

FACILITATION SKILLS FOR THE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP PRACTITIONER

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Johanna Reed Adams, Ph.D.
Community Leadership Development State Extension Specialist,
University of Missouri Extension

Presentation Track: Practice

Community development practitioners recognize facilitation as a critical leadership skill. This presentation addresses the “science”, “art” and “practice” of facilitation for individuals who work with community leadership groups and organizations. Emphasis will be placed on practical skills. Participants will have the opportunity to practice within a safe context.

Johanna Reed Adams, Ph.D. is the State Community Leadership Development Extension Specialist at the University of Missouri-Columbia. Johanna is responsible for the programming designed to respond to the rapidly growing need for community-based leadership. She works with University of Missouri Extension Regional Specialists and collaborating partners to create educational programs requested by community and organizational leaders throughout Missouri. Johanna’s main focus has been the EXCEL (EXperience in Community Enterprise and Leadership Development) program held throughout Missouri. She has a Bachelor of Science in Political Science, Masters in Public Administration and a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Introduction:

There has been a renewed interest in citizen involvement in community decisions. While many issues are still decided by powerful and financially strong networks, the ability of the average citizen to collect relevant information, address issues with intelligence, and initiate public meetings has made the public influence greater.

Those who work with communities have learned to recognize the need for effective facilitations skills. Facilitation is a critical leadership skill or tool. This hands-on presentation will address the “science”, “art” and “practice” of facilitation for individuals who work with community leadership groups, community organizations or in the workplace. Emphasis will be placed on practical skills. In the tradition of experiential learning, participants will have the opportunity to practice within a safe context.

- Objectives:**
1. Increase the individual’s comfort level as a facilitator.
 2. Build capacity among community leadership practitioners.
 3. Prepare individuals to facilitate meetings and project initiatives.
 4. Provide a toolbox of skills and resources.

Background

With its focus on asking instead of telling, listening and building consensus, facilitation is the embodiment of the new leadership ideal and a core skill for all leaders!

To get the most from people today, leaders have to know how to create buy-in, generate active participation and empower people to take charge. To keep pace, tomorrow’s leaders need to be coaches, mentors, sponsors and teachers. At the core of each of these new roles is the skill of facilitation.

Context: For this workshop (Working with community groups/organizations)

Settings: Two fold/ facilitate groups/meetings such as community leadership boards, participant groups, sessions, meetings in the community, organizations and learning/decision-making, discussions, process, planning, and creating, new ideas/solutions to problems.

How it works

Description of Content and Format:

Participants will be introduced to core competencies in group facilitation. and how they relate to community-based concepts and initiatives. Topics will include: what facilitation is and isn’t; the role of a facilitator; criteria for getting involved

and not getting involved; the art and science of facilitation; key communication skills; how to create a safe and cooperative environment; when and how to use ground rules; group formation; how to identify key stakeholders; and participatory decision making techniques. Participants will receive useful materials to add to facilitation toolbox.

The format will be highly interactive and participatory. It will involve participants in tabletop exercises, sharing of individual experiences, case studies, and group activities that illustrate and relate to the subject matter.

Format Outline:

- Introductory group exercise (ice breaker) to put people at ease with each other, to find out what their expectations are and to model the lesson of “getting in tune” with the group.
- Questions to ask and areas to clarify as one moves into the role of facilitator.
- Small Group Assignment: Create an agenda or process design based on a case study followed by sharing and debriefing of exercise.
- Exercises that provide practice of key communication skills.
- Practice using flip charts effectively.
- Anticipate worst case scenarios and discuss/model ways to deal with the possible glitches in the facilitation process.
- Allow time for participants to reflect on learning.
- Explore applications and opportunities to practice, discuss and model good facilitation skills.

Results when facilitation is practiced

- Community and Organization members are more motivated to support the decisions made;
- The best efforts of groups usually yield better results than individual efforts;
- Maximum participation and involvement increase productivity;
- Managers and leaders are better able to draw on those they lead as resources, an ability that is critical to organizational success;
- Everyone has a chance to be influential and useful, and people sense that they are an integral part of a team effort;
- Communities/Organizations can be flexible and produce results more quickly because people are committed to the decisions made;
- Decisions are made where the work must be done;
- People realize that responsibility for implementing decisions lies with everyone;
- Innovation, problem-solving, and implementation skills are build’
- People are encouraged to think and act for the overall good of the communities/organizations;
- Higher-quality decisions can be made;

- A forum is provided for constructive conflict resolution and clarifying misunderstandings; and
- Negative effects are less likely, such as low morale, low involvement, and withholding information from others, as well as attitudes such as “its’ not my job: and “just tell me what to do.:

Conclusions/Recommendations

In the Foreword to Facilitator’s Guide to Participatory Decision Making by Sam Kaner, Michael Doyle presents two important lessons learned. *“Lesson one: if people don’t participate in and ‘own’ the solution to the problems or agree to the decision, implementation will be half-hearted at best, probably misunderstood, and, more likely than not, fail. The second lesson is that the key differentiating factor in the success of a community or organization is not just the products and services, not just its technology or market share, but the community’s or organization’s ability to elicit, harness, and focus the vast intellectual capital and goodwill in their members, employees, and stakeholders. When these get energized and focused, the community or organization becomes a powerful force for positive change in today’s business and societal environments.”*

In order to be successful in today’s rapidly changing world, Community Development Practitioners must possess facilitation skills in order to effectively follow the Community Development Practices and Principles.

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Download free from:

<https://muextension.missouri.edu/explore/commdm/dm0463.htm>

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***Facilitation Resources: Volume 1. Understanding Facilitation;
Volume 2. Contracting and Handling Logistics;
Volume 3. Getting Focused: Vision/Mission/Goals;
Volume 4. Managing Group Interaction;
Volume 5. Making Group Decisions;
Volume 6: Dealing with Group Conflict;
Volume 7. Utilizing Diversity, Power, and Ethics; and
Volume 8. Designing a Volunteer Facilitation Program.***

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To order go to: <http://www.extension.umn.edu/units/dc/>

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