



## Setting the Stage

### Objectives:

- ✓ Utilize facilitation skills in getting everyone to participate, creating a positive, supportive environment and encouraging open communication among all members of the Advisory Council.
- ✓ Gain knowledge and skills necessary for being an effective group member.
- ✓ Design a meeting environment using appropriate room arrangements, creating a welcoming atmosphere, and providing for physical needs and comfort.

### Advance Preparation:

- ✓ Review lesson plan.
- ✓ Duplicate handouts and worksheets for each participant.
- ✓ Review Power Point slides and slide notes for presentation.
- ✓ Prepare Overhead Transparencies if not using Power Point program.

### Materials Needed:

- ✓ Handouts duplicated for each participant:
  - ["Room Arrangement"](#)
  - ["Room Arrangement Case Studies"](#)
  - ["Participant BINGO"](#)
- ✓ Overhead Projector or LCD Projector and Computer
- ✓ [PowerPoint: "Skilled Group Leader" slides 1-17](#) and notes pages
- ✓ Screen
- ✓ Flip chart pad and easel and for each group of 4-6 participants
- ✓ Markers for each group of 4-6 participants

### Time Needed:

- ✓ Preparation: 1 hour
- ✓ Presentation: 1 hour

## BACKGROUND

Generating ideas and identifying needs of a community is the first step in providing direction for the development of relevant programs in a local community. Most groups are able to produce lists of program possibilities that go far beyond what a local staff is able to address. Priorities must be set and decisions must be made in a manner that encourages ideas and opinions from all group members and results in program direction that represents the best decision for the citizens of the county.

For a group to move through the decision making process, members must be skilled in facilitating discussion, generating ideas and setting priorities.

For additional background information review the handouts, slide notes, lesson plan and instructor's comments integrated into the lesson.

## INTEREST APPROACH

- Ask participants to think about the BEST meeting they ever attended. Have them picture in their mind the meeting room arrangements, the atmosphere in the meeting, the total meeting process.
- "What was that meeting like?" *List the characteristics of that meeting on the flip chart as participants call them out.*
- Tell participants that good meetings aren't an accident. They are the result of careful planning and an understanding of how to create the positive, supportive environment that encourages participation from every participant.
- Explain the purpose of this session and that in the next hour you will be covering the role of a facilitator/group leader, what makes him or her effective, how facilitators/leaders manage content **and** structure, and how you can set the stage for an effective meeting through room arrangements, controlling the meeting room environment and establishing a good beginning.

## LESSON

- Use the PowerPoint "Skilled Group Leader" slides 1-17 and the corresponding notes pages to guide the presentation.

### I. WHAT IS A FACILITATOR?

**Instructor's Comments:** *Facilitators provide the framework*

*that allows the collective wisdom of the group to emerge. In advisory councils, this role is usually assumed by the leader - a chair or president.*

**SLIDE #1** - Title Slide

**SLIDE #2** - Read definition

**SLIDE #3** - Key Words Highlighted in Red -  
Discuss key words and phrases in the definition.  
(See slide notes.)

## II. WHAT MAKES A FACILITATOR EFFECTIVE?

**Instructor's Comments:** *Facilitators are flexible, have a sense of humor, tolerate ambiguity, utilize active listening skills, and are creative and intuitive.*

**SLIDE #4 - Characteristics of an Effective Facilitator/Group Leader** (Instructor discusses each bullet. See slide notes.)

**SLIDE #5 - Characteristics of an Effective Facilitator/Group Leader (continued)** (See slide notes.)

## III. MANAGING STRUCTURE VS. CONTENT - MAJOR TASKS OF FACILITATORS/GROUP LEADERS

**Instructor's Comments:** *As leaders on the County Advisory Council, the role of facilitator will often fall to you. Your task is to manage the structure, ask questions, design activities and respond neutrally you elicit contributions from all members. The content, what happens as a result of the structure, is the responsibility of the participants.*

**SLIDE #6 - Structure describes "how" the process works.** (See slide notes.)

**SLIDE #7 - Content describes "what" is shared.** (See slide notes.)

## IV. SETTING THE STAGE

**Instructor's Comments:** *The physical environment plays a major role in determining the success of the meeting. Poor environments create distractions and prevent the members from focusing on the tasks at hand. Busy, often hectic, lifestyles make it difficult for many participants to arrive at meetings ready to get to work. The meeting environment itself should not add to the problem. Rather, it should be designed*

*to create a pleasant atmosphere which encourages creativity and enhances the work of the group leader.*

### **Group Discussion**

**Discussion Question:** Think about a room that is inviting and pleasant. How would you describe that room? What are the good points about this room? What are the negative?

*(Participants will share some of the following examples of "good points." Negative will be the opposite. Add items if not mentioned by group.)*

- Bright, well lighted
- Comfortable temperature
- Chairs that are comfortable
- Interesting pictures on wall
- No noise from heating/cooling system, street, rooms next door or light fixtures
- Lights with dimmers
- Clean
- Tables to write on
- Windows/natural light
- Good acoustics

**Instructor's Comments:** *Creating an environment like this doesn't have to be expensive. However, it does take a conscious effort.*

**SLIDE #8** And Instructor's Comments - **3 Elements in "Setting the Stage"** (See slide notes.)

#### **A. ELEMENT # 1: ROOM ARRANGEMENT**

**Instructor's Comments:** *The physical arrangements of the meeting area play a major role in communicating that active participation is encouraged and expected. Room arrangement "determines" the ease of interaction between the leader and group members, and allows group members to interact with each other and the leader.*

**SLIDE #9 - Room Arrangements** (See slide notes.)

**Handout - Distribute Handout: "ROOM ARRANGEMENTS"**

**SLIDES #10 - #15 - Diagram For Each Style On Handout** (See slide notes for each slide to describe the specific room arrangement.)

**Group Activity - Distribute "ROOM ARRANGEMENTS CASE STUDIES"**

Divide audience into small groups of 4-6 persons. Assign each group one situation from the handout. Give each group a sheet of flip chart paper and markers. Ask them to discuss major meeting room needs for their assigned situation and draw the current meeting room with the best arrangement for the meeting described. Each group shares their diagram and the reasons for the arrangement.

## **B. ELEMENT # 2: MEETING ROOM ENVIRONMENT**

**SLIDE #16 - Meeting Room Environment** (See slide notes for each element.)

## **C. ELEMENT # 3: GOOD BEGINNINGS**

**Instructor's Comments:** *As groups come together, there is uncertainty and tension. Participants rarely know everyone else in the group. They may doubt their own ability to fully participate, feel inhibited by their lack of experience and/or the reputation of others, and lack a clear understanding of their role in the group. The following tools and activities help to reduce the tension, increase the comfort level and create a level field for all participants.*

**SLIDE #17 - Tools and Elements of Good Beginnings** (See slide notes.)

**Instructor's Comments -** *There are many creative ways to provide for participant introductions. Below are several ideas that are easy to use and achieve the purpose:*

**Self-Introduced:** *Each individual introduces themselves to the group. Ask participants to include information beyond their name.*

*Example: Where they are from, their job, family information, who they represent in this group, etc.*

**Participants Introduce Someone Else in Group:** *Ask participants to pair up with someone else and spend 3 - 5 minutes getting to know the other person. Ask them to introduce each other to the group.*

**Games or Activities:** *Such activities as "Find someone who..." or "Participant Bingo" can be developed where phrases or boxes describe a characteristic. Participants circulate around the room and have others sign their names by the description that fits them, thus meeting other participants. The group leader may ask each participant to state their name and a characteristic that*

*fits them. Or the group leader may read a phrase and ask them who it fits.*

### **Group Activity - Distribute Handout: "PARTICIPANT BINGO"**

Ask participants to circulate and have other participants sign their name in a square the represents a skill or characteristic they have. After 10-12 minutes ask participants to introduce someone who has signed each box. Make sure each participant is introduced.

**Instructor's Comments** - *Introductions are very important in getting groups off to a good start. As new members are added, introduce them to the group and encourage participants to get to know that person during breaks.*

## **APPLICATION**

- The next time you are leading a group discussion practice the characteristics of an effective facilitator: introduce everyone, listen closely, ask quiet participants for their ideas, use questions to clarify and draw out ideas.
- Volunteer to be a recorder for a group and use the tips on writing on flip charts to gain practice and develop skills.
- Observe the body-language of group members and leaders. Is the message they are communicating intentional or unintentional? Is it supportive of a positive group environment?
- For the next council meeting, assign a group to work with the agent and chair in arranging the meeting room to support the meeting activities.
- Assign a group to develop a "get acquainted activity" for a council meeting.

## **REFERENCES**

Hackett, Donald and Martin, Charles L. Facilitation Skills for Team Leaders. Menlo Park, CA: Crisp Publications, Inc., 1993.

Kaner, Sam. Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making. Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers, 1996.

Butler, Ava S. The Trainer's Guide to Running Effective Team Meetings. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1996.

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