

# **The Art & Science of Meeting Effectiveness**

**Wendy MacDonald  
FCSS Conference 2009**

# Session Goals

- 1. Explore the elements of effective FCSS Advisory Board meetings.**
- 2. Understand how each person's actions influence the usefulness of meetings for themselves & other participants.**
- 3. Apply dialogue processes that consider multiple perspectives and lead to cooperation and consensus.**

# Meetings:

- **Are the primary way in which boards explore issues and make decisions**
- **Require both “Art & Science” to be successful**
- **Are mostly about relationships & communication**
- **Require accountability from everyone involved...everyone has a role**

# Meetings are Effective When...

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

# Meetings Components

**Content** – information, knowledge, experience, ideas, myths, opinions & perspectives

**Interaction** – how participants work together – feelings, attitudes & expectations that influence participation & cooperation

**Structure** – the way info & participants are organized to achieve meeting purpose

**Task** (Getting things done/ closure) & **Relationship** (People focus/ interaction) should be appropriate & balanced – The “What & How”

# Overcoming Meeting Challenges

- **Clear Objectives/ Purpose**
- **Thoughtful Prepared Agenda**
- **Appropriate & Prepared Participants**
- **Role Clarity**
- **Managing the Meeting Time**
- **Leading & Facilitating**
- **Involving Everyone in Their Own Way**
- **Summarizing & Closure**

# Consensus Building

***Each member able to accept group decision based on logic & feasibility, even though it may not be their desired position***

- Avoid arguing for you position...state it & then listen & understand
- Avoid win/lose culture & stalemates
- Don't avoid conflict or agree too quickly
- Diversity of opinion should be respected & encouraged respectfully

# Decision Making Meetings

## RATIONAL DECISION PROCESS

- **Study/ discuss/ clarify the situation or issue**
- **Define the decision to be made**
- **Generate alternatives**
- **State critical & desirable criteria to utilize in evaluating alternatives**
- **Evaluate alternatives (possibly amend or add)**
- **Choose among alternatives or combination of alternatives**

# Generating Alternatives

## Will it be done by Individual or Group Process?

- **Brainstorm** – free-form, creative, power of association, encourages collaboration
- **Nominal Group Technique** – structured approach that assembles individual ideas  
*No judgmental/ evaluative discussion during alternative generating process*

# Choosing Among Alternatives

- **Consensus**
- **Voting**
- **Nominal Group Technique**
  - Criteria-Based Rating
  - Criteria-Based Ranking
  - Criterion-Based Pair Comparison

# Dialogue & Consensus

People create, share & refine knowledge through conversation. Conversation can be:

- **Discussion** – roots come from “break apart”/ take sides ... fragmentation & competition for being “right”
- **Dialogue** – roots come from “flow of meaning” ... collective wisdom & thinking together (not to confused with “group think”)

# **Dialogic Leadership – Four Player Model**

**Must be prepared to:**

- 1. use & encourage honesty/ use own voice**
- 2. listen deeply**
- 3. hold space & respect for other's ideas even if you don't agree/ legitimacy of diverse opinions**
- 4. desire to broaden awareness & perspective**
- 5. Understand advocacy vs inquiry & balance them**

**Adapted from the work of David Kantor (1995) & William N. Isaacs (1999)**

# We All Play A Role

- **Movers** – people who initiate ideas & offer direction
- **Followers** – people who add to &/or support ideas
- **Opposers** – people who challenge ideas & validity
- **Bystanders** – people who watch & may provide perspective on what's happening

# Multiple “Players” & Perspectives Required

- Without **MOVERS** there is no direction
- Without **OPPOSERS** there is no correction
- Without **FOLLOWERS** there is no completion
- Without **BYSTANDERS** there is no perspective

# Dialogic Leaders

- **Can play each of these four roles when required to balance dialogue**
- **Can encourage others to play these roles**
- **No role is “better” than others**
- **Anyone can be a dialogic leader**
- **Conversations get competitive & fragmented when we get stuck in one role and don't try to balance & round out all perspectives**

# Enhancing Meeting Dialogue

- **LISTENING** – Prepare to listen not to speak, defend, or plan. Collective listening.
- **SUSPENDING** – Neither suppress or advocate for our position/ Awareness of thoughts & feelings without acting on them
- **RESPECTING** – Try to understand what others are saying/thinking
- **VOICING**- expressing ourselves, courage, authenticity, honesty/action in sharing perspective

# Stimulating Dialogue

- 1. Ask for participants feelings & perspectives**
- 2. Paraphrase what you hear others saying**
- 3. Ask for examples/ more detail**
- 4. Question assumptions**
- 5. Provide affirmation & support for participating**
- 6. Role Reversal- put yourself in their “shoes”**
- 7. Look to the future, beyond the immediate**
- 8. Stop action & discuss other issues if required**
- 9. Ask for clarification from the speaker**
- 10. Ask for a summary so repetition isn't prolonged**
- 11. Do informal “survey” – how close to consensus are we?**

# Building Environment of Trust

- **Aligns & enriches effort & work**
- **Enables quicker exploration of ideas**
- **Pooling of shared resources**
- **Collaboration on tasks & projects**
- **Fulfillment & meaningful relationships**
- **Allows for mutual accountability**

# Trust

## Building

- Awareness of others
- Acceptance & Respect
- Involving Others
- Honesty/ Openness
- Sharing/ Vulnerable
- Loyalty
- Confidentiality as appropriate

## Busting

- Breaching confidentiality
- Withholding info.
- Critical feedback without explanation
- Fear tactics
- Always using hierarchy instead of direct communication

# Challenging Participants Who...

- Dominate discussion or “grandstands”
- Like to argue or compete
- Start side discussions
- Lack confidence to participate
- Are antagonistic to others
- Attempt to “get rather than give” an opinion
- Are superficial or off-topic

***WHAT WOULD YOU DO AS A CHAIR OR PARTICIPANT (Constructively 😊)?***

# Effective Board Meetings

- **Consider benefits of full dialogue/ diversity of perspective to an FCSS Advisory Board**
- **Build trust to support dialogue**
- **Learn to appreciate & use 4 roles in a dialogue**
- **Consider when decisions must be made & how (board process/norms)...Is consensus always desirable? Why?**
- **Look after both the “art & science” of meetings**

# Resources

**Board Development Program, Alberta Culture & Community Spirit <http://culture.alberta.ca>  
(Resources: Bulletins)**

- ***Meetings That Work***
- ***Effective Meetings Call for Effective Chairs***

**Haynes, M. (1997). *Effective Meeting Skills*.  
Menlo Park, CA: Crisp Publications Inc.**

**Bens, Ingrid (1997). *Facilitating with Ease*.  
Toronto: Participative Dynamics**