



COMMUNITY TOOL BOX

Section 4. Techniques for Leading Group Discussions

(<http://ctb.ku.edu>)

What is an effective group discussion?

___An effective group discussion is one in which the group is able to accomplish its purpose or to establish a basis either for ongoing discussion or for further contact and collaboration among its members.

You understand the elements of an effective group discussion:

___All members of the group have a chance to speak, expressing their own ideas and feelings freely, and to pursue and finish out their thoughts

___All members of the group can hear others' ideas and feelings stated openly

___Group members can safely test out ideas that are not yet fully formed

___Group members can receive and respond to respectful but honest and constructive feedback

___A variety of points of view are put forward and discussed

___The discussion is not dominated by any one person

___Arguments, while they may be spirited, are based on the content of ideas and opinions, not on personalities

___Even in disagreement, there's an understanding that the group is working together to resolve a dispute, solve a problem, create a plan, make a decision, find a precept or set of precepts all can agree on, or come to a conclusion

You understand the possible uses for a group discussion:

- ___ Create a new situation – form a coalition, start an initiative, etc.
- ___ Explore cooperative or collaborative arrangements among groups or organizations
- ___ Discuss and/or analyze an issue
- ___ Create a strategic plan – for an initiative, an advocacy campaign, an intervention, etc.
- ___ Discuss policy and policy change
- ___ Air concerns and differences among individuals or groups
- ___ Hold public hearings on proposed laws or regulations, development, etc.
- ___ Decide on an action
- ___ Provide mutual support
- ___ Solve a problem
- ___ Resolve a conflict
- ___ Plan the work or an event

Why would you lead a group discussion?

- ___ A group discussion gives everyone involved a voice
- ___ A group discussion allows for a variety of ideas to be expressed and discussed
- ___ Group discussion is generally a democratic, egalitarian process
- ___ A group discussion leads to group ownership of whatever conclusions, plans, or action the group decides upon
- ___ An effective group discussion encourages those who might normally be reluctant to speak their minds
- ___ Group discussions can often open communication channels among people who might not communicate in any other way
- ___ In some cases, a group discussion is simply the obvious, or even the only, way to proceed

You might lead a group discussion because:

- ___ It's part of your job
- ___ You've been asked to
- ___ A discussion is necessary, and you have the skills to lead it
- ___ It was your idea in the first place

Some people who might find themselves leading a group discussion:

- ___ Directors of organizations
- ___ Public officials
- ___ Coalition coordinators
- ___ Professionals with group-leading skills
- ___ Teachers
- ___ Health professionals and health educators
- ___ Respected community members
- ___ Community activists

When might you lead a group discussion?

- ___ At the start of something new
- ___ When an issue can no longer be ignored
- ___ When groups need to be brought together
- ___ When an existing group is considering its next step or seeking to address an issue of importance to it

How do you lead a group discussion?

- ___ Choose the space
- ___ Provide food and drink

___ Bring materials to help the discussion along

___ Become familiar with the purpose and content of the discussion

___ Make sure everyone gets any necessary information, readings, or other material in plenty of time to study it well beforehand

General guidelines:

___ Think about leadership style

___ Put people at ease

___ Help the group develop ground rules

___ Generate an agenda or goals for the discussion

___ Lead the discussion

- Set the topic
- Foster the open process
- Involve all participants
- Ask questions or provide information to move the discussion
- Summarize and/or clarify important points and conclusions
- Wrap up the session

___ Follow up if necessary.

Do's for discussion leaders:

___ Model the behavior and attitudes you want group members to employ

___ Use encouraging body language and tone of voice, as well as words

___ Give positive feedback for joining the discussion

___ Be aware of people's reactions and feelings, and try to respond appropriately

___ Ask open-ended questions

- ___ Control your own biases
- ___ Encourage disagreement, and help the group use it creatively
- ___ Be a recorder if necessary
- ___ Keep your mouth shut as much as possible

Don'ts for discussion leaders:

- ___ Don't let one or a small group of individuals dominate the discussion
- ___ Don't let one point of view override others
- ___ Don't assume that anyone holds particular opinions or positions because of his culture, background, race, personal style, etc.
- ___ By the same token, don't assume that someone from a particular culture, race, or background speaks for everyone else from that situation
- ___ Don't be the font of all wisdom

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