



University of Nevada
Cooperative Extension

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Tip Sheet

Session Purpose

A Series of Fact Sheets on Effective Group Facilitation

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What is session purpose?

Session purpose is a general description of the desired outcomes, goals, or accomplishments associated with group meetings or gatherings. The purpose describes the anticipated results that are expected of the participants. Often written in a bullet format on flipchart paper, it outlines the expectations of the meeting agenda.

Why is it important to describe the session purpose?

Facilitators are challenged to help group participants understand the intended purpose of a session. Participants come to meetings with their own expectations, which might not be the same as the expectation of the meeting coordinators or

facilitators. The session purpose should be discussed at the beginning of a meeting. In some instances, the participants may want to adjust or reframe in their own words the session purpose. Regardless, it is important to agree on a purpose prior to meeting commencement.

Agreement on session purpose helps keep the group on task and focused on accomplishing specific goals. At the conclusion of the session, the facilitator should help the participants review the purpose to determine if the meeting was successful in accomplishing the desired goals agreed upon at the meeting's onset.

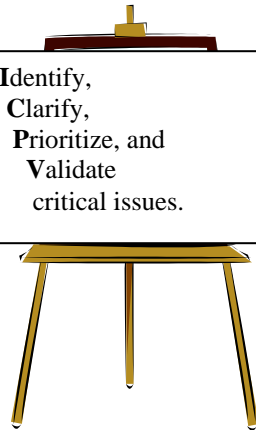
Topic: Dispute resolution

- Engage in a respectful, civil discussion.
- Gain understanding of different perspectives.
- Share strengths and limitations.
- Discuss next steps.



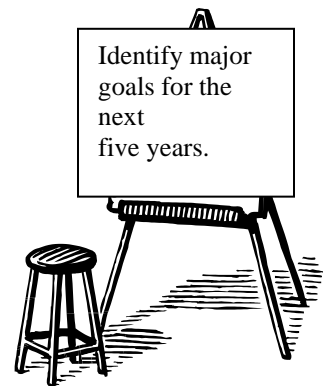
Topic: Issues clarification

- Identify,
- Clarify,
- Prioritize, and
- Validate critical issues.



Topic: Long-term planning

- Identify major goals for the next five years.



What does a session purpose look like? Three examples of a session purpose are shown above, which are pertinent to different session topics.

How is a session purpose crafted?

It is important to think about what you plan to accomplish in the session. Be realistic about the time allotted and don't attempt to accomplish too much. It is better to accomplish more than intended – to “under-promise and over-deliver” than it is to “over-promise and under-deliver,” which may leave the group feeling a little defeated and hopeless.

Once discussed and agreed upon, the session purpose should be useful in providing direction for composing the meeting agenda. The facilitator should ask: Is this what I hope to accomplish in the time allotted? Then work backwards by asking: Is this what we intend to do,

and will it produce the results specified in the session purpose? One may find that either the purpose or the agenda may need to be adjusted.

What are the advantages of using session purpose?

The session *purpose* describes a destination. The session *agenda* describes a path to reach the destination. Session purpose and agenda together provide a cognitive road map for participants. Cognitive road maps, also known as advanced organizers in educational learning environments (Eggen & Kauchak, 2006) are verbal or written statements that the teacher-facilitator uses at the beginning of a session to help participants see where they have been and where they are headed. Acting as a compass, the session purpose guides participants toward meeting a targeted goal.

Without a session purpose, the facilitator and participants may be less focused on a common direction.

Additionally, a session purpose can serve as an accountability measure. At the conclusion of session, it is easy to determine whether the established purpose was met. If it was accomplished, take the opportunity to celebrate the group's achievement. Participants gain greater appreciation for group work if they recognize when they have been successful and had an enjoyable, productive experience. If the session purpose was not accomplished, a number of mishaps could have occurred. The meeting might have strayed off track, the purpose might not have been agreed upon at the onset, or the purpose was too ambitious for the time allotted.

Conclusion

Spending time reviewing the session purpose at the beginning of a meeting will help participants stay focused and establish a common understanding or road map. Also reviewing the session purpose at the end of a meeting will serve as a means for gaining evaluation comments on the group's effectiveness. Hopefully, facilitators and participants find this tip sheet helpful in improving group process effectiveness.

Resource

Eggen, P.D. & Kauchak, D.P. 2006. Strategies and models for teachers: Teaching content and thinking skills, 5th ed. Pearson Education Inc., Boston.