



University of Nevada
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Tip Sheet

Techniques for Inspiring Hope in Groups

A Series of Fact Sheets on Effective Group Facilitation

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Reframing: Inspiring Hope

“I am worn out and tired. I don’t want to go to another meeting. I know meetings are important, but all we do is complain, complain, and complain, or we argue and never get anything accomplished.”

Does this sound familiar? In our experience with community-based groups, some people have these feelings and view group meetings as hopeless. Sometimes these same individuals drop out of groups; or if they stay involved, they become “difficult people.” Then there are those who continue to attend meetings but become apathetic, lacking the energy to be involved in constructive problem solving.

What can facilitators do in these not-so-positive situations? This tip sheet offers the inexperienced and

experienced facilitator ideas for creating and sustaining positive energy (hope) in groups.

Storytelling

During the first ten minutes or so of a meeting, consider encouraging members (voluntarily, of course) to talk about something special that happened in their lives during the past couple of weeks. The use of the word “special” is key to framing the question in a way that elicits a positive emotion.

Often participants talk about a child’s birthday, an anniversary, graduating from college, completing a major project, or a walk in the park. During storytelling, observe the participants’ faces. Note the smiles, the occasional laughter, or the looks of surprise when participants learn something new about another person.

Agenda sharing

Post the meeting agenda on a wall board. Next to the word “agenda,” write “suggested” with a smiley face. When reviewing the agenda at the beginning of the meeting, ask participants to add to and/or change the agenda. Empower them. Remind them that the agenda is theirs, not the facilitator’s.

Don’t forget what you, as a facilitator, can transmit through your body language. Your facial expression will show how you really feel about making changes. Look into the mirror and ask yourself to show a face that agrees with your words. The participants will know how you truly feel by the look on your face, despite your words. Let your face inspire hope!

Brainstorming

Brainstorm, brainstorm, and brainstorm! Know the difference between brainstorming and decision making. Group energy often increases during brainstorming. Remind participants that “all ideas count, even the crazy ones!” After a brief period of time using a brainstorming method (www.unce.unr.edu/publications/FS03/FS0309.pdf); inform the participants that “we are now going to sort these ideas out, and perhaps prioritize them.”

Encourage the group to ask questions about the brainstormed ideas, then ask if any idea requires clarification before starting to prioritize the items using a decision-making technique. The facilitator may need to remind the group during this phase that ideas are not to be

debated or evaluated until the group enters into decision making.

Decision Making

Sometimes it is helpful to take a break between brainstorming and decision making. A little fresh air can help the creative thinking process. It can also give the facilitator the opportunity to reflect on additional means for energizing the group. Begin the decision-making phase by first reviewing ideas that were brainstormed. With the participants’ permission, eliminate redundant ideas and create groupings of similar ideas.

After clarifying and grouping ideas, give each idea an identifying letter or number. Then, provide participants with two or three colored stick-on dots. Ask them to select a couple of priority ideas from the list of brainstormed ideas by writing on each of the dots a number or letter corresponding to priority idea. Then, collect and post the dots or ask the participants to place their dots next to the ideas listed—for example—on a flip chart or sticky wall (www.ica-usa.org).

As facilitator, observe the participants as they look at the recorded responses. Ask them what the responses mean to them. Perhaps the group may decide to “vote” again—this time, voting only on those items that received a significant majority of the recorded votes.

Conclusion

Go for it! Let your face talk. Observe the group's reaction. Try a new technique. Remain flexible. Feel free to change and ask the group for ideas to energize the discussion. Most importantly, EMBODY HOPE!

Resources

Center for Nonviolent Communication. www.cnvc.org.
Havercamp, M., Polzin, M.
Community Visioning and Living

Action Planning Process. University of Nevada Cooperative Extension. 05-24.

www.unce.unr.edu/publications/SP05/SP0524.pdf.

Institute for Cultural Affairs.
www.ica-usa.org.

Rebori, M., Havercamp, M.
Anonymous Brainstorming Technique, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension. 03-09.
www.unce.unr.edu/publications/FS03/FS0309.pdf.