



## GUIDELINES FOR FACILITATING A MEETING

### What does a facilitator do?

- A facilitator accepts responsibility to help the group accomplish a common task: to move through the agenda in the time available and to make the necessary decisions and plans for implementation
- A facilitator makes no decisions for the group, but suggests ways to help the group move forward. She works so that the participants are aware that they are in charge, that it is **their** business that is being conducted, and that each person has a role to play.
- The facilitator's responsibility is to **the group** and its work rather than to the individuals within the group. Therefore, a person with a high stake in the issues being discussed will have a more difficult task being a good facilitator.

### Points to Consider in Facilitating a Meeting:

1. Follow suggestions in "Planning the Agenda" listed in handout 'Planning and Preparation of Meetings'.
2. Start the meeting on a positive note of confidence and energy, e.g. a sharing of experiences.
3. **Agenda Review:** Go through whole agenda. Explain what is to be covered and how, and the rationale for each item
  - 3.1 Invite questions and comments.
  - 3.2 Remember that your responsibility as a facilitator is to the whole group, not to individuals.
  - 3.3 If suggestions for changes are made, make sure that all agree to the changes. If major changes are suggested, make sure that the group understands that this can result in possible elimination or postponement of other items due to time constraints. If some participants do not want to deal with a suggested item at that time, consider that there is no consensus and that it cannot be included.
  - 3.4 When the agenda has been amended, ask the participants if they are willing to accept it. Insist on a response.

#### 4. **During the meeting:**

- 4.1 Arrange (before the meeting if possible) to have someone different present each item on the agenda.
- 4.2 Encourage the expression of various viewpoints.
- 4.3 Expect differences of opinion - if handled well, they can contribute to creative solutions.
- 4.4 Be suspicious of agreements reached too easily - test to make sure there really is agreement on essential points.
- 4.5 Don't let a discussion continue between 2 people; seek comments from others.
- 4.6 As much as possible, hold people to speaking for themselves **only** and to being specific when they refer to others (e.g. discourage "some people say", "we all know")
- 4.7 Keep looking for minor points of agreement and state them.
- 4.8 Encourage participants to look for fresh solutions and state them; it helps morale.
- 4.9 in tense situations or when solutions are hard to reach, remember that humour, affirmation, small buzz groups, change of place, etc., may help.
- 4.10 When you test for consensus, state in question form everything you think the participants agree on and be specific. Insist on a response
- 4.11 If you find you are drawn into the discussion in support of one particular position, suggest that someone else take over the facilitation until that item is decided.
- 4.12 Remember that any meeting will benefit from quick breaks in the proceedings

#### **Closing the Meeting:**

##### 5. **Evaluation:**

- 5.1 In small meetings (up to 50 participants), it is often a good idea to evaluate the meeting to see how the process, not the content, was perceived by the participants.

##### 6. **Closing:**

- 6.1 Try to end the meeting on a positive note with a sense of gathering: A song, some silence, standing in a circle, shaking hands.

#### **Techniques to Consider:**

1. **Process Observer:** With the consent of the group, ask a participant to observe how the group is working together and to note her observations. While functioning as a process observer, the participant should not get involved in the task of the group. She should also be careful to note the

strengths of the group - helpful suggestions, or procedures that moved the group forward. In giving feedback to the group, she should try to be specific and factual so that people do not become defensive. The specific things to watch for might be:

- 1.1 The general atmosphere: relaxed, tense
- 1.2 How were the decisions made?
- 1.3 If there was conflict, how was it handled?
- 1.4 Did everyone participate? Were there procedures which encouraged participation?
- 1.5 How well did the group members listen to one another?
- 1.6 Were there recognized leaders in the group?
- 1.7 How did the group interact with the facilitator?

2. **Use a Co-facilitator:**

- 2.1 More information and ideas will be available during the planning.
- 2.2 More energy is available to the group - especially during times of conflict or when handling complicated matters.
- 2.3 If a facilitator becomes personally involved in the discussion, it is easy to hand the job over to the co-facilitator for that period of time.
- 2.4 Co-facilitation is a way for more people to gain experience and become skilled facilitators.
- 2.5 It is less exhausting and demanding.