

The following presents a series of activities that can be used by community leaders or facilitators to help groups develop (i) consensual decision making skills; (ii) problem solving skills; and (iii) facilitative skills.

Consensus Decision Making

10 WAYS TO ENHANCE CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING IN YOUR GROUP

1. Recognise that consensus is not having everyone agree on everything, but rather that everyone in the group can live with the decisions.
2. Remove the sense of insecurity that comes with political process and lack of information - ensure everyone has the same key information, with adequate time to consider and the chance to discuss it as a group.
3. See consensus decision making as a process not only an outcome. This means using collaborative and open approaches to how we speak and work with each other, how we handle conflict and how we address issues.
4. Build small agreements along the way, rather than aiming for only the final decision after discussion.
5. Record all members' concerns at the beginning of the discussion and then seek to group or clarify the concerns. Ensure each is fully discussed and addressed before moving toward decision making.
6. In discussions follow the key processes around negotiation and conflict management such as focus on the interests not the position, be hard on issues but soft on people, avoid personal attacks and seek alternative solutions. Consider building these into your ground rules or group contract.
7. Use a standard set of levels of consensus such as:
 - a. I can easily accept this decision
 - b. I can accept this decision, but it is not my preferred option
 - c. I can live with this decision
 - d. I don't agree but I will not block this decision
 - e. I can not accept this decision.

As a group you can then decide at what level you will accept consensus and build this into your decision making process.

8. If you are blocked
 - a. Refer back to the mission or purpose of the group
 - b. Create some space and come back after some other issues have been discussed
 - c. Consider the impacts of not coming to a consensus on this issue
 - d. Seek an alternative group to make a decision such as refer to board or specific subcommittee.
9. Develop an initial proposal and encourage members to criticise and pull it apart. Out of this process develop a proposal which addresses concerns and has the ownership of those involved.
10. Have a back up plan for decision making, if all else fails such as 70/30 in which you are willing to accept the majority decision if you have over 70% agreement.

Group Problem Solving Tips

10. When you are considering problems your group is facing, it is firstly a good idea to brainstorm a list of problems, complaints and issues for the group. Bob Dick suggests you then list the problems under the following categories:

- ▣ Acts of God we just have to live with
- ▣ Acts of lesser Gods we probably have to live with but we can let them know
- ▣ Issues we share with other groups and resolve jointly
- ▣ Issues that are ours alone

This will allow you to gain perspective on your issues and realise some problems we just have to live with.

- ▶ When considering which problem we should put our energies into as a group, it is useful to categorise these by thinking about:
 - ▣ The size of the problem – how many people are effected.
 - ▣ The seriousness of the problem – how much damage is it doing or likely to do.
 - ▣ The likelihood and ease of success – in solving the problem.
 - ▣ The potential for growth once the problem has been solved.
- ▶ Einstein noted that “the significant problems we face can not be solved with the same level of thinking we were at when we created them”. This means that solutions to some of our problems will require very different thinking that may involve looking outside our traditional approaches and looking laterally.
- ▶ In problem solving we may need to consider the Latin “festina lente” which means ‘hasten slowly’. In many cases we will need to take the time to effectively sort out the problem now, rather than adopt a quick bandaid solution.
- ▶ Remember the importance of the Hawthorne effect and the Placebo effect. Often the attention given to people when trying to solve the problem has a greater positive effect than the solution itself.
- ▶ A very useful concept is the Pareto principle, which simply stated is the 80/20 rule. The principle applied to problem solving states that 80% of all our difficulties will come from 20% of our problems. Or put differently by applying ourselves to 20% of our problems we will reduce our difficulties by 80%.
- ▶ In seeking solutions to problems facing our group, it is useful to recognise that people come from different positions and often seek different results. In solving problems we should remember to focus on the problem not the person, to use processes which assist us to work logically through the problem rather than simply debate and to focus on people’s interests rather than their position. Most importantly we will need to seek out solutions which offer win/win solutions. In coming to these solutions we may uncover alternatives different from the ones we initially came with.
- ▶ Many of the challenges in problem solving relate to the fact, it is difficult to identify the cause of the problem rather than its many symptoms. Peter Senge suggests a technique called the Five Whys. For each cause we see we should go deeper through asking why 5 times.
Eg. The door was left open last night. Why?
 Someone didn’t lock it. Why?
 The person didn’t know how to set the lock. Why?
 We didn’t tell them. Why?
 We don’t have a procedure. Why?
 We haven’t changed any of our procedures since we moved to the new building.

Group Problem Solving Process

1. REACH AGREEMENT ON "WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?"

The aim of this first stage is to arrive at a short clear definition of the problem, which the entire group agrees on. Too often groups commence solving a problem without a clear definition of what the problem is or ensuring that they are working on the same problem.

Several processes can help you reach this aim:

- Brainstorming is a useful technique to initially list all the possible issues around the problem.
- Another approach is to go through a process of asking the 6 questions:
 - Who – eg. Who is involved in the problem?
 - Who is impacting on the problem?
 - Who sees it as a problem?
 - What – eg. What is happening here?
 - What are the issues?
 - What are the symptoms and causes?
 - When – eg. When is it occurring?
 - When did we first notice it?
 - When do we need it solved?
 - Where –eg. Where is it occurring?
 - Where is it not occurring?
 - Where is it most strong or most frequent?
 - Why - eg. Why are these things happening?
 - Why are the things we have done so far not working?
 - Why is it happening here but not there?
 - How - eg. How is it happening?
 - How should it be working?
 - How do other people see it?
- Nominal Group Technique is a way of ensuring everyone has input into the problem definition process and the final problem definition. This technique is discussed later under Group Facilitation.

2. GENERATE ALTERNATIVES

In this stage we focus on possible ways we can solve the problem. We are seeking to generate as many realistic, high quality approaches/ strategies as possible.

Some things to think about in this stage are:

- Solutions do not usually come out of the blue. At this stage you will need to research, reflect, discuss and ask lots of questions. Be on the look out for the way other groups are already solving this problem. Talk to as many people as possible.
- Remember that at this stage we want to generate rather than evaluate. Avoid criticising ideas or rating ideas at this stage.
- Brainstorming, nominal group technique and the six questions are also useful for this stage.
- If you find yourself always coming up with the same ideas which have not worked in the past, you may be better off using some of the lateral thinking strategies and techniques developed by such writers as Edward de Bono. These include:
 - Brainstorming using a random word as a starter. In one group we worked with, 'people not attending meetings' was the topic and the random word was 'omelette'. We brainstormed ideas such as omelettes require recipes and so we might need more effective planning for our meetings. But we also came up with the fact that to cook an omelette needs heat and perhaps we needed a more exciting issue for the meeting if we wanted to have people attending.
 - Reversing the situation eg. Rather than how do we solve conflict in our group, how do we generate more conflict in the group. This may lead to thinking of conflict in different, more positive ways.

3. EVALUATE ALTERNATIVES

In this stage we want to look at our alternatives and decide which is the best. To evaluate effectively we need some criteria to base our judgement on.

In this stage consider:

When you evaluate alternatives you are looking for solutions that will be effective, efficient and have the least problems associated with them.

- Group can collectively decide on what criteria are most appropriate. Criteria should be objective and considered, and ideally agreed on by all.
- You may wish to make your decision easier by excluding those alternatives that don't meet all the criteria, or have some drawbacks. Alternatively you might only examine those which all agree on as possible for the group or consider only the best three.
- A matrix is a useful way of pictorially representing this decision making process. Weighting criteria can enhance decision. The following matrix shows how a decision was reached about a new computer program. Programs X, Y and Z were considered on the basis of cost (which was weighted with a factor of 10), user friendliness (with a weighting of 8) and Other uses (given a weighting of 3). Program Y was the one chosen using this method.

Eg. Decision re: new computer program

	Program X	Program Y	Program Z
Cost (10)	2 (20)	4 (40)	3 (30)
Friendly (8)	3 (24)	4 (32)	4 (32)
Other use (3)	5 (15)	1 (3)	2 (6)
Total	59	75	68

4. ACT AND EVALUATE

Now it is time to act on the solution decided and finally evaluate how successful your solution turns out to be. If solutions are not successful, it may be worthwhile going back to this process and evaluating your decision making as well.

Group Facilitation

1. TO GENERATE NEW IDEAS

a. Brainstorming

The idea of brainstorming is to generate as many ideas as possible. In brainstorming the aim is to defer judgement and to think as far out of the box as possible. The more ideas the better.

1. Prepare your opportunity or problem as a question.
2. Encourage group to throw in as many ideas as possible without discussion or comment.
3. Record all ideas without censoring or changing.
4. After all ideas are exhausted or a specific time limit, spend the time to discuss, clarify, fully detail and combine ideas.

NB To further encourage different thinking or new ideas, brainstorming can be extended by asking people to:

- a. Imagine the problem / opportunity in particular ways eg. as an animal or a machine
- b. Imagine the problem / opportunity as a particular process eg. as putting together a recipe or building a house
- c. Imagine the problem / opportunity as a specific metaphor eg. how is this like a garden or a computer
- d. Make completely random associations using completely unrelated comparisons eg. what is similar between this problem / opportunity and cleaning your teeth, getting married underwater or installing a sprinkler system in the botanic gardens

b. Affinity diagram

Affinity diagram is a further development on brainstorming and seeks not only to generate new ideas but also group these ideas into key themes. This process often engages participants more effectively and fully than brainstorming and ensures greater ownership and understanding of ideas generated.

1. Ask people to brainstorm ideas onto post-it notes or cards.
2. Place all cards so that they can be viewed by everyone.
3. Ask participants as a group to sort cards into 5 – 10 groupings. (This can often be very interesting and involving if group does not talk during the process.)
4. For each grouping, create a summary or header to indicate the key theme in each set.

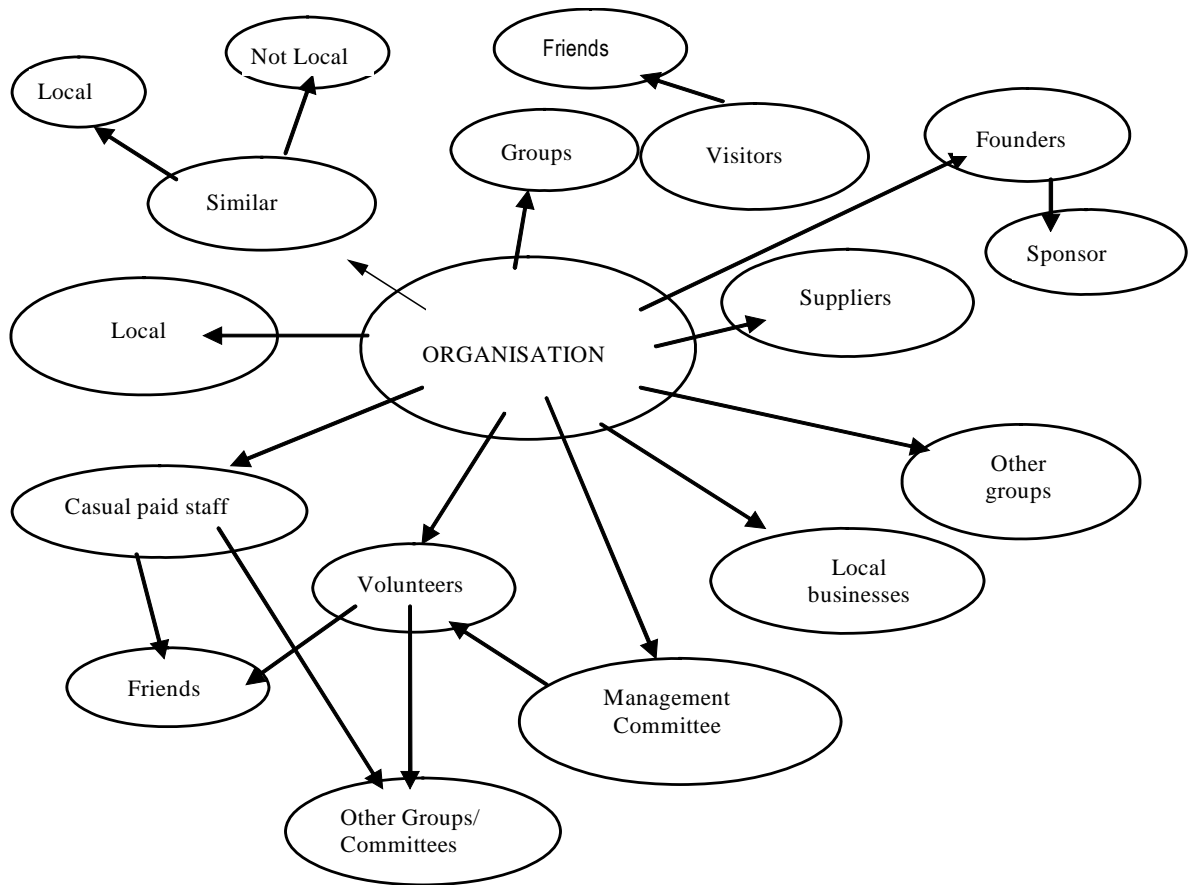
NB What is fascinating about this approach is that different groups will sort the same ideas into very different groupings.

c. Mind-mapping

The aim of mind-mapping is to provide a thorough and whole picture of the issue and consequently to generate lots of idea. In mind mapping we start with a central concept and by writing and drawing we develop a range of connections and ideas through free association.

1. Write the key idea/ problem/ opportunity in the centre of the page.
2. From this concept list out what ever comes to mind with related issues, ideas, symbols etc. Let your mind run free and list as many things as you can. Free associate and don't censor the things you list down. Link these with lines to the central concept or to each other.
3. In developing your mind map use as emphasis, colours, different shapes and variations in size and writing of words.

NB below is an example of a mind map around mapping potential sources of community volunteers.



2. DECISION MAKING

a. Positives Minus and Interesting

This is a very simple but effective way of assisting groups to make decisions. It is a technique developed by Edward De Bono.

1. Identify the options / possible solutions you currently have.
2. For each option draw up a sheet of paper with 3 columns: Plus, Minus and Interesting.
3. Brainstorm the impacts and results of each option. List positive and negative factors under the plus and minus columns. While brainstorming you will find that certain impacts are not necessarily positive or negative but rather interesting facts. By listing these facts under the interesting column you will eliminate a range of distractions and side tracks but you may also find that these impacts may play a key role in your final decision.

Eg. Issue: Moving to new premises

	Option 1: North Suburb	
+	-	interesting
close to public transport	no car parking consumers from southside need 2 buses	share with disability service provider
reasonable rent		

b. Nominal Group Technique

This method of idea generation and decision making ensures contributions from all members of the group and is particularly useful when one person is dominant in the group or where there are personality conflicts.

1. Problem / opportunity is written into a clear question.
2. Group is asked as individuals to silently brainstorm as many ideas as they can.
3. Facilitator then takes one idea at a time from each group member and lists them. This continues round robin until all ideas are listed. There is no discussion about ideas during this phase.
4. Idea originator provides clarification or explanation if required, but no criticism is allowed. Duplicates are eliminated.
5. Group members rank responses to indicate preferences.

3. MANAGING CHANGE

a. Force Field Analysis

Through this process we can identify the driving and restraining forces behind any proposed change process and identify ways to assist change. This process was developed by Kurt Lewin.

1. Identify clearly the proposed change which is to occur.
2. In two columns, list the forces that will drive the change and the forces that will restrain the change.
3. Rate each of these forces from 1-5.
4. Once we have done this we can see how likely the change is to be successful based on how strong the driving forces are compared to the restraining forces.
5. We can also consider what strategies we can use to reduce or eliminate the restraining forces. (NB The focus is on reducing restraining forces as developing new drivers often tend to set up new resistors, and also generates the notion of forced change).

See attached Force Field Analysis Worksheets

Force Field Analysis 1

FORCE FIELD ANALYSIS 1

Identify the forces driving you toward change.

1.

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

Identify the forces restraining change.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

Rate the size of each force from 1-5 with:

1 Being almost nothing

3 Being moderate importance

5 Being major factor

Force Field Analysis 2

FORCE FIELD ANALYSIS 2

Plot the Forces

DRIVING FORCES

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Status Quo

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

RESTRAINING FORCES

Force Field Analysis 3

FORCE FIELD ANALYSIS 3

For each major factor in restraining force, identify ways to reduce or eliminate the force.
