

PN-XCL-707



**ACCORD  
HANDBOOK  
IN  
COLLABORATIVE  
DECISION  
MAKING**



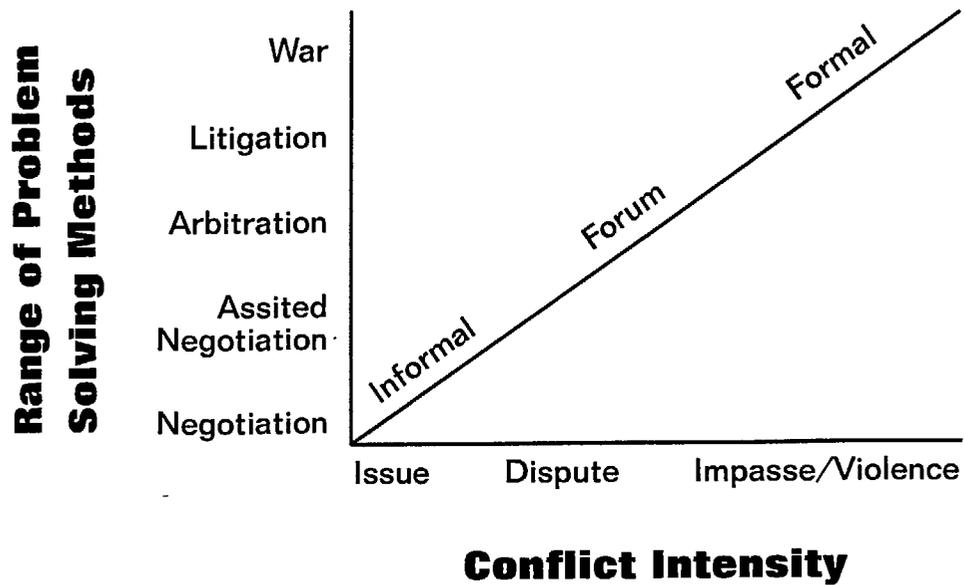
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Acknowledgement: This handbook draws extensively on the work of Mediation Network, A Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution.

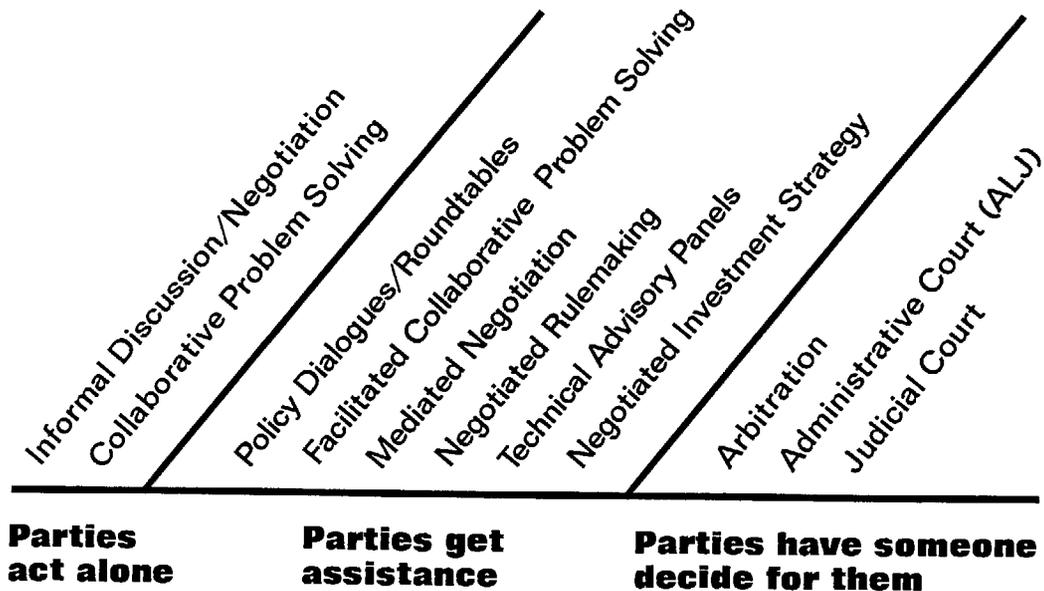


## CONFLICT INTENSITY AND RESOLUTION METHODS





## A SPECTRUM OF POSSIBLE SOLVING PROCESSES





## **PURPOSES OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESSES**

### **CATEGORISATION BASED ON PURPOSE AND OUTCOME**

<b>PURPOSE</b>	<b>POSSIBLE OUTCOMES</b>
Information exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improved communication and understanding</li><li>• Lists of concerns and/or options;</li><li>• Better definition of problems or issues</li></ul>
Feedback/Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Opinions or suggestions for action</li><li>• Plans developed and refined</li></ul>
Agreement-seeking or Decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Agreements on actions or policies are reached</li><li>• Consensus is developed</li></ul>



## **FIVE ATTRIBUTES OF COLLABORATIVE DECISION MAKING**

1. Participants represent stakeholder groups or key interests, not simply themselves
2. All necessary interests are represented or at least supportive of the discussions
3. Participants share responsibility for setting the ground rules for the process and for creating an outcome acceptable to all parties
4. An impartial facilitator, accountable to all participants, manages the process and maintains a safe atmosphere for communication
5. The intent is to make decisions through consensus rather than by voting



## **A CONSENSUS PROCESS IS MORE LIKELY TO BE APPROPRIATE WHERE**

- Limited number of interests will be significantly affected – roughly 20 – 25
- Appropriate individuals/entities exist who can represent those interests and are willing to participate
- Situation involves diverse, complex issues
- Issues are known, mature, ripe for decision
- No party will have to compromise a fundamental value to reach agreement
- Outcome is in doubt: there is countervailing power
- Parties view it as in their interest to negotiate
- Agency is willing to rely on the process, provide resources, and participate in it
- There is not good ongoing communication between the parties
- There is a deadline or some need to reach a timely agreement



## **SUCCESS FACTORS FOR COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES**

- **CLEAR FOCUS**

Often a specific problem motivates the initiation of a process, but this problem may simply be a symptom of a larger set of issues. Clearly defining what issues the process will address and keeping these in focus is crucial to making progress in a collaborative process.

- **COMMITTED PARTICIPANTS**

The effort is not likely to succeed unless participants have a strong commitment. The deliberations must take place in a safe forum where perspectives and options can be presented and exchanged. Commitment builds as participants gain trust in one another as individuals and in their ability as a group to solve problems. Discovering that shared values exist builds trust. Proceeding by consensus – rather than making decisions by majority vote – enhances commitment.

- **LEADERSHIP CAPACITY**

The group must have members with competence, drive, credibility with their constituency and charisma. Because collaborative solutions require broad, systems-based thinking, participants should be willing to take an interest-based approach, rather than refusing to budge from their positions.

- **SOUND STRUCTURE AND PROCESS**

Several factors are important: broad representation; joint agreement on ground rules, including how consensus will work; and an impartial facilitator to ensure a productive atmosphere.

- **LINKS TO EXTERNAL CONSTITUENCIES**

The participants representing groups must not only have credibility within their group, but if the results of the process will need to be adopted by a governmental body, links must also be established with that body. The process should be designed to inform constituencies about what is happening and to maintain linkages with decision makers so that they stay informed as the process proceeds.



## **ASSESSMENT OF WHETHER TO USE A CONSENSUS PROCESS OR NOT**

### **IF THE FOLLOWING FACTORS ARE PRESENT, AN AGENCY CAN PROCEED TOWARD USING A FACILITATED PROCESS:**

- The issues are of high priority and a decision is needed
- The issues are identifiable and negotiable. The issues have been sufficiently developed so that parties are reasonably informed and willing to negotiate
- The outcome is genuinely in doubt. Conflicting interests make development of enforcement of the proposed policy difficult, if not impossible, without stakeholder involvement
- There is enough time and resources. Time is needed for building consensus among conflicting interests, and resources are necessary to support the process
- The political climate is favourable. Because these kinds of negotiations occur in the political context, leadership support and issues of timing, e.g. elections, are critical to determining whether to go forward
- Legislative leadership supports using the process
- The interests are identifiable. It will be impossible to find representatives for affected interests



## **SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK IN CONVENING A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS**

- What issues ought to be addressed in this situation? Priority issues for you?
- Who are the other significant parties who care about this situation?
- What are each party's basic interests? Are they mutually exclusive?
- What parties have good reason to negotiate? What parties might not want to? Why?
- What is a realistic objective for the outcome of any negotiation? Is 'closure' possible?
- What questions do you have about other parties' interests?
- What legal, resource, or other barriers to successful negotiation do you see?
- If you could not reach agreement, what would you do? What would others do?
- Who would implement any agreement that is reached?
- In your view, should these issues be negotiated?
- If negotiations were arranged; would you participate? Who else would need to be there?
- If you don't think negotiation should proceed, why not?



## **STAKEHOLDERS**

- Parties who directly implement the policy or rule
- Co-regulators
- Parties necessary to implement certain provisions of the policy
- Persons who are potentially affected by the outcome – positively or negatively
- Parties who can block implementation of the policy



## **HOW PARTIES SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN CONSENSUS PROCESSES**

- Identify their respective interests – i.e., what they *need* to get from the process
- Provide coherent representation
- Provide information and data
- Articulate issues, problems
- Be ready to suggest solutions
- Be flexible
  - Listen carefully to proposals from other parties
  - Don't reject proposals out-of-hand – ask "Can they be adapted to meet our interests?"
- Check with constituencies often
- Keep promises



## **THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF AN AGENCY IN A NEGOTIATION**

### **ADMINISTRATIVE**

- Provides resources, meeting facilities, etc.
- Hires neutral – convenor, facilitator, Mediator

### **STAFF**

- Provides information, data, analysis
- Analyse committee proposals

### **PARTY IN INTEREST**



## **HOW AN AGENCY SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN CONSENSUS PROCESSES**

- Leader
  - ◆ Full Participant in give-and-take
  - ◆ Don't expect ratification
  - ◆ Don't be a wimp
  - ◆ Deliver on promises
- Encourage others to develop ideas
- Represent whatever interest/views/positions it would in normal rulemaking or other decisional process
- Does not delegate decision-making to private organisations – no decisions will be made without the agency's concurrence



## **ETHICAL ISSUES FOR SPONSORS**

### **SPONSOR'S ROLE AS A CONVENOR**

- Whether an agency should convene a process:
  - ◆ When it is not clear and open about its purposes: seeking agreement, seeking advice, getting input or information, or chilling out a dispute.
  - ◆ or when,
    - Not all key parties are available, willing, or interested in participating
    - Not all key parties are informed or can be effectively represented, or
    - Parties feel compelled or coerced to participate
  - ◆ When staff is committed to a collaborative approach, but leadership is unaware of the process or noncommittal, or vice versa.
  - ◆ when there has been a negative assessment.

### **SPONSOR'S ROLE IN FACILITATOR/MEDIATOR SELECTION**

- Can an agency select a facilitator/mediator without involving the other parties in the selection?
- Can an agency staff person serve as an impartial facilitator/mediator and be impartial and accountable to all parties?
- Can an agency contract with an outsider facilitator/mediator and not treat them as accountable solely to the agency?

### **SPONSOR'S ROLE IN IMPLEMENTATION**

- Whether an agency will follow through on its commitment to the agreement and its implementation?



## **BEST PRACTICES FOR GOVERNMENT AGENCIES:**

### **GUIDELINES FOR USING COLLABORATIVE AGREEMENT- SEEKING PROCESSES – AN ABSTRACT**

These guidelines for best practice are proposed by the Society of Professional in Dispute Resolution for government-sponsored collaborative approaches that seek agreement in issues of public policy. The processes these guidelines address have the following attributes:

- ◆ participants represent stakeholder groups or interests, and not simply themselves,
- ◆ all necessary interests are represented or at least supportive of the discussions,
- ◆ participants share responsibility for both process and outcome
- ◆ an impartial facilitator, accountable to all participants, manages the process, and
- ◆ the intent is to make decisions through consensus rather than by voting.

These recommendations are directed primarily towards federal, state, provincial and territorial government officials to help ensure successful use of collaborative processes for decision-making. They may also be useful to local government, although consideration must be given to how stakeholder-based processes may affect more inclusive citizen participation strategies.

As the use of collaborative approaches for resolving public issues has expanded, so has the terminology for naming and describing them. As a first step in sorting out the terminology, the Committee distinguished agreement-seeking processes from two other primary purposes for discussions between government agencies and the public – information exchange and advice. Given these objectives, the following chart highlights the differences in outcomes that can be expected:



PURPOSE	POSSIBLE OUTCOMES
Information exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improved communication and understanding</li><li>• Lists of concerns and/or options;</li><li>• Better definition of problems or issues</li></ul>
Feedback/Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Opinions or suggestions for action are obtained</li><li>• Plans or drafts are refined</li></ul>
Agreement-seeking or Decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Agreements on actions or policies are reached</li><li>• Consensus is developed</li></ul>

Only processes in the third category are the subject of this report, but even labels for them abound. Some derive from labor/management bargaining. Others combine words that describe some attribute of collaborative consensus-based public policy processes. The list below gives a sense of the hybrids that may be found.

cooperative decision making	collaborative decision making
collaborative agreement-seeking processes	environmental conflict resolution
collaborative consensus-based forums	consensus-building
consensus-based processes	joint decision-making
shared decision-making	environmental mediation
negotiated processes	multi-party negotiations
mediated negotiation	mediated approaches
mediated agreement-seeking processes	public policy mediation
policy dialogue	joint problem solving
facilitated consensus forum	facilitated joint decision making
collaborative agreement-seeking processes	facilitated negotiations
negotiated rulemaking	regulatory negotiation



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BEST PRACTICE

The recommendations that follow are directed towards overcoming the concerns and problems that have been identified. They propose a set of best practices for use of collaborative decision-making processes.

- **Recommendation 1: An Agency Should First Consider Whether a Collaborative Agreement-Seeking Approach Is Appropriate**

Before a government agency, department, or official decides to sponsor an agreement seeking process, it should consider its objectives and the suitability of the issues and circumstances for negotiation. In particular, before the sponsoring agency convenes a collaborative process, it is essential for the agency to determine internally its willingness to share control over the process and the resolution of the issue.

- **Recommendation 2: Stakeholders Should Be Supportive of the Process and Willing and Able to Participate**

In order for an agreement-seeking process to be credible and legitimate, representatives of all necessary parties—those involved with or affected by the potential outcomes of the process—should agree to participate, or at least not object to the process going forward. If some interests are not sufficiently organized or lack resources and these problems cannot be overcome, the issue should not be addressed through collaborative decision-making.

- **Recommendation 3: Agency Leaders Should Support the Process and Ensure Sufficient Resources to Convene the Process**

Agreement-seeking processes need endorsement and tangible support from actual decision-makers in the sponsoring agency or department with jurisdiction and, in some cases, from the administration or the legislature. The support and often the involvement of leadership is necessary to assure other participants of the commitment of authorized decision makers who will be responsible for implementation. Their support helps to sustain the process through difficult periods and enhances the probability of reaching agreements.

Sponsoring agencies also need to ensure that there are sufficient resources to support the process from its initiation through the development of an agreement. As part of the pre-negotiation assessment, sponsors need to determine how they will meet evolving resource needs and provide funds and staff to accomplish the goals of the negotiation.



- **Recommendation 4: An Assessment Should Precede a Collaborative Agreement-Seeking Process**

Before an agency, department, or official initiates an agreement-seeking process, it should assess whether the necessary conditions are present for negotiations to take place. Presence of the factors in recommendations 1 – 3 are best ascertained as part of a deliberate assessment.

- **Recommendation 5: Ground Rules Should Be Mutually Agreed Upon by All Participants, and Not Established Solely by the Sponsoring Agency**

All participants should be involved in developing and agreeing to any protocols or ground rules for the process. Once ground rules have been mutually agreed upon, the facilitator should see that they are carried out, or point out when they are not being followed and seek to remedy the problems. Any modification to ground rules should be agreed upon by all participants.

- **Recommendation 6: The Sponsoring Agency Should Ensure the Facilitator's Neutrality and Accountability to all Participants**

It is preferable for all parties to share in selection of the facilitator. When that is not possible, the agency or department has a responsibility to ensure that any facilitator it proposes to the participants is impartial and acceptable to all parties. The facilitator should not be asked by the sponsoring agency, or any other participant, to serve as their agent, or to act in any manner inconsistent with being accountable to all participants.

- **Recommendation 7: The Agency and Participants Should Plan for Implementation of the Agreement from the Beginning of the Process**

There are two aspects of implementation: formal enactment and actual implementation. Planning for implementation is integral to the process.

- **Recommendation 8: Policies Governing These Processes Should Not Be Overly Prescriptive**

Policy makers should resist enacting overly prescriptive laws or rules to govern these processes. In contrast to traditional processes, consensus-based processes are effective because of their voluntary, informal and flexible nature.



## **GUIDELINES THAT GOVERN FACILITATORS/MEDIATORS AS THEY CONDUCT AGREEMENT SEEKING PROCESSES**

DO'S	DO NOT'S
They should serve as advocates for the principles that underlie collaborative decision-making processes, including structuring and managing the process to ensure representation and effective participation by all key stakeholders, whatever their cultural, racial, religious or economic backgrounds	They should not participate in any process that is misrepresented as to its purpose or that is intended to circumvent legal requirements
They should protect the confidentiality of private communications with any of the participants	They should not be advocates for any participant's point of view on any substantive issue
They should gain the agreement of all participants to the ground rules for the process and to any subsequent modification to them. Once ground rules have been mutually agreed upon, they should enforce them impartially	They should not be inhibited by any attempt of the sponsoring or funding agency to control the process through them. Such as inhibiting their ability to communicate or manage communications with other participants. As a last resort, if the matter cannot be resolved satisfactorily, they should withdraw from the process
They should address situations where it happens that any participant is not acting in good faith	They should not be engaged to carry out other kinds of non-neutral activities for the sponsoring agency at the same time they are under contract to facilitate an agreement-seeking process. They should disclose when they have continuing or frequent contractual relationships with one or more of the participants
They should advise the parties when, in their opinion, the process no longer appears to be meeting its objectives	
They should withdraw from the process if their continuing involvement is not acceptable to the group	



## **FACILITATOR ETHICS**

- **IMPARTIALITY**

The neutral must maintain impartiality toward all parties. Impartiality means freedom from favoritism or bias either by word or by action, and a commitment to serve all parties as opposed to a single party.

- **INFORMED CONSENT**

The neutral has an obligation to assure that all parties understand the nature of the process, the procedures, the particular role of the neutral, and the parties' relationship to the neutral.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Maintaining confidentiality is critical to the dispute resolution process. Confidentiality encourages candor, a full exploration of the issues, and a neutral's acceptability. There may be some types of cases, however, in which confidentiality is not protected. In such cases, the neutral must advise the parties, when appropriate in the dispute resolution process, that the confidentiality of the proceedings cannot necessarily be maintained. Except in any information in confidence within the process also must be honored.

- **PROMPTNESS**

The neutral shall exert every reasonable effort to expedite the process.

- **THE SETTLEMENT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES**

The dispute resolution process belongs to the parties. The neutral has no vested interest in the terms of settlement, but must be satisfied that agreements in which he or she has participated will not impugn the integrity of the process. The neutral has a responsibility to see that the parties consider the terms of a settlement. If the neutral is concerned about the possible consequences of a proposed agreement, and the needs of the parties dictate, the neutral may find it advisable to educate the parties, to refer one or more parties for specialized advice, or to withdraw from the case. In no case, however, shall the neutral violate section 3, Confidentiality, of these standards.



## **ORGANISATIONAL MEETING(S)**

- Finalise agreement on scope of negotiation
- Specify membership
- Clarify roles of member, agency, facilitator
- Reach agreement on ground rules/protocols, schedule
- Develop a list of issues to start on
- Develop a working definition of consensus (or other decisional standard)



## THE 'WEDGE' OF INTERESTS

TECHNICAL ADVISORS	Committee Member may ask to explain a point
REPRESENTATIVE/COMMITTEE MEMBER	Has full right of the floor
DECISION BY CONSENSUS	Each Committee Member has a veto
CAUCUS OF ALLIED INTERESTS	
FACILITATOR	Leads Discussion
CONSTITUENTS IN AUDIENCE	May speak only with agreement of the Committee
CONSTITUENTS WHO ARE NOT PRESENT	Keep in touch



## **KINDS OF MEETINGS IN NEGOTIATIONS**

- Plenary sessions
- Caucuses
- Consultations with facilitators
- Task groups/Subcommittees/Workgroups



## **PURPOSES OF GROUND RULES/PROTOCOL**

- Replacement for Robert's Rules
- Description scope of negotiation
- Define operating procedures, decision-making process, and consensus
- Define roles and relationships
- Define behavioural rules
- Test parties' capacity to reach an agreement
- Set a productive tone by demonstrating parties' ability to agree



## **SOME ISSUES GROUND RULES/PROTOCOLS MAY ADDRESS**

- Objective and end product of the process
- Who can participate
- Who speaks, and when
- How decisions will be made – e.g., consensus or other standard, impasses, caucuses
- Defining acceptable behaviour – e.g., good faith, characterising others' motives
- Roles of representatives vis a vis constituents
- Dealing with the media and/or the public
- Protecting legal rights/agency mandates
- Methods for exchanging and verifying information
- Protecting sensitive or proprietary data
- Role of a facilitator/mediator
- Meeting locations, schedule, recordkeeping



## **GUIDELINES FOR GROUND RULES**

Ground Rules are agreements to procedures that participants in a group will use to improve their ability to work together to solve problems and resolve conflicts.

Procedures provide an essential framework for these informal collaborative processes. When the procedures a group will use are made explicit, they help create an atmosphere of predictability. Clearly stated procedures protect everyone by investing the whole group with the responsibility for making the all participants to adopt and monitor.

The following four areas should be considered when formulating Ground Rules:

- ◆ The statement of the problem or issue.
- ◆ The goals for the proces
- ◆ The proposed process steps
- ◆ Participants roles and guidelines for interaction
- ◆ The method by which decisions will be reached

### **• The Statement of the Problem or Issue**

Defining the issues that will be addressed by the process (and sometimes specifying what issues are not to be addresses) is essential.

### **• The Goals for the Process**

The goals that the group will try to achieve.

### **• The Proposed Process Steps**

The structure, organization, and conduct of the meetings, timetables for the process, and the use of caucuses are a few examples of items that need clear definition.

### **• Participant Roles/Interactions**

From the onset of the process, participants must be clear with each other about such issues as what their expectations are for each other about participation, maintaining confidentiality, communicating with constituencies, and contacting the media. Depending on the sensitivity of the issues and the context, each process will have its own unique set of Ground Rules regarding these kinds of issues.

### **• Decision Method**

It is of particular importance to clarify what the group means by consensus and how they will know when agreement has been reached.

Written ground rules are usually desirable. If the term "ground rules" seems too formal for some gatherings, the group may refer to them as guidelines.



## **CONCERNS ABOUT USE OF COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES**

### **HOW COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES ARE USED BY AGENCIES WHO ARE THE AUTHORIZED DECISION MAKERS:**

- How can regulatory agencies share control over processes and products while retaining their mandates?
- How will the cultures of bureaucratic agencies adjust to consensus decision making?
- When public officials purport to be seeking agreement with stakeholders, but actually only seek advice or input, do they contribute to cynicism about government?

### **PARTICIPATION:**

- Who decides who can participate and how it is decided?
- How the increasing use of collaborative processes affects the ability of some groups to participate, spreading their energy too thin?
- When all interests cannot be identified or represented, should the collaborative process still go forward?
- If agreement is reached, will traditional opportunities for public comment and input be diminished.

### **THE PROPER USE OF MEDIATORS AND FACILITATORS**

- Can an agency staff person serve as an impartial facilitator in the eyes of other participants?
- Can the facilitator be accountable to all parties when under contract with an agency.

### **MAINTAINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES**

- While governments traditionally tend to routinise, prescribe and mandate procedures, collaborative processes are most effective because they are flexible, adaptive and voluntary. How will these two different ways of working combine, maintaining the positive attributes of each?
- Will agencies expect more from collaborative processes than they can deliver?
- Can agencies commit the time and resources it takes to ensure a successful process, particularly as the use of such processes increases.
- Will sufficient attention be given to implementing the agreements reached?



## **NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE [NGT]**

Nominal Group Technique, or NGT, provides a way to generate ideas and to organize those ideas into a prioritized list. It is extremely useful when the time for a meeting is limited but it is important that all the ideas of a group are heard. NGT can be completed in 60 minutes.

### **STEP ONE – MEETING PREPARATIONS**

NGT works best with small groups of 5-9. If your group consists of more people, plan to divide the group in a random way into smaller groups. A facilitator will be needed for each group, so part of your meeting preparation will be recruiting and training enough facilitators for each small group.

The room(s) should be set up that each small group has a place to gather. Because each group will be talking, noise may be a factor to deal with if all the groups are in one room. Therefore, think about the location for the meeting ahead of time. If possible, allow for one large room for the group to gather initially and then break out into smaller separate rooms. Each group facilitator will need: a flip chart, assorted colors of water-based marker, drafting/masking tape, strips of dots and enough pencils and paper for each person in the group.

For NGT to be successful, it is important that the meeting organizers, together with the meeting facilitator, discuss what question the group will be asked to consider. Keeping in mind what the meeting is expected to accomplish, design a question that is simply stated and allows for creativity of ideas but also is specific enough so everyone's thoughts are channelled in the same direction. For example, a poor NGT question would be:

- ◆ "What can you as an individual and we as a community do to ensure funding support for public education both in the long-term and short-term?"

This is a poor question because it is too complex and requires responses to be given such that it would be difficult to determine for which part of the question ideas were given.

A better question would be:

- ◆ "What can be done to ensure funding support for public education?"



## STEP TWO – CONDUCTING THE MEETING

### DESCRIBING THE PURPOSE FOR THE MEETING

Ideally, a chairperson will clarify the purpose of the meeting, the context for the meeting (how this meeting fits into the history of the group and their ongoing work) and the facilitator's role. You should be prepared to describe your role if it is not done by someone else.

You should outline the steps of the NGT. You might say something like this:

- ◆ "Given the session's purpose, we as a group will consider the following question (read the question which has been previously written on a flip chart).
- ◆ "First, everyone will work silently and independently for four minutes. You should take time to jot down all of your responses to the question.
- ◆ "Next, I will go around the circle, calling upon you one at a time so you can give one of your ideas (responses). I will write them down on the wall sheets. I will go around the group several times until I get down most of your ideas.
- ◆ "After I have recorded your ideas, we will revisit each one to make certain that its meaning is clear to everyone in the group.
- ◆ "The final step will be a voting procedure whereby the people in the group will identify what they believe are the best responses to the questions."

Then ask the group,

- ◆ "Do these steps appear to be a reasonable way to generate ideas?"



## BEGINNING THE ACTUAL PROCESS

### FIRST: ASK THE QUESTION

Pass out sheets of paper with the triggering question at the top of the page.  
Tell the group,

- ◆ "For the next four minutes, please work silently and independently. Please write down your ideas. The paper will not be collected."

If anyone does start to talk or to do anything else that is likely to be disruptive to the others in the group, remind them:

- ◆ "This is the time for each of you to do your own work. You will get a chance to talk to the other members of the group in just a moment."

During the time that the group is working silently, tear off masking tape for hanging wall sheets and prepare strips of 'dots' for the voting. You will need one strip of dots for each participant.

### SECOND: COLLECT IDEAS

After the group has finished silently writing, begin the collection of ideas. You might begin by saying something like:

- ◆ "I want to go around the table and collect one idea at a time from each of you. I will call upon each of you more than once, so you will have a chance to contribute at least a few of your ideas."
- ◆ "Listen to what others in the group say, to make certain that you do not give me exactly the same idea. I do not need to write down an idea more once. Another reason to listen is because someone may say something that causes you to remember something that should be contributed and you might not have thought about it had you not listened."
- ◆ "You may pass at any time if you do not have an item to contribute when I call on you. I will call on you again when I come back to you the next time."

As an item is given to you, record it on the flip chart. Write down *exactly* what they say. Do not ask them to say it in a few words (unless it is extremely long). Resist the temptation to say, "Don't you really mean" and then provide your idea. It is very important that the group feel that it is their list, and the most important thing that can be done to assure they believe that the list is theirs is to use their language.



Number each item in consecutive order. Start numbering about (6) inches from the left edge of the page, to allow room for the voting

Alternate the colors of each item. That will enhance the readability of the items.

Speed is the most important factor in getting down the items. Do not belabour your handwriting or worry about your spelling. Get the items down quickly.

You should collect all of their items, if possible. But there us a point of diminishing return if the list gets too long. Experience suggests that a list of 20-30 will include almost all of a group's important items. If it is a very large group, 12 or more, tell them that you are going to go around the group two times. That will encourage them to give you their best items. After two passes, you can ask if there are any more items that have to be on the list. If it is a very, very large group, 25 or more, and you were not able to do the best thing, which would have been to break them up into more than one group, you should not try to go around the group more than once.

### THIRD: CLARIFY IDEAS

Once all of the ideas have been collected, and are written down on sheets in front of the group, the task is to clarify the meaning of the ideas. The way to do this is to read each of them, in order, and ask if the meaning of the item is clear. If it is, if there are no comments about the meaning of the item, move on to the next one. Do that until you work your way through he entire list. You need to be clear with the group that this is not an occasion to argue about the worth of an item. They will have an opportunity in the next stage, with their vote, to indicate which items they believe are most important. There are occasions when it is important for the group to argue about the worth of the items on the list, but only if they have allocated sufficient time to do that. Your job as a facilitator will be to keep the group to the time they have allocated.

One suggestion for how to allocate time is to allow 15 minutes for voting and to divide the remaining time by the number of items. For example, if you have an hour left at the point when you are about to begin discussing the items, that will give you 45 minutes for the discussion. If you have 20 items to consider, you might announce to the group that they have a little over two minutes to discuss each item.

It is often the case that someone will try and reduce the complexity of the list by grouping items in broad categories. Your rule should be to consider a request only if the items are identical. Someone gave you the item with the knowledge they were only to contribute it if it was different. Sometimes group discussion can determine that two (or even more) items mean the same thing, and you should do something about that, such as create a single item and eliminate the duplicates. But make changes in the list very cautiously and with respect for the original language. Check with the group. Ask them, "Do items 11 and 18 mean exactly the same thing?" If not allow them to stay in the original form.



#### FOURTH: VOTE

Once the group is clear about the meaning of the items, they can vote to determine which are the most important items.

Voting will allow the group to select those items which are the most important to them.

Pass out a strip of five colored dots to each person and then instruct them as follows:

- ◆ "I am going to give you four minutes to select the five most important items and to put the numbers of the five items on the colored dots."

It is a good idea to illustrate what you want by putting a sample on a wall sheet.

10	7	3	9	1
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Once everyone has selected five items and written the numbers on the dots, have everyone get up, go to the sheets posted on the wall and place their dots by the appropriate item.

This will allow for a visual representation of the group's preferences. The items with the most dots next to them will be the most important items to the group.

If the small group is going to reconvene in a larger group, ask for a volunteer from the group to report the "top" items to the larger group.

At this point, the actual Nominal Group Technique process is finished. Whoever is in charge of the meeting should take over and discuss the next steps with everyone.