

Effective Meeting Facilitation: Sample Forms, Tools, and Checklists  
by **Miranda Duncan**

[NOTE: The following items follow on the heels of Miranda Duncan's previous chapter on meeting facilitation. You may find any or all of them to be useful tools in your efforts to conduct meetings that produce significant results. -Morrie Warshawski, Editor]

## 1. STORYBOARDS

A storyboard uses the same process as brainstorming, with two advantages. First, participants think before they respond. Identifying what you want them to think about is the first step. For example, you might ask the staff of a school to think of ways to create a safe, nurturing environment where learning can take place. Or, you might be interested in learning more about the strengths of a community, and ask residents to think about all the things in the community they would miss if those things no longer existed. Second, if the items are described on post-notes, they can be grouped and combined easily -- giving participants the satisfaction of organizing their ideas quickly.

Storyboards are useful in developing a vision for the future. For example: "If you were to host a visitor who plans to move to your community in the near future, what would you want that person to see?" Or, "If money were not a problem, describe this organization 20 years from now."

If ideas will span across a broad spectrum, the facilitator may want to think through categories in advance and post those categories to help sort information.

Step 1. Ask the question.

Step 2. Give people five to ten minutes to respond in writing. Use standard sized paper for each item.

Step 3. Each participant posts his or her ideas.

Step 4. Participants have the opportunity to walk around the room, taking in all the ideas and gaining a visual image of what they will create.

Follow-up: The information may be used as a basis for a report or plan.

## 2. NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE

1. Frame the question -- this takes thought before the group assembles. What do you want the group to tell you?

Pose the question in clear, simple language (so that it can be answered with a simple idea or sentence). Encourage participants to think for a few minutes, or write down their thoughts before speaking.

2. After a few minutes of thinking individually, ask the participants -- in "round robin" style -- to respond to the question with one (only one response at a time) of their ideas. Give instructions that this step is accomplished by just listing the ideas, discussion will follow. The facilitator puts the ideas up on flip chart paper (alternating two colors) without numbering the items.
3. After all the ideas are up on the flip chart paper, review the list by discussing each item briefly. The purpose is to clarify and understand the logic behind the idea. Unless there is direct overlap of ideas, keep items separate. After discussion, number each item.

Encourage participants to speak in favor of an idea they believe particularly worthy -- or explain why they find an idea troublesome. (This is a key part of understanding diverse points of view.)

4. Ranking the items can be accomplished in a number of ways. The easiest is to use sticky dots. Give each participant five dots and instruct them to write number each dot 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Then direct the participants to select from the list the five most significant or useful ideas.

Tell the participants, "Now that you have selected in your own mind the five most important ideas -- of those five items, give the dot with five points (the number "5") to the most significant and the dot with one point ("1") to the least significant of your five favorites.

Continue giving points according to preference (four points to next most favorite idea, three, and two respectively).

(Participants can walk up to the items listed on the flip chart paper posted on the walls, and stick the dots directly on the items.)

5. Tally the totals.
6. Ask for discussion on the results. Do the top ranking ideas make sense?

Note: Nominal group technique works when you want to determine priority concerns or priority directions. For example, the question (# 1 above) might be framed: "If you were writing your organization's annual report a year from now, what accomplishments would you like to be able to include?"

The process can be used with large or small groups. It should not be used to bring the group to a final decision. Action planning is often the next process step after nominal group technique surfaces concerns and priorities.

### 3. ACTION PLANNING WORKSHEET

Objective: You have identified xyz as a significant goal for the organization. Outline the steps necessary to achieve that goal.

Who might share your interest in achieving this goal?

How might you enlist their involvement in helping you achieve the goal?

Who else needs to be involved in achieving this goal?

How will you get them to become involved?

Timeframe: How long it will take to achieve the goal?

When do you plan to begin?

When will you complete your work?

List specific tasks (in chronological order) you see as necessary to achieve this goal.

1.

2.

3.

Feedback mechanism: How will you know you have accomplished your goal?

### 4. INTERPRETIVE STRUCTURAL MODELING: PAIRED COMPARISONS

ISM is a process that forces participants to focus on the importance of one idea in light of a competing idea. The structured discussion about preferences is as much a part of the process as arriving at the end product -- which is a list of items in order of priority.

Preparation: In a complex, potentially conflictual situation, each item would have a one-page briefing paper to inform participants more fully about what the item encompasses. This step is not necessary for all situations, though.

Each item is written on a piece of cardboard 30" by 6" (so everyone in the room can see when the cardboard is held up by the facilitator). These items are numbered. The facilitator also prepares index cards with corresponding numbers to track the group's priorities as the process moves along.

The facilitator must also prepare a "comparison statement" -- i.e., "X is of greater priority to budget for than Y" -- or, "A must be accomplished before we can go on to B".

Anywhere from 10 to 20 items may be compared -- experienced facilitators have used this process to sort through as many as 80 items. For larger number of items, you need two facilitators -- one as a "controller" and the other as a "presenter."

Step 1. The controller picks any two items. For example, item #4 and item #7. The presenter, displaying the cardboard, asks the group, "Is #4 more important to you than #7 -- and encourages someone from the group to speak on behalf of each item. Then the group votes which is of greater importance. (For the sake of example, #4 is the preferred item by a majority of the group). The controller reflects the priority of the two items with the index cards only s/he can see for now. [ #4 #7 ]

Step 2. The controller selects the next item to be compared -- compared to the lesser preferred of the first pair. For example, #3 is compared to #7. If a majority of the group votes for #7, then #3 becomes third, so far. If #3 is voted more important than #7, the presenter will ask the group to compare #3 with #4.

For the sake of an example, the majority decides #3 is of greater importance than #4. The controller arranges the index cards in this order: [ #3 #4 #7 ].

Step 3. The controller continues to select items to be compared, always starting out the comparisons from the middle of the sequence (i.e., #4 in this example) and moving up or down, depending on the preference of the group. So, if the controller selects #8, the presenter asks the group to compare #8 with #4. If #8 is of lesser importance, then the presenter will compare it with #7. If #8 is of greater importance than #4, the presenter will ask the group to compare it to #3. If #8 turns out to be of lesser importance than #3, the display becomes: [ #3 #8 #4 #7 ].

If two items are of equal importance, the display can reflect that. For example, when the new item #1 is compared with #4, the group's vote come out even. The display of index cards is formed with #4 and #1 in line vertically:

#1  
[ #3 #8 #4 #7 ]

Step 4. Step 3 is repeated until all items have been compared and put in order. The presenter then arranges the 30" by 6" cardboard items in the same order as the controller has displayed the index cards, giving the participants a visual sense of their priorities.

Note: This process is time consuming because it involves discussion. Discussion is a critical part of reaching consensus and should be encouraged. This activity should be planned as the last activity the group will do for the day. Participants generally take great satisfaction in both the discussion and the end product of this process.

## 5. FORCE FIELD ANALYSIS

Force field analysis is useful in clarifying a problem, and finding solutions responsive to specific obstacles preventing goal achievement.

1. Participants are asked to focus on the situation with which the group is concerned -- a situation they want changed. They describe in specific terms the attributes of the current state.
2. Participants then imagine what the situation will be like in five years if nothing is done -- the worst scenario.
3. Participants then think about what the situation would be like if something were done -- what would the desired state look like?
4. The next step is to identify the forces driving change and those forces restraining change.
5. Participants use a problem solving process to remove or buffer the restraints.
6. They identify goals based on the forces driving change.

current state      desired state

<--- restraining forces      incentives --->

GAP

(How can we get from the current state to the desired state?)

## 6. PRINCIPALS OF PROBLEM SOLVING

Let go of the "right/wrong" or "assigning blame" paradigm.

Convey respect for the other person.

Undertake to solve the problem together.

Focus on the problem first, then look for solutions.

## 7. LOOKING FOR SOLUTIONS: STEPS IN PROBLEM SOLVING

Prepare in advance for the meeting -- gather as much useful information as possible.

Agree to meet when there is time to work through a problem.

At the meeting

- Exchange view points
- Define general characteristics a solution should have (criteria)
- Identify sources of the conflict
- Identify goals and hoped-for outcomes (Formulate a clear statement of what you - plural - want to happen)
- Identify any sub-issues that need to be resolved
- Consider many options for achieving the goals
- Weigh the good and bad of each option (What would happen if...)
- Make a decision
- Develop an implementation plan (who will do what by when)

Check back to see if the solution is working.

## 8. THE PROCESS OF REACHING CONSENSUS

1. Item on the agenda (advanced circulation if possible)
2. Proponent introduces item, giving background, rationale, benefits and drawbacks
3. Clarification of the proposal itself (keep working on problem definition)
4. Open up discussion on the proposal

- keep discussion on course (to the subject matter)
- keep public record (flip chart)
- clarify, summarize, record new issues

5. If there are unresolved concerns, list them one at a time -- the person who objects should be the one to talk through those unresolved concerns

(use silence as a strategy)

6. Test for consensus again

Responses

Agree in Principle: with minor revisions, with reservations

No Agreement: opportunity to persuade, agree to disagree

Blocking: When one or more (usually two) individuals oppose an otherwise agreed upon decision that has been developed through the consensus process outlined above. Blocking is not disagreement -- disagreement has been expressed throughout the consensus process. This disagreement strengthens the decision. Blocking comes after the synthesizing of differing views, and is a momentous undertaking.

Advantages of consensus

- quality of the decision
- commitment to implementation
- fostering values and skills we preach but forget to practice

## 9. MEETING EVALUATION: SAMPLE FORM

(date)

What aspect(s) about the meeting did you find most helpful?

What aspects were least useful to you?

Please offer any suggestions you have for improving our meetings in the future.

Are there any action items coming out of this day you would like to see pursued? If so, please describe follow-up steps.

#### 10. SOURCES OF CONFLICT DIAGRAM

