- ◆ Find out the group's expectations.
- ◆ Stay in your facilitator role.
- ◆ Don't be defensive.
- ◆ “Buy-in” to power players.

Adapted from the Community Tool Box Website

Workshop Six – Handout #5

Dealing with Disrupters: Interventions

- ◆ Individual domination: Ask the group how they feel about the person's participation.
- ◆ Going off the agenda: Remind participants of agenda and ground rules.
- ◆ Intimidation: Talk about it openly.
- ◆ Tension: Try a humorous comment or joke.
- ◆ Someone expressing doubts: Accept or legitimize their point.
- ◆ Side conversations: Use body language and eye contact to get their attention and convey your intent.
- ◆ If these fail: Take a break and confront the disruptive person privately.
- ◆ Last resort: Confront the disruptive person in the room.

Adapted from the Community Tool Box Website

