HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE COALITION LEADER:

A GUIDE FOR NEWBIES (OR "OLDIES" NEEDING A REFRESHER)

A publication of the

Evolution Foundation

www.facebook.com/OKevolutionfoundation

Introduction

So, you've just agreed to lead a coalition, or community team, or community task force, or coalition committee, or whatever your community calls your group. The point is, you've agreed to give leadership to a group of people who meet regularly to solve community problems and share resources. Now what?

This Newbie's guide is designed to give you a jump start and increase your confidence in your new role. You can do this! Many others have done it before you with great success. You can too with a little help.

The guide addresses the basics of planning meetings, communicating to participants, and running effective meetings. As you make your way through it, there will be places where you say, "Well, duh, that's obvious." It may be to you, but not to every Newbie. If you already understand that section, then quickly move on. No need to wallow in the obvious.

How This Manual is Organized

Each section of the Newbie's guide will give a brief overview of that topic followed by a more detailed explanation of the topic. If after reading the introduction, you think you already know the material that is to follow, I still encourage you to at least glance at what follows. You might be surprised at what you learn.

In addition, to the text, we at the Evolution Foundation are very aware that some people learn better through more visually stimulating media like videos. Where possible we've placed a few links to quality YouTube videos in the guide as well. Be aware, however, that these were not produced by the Evolution Foundation but have been posted on YouTube for public use.

Part 1: Understand Your Coalition

Summary:

Every coalition is formed for some reason. This reason, whether it is written down or even articulated, is the foundation of the coalition's mission. Over time, that mission often shifts and changes. Do you know and understand the mission of your organization? Do others in your coalition understand why the group exists?

Similarly, every coalition (unless it's brand new) has a history, a list of successes and failures, a track record of what they do well and not so well. As a leader, you need to understand this history so that you might help the coalition focus on its strengths and avoid its past struggles.

Finally, the coalition chair needs to be very familiar with all the coalition's documents such as bylaws, strategic plans, and financial statements.

What is a Community Health Coalition?

This video gives a visual picture of some of the good things an effective coalition can do in your community.

Effective coalitions, however, require effective leadership that helps the coalition develop a plan and work together to bring change.

Just click on the video to watch.

If you have been elected to a leadership position in your coalition, it is likely that you have been attending fairly regularly for some time. Others have chosen you because they see something they like in you—leadership qualities, faithfulness, a caring spirit, or any number of other good qualities. They have entrusted to you something that is important to them because they believe in your abilities. Receive this as a compliment and resolve to fulfill their faith in you.

We realize that it is also possible, however, for someone new to the coalition to be chosen to be a leader. Typically, this happens when the coalition is new or when the coalition is struggling to find leadership. If the reason is the latter, that is an indication that the coalition is struggling not just in finding leadership but in commitment of its members to a mission they feel is important. If that is the case one of your main goals for the coming year may be to help the coalition rediscover its purpose.

Whatever the reason you were elected to lead your coalition, here are a few practical suggestions to get yourself acclimated to your new role.

1. Have a meeting with the outgoing chairperson.

Too often, the coalition leadership role is passed from one person to another without little to no conversation between the two individuals. The outgoing chair has a wealth of knowledge about what has worked and not worked during the past leadership term, the expectations the group has of its leaders, and the particular culture of the group. Yes, every coalition has its own culture, its own way of doing things, its own standard of norms that are rarely written down.

So, sit down with the outgoing chairperson over lunch or some other undisturbed time and ask her or him these questions:

- How have you gone about doing the job of the coalition chair?
- What's the history of the coalition as you understand it?
- Does the coalition have a mission statement? What's the purpose of the coalition? Why do we meet? What are we trying to accomplish with each meeting?
- Does the coalition have a strategic plan? Are there specific goals they are working on right now?
- Does the coalition have bylaws? How strictly are they followed? Do they need updating?
- What is the structure of the coalition? That is, who are the other officers and what are their roles? Does the coalition have sub-committees? If so, how well are they working and how do they report their work?
- What are some of the successes of the coalition in recent years?
- What are some of the failures of the coalition in recent years?
- Are there any "land mines" I need to know about? That is, are there topics, unpleasant past experiences, or controversial items I need to be aware of?
- What advice do you have for me as I take over?

The outgoing chairperson may not know all the answers to these questions. If not, spend time with other long-time coalition members who are clearly invested in the group. They can enlighten you and often give varied opinions about these things. The more you understand, the better.

2. Examine all Coalition Documents

Someone in the coalition is probably the caretaker of the documents. It could be the chairperson, the secretary, or some longtime member. Unfortunately, these documents may get lost as leadership changes. Take it upon yourself to gather and organize the documents. You want to do this first of all so that you can read them and know them. Second, you want to have everything in order when your term ends to make things easier on the next person.

So, what documents might you expect to find? Here are a few to look for:

- **Mission statement.** Every coalition needs a clear mission statement. The mission statement is a short statement that describes the purpose of the coalition, why it exists, what it hopes to accomplish, and how it wants to accomplish that purpose. We suggest that the mission statement be printed on coalition agendas, brochures, or any other coalition document. It is important to continually review it in order to keep the group focused.

  One of the reasons coalitions sometimes flounder is that they have lost their sense of purpose. They meet regularly but don't seem to accomplish much. When this happens, partners stop coming to the meetings and participating. They have better things to do with their time.

  Know your mission, review it often with coalition members, and let it be the driving force of everything you do.

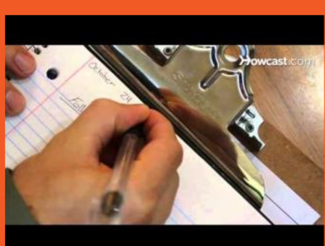
  If your coalition does not have a mission statement or you believe it might need to be revised see our publication "How to Write a Good Mission Statement". You can also contact the Evolution Foundation. One of our consultants will be happy to meet with your group to help you create, review, or rewrite your mission statement.

- **Bylaws.** Bylaws are written documents that set forth the rules, regulations, and structure of your organization. Although some people (okay, probably most people) find these documents boring, they are still crucial to a healthy coalition.

Taking Minutes

As a coalition chairperson you should not be responsible for taking minutes at your meeting. However, someone needs to be designated to do this. Typically, this is the function of the coalition's secretary. If you do not have a secretary or the secretary is absent, designate someone in attendance to take minutes. Try not to take minutes while you are simultaneously leading the meeting. This is extremely difficult to do effectively. Either your minute taking will suffer, or your leadership of the meeting will suffer.

Click the video to watch how to take good minutes.



Good bylaws, for example, will tell you the term you've been elected for. You probably want to know that. Have you just been elected to a three-year term when you thought it was only going to be one year? Good bylaws will also describe who can be a member of the coalition, how decisions are made by the group, who has authority to make decisions for the coalition in emergencies, how officers are to be elected, what other leadership positions are needed, what committees are in place or how committees are created, how money is handled, and so forth.

You don't need to memorize your coalition's bylaws, but you do need to have them handy because these questions will arise during month-to-month management of the coalition's business.

Once you look at your bylaws, you may discover that your coalition is not functioning the way the bylaws describe. This is not unusual. Over time, coalition's often fall into patterns of business that depart from what was written. This doesn't necessarily mean you need to go back to the "rules" in the bylaws. It might mean that. However, it might also mean that you need to create an ad hoc committee to review and update the bylaws. Maybe they need to be changed to meet current practices.

If your coalition does not have a set of bylaws, then those need to be created. The good news is that you don't have to start from scratch. Contact the Evolution Foundation and we can give you sample bylaws from other coalitions that you can use for your template.

- **Coalition Minutes.** Hopefully, your coalition has a secretary who keeps minutes from each meeting. These are a record of the things discussed and agreed upon at each meeting. These minutes are helpful in several ways.

First, they help coalition members remember what they discussed at the previous meeting. Most coalitions meet monthly. A month is sometimes a long time for us to remember what transpired.

Second, minutes help absentee coalition members get caught up on what the coalition has been doing. Members of your coalition will not be able to attend every meeting. That doesn't necessarily mean they are not interested in the work of the group. Minutes help them be informed.

Third, minutes save the coalition from confusion and even conflict. If no one has written down the record of some action the coalition voted to take, then future conversations about that action will be based on memories alone. Believe it or not, our memories are fallible. Our varied memories may lead to problems.

Finally, as you will see in the next section, you will need those minutes to help create the agenda for your next meeting.

- **Strategic Plans.** Every coalition needs a strategic plan. Simply put, the strategic plan is a written document of goals the coalition is working on, things they want to accomplish together in the coming months. This does not have to be an elaborate plan. In fact, we suggest the coalition focus on only one to three goals or projects at a time.

  Each of the goals or projects needs to be directly tied to the purpose described in the coalition's mission statement. In addition, the coalition needs to somehow address their goals at each coalition meeting. Too often, strategic plans are created, then forgotten. Unless, you as the coalition chair continually remind and lead the group to address the goals, they will never be accomplished.

  If you discover your coalition does not have a strategic plan or you need to revise and update the one you have, the Evolution Foundation has consultants trained to lead you in that process. Feel free to contact us.

- **Financial Statements.** Some coalitions handle money. Some don't. If your coalition receives money through grants, fund-raisers, and other donations then uses that money to help pay for projects, then there should be regular financial statements showing the balances and cash flows. Typically, if your coalition handles money like this a treasurer should be elected by the coalition and clear bylaws need to be drafted on how that money is managed. As the chair, be aware of the financial resources available to the coalition, how it is raised and how it is spent. Make sure the coalition is being fiscally responsible by strictly following the bylaws in this area.

Part 2: Prepare for Your Meetings

Summary

Proper preparation for coalition meetings is the key to successful meetings. At the core of that preparation is putting together an agenda that will address all the coalition's business, give time for sharing of information, and provide opportunities for collaboration. In this section of the guide you will discover how to create your agenda.

Effective coalition meetings are the direct result of good planning and preparation. That means, it is imperative that you spend some time preparing the agenda for your meetings. That may sound more daunting than it really is because most coalitions already have some sort of standing agenda template they use. For the most part, all you will need to do is pull out the last meeting agenda and update it for the future meeting.

However, please, please, please don't do that the morning of the meeting or even the night before. If you do, you may discover that you don't have all the necessary things in place for the meeting that is about to happen. Instead, start early and follow these recommended steps.

Step 1: Reread the minutes from the previous meeting. Make note of items that were covered with particular attention given to assignments people agreed to do, reports that need to be given, items that were tabled (meaning pushed back to the next meeting), and so forth. Look for things that need to be addressed, announced or reported in the upcoming meeting.

Step 2: Get input for the agenda. If you have a leadership team—a vice-chairperson, a secretary, maybe a treasurer, and maybe committee chairs—seek their input about agenda items for the upcoming meeting. Send them an email or text and ask if they know of items to include on the agenda.

Step 3: Create your agenda. If you use a basic template in all your meetings be sure to change the dates, remove old information, and update it with the new items that you have identified. Whether you use a standing agenda or not, we suggest that you evaluate your agenda regularly to make sure it is meeting your needs.

Here are some items that many coalitions include in their agendas. You may or may not include each of these items, but we encourage you to consider all of them.

- **Welcome and Introductions**—Often a coalition chair will assume everyone in the room knows each other. Don't assume that. Someone may be there for the first time, or perhaps they haven't been in a while. Just because you know them doesn't mean they know everyone in the room. In addition, this is the only time some of the coalition members see each other face to face. Names and agency affiliations are forgotten. Give them an opportunity to refresh their memories. Have each person introduce themselves. Occasionally, creative chairpersons take the time to ask members to give more than their name and agency affiliation. They might ask everyone to share something less official like their favorite movie, or their most memorable vacation, or their favorite hobby. These exercises, if there is time, build relationships among your members. You will be surprised at some of the stories you will hear and the sense of connection that follows. These exercises also get people talking so they are ready to participate and talk more during the meeting business.
- **Approval of the Minutes** from the previous meeting—Here you will ask the members to read the minutes and make any corrections that need to be made. Then, a vote from members is required. This means someone will need to make a motion to approve the minutes, someone will need to "second that motion", and the entire coalition will need to vote to approve them. Newbies often make the

mistake of assuming a motion and a second are sufficient. They are not. A vote of the entire coalition is required for any business transaction. [If you have questions about Robert's Rules of Order, see our separate Guide entitled "How to Use Robert's Rules of Order in Your Coalition".]

- **Financial Report**—if there is one. Again, a vote to accept the report is in order.
- **Spotlight Presentation**—Some coalitions invite speakers to share pertinent information of interest to the coalition or highlight their agency's work as a way to keep the coalition informed of community resources. If your coalition does this, you will need to contact the person scheduled to speak prior to the meeting to remind them and to tell them how much time they are allotted.
- **Strategic Plan Update**—If the coalition has a strategic plan, and we highly recommend that they do, then that plan needs to be highlighted at every meeting to discuss the progress toward the plan's goals. It is time to check up on previous actions during the month and make new assignments for the coming month. Remind the coalition members of the goal(s) they are working on. Ask for updates on action steps to be completed since the last meeting and lead the group in making assignments on action steps for the coming month.
- **Committee Reports**—Some coalitions have assigned specific tasks to committees to work on. Often those tasks are directly related to the strategic plan. During this segment of the meeting, committee chairpersons will update the rest of the coalition, get input from the coalition members, or bring some recommendation to the coalition. Votes are not needed by the coalition to simply receive a report from a committee. If that committee has some action they want the coalition to take, then they will bring that as a motion to the coalition. Motions brought by committees do not need to be seconded, but they do need approval by the entire coalition through a vote. [Again, we offer our guide entitled "How to Use Robert's Rules of Order in Your Coalition" to help you through these matters.]
- **Old Business**—Here you will lead the coalition in discussion of any items left over from the previous meeting that need to be discussed and acted on.

- **New Business**—Just like it sounds, here you would lead the group in discussing any new items of business that arise. Some coalitions require that these items be put on the agenda prior to the meeting. Others are open to members placing items on the agenda during meeting. Be familiar with your coalition's bylaws and culture. Doing the necessary preparation ahead of time and having new business items already listed on the agenda before the meeting will save you from being surprised by some unexpected business item.
- **Resource Sharing**--Most coalitions take the time to give participants the time to share what is happening in their agency, share activities or events, and discuss upcoming events or trainings. Some coalitions go further by encouraging participants to talk about specific family needs in a generic way. For example, an individual might say, "I'm working with a family whose home recently burned. They need furniture to replace what is lost. Where can I get that for them?" Then, coalition members can share what they know about community resources for that specific request. This kind of resource sharing leads to a much more in-depth understanding of what is available for clients and families in the community.
- **Review of Action Steps**—This is an agenda item we really like and don't see it enough on agendas. It is a place for the coalition to pause before adjourning and look back at everything they agreed to do in the coming month and who is going to do it. That way everyone leaves with a clear understanding of action on their minds. This will also help you prepare the agenda for the following month. You will know exactly where to go in the minutes to find the actions steps that need to be addressed next time.
- **Announce the Next Meeting Date**
- **Adjourn the Meeting**

Step 4: Finalize the Agenda. Take the time to make the agenda look nice. Put a header at the top of the page with the word "Agenda" followed by your coalition name and logo (if you have one). Directly below the header put your coalition's mission statement as a constant reminder to members of your purpose for meeting. Finally, list each agenda item in their proper order. Some coalitions list their officers and their contact information on the agenda as well—a good idea.

Step 5: Communicate with Coalition Members. Although you have the next meeting of the coalition clearly written on your calendar and you are not likely to forget it (because you are the chairperson and you've put some time into the preparation), you cannot assume the same is true of your coalition members. You need to remind them. If you don't, you can expect poor attendance.

Send out a reminder of the meeting three or four days before the meeting. Please, please do not wait until the morning of the meeting to do this. Many members may not check their email or have already planned something else by this time. Go ahead and attach the agenda for the next meeting and the minutes from the last meeting to these email reminders. People like to know what to expect at the next meeting and have time to review the minutes before arriving at the meeting.

Some chairpersons send these invitations in a simple email, but others use resources like Evite or an Outlook invitation that will automatically apply the meeting to the receiver's calendar. These can be a little more attention grabbing. Just remember that the Evite invitations require an additional mouse click to open them and not everyone uses Outlook as their calendar of choice.

If you do use Outlook, there are ways to make a "group" for your coalition so whenever you want to send an email to everyone, it is a matter of clicking on your group's name rather than having to copy and paste from previous emails or typing every email in. There are lots of resources on-line to show you how to do this.

A couple of other notes about coalition communication:

1. **Don't over do it with your emails.** Most of your coalition members have full inboxes as it is. If you can avoid sending emails about every little thing, your members will appreciate it. Send the necessary ones and combine information in one email if possible. As chairperson, you will have members send you emails that they want forwarded to everyone in the group. How you handle these is up to you. Ask yourself, is this information pertinent to our coalition? Is it important? Is it time sensitive? If you forward items too often (and you'll have to decide how much is too often), then coalition members may start deleting your emails before reading them.
2. **Avoid replying to all.** Sometimes a coalition chair needs input from coalition members about something so he or she will send out an email asking for help. This is fine and appropriate. What is not fine is for coalition members to reply to the chair

Email Etiquette

Although this video by Adriana Girdler is not specifically addressed to Coalition leaders, the things she has to say about being professional with your emails apply to you. You want your communication with coalition members to be as professional as possible.

Click on the video to hear her nine tips for email etiquette.

using the "Reply to all" in their email software. This creates an inbox nightmare for everyone in the coalition. Discourage this if possible.

3. **Keep email lists up to date.** Typically, coalitions pass around a sign-in sheet at each coalition meeting as a record of who is attending. These sign-in sheets ask for information such as each person's name, email address, phone number, agency affiliation, etc. Ask whatever works for your coalition but make sure you get everyone's email addresses so you can make a master coalition email list. Then make sure you update the lists on your computer each month so that when the next email goes out everyone will get the announcements. Some coalitions have a place on the sign-in sheet for members to indicate that their information is new or has changed.

Part 3: Lead Your Meeting

Summary

Group facilitation is both an art and a skill. If the skills needed to lead a good coalition meeting don't come natural to you, they can be learned. Yes, it might take a little time and practice, but you can do it. In the meantime, don't be too hard on yourself. Remember, a great guitarist starts with simple chords and gets better with practice. At each meeting do the best you can with what you know. Then after the meeting, evaluate yourself.

This section gives the basics of facilitating conversation and managing discussions during a coalition meeting including a quick note about Robert's Rules of Order.

During a meeting your chief responsibility is to facilitate the conversation. Your job is to keep the group focused on the agenda items, keep discussions moving, encourage conversation, and manage the various voices in the room so that everyone stays happy and engaged. Sound daunting? It can be at times, but this section will help you with the skills you need to do that.

How to Run a Meeting

This video from projectmanager.com summarizes some of the key points in this guide. She is talking specifically about project manager meetings, but the concepts are the same for coalition meetings.

Click the video to see another way to envision the concepts in this guide.

Facilitator’s Tasks and Goals

Managing the meeting’s agenda as discussed in the previous section is only a part of the facilitator’s task. Although this is important, facilitators have an additional task—helping participants communicate in healthy ways. While others are focusing on the topic of discussion, you need to be observing the group’s behavior.

- Are participants interrupting each other or listening respectfully?
- Is communication supportive or dismissive?
- Are some people monopolizing the conversation?
- Is the group staying on task or are they chasing rabbits?
- Are half the people in the room on their phones checking their Facebook for something more stimulating?

Some have likened facilitators to traffic cops. That is, the facilitator must keep the conversational traffic flowing smoothly. A good traffic cop or facilitator knows when to step in and halt the flow in one direction in order to allow another direction to proceed. If the traffic lights are broken, the policeperson must be proactive in directing traffic to avoid disastrous collisions. Similarly, if emotions (including boredom) get out of hand a good facilitator must step in and proactively direct conversations in healthy ways

More specifically, group facilitators are continually trying to accomplish the following goals.

1. Keep the group on track and focused on the topic under discussion.
2. Create a positive, open environment that makes it easy for participants to share their own concerns, ideas, or stories.
3. Help all group members participate actively.
4. Create a safe place for sharing and exploring difficult topics.
5. Manage conflict proactively.
6. Identify and manage behavior that is hampering the group’s effectiveness.
7. Help the group evaluate its behavior and health.
8. Manage time.

Developing facilitation skills requires the facilitator to be self-aware. Specifically, you must be continually aware of what you are experiencing and be able to elicit responses from participants about what they are feeling as well. For example, if you are feeling uncomfortable about how a group member responded to another group member, you may need to speak up and state that. In addition, you might need to explore how others felt about the sharp words the group member spoke.

The difficulty with good facilitation is that it is quite subjective. Each facilitator will handle situations differently. Each decision to intervene and "redirect traffic" will be based on complex things you are observing and feeling. Despite its subjectivity, there are skills that facilitators can develop to accomplish their objectives consistently.

Skill #1: Intervene Only When Necessary

Sometimes facilitators think their job is to "help" the participants. If no one is saying anything, the facilitator feels the need to fill the silence with words or questions of their own. If someone is struggling with the right words, the facilitator may feel the need to articulate the thought for the participant. If two individuals are disagreeing, the facilitator may feel the need to step between the two rather than allowing them to work through their frustration together. If someone becomes angry or upset, the facilitator may feel the need to "make everything all right."

Tension, conflict, silence, and emotion can be very powerful ways to help group members grow. If facilitators are too quick to "help" or "save" participants, that growth may be hindered rather than enhanced. Before intervening, ask yourself the following questions. If your answers are yes, don't intervene.

- Does this behavior appear to be a one-time occurrence that participants will move beyond quickly?
- Is the behavior bothering only you instead of the whole group?
- Will other group members likely intervene if you keep your mouth shut?
- Will intervening discourage the group from tackling a difficult issue?
- Would taking someone aside later in private be more helpful than intervening now?

Skill #2: Intervene Correctly

There are appropriate times for the facilitator to help the group with their conversational flow. Once you make the decision to intervene, you must make a further decision as what type of intervention to make. You have three basic choices: a personal intervention, a group intervention, or a diversionary intervention.

Group Intervention. In a group intervention, you address your comments to the entire group without pointing out any single individual. You may need to remind the group of ground rules or agenda constraints. For example, if one member is chasing a rabbit and taking the group away from the topic at hand, you might say, "Our subject today is goal number one of our strategic plan. I would like for us to return to that topic." Notice, that this comment uses the plural pronouns "our" and "us" and does not address any one person.

Personal Intervention. Personal interventions are comments directed to an individual rather than the group. You might speak directly to an individual to encourage him or her to stick with the agenda. It's important in this circumstance to avoid attacking the individual personally. Maintain a calm voice and point out the behavior that needs to change.

Once you decide a personal intervention is necessary, you must then decide if you should do that publicly or privately. Public Interventions address the issue immediately with the whole group listening to your conversation with the individual. Although it may bring a quick resolution, it may also embarrass the individual in front of his or her peers.

Private Interventions wait for a time when you can talk to the individual alone. In that way, you eliminate the possibility of embarrassment. However, the delay may allow the individual to continue the inappropriate behavior in the present.

Diversionary Intervention. Sometimes when a group is starting to sway from the topic or has begun violating appropriate behavior such as making inappropriate remarks about someone else, a facilitator might use a diversionary tactic to refocus the group. Perhaps all you need to do is ask a new question about the agenda subject. By answering the question, group members naturally move back toward appropriate conversation.

You might also state something like, "That sounds like an important issue. Why don't we put that on our list to talk about at a later meeting?" In the diversionary intervention, you don't

How to Be an Effective Chair

In this video Susan Leahy talks about the importance of making interventions as a chairperson to keep your group on task. She also talks about the courage it takes to make an intervention and how to go about doing it correctly.

Click on the video to hear her perspective.

need to directly address bothersome behavior. You simply need to point the group back in the right direction. If done subtly enough the group will never know they've been diverted.

Skill #3: Intervene at Dysfunctional Behavior

It's okay if participants disagree or even get a bit emotional during a group session. Emotions are a sign that participants care about the issues. However, if those emotions bleed over into dysfunctional or harmful behavior you need to intervene. For example, if a participant calls other people names or displays negative stereotyping, you need to address the issue.

It is possible that a member might be upset with you as the facilitator. When you recognize this, it's important to address it. First, ask yourself what prompted their behavior? Did you say or do something inappropriate or demeaning? If so, acknowledge the other person's perspective, explain your intent, and express your regret. When you respond like this, you are modeling for others how to handle conflict in positive ways.

Skill #4: Intervene at Cultural Insensitivity

Your group members come from a variety of cultural backgrounds and bring to the group varied expectations. As facilitator, your job is to make sure members are sensitive to the cultures and expectations of others in the group. Cultural differences cause participants to:

- Have different comfort levels with open and honest comments.
- Want different levels of formality.
- Have different perspectives on time.
- Hold varying perspectives toward the individual or group.
- Have different comfort levels with physical closeness.
- Have language differences.
- Place differing emphases on body language.

When a group member uses language offensive to others, you may need to intervene and talk about cultural sensitivity. When group members press a quiet member to "say something" you may need to intervene to talk about the differences in individuals and comfort levels. You get the idea. In order to be a good facilitator, you must continually work toward cultural competence in your own life so you can recognize those moments that may be awkward for others.

Skill #5: Intervene to Encourage Participation

Remember, that just because a person doesn't speak much in a meeting doesn't mean that that person is not engaged. People come to the meetings with different comfort levels, different expectations, and different cultural backgrounds. To force people to speak may be insensitive and tend to push them away.

With that said, however, there are times when you as the facilitator need to encourage the entire group to talk more openly and freely. Here are some specific things you can do to encourage participation.

Ask Clarifying Questions. When a group member says something that you don't understand or if you think other group members are not understanding, you might want to ask for clarification. "Jean, could you tell us a bit more about what you mean when you said…?" or "I'm not sure I'm following your point. Are you saying…?" etc.

Ask for Suggestions. Remember you are not expected to be the expert, nor are you expected to have all the answers as a facilitator. Your task is to help others discover solutions, give suggestions, and share their thoughts. It is not uncommon for coalition members to turn to you for answers. Don't let them. Instead turn the problem back on them with, "What suggestions do you have for this problem?"

Summarize or Paraphrase. After a speaker or member concludes his or her comments, you might want to ask the group to share what they heard or what was significant to them. In a similar fashion, you might want to summarize by saying something like, "I heard Clara say…." Then ask, "Clara, is that correct?" To get others involved, follow that with a general question to everyone, "What did you hear Clara say?"

Use Smaller Groups. Many people who are reluctant to talk in front of a group are more than willing to talk face-to-face with one or two other people. At times, as the facilitator, you may ask the larger group to divide into groups of twos or threes to discuss a topic more fully. Afterwards, the smaller groups can report what they discussed with the larger group.

Pull Ideas Together. As facilitator, you should be looking for patterns and connections in the conversations of group members. If your coalition is having a robust conversation about a topic or brainstorming together take notes of what everyone is saying on a flip chart. When everyone has had their say, draw the group's attention to the flip chart and ask them to look for patterns, to help me group the comments together in ways that make sense. This exercise helps everyone think about the topic in context and often produces new insights.

A Note about Robert's Rules of Order

Many coalition bylaws will state that Robert's Rules of Order (or something similar) will be used in managing meetings. In truth, Robert's Rules of Order are a complex set of rules that help assure every voice is heard during the consideration of an item and that the introduction, discussion, and resolution of that item is done in an orderly fashion. Simply put, they keep groups from possible chaos. Ironically, at times Robert's Rules are so complex that they end up causing chaos because not everyone understands the procedure being followed.

With that said, most coalitions will never have to access the more complex procedures outlined in Robert's Rules because the decisions made by a coalition are often the result of consensus or simple votes.

As a coalition leader you need to know at least the very basics of when and how to bring an item to a vote. Rather than overwhelm you here with that information, see our separate guide on "How to Use Robert's Rules of Order in Your Coalition."

Conclusion

Well, that's it. Anyone can be a coalition chairperson—just show up each month and talk about a few things. But if you want to be a good coalition chairperson who leads the coalition to be an effective and meaningful organization in your community, then it will take a little effort.

If you are new at this, you may feel awkward or a bit insecure to begin with. Stick with it, however, because it does become easier. The more you do it right, the more confident you will become. Before you know it, everything in this manual will become second nature.

Also remember that if you do stumble, that is perfectly okay. For the most part coalition members are extremely forgiving and helpful. Simply ask them for help and feedback. They are just grateful that you've been courageous and committed enough to do the job. It is because of people like you that coalitions like yours make such a difference in their community.

Also, in the state of Oklahoma, the Evolution Foundation is here to help you with your coalition. We have consultants that can meet with you, coach you, and encourage you. Don't hesitate to contact us. You can find our contact information on our Facebook page: www.facebook/OKevolutionfoundation.

We have more guides for you and your coalition.

Check out our other

Newbie Manuals