

## ***Gathering Experience for a Fellowship Discussion***

We can use input and experience from local members to either decide on a topic to discuss during a workshop, or to decide what aspects of a specific issue are most important. Gathering input **before** a discussion session can help you to create a clear, focused workshop that addresses the key points of an issue. It can also help to ensure that your members are discussing something that is important to them and the local fellowship.

### **Deciding on a Topic**

If your discussion is on a group level (or something of a similar size) it might be possible to start out your session by deciding on what you want to discuss. If the workshop is any larger it is usually best to decide on a topic in advance.

Usually one or two simple questions are best. Try to include a positive question as well as a negative one to create a balance. A good example is: "What is working well in our group/area/local service efforts?" and "What is not working well in our group/area/local service efforts?" It is important to balance any issues we are experiencing with an understanding of the things we are doing well. We can use these strengths to build solutions.

### **Getting More Information**

If you have already decided on a topic for your workshop then it can be helpful to gather experience and ideas to help shape the session. Again if you have a small group you might try this at the beginning of the session, but it can be a great help to gather input before the workshop in order to use the time you have on the day to get closer to a solution or a decision.

A few simple questions are usually the best idea. For example if we are talking about our public image then we could ask: "In what ways do we create a positive public image in our local community?" and "In what ways have we created a poor impression of NA in our local community?" If there are specific issues then use the questions to get details on these.

### **Ways to Gather Input**

Here are some simple ways to gather input prior to a discussion session.

1. Existing sources – group records, RCM reports, inventory material etc.
2. Printed or emailed flyers or surveys distributed to members and groups
3. Separate input sessions before the main workshop
4. Online surveys or discussion boards

### **Prioritizing**

Having gathered the input you will need to prioritize the ideas or topics so we can discuss the most important ones.

You can use the number of times something is mentioned during the input gathering process to prioritize it before the session. If you decide to prioritize during the workshop try writing them out on a large piece of paper and have everyone put a mark next to their choices, or vote with a show of hands.

Ideas or topics that are not as highly rated can be saved for future discussions.

# An Introduction to Facilitation Skills and Techniques

Facilitate: to make easier; to help bring about

## KEY SKILLS

Some simple skills can help us to improve as facilitators. The most basic skill is to understand your role - listening is a key action for a good facilitator. Your job is to encourage discussion while remaining focused on the issue and staying on time. Try to remain objective and guide the group towards consensus. Remember there is no substitute for preparation – be sure you know your topic and what you are hoping to achieve.

What we do physically can be a strong positive influence on a session. Some simple ideas are:

- Smile, show enthusiasm
- Make eye contact, even in a large group
- Try to vary your tone of voice and avoid sounding too 'dull'
- Speak from the heart – let your passion and enthusiasm show
- Be who you are – let your own style come through
- Use open hand gestures – no crossed arms
- Use your feet – walk out into the group and move around the room where possible
- Don't talk with your back to the group

## KEY TECHNIQUES

### **Questioning**

- Make sure everyone has a chance to participate
- Remember that some participants are shy so encourage them to share without making them uncomfortable
- Try to get to the root cause of an issue
- Ask for more details on shared ideas – try to gain clarity
- Explore what we learn from positive or negative experiences

### **Organizing**

- Group common thoughts and ideas together
- Avoid repetition, but don't lose the details
- Combine ideas to build solutions
- Don't lose good ideas that are off topic – use the "parking lot"

### **Connecting**

- Focus on the positive aspects of what can be accomplished
- Rephrase ideas so they relate to the issue we are discussing
- Encourage participants to use the ideas shared to find solutions or to reach goals
- Stress how important it is to involve ourselves in these discussions and how we are a part of the solution today

### **Key questions:**

- What have we tried in this area that works?
- What would happen next?
- Is that what you mean?

### **Key questions:**

- Are these ideas similar?
- What would happen if we tried these ideas together?
- Can anyone add anything to these ideas?

### **Key questions:**

- How can we use that idea to help with our issue?
- What can we do today that will make a difference?
- Can we see some solutions or next steps emerging from our ideas?