Designing and Facilitating Effective Large-Group Processes

Learning Objectives

- Explain the steps necessary to successfully convene and facilitate a large-group decision-making process.

- Describe the common skills and techniques used by large-group facilitators.

- Describe the ways in which the media can be either an asset or a liability in large-group decision-making processes.

- Demonstrate an understanding of the benefits of various meeting formats and when and how to apply them.

- Describe and perform the tasks of a successful facilitator.

JOHN AT THE BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

John's agency is plagued by an antiquated system for the management of public meetings and decision-making processes, not unlike many other state and federal government agencies. When a coal mining company seeks to open a new mine or to expand an existing operation, the mining company meets secretly with property owners, slowly buying access to desired properties until all or nearly all the needed plots have been purchased. With each purchase, they require the seller to sign a nondisclosure agreement so that the company's desire to open a new

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mine does not become public knowledge until all the plots needed have changed hands. Then, the company applies for a mining license from the Bureau of Reclamation. As long as the company has prepared an environmental impact statement, posts the necessary bond (to guard against a company going bankrupt and leaving a mess behind), and shows it has no outstanding violations on any other mines in the state, the license will be granted. Local members of the community first learn about the mine when the bureau announces the license application in the local paper, as required by state law.

Next, the employees of the bureau have the unenviable duty of holding at least one public meeting in which they record public comments regarding the license application. To be clear, there is almost nothing the public can do to stop the granting of the license, according to state law. Once the license is granted, another public meeting is required to announce the issuance of the license. The law was written with the explicit input of the mining companies and many of the legislative members on the relevant committees have previously worked as employees of the mining committees. Once they leave office, they may go into the lucrative field of lobbying, where their ties to industry and politicians will serve them well. This is not corruption; it is perfectly legal (or imperfectly legal, depending on your perspective). Unless a citizen can show the company is in violation of state or federal rules on one of their other mines or they can show the company submitted false financial statements, it is nearly impossible to stop the issuance of a coal mining license. For this reason, John and his employees at the bureau are generally viewed by citizens as being in the pocket of the mining companies. Of course, the mining companies know that the bureau's employees will not hesitate to revoke an existing license or issue a fine for violating any relevant environmental regulations, so they view the bureau's employees as rabid environmentalists.

On the day of the required public meetings, many of John's employees mysteriously become ill. Some of them are genuinely ill due to the stress these meetings cause. He consistently has difficulty in getting bureau employees to attend the public meetings and record public comments, as required by law. Citizens come to these meetings with a desire to stop the mine and they voice many concerns: noise and shaking from

blasting, lost property value as a result of living near the mine, damage to local roads from the heavy volume of truck traffic, as well as related safety concerns: the safety of ground water supplies because blasting may damage the underground aquifers, pollution from chemicals used in the mining process, and increased dust from the mining process that may make it difficult to open the windows of their homes or may worsen health conditions such as asthma. Yet, the purpose of these public meetings is to gather public comment, not supply information. Additionally, most citizens come to these meetings with the idea that their voice will matter. Sometimes they bring petitions with thousands of signatures in the hope that this will halt or delay the issuance of the mining license. It won't.

At the public meetings, the bureau's staff sit at a head table on a raised platform at the front of the building with pads of paper on which to record public comment. Citizens can step up to the microphone and share their concerns for up to five minutes per person. This leads to grandstanding by some local leaders, especially during election season. Usually the speaker makes a statement against the mine and the audience applauds vigorously, hooting their support, which takes up a lot of the speaker's time. Occasionally, someone will speak in favor of the mine. This is usually someone hoping the mine will bring needed jobs to the town. In other cases, it is an existing employee for the mining company or someone who hopes to sell their property to the mining company. They are usually heckled after the first few sentences and are unable to finish their presentations. To make matters worse, some people wait all evening to speak, but at the end of the ninety-minute meeting, some have not yet had their turn and the meeting ends on time.

John is concerned because these meetings not only leave the public with a negative view of his agency, but they can also be dangerous. At the last meeting someone slashed all four tires on his car and the local sheriff had to accompany John and his staff as they left the town hall out of fear for their safety. Clearly, something needs to change. John has been doing some reading about the management of public disputes and is nearly ready to make some radical changes to the current process—changes that do not require any modification of existing laws.

Whether you organize meetings for the corporate shareholders, a group of nonprofit volunteers, or public meetings for a government agency, facilitation skills are indispensable for managers. Large-group decision-making processes are important for every type of organization. Managers who display these skills stand out as leaders within their teams and organizations. Those who fail to master the skills necessary to lead efficient and productive meetings will encounter low attendance, low levels of attention from those in attendance, and a general sense of dread at the thought of approaching meetings. This chapter will convey methods for holding effective, efficient, useful meetings with minimal drama. Although the emphasis here is on large-group decision-making processes, most of the skills and content knowledge apply to smaller team and staff meetings as well. This chapter introduces screening tools managers can use to determine which issues are most likely to benefit from a collaborative decision-making process; outlines choices about meeting logistics; explains how to deal with the presence of the media during negotiations and public meetings; examines the skills, characteristics, and habits of effective facilitators; and presents a variety of potential meeting formats from which to choose.

When applying ADR to large-group decision making, it is important to understand key terms such as *consensus, collaboration*, and *deliberative democracy* as applied to large-group processes. **Consensus** occurs in matters of policy when "the parties have reached a meeting of the minds sufficient to make a decision and carry it out; no one who could block or obstruct the decision or its implementation will exercise that power; and everyone needed to support the decision and put it into effect will do so" (Arthur, Carlson, & Moore, 1999, p. 5). In terms of large-group processes, collaboration occurs when multiple parties come together to accomplish a common objective because of a shared need through authentic conversations in which people speak frankly and listen to one another under norms of reciprocity that require a cooperative give-and-take that enables the group to negotiate effectively (Arthur, Carlson, & Moore, 1999). **Deliberative democracy** refers to the underlying principle that for laws to have true legitimacy they must be subject to authentic deliberation prior to a majority vote. (The term *deliberative democracy* was originally coined by Joseph M. Bessette [1980].) Authentic deliberation means that decision makers engage in discussion, debate, and analysis that are free from the influence of unequal power derived from wealth, status, or other sources of inequality. The goal of deliberative democracy is to move toward consensus but decisions can be made based on majority

vote once deliberations have occurred and all have had a chance to participate. Deliberative democracy is a founding principle of Western governmental systems, albeit incompletely achieved in practice.

PUBLIC AND LARGE-GROUP MEETING DISASTERS

No one comes. Everyone comes. The room is too small. The room is cavernous and there is the faint sound of crickets. Grandstanders monopolize the microphone and shout unhelpful criticisms and those on the podium alternate between disinterest and intimidation. No one speaks at the meeting that was intended to gather input from stakeholders. No clear agenda exists and the meeting seems to wander wildly off topic. A clear agenda exists yet the meeting wanders wildly off topic. One person dominates the discussion and is seemingly indifferent to the annoyance of the others present. The issues on the agenda were composed of announcements that could have been disseminated via e-mail, taking people away from other pressing tasks. Important decisions could not be made during the meeting because long debates failed to lead to a consensus among decision makers. Do any of these sound familiar? Sitting through poorly designed and executed meetings can feel like torture. Leading such a meeting is even worse. Yet with some planning and preparation, attending or leading group meetings can be invigorating and instrumental to decision making within an organization or on issues of public policy. Whether you are a wallflower who hates public speaking or are a founding member of Toastmaster's, learning the art of skillful meeting design and facilitation will serve you and your organization well. Not only can some up-front preparation make all the difference, when you find yourself in the middle of a meeting that just isn't working, you can change course midstream and be transparent about your observation by saying something like, "It seems this isn't working; let's try it another way."

Why should individual stakeholders and representatives of stakeholder groups be included in decision making? It turns out that regular people tend to have intimate knowledge about the problems affecting their lives, communities, and work. They often come up with innovative ideas for problem solving—innovations that policy makers might not think up on their own. Including stakeholders, as appropriate, into decision-making processes can simply yield better, more sustainable, implementable, politically palatable decisions that uphold the ideals of democracy. As this chapter will show, collaborative processes are most useful

and have maximum legitimacy when all relevant stakeholders are engaged in the process and have a voice.

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Inadequate Input Leads to Unanticipated Failures

A federal agency was organizing a review of the potential effects of shale oil development on water resources in Western Colorado. Agency officials invited federal and state officials, industry representatives, and urban environmentalists to participate. The plan was to discuss the issues, produce agreements, and then announce them to the world. No public meetings were held. The opinions of the agricultural and community water interests were not sought until after the discussions were completed. As a result, the agreements reached by the group omitted subtle but important long-term consequences to agriculture of diverting water to the shale oil industry. The report, and the work that had gone into it, were so flawed that it was never given serious consideration. (Carpenter & Kennedy, 2001, p. 177)

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Expert outside neutrals may be brought in to help with these processes or inside manager leaders may be used. The term *facilitator* is most commonly used to refer to the leaders of these large-group processes but the term *mediator* is also frequently used, especially with smaller groups or when the group's task is to reach a formal agreement. In truth, the terms *mediator* and *facilitator* are often used interchangeably in the literature but for the sake of consistency, this chapter will refer to the leaders of large-group collaborative processes as facilitators. It is the role of facilitators to help "create the conditions for new understandings, solutions, agreements, deals, accords and plans to emerge" (Adler & Fisher, 2007, p. 21).

NEEDS ASSESSMENT STAGE

Before diving in headfirst for a collaborative effort or to convene a group of stakeholders to discuss a contentious issue, it is critical to conduct a thorough assessment of the issue or conflict in order to determine the likelihood of success.

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A needs assessment (also called *conflict assessment*) is an evaluation of the conflict or issue to determine whether a collaborative process is appropriate. What are the goals of the potential effort? The goals will have a formative impact on the process choices: is the goal to reach a collaborative decision on an issue of policy? Is the goal to exchange information in two directions (or share information in one direction) between government and the public or between a corporation and its customers? Is the goal to build understanding and community between groups with a history of conflict in order to reduce the incidence of future conflict (such as Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland or African American and Korean American communities in Los Angeles)? Each of these goals would necessitate different process choices. Information about the dispute can be gathered through firsthand observation, interviews with stakeholders, reviewing documents and media reports, and so on.

The **process sponsor** is the organization that convenes and usually financially supports the large-group process of decision making or information exchange. The sponsor is usually a governmental agency but it can also be a private or nonprofit organization or the process can be jointly sponsored by more than one organization. The sponsor generally conducts an assessment of the conflict or, ideally, hires an outside consultant to conduct an unbiased assessment. The assessment will determine who the key stakeholders are; their positions, interests, BATNAs (see Chapter Three); the salience of the issue to each stakeholder; and their willingness to participate in a collaborative process (see Table 12.1). The assessment will examine the ripeness of the dispute to determine whether the timing is appropriate for a large-group effort. As discussed in Chapter Eleven, if it is too early in the life cycle of the dispute or issue, there may not be enough information available or an adequate sense of urgency to motivate stakeholder groups to participate. Alternatively, if the issue has risen to the crisis stage and an immediate decision is needed from an authoritative body such as a court or government agency, it may be too late to begin a collaborative process. The conflict assessment must include an analysis of the dispute's ripeness. Related to ripeness, the assessment should examine the timeline available for the group to meet and accomplish its goals. If the group's task is to reach a collaborative decision, then a clear deadline is necessary. Otherwise the group may talk and talk, with no definite end in sight, putting off difficult decisions because no deadline exists.

			Table 12.1				
			Conflict Assessment Protocol				
Parties	**Issues**	**Interests**	**Importance of Issues (High, Medium, Low)**	**Source of Power and Influence**	**Positions and Options**	**Interest in Working with Other Parties**	**Other Comments**
Party 1.							
Party 2.							

Source: Carpenter and Kennedy (2001, p. 87).

During the assessment stage, the sponsor must determine whether sufficient resources exist to support a collaborative process. If a facilitator, mediator, or other expert neutral will be hired, who will pay for those services and how will the resources be found? Will all the key stakeholders be able to send at least one representative to the meetings or will they need some financial support to participate? This is especially important for volunteers who represent civic groups. Participation may mean missed work, thereby making it a burden that is not sustainable for some groups. It may be possible to find grants or government agency funding to enable civic or nonprofit groups to send representatives to these meetings so their voices are not overshadowed by commercial and government interests.

If the process would benefit from having a facilitator (see Chapter Four for a detailed explanation of facilitation versus other types of ADR processes) or other neutral to lead the effort, should that individual come from inside the sponsoring agency, from one of the other stakeholder organizations, or should an outside neutral be hired? The question of whether to hire an outside or inside neutral is not always simple to answer. Outside neutrals will bring process knowledge, experience in handling other complex large-group processes, and an objectivity that comes from *not* being from one of the stakeholder groups. However, there may be no money to hire an outside neutral or the group may believe that the technical aspects of the issue are so complex that only someone from one of the stakeholder groups could possibly meet the groups' needs. If the groups decide

to use an inside neutral, there needs to be a supermajority (as close to unanimous as possible) for that choice. It needs to be clear as to whether the neutral will give up his advocate role and act as the neutral or retain his right to share his own comments and preferences and still facilitate the group discussion. In general, the former seems to work better and with less friction than the latter option. It is also possible to combine the inside or outside neutral role in interesting ways. For example, many large government agencies have trained employees in facilitation and mediation skills. It may be possible to invite a facilitator or mediator from a government agency that is not a party to the current dispute or decision-making process. These shared neutral programs are designed to meet the demand for expert neutral facilitators and also save the expense and contracting process hurdles required when hiring an outside neutral. Stakeholders may decide they wish to hire an outside neutral for the purposes of objectivity and expertise yet pair this person up with one or more inside stakeholders who will serve as a team to make process-related decisions and ensure that the facilitator or other neutral has the subject-matter specific knowledge the group feels is necessary to fully understand the issue under discussion.

What happens if a collaborative decision-making or dialogue process is undertaken, yet one or more key stakeholders were uninvited? The legitimacy of the process becomes immediately suspect. The decision that results is likely to be seen as skewed toward the interests of those who were invited and indeed it will probably reflect the voices of those present more than those who were absent. Imagine the US president is considering new environmental and safety regulations concerning oil pipelines and all the major American oil companies are invited to participate in initial talks on the matter. But the Sierra Club and other civic groups are not invited. The result of these meetings will be viewed with cynicism by many. Those who were not invited to participate may seek to block the implementation of any resulting policy change through the courts, claiming that the agency has overstepped its mandate from Congress or has been captured by the interests it is supposed to regulate. Clearly, identifying and recruiting the participation of all key stakeholders is critical to the success of any collaborative effort.

So how do you know which groups or individuals to invite? Try using a snowball sampling method. Begin by speaking with the obvious stakeholders—organizations from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors that are clearly affected by the issue under discussion. Speak to leaders within those organizations

to ascertain their interest and willingness to participate in a collaborative process. Ask them, "Who else should participate?" and "Is there anyone who should not be invited to participate?" Then go to those individuals and organizations who were mentioned by others and ask the same questions. Once you stop hearing new names, it is probable that most or all of the key stakeholders have been identified. Interestingly, the answers to both of these questions are likely to indicate other groups or individuals who need to be invited to participate. Anyone who has the power or incentive to block the implementation of the group's decision is someone who has a stake in the issue. Their voices need to be heard. Remember the advice of the famous Chinese general Sun-tzu, "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer." By inviting the most cynical or extreme groups, along with the moderate ones, you ensure that no group can later claim the process was tilted against them. More important, their views and the views of all participants will probably evolve as they take part in the group process. At a minimum, all groups should leave the process with a deeper understanding of the others' concerns and the complexity of the problem itself. These more complete understandings as well as the relationships and rapport formed between negotiators can become the basis of a future agreement and collaboration.

In spite of your best efforts to identify and invite all key stakeholders to participate in the process, it is not uncommon for an individual or organization to appear halfway through the process and insist on joining the group. This happens for three main reasons: (1) a stakeholder group was overlooked during the snowball sampling mentioned previously, (2) the group formed recently and now wants to be recognized and included, (3) a stakeholder group was invited early in the process but chose not to participate. Now that the process is under way and draft policies or decisions are being formulated, the group has decided that its interests are indeed affected by the groups' activities, thereby necessitating its late inclusion into the process. In other words, they were hanging back to see what the group was going to do and whether their participation was warranted. In any event, if the process involves issues of public policy, it is best to allow latecomers to participate and encourage the other members to welcome them into the process. This can be frustrating for those who have participated from the outset and may require the neutral to explain the benefits of including all comers, regardless of when and how they arrive.

Screening cases for the appropriateness of an ADR process is a key step in the assessment stage. Screening needs to occur on two levels. The sponsoring

organization or agency needs to decide whether it is willing and able to engage in a collaborative process, as do the potential participants. The following box lists the questions commonly asked in a sponsor's assessment. As the box shows, a sponsor should consider a collaborative process when none of the parties is seeking to set a precedent through the courts, when all key stakeholders are willing and able to participate, when adequate time exists along with a reasonably firm deadline for action, when financial and personnel resources exist to support a collaborative process, when the agency is honestly willing to share decision-making power or at least take the group's decision under advisement (and be transparent from the outset what the effect of the group's decision will be), and when ongoing communication and buy-in will be necessary for the implementation of any policy changes resulting from the process. On this last point, it should be noted that when stakeholders believe a policy or rule was created arbitrarily or that it is unreflective of their operational realities, they tend to drag their feet on implementation. Creating new policies or rules is useless if they are not implemented.

Assessment Screening Questions for Process Sponsors

1. Do the issues appear to be negotiable?
   Are parties framing this as an issue of fundamental rights or moral values that cannot be negotiated?

   Are parties seeking to establish a legal precedent?

2. Are the interests clearly defined?

3. Where does this issue fall on the spiral of unmanaged conflict?
   Is this issue a priority for stakeholders?

   Is there enough time for parties to deliberate or is it an emergency?

   Is there a deadline that would help avoid endless negotiations?

4. Who are the parties and how is power balanced among them?
   Are there any parties or stakeholders who can accomplish their goals without negotiation?

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5. Are there issues of race, class, culture, ethnicity, education, or ethnicity that will make it difficult for one or more key stakeholders to participate on equal footing? If so, is there anything that can be done to overcome these differences or enable fuller participation?

6. Will the sponsor be able to provide or locate the financial and personnel resources necessary to support this process?

7. Is the agency's leadership truly willing to engage in a good faith effort at shared decision making?

8. Will the parties, including the sponsor, continue to interact with one another in the future?
   In other words, are they interdependent?

   Will any agreement require ongoing participation, collaboration, and buy-in to be fully implemented?

When the sponsor's assessment is complete, create a written summary that identifies the key stakeholders along with their interests, positions, and willingness to negotiate; the substance of the problem itself including various ways to define the problem; the negotiability of the key issues; any ethical dilemmas or value conflicts inherent in the problem; and the various processes that may be used to constructively address the problem. The following box summarizes the elements of the conflict assessment.

Questions for the Conflict Assessment

Parties
1. Who are the main parties and their key spokespeople?
2. Who are the secondary parties and their key spokespeople?
3. Are the parties well defined?

4. Do the parties want to work toward a solution?

5. Are the parties capable of working with each other?

Substance of the Problem

6. What description is the most constructive way to define the problem?

    a. Conflict focuses on different interests.

    b. Conflict focuses on strongly held values.

    c. Conflict focuses on perceived differences that do not really exist.

7. What is the most constructive way to define the problem?

8. What are the central issues?

9. What are the secondary issues?

10. Are the issues negotiable?

11. What are the key interests of each party?

12. What interests do the parties have in common?

13. What positions have been taken?

14. What other options for resolution exist?

Procedures

15. What do parties think about using some form of conflict management? What suggestions do they have?

16. Does a consensus process service the parties' interests?

17. What constraints might affect the structures of a conflict management process (timing, legal activities, resources)?

18. What other obstacles must a process overcome?

19. Which parties are experienced in using alternative dispute resolution procedures?

20. What are the chances for success?

Source: Carpenter and Kennedy (2001, p. 91).

In addition to the sponsor's assessment, all potential stakeholders will need to determine for themselves whether their interests and resources are suited to participation in a collaborative process. What will be the effect of sitting it out when the process may go on without your organization? Are your organization's needs more likely to be met through court action? How important is it to cultivate ongoing collaborative relationships with regulatory agencies and other stakeholders on this issue? How might your brand be affected by participation or nonparticipation? Will your organization be in a better position to influence the outcome of the decision-making process through participation or nonparticipation? Will implementation of a new policy or regulation be easier as a result of participation in the formulation process? Will your organization learn more about the issue and its competitors or other stakeholders through participation? What is the overall ratio of benefits to costs for participation? Do not forget that the middle ground is always possible: participate now and decide later if participation should be ended.

CONVENING STAGE

Convening is the process of bringing stakeholders together to design the process jointly and begin the dialogue or negotiation. If the needs assessment led to the conclusion that a collaborative process is a good idea, the next phase is to convene the key stakeholders and begin discussions about the process itself. During the assessment phase key stakeholders were identified and all or most of them were interviewed to learn more about their willingness to participate, their motivation to negotiate in good faith, and any resources they might need in order to fully participate. Facilitators do not get to choose which individuals serve as delegates from the various stakeholder groups. However, if they are able to use their influence or make suggestions, "in multi-party cases, mediators must perpetually scan for participants who will imagine the big picture, enhance trust, integrate disparate interests, coordinate tasks and emerge as bridge-builders" (Adler & Fisher, 2007, p. 21).

This is the phase during which primary stakeholders work together to craft the problem statement or task description that will guide the group's time together. The sponsor may seek to suggest the problem statement and task description but in the end participants will need to concur with the framing of this statement in order to consent to participate in the process.

During the convening stage participants work with the facilitator to craft and consent to the ground rules and procedures that will guide their time together, including the length and frequency of meetings, rules about who speaks when, and decision rules.

A word about decision rules is in order at this point. Although 100 percent consensus is a wonderful goal, in a large and diverse group it can be nearly impossible to reach. For example, a local church was seeking a new pastor after their long-serving leader announced his retirement. Each Sunday the congregation would host a guest pastor or job applicant who would give the weekly sermon and then join the congregation in a potluck lunch. A few days later the congregation would meet, discuss the job applicant, and vote as to whether or not to hire him. There were approximately four hundred officially registered and voting church members, but the church's bylaws were written when the church was much smaller and required a 100 percent agreement to hire a new leader. As a result, each week there would be at least one church member who was a holdout. Getting four hundred people to agree on anything is nearly impossible. Slowly, members began leaving the church for other congregations and eventually the church completely closed. The rule of 100 percent consensus was well intentioned but unworkable. It also gave attention and power to those who seek to act as spoilers. A **spoiler** is someone who uses his power to sabotage the group's progress in order to gain attention or further his own goals. Spoilers usually hold significantly more extreme views than the majority of process participants and can use consensus processes to stall or sabotage outcomes they wish to avoid.

When leading large-group decision-making processes, consider selecting something short of a 100 percent consensus rule unless the agreement of every stakeholder is necessary for the implementation of any resulting decision. For example, a "consensus minus one" rule will make it clear to the group that if only one party does not join in on the agreement, it will go forward without their support. Other options include a vote that requires a supermajority. The percentage required to reach agreement is something that can be negotiated among group members. The key is to make decision rules at the outset of the negotiation rather than waiting until it is time to take a vote or reach a decision. At that point, those who are unhappy with the agreement will insist on 100 percent consensus and those in favor will prefer a simple majority.

The convening stage is the time to teach consensus building 101. In other words, for a group that will meet repeatedly it is important to build a baseline

of knowledge regarding collaborative skills, including the difference between interests and positions, listening and framing skills, and techniques for keeping constituents informed and on board with agreements reached at the table. In fact, it can be a facilitator's duty to train participants in facilitation skills with the goal of helping them eventually take over the facilitator's role. The best facilitators are those who are able to model and train parties in these skills to empower them to create a self-managing group, especially if the group will be together permanently.

During the convening phase it is crucial to build in social and networking time so the participants can get to know each other as people. In most cases, dialogue must come before negotiation—this means the participants simply need to get to know one another, overcome any preexisting stereotypes or assumptions made in the absence of real interactions, and develop the trust necessary to have frank and open discussions.

During the convening stage it is also important to create a timeline for process milestones and for the close of the group's work. Some groups work in an ongoing manner, making decisions as necessary to manage shared resources or deal with recurring challenges rather than having a specific timeline for completion. In these processes it remains important to have timelines for decisions and milestones so as to discourage endless discussions without resulting decisions.

In order to evaluate the efficiency, efficacy, and value of the large-group process it is important to build in evaluation methods from the very beginning. For example, a pretest and posttest may be crafted in order to understand the effect of the process on the management of a resource such as water supply, forest health, hospital quality of care, and so on. The development of evaluation tools will ensure the group has clear goals and methods for evaluating progress toward the goals.

DURING THE PROCESS

Once the meetings or negotiations are under way, the facilitator plays a role in ensuring clear and consistent communication between the negotiators and the constituencies they represent. Any negotiation in which participants represent broader constituency groups is in effect a two-level game, to borrow a concept from game theory. In other words, *intra*group negotiations occur in order to arrive at unified bargaining positions or to respond to offers made. Concurrently, *inter*group negotiations occur between stakeholder groups. Although the traditional facilitation role occurs in the intergroup negotiations, facilitators may

also be called on to assist with the intragroup negotiations that must successfully occur in order for a stakeholder group to effectively participate in the larger discussions. Many a negotiation has fallen apart because one or more representatives could not get their constituents to agree on a negotiating position or agree how to respond to a specific offer.

Be on the lookout for **collaboration fatigue**, which is the weariness that sets in among negotiators after talks have been ongoing for months or even years, especially if progress seems elusive or minimal. The signs of collaboration fatigue include falling meeting attendance, growing impatience or inattentiveness of representatives, and a decreased willingness to financially support the collaborative process. Through the use of ongoing evaluation tools it may be possible to gain feedback from stakeholders that will enable process changes to be made that will help avoid collaboration fatigue.

For public policy decision-making efforts, keep in mind the importance of timing — election cycles, agency leadership changes, funding cycles, and personnel changes. Few large decisions are made or endorsed by politicians just before an election. However, new dialogue or collaborative processes are often endorsed prior to elections as long as the timeline for decisions occurs comfortably after election day. Politicians and agency leaders may flock to collaborative processes not only because they produce better-quality decisions, but also because they provide political cover. A decision reached through a consensus process is likely to occur only if a supermajority of stakeholders reaches agreement. By delegating decision-making authority to a stakeholder group, politicians can give them credit and declare the outcome to be reached through a fair and democratic process. Be sure to pay attention to the timing of a collaborative process in order to maximize the chances of finding and sustaining political and leadership support. Yet a collaborative project supported by one politician or agency leader may be abandoned by the next, especially if it is viewed as the pet project of the previous administrator. Similarly, each participating organization will have a delegate in the stakeholder group. For long-term negotiations, the group will inevitably need to weather retirements, family leaves, and personnel changes for individual delegates. Recognizing these milestones can become a unifying tradition within the group. Welcoming in new members and getting them up to speed and on board can be crucial to the group's continued success, as this story illustrates:

> In one case involving proposed development in an environmentally sensitive area, leadership came primarily through the government's lead lawyer. As with

most effective negotiators, he was an avid listener who anticipated the other parties' issues, worked hard to figure out potential solutions before they raised concerns, and created a vision for the future that integrated everyone's interests. This resulted in a level of trust that enabled significant progress. Then, overnight, everything changed and his replacement, who had not been involved with the previous discussions, had different ideas and a less collaborative and more adversarial style. He did more talking than listening, the collaboration ended and the deal fell apart. (Adler & Fisher, 2007, p. 21)

Although finding and keeping the right people at the table is an ongoing struggle, it is also important to realize that the project is bigger than any individual stakeholder. Stakeholders should be encouraged to keep others from their organization in the wings and in the loop in case they need to step away from the project for any reason. Although this is not always possible, anything the manager facilitator can do to ensure the longevity of the project beyond the career changes of any one person will contribute to the collaboration's ultimate success. Be creative—Raines and Kubala (2011) detail how their collaborative effort lost its main keeper of the flame when the project manager left the US Army Corps of Engineers to go to work for a private company. His contribution was so pivotal the group found funds to hire him through his private company in order to finish the project under his stewardship.

Finally, a few words about agreements are in order. Agreements generally take one of three forms: (1) agreements in principle outline the process through which the problem will be solved, for example "a committee of delegates will select the best person for the position"; (2) each issue is negotiated separately until all issues are resolved (also known as the *building block approach*); or (3) an entire package of proposals is developed that addresses all issues in a comprehensive manner and is accepted or rejected (Carpenter & Kennedy, 2001). As discussed in Chapter Three, it may be helpful for the group to develop objective criteria against which any proposal can be examined. A plan and timeline for implementation should be part of the agreement rather than considered as an afterthought. Before any final agreement can be concluded, each representative must take the draft agreement back to his or her constituents and gain their approval before a final decision can be made. Once the agreement has been finalized and any required signatures attained, the next step is implementation.

AFTER THE PROCESS

Once regular meetings cease or become less frequent, and with the expected challenges that come with the implementation of any agreement, it is not unusual for preexisting animosities to return or trust to wane. For implementation to go smoothly, some form of ongoing monitoring will likely be necessary along with a plan to deal with those who fail to fulfill their commitments. Periodic meetings may be necessary to discuss progress with regard to implementation, maintaining cooperative morale, or even renegotiating parts of the agreement when unexpected circumstances or unforeseen problems arise during the process of implementation. Evaluation of the process and its ongoing impact on the policy issue should continue in order to institutionalize and improve the success of collaborative efforts and gain feedback that may be of continued use as the project matures. Process evaluation is an important topic but beyond the scope of this book. Luckily, there are many useful guides to evaluating large-group decision-making processes from which you can borrow survey questions and ideas for data gathering (see Emerson, Orr, Keyes, & Mcknight, 2009; Orr, Emerson, & Keyes, 2008).

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN PUBLIC DISPUTES

As discussed in Chapter Eleven, sunshine laws generally require that decision-making meetings held by government agencies are open to the public and therefore the media. In truth, most policy-making meetings are simply not riveting enough to attract media attention. When an agency is operating smoothly and no crisis exists, the media is notably absent. Yet when there has been a mistake or a crisis has arisen that necessitates a change in course or new policy action, then the media is more likely to be present. Unlikely as it seems, the media can be a positive asset for collaborative governance and decision making, but many leaders miss opportunities to develop a positive working relationship with the media or to use them appropriately as a venue for communicating with the public about important policy issues. Chapter Two presented Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Recall that most basic needs are for food, shelter, and physical security. Any issue of public policy that deals with these most basic needs are likely to be heated, to draw out passionate pleas on all sides of the issue, and therefore to pose the greatest likelihood of attracting media attention. These issues may be

about jobs, food safety, housing demolition or creation, prices for heating oil or food staples, and so on. When people sense their basic needs are threatened, they are likely to have strong reactions. People fear losing control over these areas of their lives, hence, the pervasive distrust of many governmental institutions that have the power to affect citizens on these issues. The media may be tempted to oversimplify policy issues into hysteria-producing sound bites that attract an audience to their stories with headlines like these: "Is the meat in your refrigerator dangerous?" or "The city government has decided to demolish five homes along the banks of the East River—could yours be next?" Any hint that the government is meeting in secret or withholding information from the media will only feed these fears. The trick in working with the media is the same as it is in working with any other organization or individual—meet needs through interest-based strategies. Help them meet their need for interesting news that attracts an audience and provides the public with accurate, useful information in a timely fashion.

As many public officials and higher-level bureaucrats have learned, contact with the media can result in incomplete and even factually inaccurate stories that can embarrass managers and even end careers. One public sector manager recently conveyed how he was misquoted in the local paper: "They misspelled my name, incorrectly listed my rank as higher than it is, and got the numbers in the article all wrong. Yet the public have taken the article as 'gospel truth' and we've been inundated with angry phone calls from concerned citizens." Incidents like these can lead managers to try to avoid contact with the media, yet their very avoidance is seen as a challenge to reporters, a sign that the managers are hiding information from the public. What can be done?

First, organizational leaders, upper-level managers, and professional policy facilitators should cultivate positive relationships with media representatives in their regions. If you work for the department of education, you should know the names of the reporters who are typically tasked to cover education stories in your city and state. Be careful not to be perceived as wasting their time because they are constantly running under tight deadlines. They will only meet with people who have something of interest to tell them. When you know changes are in store for your organization, set up meetings with relevant reporters to share the news of these impending changes. Tell them about your plans to use a collaborative

process that engages the public and key stakeholders. Explain to them the reasons why your organization is willing to undertake this type of process. Invite them to attend as observers. Observers to the negotiations cannot speak or ask questions unless invited to do so by the facilitators or key stakeholders. Tell them they can funnel questions to you and you will seek answers from the participants, as time allows. Ask them to refrain from popping in and out during sessions but instead to be present for the entire work session. This will help avoid their tendency to look for a sound bite to take out of context (but is no guarantee). Ask for their advice because they probably know who the key stakeholders are as well as some of the history on any contentious public issues. They often have a good feel for the political dimensions of policy issues and may be willing to point out stumbling blocks in advance. Tell them you will prepare news releases to share with them when important decisions or milestones have been met within the group process. These press releases should include the proper spelling and titles for all participants as well as some background information on the issue itself (for example, "why is clean water important to our economy?"), define technical terms in layperson's language and include a brief description of the collaborative process itself. Remember to keep all press releases brief and succinct to maximize the likelihood they will be used as written. These releases should be agreed on by all key stakeholders or a subcommittee elected by the larger group. In some contentious policy negotiations, participants may wish to agree on ground rules for dealing with the media. For example, "We agree not to speak to the media individually until the negotiations are over, but to instead craft mutually agreed-on press releases." This strategy reduces the incidence of having individual stakeholders trash talking their fellow negotiators via the media when talks get difficult. Assure the media of your intention to share information with the public rather than withhold it—especially the information they need to reach informed opinions on policy matters. In some ways, you are educating the reporter about the ways in which she can serve as a conduit for information to the public and developing a deeper level of understanding and analysis on the policy matters relevant to your organization's mission. With a little luck and some finesse, you will turn the media's presence from a liability into an asset. The following box summarizes these guidelines for working with the media.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL LARGE-GROUP FACILITATORS

Few organizations have had more experience facilitating group decision making than the United Nations (UN) member bodies. It is not surprising the UN has developed specific advice for their team members who frequently facilitate meetings composed of culturally diverse stakeholders seeking to collaborate for mutual gain. The following box paraphrases the characteristics of a successful facilitator and is based on the materials developed by the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

Characteristics of Successful Facilitators

- Believe in your group's capacity to solve its own problems.
- Use well-developed communication skills.
- Have knowledge of the group's needs, expectations, and potentials.
- Have the ability to work with a diverse group without forcing your own preferences or beliefs (i.e., low ethnocentricity).

- Use perseverance and patience.
- Use knowledge of multiple approaches and have a willingness to change an approach that isn't working (i.e., knowledge and flexibility).
- Have the ability to monitor, assess, and summarize the outcomes and effects of the group's efforts.

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Source: Adapted from http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/docs/04-facilitator_guide .pdf

To add to this list, Adler and Fisher (2007) argue for facilitative leaders as able to "foster better communication, brokering concurrence, taming tough problems and managing the inevitable conflicts that occur in politically charged environments" (p. 21). They add that facilitators do everything from arranging the room and setting out the cookies to addressing the "political choreographies" that address "complex intellectual and emotional moves that are needed to bring a dialogue or negotiation to a productive fruition" (p. 21). Perhaps that is why many observers have noted that successful facilitators seem to exude humility, transparency, the ability to think on their feet, can change course when necessary, maintain healthy emotional boundaries, remain calm in the face of the storm, show empathy, remain flexible, and understand the need for structure. Facilitators are resilient, adaptive, and proactive at managing positive change and constructive communication between disparate groups and individuals. Although individuals may be born with natural endowments that make them great facilitators, these skills and techniques can also be honed through practice and purposeful application.

HABITS OF AN EFFECTIVE FACILITATOR

Whether you are leading a meeting of five or five hundred, mastering the skills of facilitation can be key to ensuring productive group performance and decision making. Being a facilitator requires responsibility and authority. If the facilitator is a neutral in regard to the decisions under discussion, she will generally be trusted to be fair, unless her actions lead some parties to believe otherwise. If the facilitator is not neutral in regard to the issues under discussion, then trust may

need to be earned through a display of fairness, impartiality, and competence. The following box displays the key tasks of successful facilitators. Some of these tasks require additional elaboration.

Primary Tasks of Effective Facilitators

- Establish an agenda.
- Keep the discussion focused on the agenda.
- Clarify statements.
- Summarize statements.
- Explore ideas.
- Encourage all members to participate.
- Maintain a calm and positive tone.
- Enforce the ground rules fairly.
- Transparently describe what is happening.
- Offer process suggestions.
- Supervise record keeping.
- Test for agreements.
- Manage communications and activities between meetings.
- Verify that constituents are informed.

Source: Adapted from Carpenter and Kennedy (2001, pp. 158–168).

A mistake made by many a formal or informal facilitator is the failure to work with the parties in advance to create an agenda around which there is agreement. In advance of the meeting, send around a draft agenda or a request for agenda items. Work with the key stakeholders to ensure the agenda is of sufficient interest to draw players to the table and is manageable based on the available time frame for the meeting. Make sure the meeting's sponsor and facilitator are clear about the goals of the meeting. Is the goal to make a joint decision? To build rapport among parties? To provide a venue for communication between representatives

of different work units or organizations? The goals of the meeting should be clear to all invitees. Once the meeting commences, do your best to stick to the agenda using good time management skills. The agenda should have a timeline for each item's discussion, around which there can be some limited flexibility to account for the fact that it is impossible to fully predict how much time it will take to address each agenda item in advance. Be sure that each agenda item is indeed something that requires discussion, brainstorming, or negotiation during the meeting. Announcements can be shared in advance of the meeting via memos or other venues and should not take up the bulk of the time assigned for the meeting. For each agenda item, ask yourself, "Can this be addressed outside of a group meeting? If so, how? If not, then is it appropriate fodder for group meeting time?" If a public meeting is required in order to announce a draft policy, then consider using the meeting to accomplish additional goals, such as listening to feedback from stakeholders or gaining input as to potential process choices that may improve the final decision or its implementation.

Occasionally, entirely new items will arise during the meeting that threatens to swamp the group's ability to address the preexisting agenda items. At that point, it makes sense to ask the group whether they prefer to discard the original agenda for the more-pressing issue or whether a separate meeting should be called to deal with that issue. If the group has a tendency to get easily off track, you may choose to create a parking lot, which is a list of issues that one or more of the members wish to discuss but is not on the agenda. By placing these on the parking lot list, the facilitator is putting the issue to the side, temporarily. At the end of the meeting, with whatever time remains, the facilitator will tackle those issues that have made their way to the parking lot list. If time runs out, then the parking lot list will become part of the next meeting agenda or it can be addressed through online discussion boards or other communication used in between the regular meetings. When meetings lack clear agendas, they tend to get bogged down in details or easily sidetracked into nonessential issues. Like the old adage says, "If you don't know where you are going, you probably won't get there."

Keep some flexibility as necessary to account for exigent circumstances but be careful about starting meetings late. Although cultural variations should be considered, starting late tends to lead down a slippery slope: the first meeting started five minutes late, so those who were on time come five minutes late to the next meeting. Those who were five minutes late, now come ten or more minutes late. Therefore, the second meeting starts ten minutes late. Then, each subsequent

meeting gets started later and later. Do not be tempted to skip breaks or shorten the lunch breaks to account for starting late or having an overly packed agenda. These breaks not only provide the respite needed for parties to maintain their patience and stamina, but they also provide a venue for building rapport and informal discussions of important issues.

Facilitators serve their group by frequently clarifying the meaning of what group members have said. Saying "If I understand you correctly, you said . . ." serves to ensure that everyone present hears and understands the same message to the extent possible. By summarizing progress that has been made, facilitators highlight areas of consensus that have occurred and organize the group's focus on the next task at hand. Summarization helps to move the group forward from where they have been to where they are going. When working in large groups, facilitators are faced with some participants who are able to clearly articulate their thoughts and concerns and others who have more difficulty in formulating their thoughts into words. Once one individual gets embarrassed publicly, it creates a chilling effect on others who may be timid about speaking up and sharing their concerns or ideas. Facilitators often need to invite participants to further explain their concerns and engage in an exploration of those ideas so they feel their participation is welcomed, even if it requires some coaching or assistance on the part of the facilitator: "Can you tell me more about your concern? I'm not sure I understand" or "It is important that we hear from everyone and understand your needs. Could you give me an example or elaborate more about your needs?" This approach will help those quieter members feel able to participate. Likewise, there may be some who dominate the airspace in the room by sharing every thought that comes into their head or responding to every comment made by others. In these situations, it may be necessary to speak to that person during a break and invite them to help create some space for others to participate. It can help to explain that some participants might not speak up until there is a silence to fill or when they are sure that no one else is trying to get a word in. By making room for others, the participation of all parties will be possible. Discussing norms or ground rules for sharing the discussion space can be helpful prior to the commencement of the actual dialogue or negotiation in order to set the tone for a discussion in which all participate and none dominate. Enforcing the ground rules fairly helps the facilitator maintain trust and the efficiency of the process.

Large-group meetings and collaborative processes can be exhausting. Emotions may be high; listening to others for long periods can be draining. Facilitators can

assist by keeping a positive tone, pointing out the progress that has been made, and normalizing the difficulty of decisions such as those under consideration. By emoting a calm, reassuring demeanor, facilitators can help to assure parties that the task ahead of them is indeed doable.

By being transparent and explaining techniques and observations, facilitators not only help to build trust with the parties but they also help to steer the process away from potential pitfalls or icebergs. For example, when the facilitator notices that parties seem to be mentally checking out, he can say, "It seems like we are getting pretty fatigued at this point. How about a quick break?" or after presiding over bickering between the parties he might say, "I'm not sure the last few minutes have helped us to reach our goal. Let's try breaking into smaller workgroups and focus on these remaining questions, okay?" By describing what he is doing and why and by offering process suggestions, facilitators can assist parties as they navigate the shoals of the dialogue or negotiation process.

Facilitators need to be transparent when they test for agreement, meaning the facilitator affirmatively asks the parties to confirm whether they agree with a particular decision or consensus the group has been working toward. Depending on the group's rules for decision making, which were discussed at the outset of the group's convening, decisions may require 100 percent consensus or something less than that. Regardless of the decision rule, facilitators need to ask the group to affirm any decisions made and entered into the minutes.

One of the most important and under-recognized tasks of facilitators is to keep meeting minutes and facilitate communications between meetings. Meeting minutes do not need to be akin to transcripts that show who said what and exactly what was said. In fact, the parties and facilitator may need to negotiate from the outset as to what goes into the minutes. If the meetings are to be frank, it may be better to refrain from identifying speakers in the minutes but instead stick to a basic summary of the discussions. The minutes should also include a detailing of any agreements reached and action items assigned to parties as a result of the meeting. The minutes should indicate when the next meeting will be held and any activities that should occur in the interim period.

During the periods between meetings, facilitators can further the success of the group by working to confirm that each stakeholder representative at the negotiations has been communicating with her constituents concerning the direction in which the negotiations are headed and any tentative agreements being made. It is truly devastating to a group process and morale to learn that a

stakeholder representative at the negotiations has voiced support for a proposal, only to find out that the group she represents disagrees with that decision and withdraws their support for the decision or for the entire negotiation process. Therefore, one key ground rule for successful large-group decision-making processes is to keep your organizations informed and confirm their support before any decisions or commitments are made by the negotiators at the table.

Be sure to include an evaluation tool to gain feedback as to how to make future meetings as efficient and successful as possible. Consider using an exit survey that participants leave by the door, or for participants within an organization, send around a brief online survey to gather this information. Strive for continual improvement as a facilitator and consensus builder to encourage rather than discourage continued participation from your members.

CHOOSING AMONG MEETING FORMATS

The menu of meeting formats is as varied as the decisions undertaken by large groups. Understanding the pros and cons of each format can assist managers as they select the most appropriate process for the issue at hand. This is not an exhaustive list of process options because processes can be custom-made to meet the needs and constraints of each group or issue.

Charrette

A charrette is a method of organizing thoughts from experts and the public into a structured gathering that is conducive to creative problem solving. A charrette refers to an intensive period of workshop-style meetings that typically occur over one to three days. In a charrette, the group typically divides into smaller working groups and then reports back to the full group at the end of the work session. The findings of each subgroup may become the fodder for additional dialogue for the present or a future charrette. This format enables maximal input from a large and diverse group of participants as well as increases the opportunity for creative ideas to arise.

Town Hall Meeting

A town hall meeting is an informal gathering open to all members of a community. Typically the meeting centers on a specific theme, such as health care reform or improving public education, and local elected leaders or high-ranking bureaucrats

are on hand to answer questions from the audience in a talk-show fashion. These meetings are helpful when a leader wishes to make his or her views known on a particular subject but are less suited to sharing complex information with the public and do not engage the public in deliberation or decision making. If speakers are not screened, those seeking to compete with the elected officials for the public's attention or votes can end up by grandstanding.

Twenty-First Century Town Hall Meetings

A relatively recent hybrid process combines the most important elements of deliberative democracy and the old-fashioned town hall meetings (also known as *deliberative democracy dialogues*). These gatherings occur around specific issues such as the Walter Reed reuse plan, which examined ways to redevelop and use the campus of the former Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, DC, or listening to the city, which gathered the opinions of New Yorkers concerning the fate of the Ground Zero site (see http://americaspeaks.org/). This meeting format involves hundreds of regular citizens and begins with a presentation of various ideas or options along with the pros and cons of each option. Then citizens divide into smaller groups (of up to ten), with one facilitator at each table. Participants are asked to discuss each option, generate any questions, and offer alternative options. These are shared using computers at each table and are grouped into themes by process organizers. These are presented to the whole group and the meeting proceeds in an iterative process. At the end of the meeting, each individual votes on the option they prefer. The outcomes of these gatherings are shared with governmental decision makers who take into account these findings as they make final decisions on these matters. These deliberative dialogues are becoming increasingly popular because they allow the public and relevant stakeholders to learn more about the complexity of policy problems, discuss and debate various approaches to dealing with those problems, and then communicate their preferences back up the decision-making chain. As a positive spillover, these events often increase the sense of community among citizens and build social capital.

Open-Space Technology

Open-space technology (OST) is a process somewhat similar to the charrette but with a more specific format and rules. OST is used for strategic planning within organizations as well as for community-based decision making. An OST process

takes one to three days and can be used for anywhere from ten to hundreds of people. The key is that all are invited, with the knowledge that those who come have some interest or passion for the issue under discussion. The beauty of OST is that it creates a format for a group to self-organize, create an agenda for workshop activities, and end with a next-steps list of action items for group members or committees to pursue after the end of the process (Harrison, 2008). Basically, the convener creates a framing question such as "How can we reinvigorate our local economy?" or "What changes should our company make to maximize our success over the next ten years?" Participation is voluntary. At the beginning of the gathering, the framing question is posted for all to see. Participants sit in a large circle with a whiteboard or large flip chart at the ready. A "marketplace," or blank chart with times written across the vertical axis and meeting room locations across the horizontal axis, is posted so volunteers can post topics for smaller-group discussion (see Table 12.2 as an example). Anyone interested in hosting a discussion on a particular idea stakes claim to one of the boxes on the marketplace matrix, acts as facilitator for that discussion, and prepares a summary of discussions to share with the larger group at the end of the day. This is called a marketplace for a specific reason; each topic or idea posted is competing with the others to gather participants for the discussion sessions. If an idea does not appeal to others or is not viewed as important, no one will come. This is itself instructive when one or two people in a group may care passionately about an issue but come to realize they are in the minority on the issue. If two participants post similar discussion topics, no problem—more than one group can address the same issue and see if they arrive at the same or different conclusions.

Table 12.2
Marketplace Time-Space Matrix

Time	Room A	Room B	Room C	Room D
9:00–10:30				
10:45–12:15				
1:30–3:00				
Reporting session				
3:30–5:00				

The OST process has a couple of catchy ground rules, including the law of two feet; if you do not like what is happening in a session or feel you are not being heard, you simply leave and go to another session. This creates an imperative for discussion facilitators to remain on topic and facilitate a dialogue in which everyone feels heard and respected. After the reporting session, the group should prioritize its tasks and develop action items for individuals or groups to work on during and after the OST session. This can be done by simple voting or consensus building discussions. OST is not an appropriate format for issues of low salience to stakeholders or for those issues in which an authoritative decision maker is unwilling to share decision-making power with the group. Nothing would be more damaging than for a group of committed stakeholders to engage in a process such as this only to learn their recommendations were disregarded by governmental or organizational leaders.

Traditional Public Meeting Format

As the chapter's opening vignette indicates, one option is to use the old-school traditional public meeting format. In this format, notices are made to announce a public meeting on a particular topic. Agency or organizational leaders sit on a raised dais at the front of the room and record comments raised by members of the public. Anyone who wants to speak can take a turn speaking, usually by signing up on a speaker's list just before the meeting commences. The time for public comments is fixed, commonly at thirty to sixty minutes, with each speaker (typically) allowed to speak for between two and five minutes. Depending on the regulations governing the meeting, the leaders at the front of the room may simply record public comments or they may respond to questions or comments. There are a few challenges associated with this format. First, if the matter is contentious, members of the public turn out in droves, seeking to influence the decision being made, but often these meetings occur late in the decision-making process and comments are unlikely to change the outcome. Second, local politicians, members of the media, or irate citizens use their time at the microphone to voice their anger, hurl insults, or stir up the crowd's passions rather than calmly voicing concerns or asking nonrhetorical questions. Third, members of the public rarely understand the purpose of the public meeting and the mission or constraints of the managers leading the meeting. In the mining example used at the beginning of this chapter, members of the public incorrectly believed that if they turned out in large numbers, brought petitions, and had their local officials voice disapproval,

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then the mining license would not be issued. Because they did not understand the factors that go into the issuance of a mining license, they went to the meeting with the false belief that their opposition mattered. Once they realized their numbers and opposition were immaterial to the factors under which a license could be denied, they became outraged, with negative consequences.

So why do so many organizations stick to the traditional meeting format? It can be useful for one-way information sharing or to fulfill a statutory requirement to hold a public meeting. It may suffice on issues of low salience to stakeholders, as evidenced by traditionally low turnouts. When true input is needed, when an agency or organization needs to share complex information with the public, or when public or stakeholder opinions are strong, this format is generally insufficient and outdated.

Small-Group Public Meetings

As in the story from the Bureau of Reclamation in this chapter, sometimes it is important for government agencies or other organizations to receive information or comments from the public and also share information with them. In this case they can consider using the traditional public meeting format or they can consider various alternatives to enhance authentic information sharing between groups. If the issue is likely to evoke strong opinions or it involves complex technical issues, it may be best to consider using a format that breaks the issue and the crowd into more manageable pieces. Consider placing multiple tables around the room with a topic placard clearly visible on each table. In the bureau's example, one table would address blasting and noise, another would address water concerns, and still another might address property values. Place a staff member at each table with either a computer or a pad of paper on which to record comments and questions from each attendee. Staff members can answer questions on a one-on-one basis as they are able and promise an individual response through a follow-up call or e-mail on those issues that need further research. Staff members can share information about the agency's mission, constraints, or mandates as well as redirecting citizens to other agencies or elected officials who can address issues outside of their own organization's mandate. By splitting the crowd up into smaller groups, with no microphone, managers can avoid the grandstanding and blustering that might otherwise occur, and still ensure that information is shared between citizens and agency staff. The one-on-one conversations with staff members can better convey the agency's genuine concern and empathy for

the situations faced by individual citizens and serve as a conduit for mutual education about the decision-making process and the issue under review.

Visioning Sessions

When developing or redeveloping a public space, consider using a process called *visioning*. In this process community members and leaders are invited to attend one or more visioning sessions in which they seek to create a joint vision for how a section of the neighborhood or community should look once it has been reclaimed or redeveloped. For example, a section of largely abandoned industrial lots along the riverfront in Memphis is slated to be redeveloped into public space, perhaps including a linear park with walking trails and other amenities. Local residents and businesses are invited to a gathering in which they literally draw pictures to show their ideas for what the site should look like once it is finished. A professional artist in attendance takes these individually created drawings, pulls out themes with the help of audience members, and creates a poster to show a shared vision of the space. This vision then becomes the basic plan used for the site's development, perhaps with more public input throughout the process. This hands-on involvement gets community members engaged in shaping their neighborhoods, influencing the ways in which public funds are spent, and involved in dialogue about the trade-offs among various choices between competing visions.

World Café

The world café defines itself as "a conversational process based on a set of integrated design principles that reveal a deeper living network pattern through which we co-evolve our collective future" (Brown & Isaacs, 2005, p. 2). The unique contribution of the world café process is that it encourages participants to share information about their own experiences and worldviews with the goal of building interpersonal and intergroup understandings around issues of shared interest. For example, a neighborhood could convene a world café to discuss local crime, school quality, or economic changes. Through these discussions an agenda for future collaboration may emerge but the main goal is to build relationships and understandings within and across groups. This is a useful process with groups who have been traditionally distant or at odds with one another. The focal issue of discussion engages the group in an examination of what they have in common and allows for the sharing of diverse experiences and perspectives.

CONCLUSION

Managers regularly facilitate meetings, whether those are simply staff meetings, meetings of shareholders, board of directors meetings, or public meetings. This chapter examined a number of meeting formats and skills designed to assist managers as they improve their facilitation skills. The trick about facilitating productive meetings is that they require careful planning. From agenda setting to selecting the meeting time and location to inviting all the key stakeholders, successful meetings are built on a foundation of thoughtful planning. Whether you are a public sector manager who regularly facilitates public meetings or a manager from the nonprofit or private sector who leads board meetings, skilled facilitation is an indispensable skill to develop and employ as a collaborative manager.

JOHN AT THE BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

It has been six months since the meeting in which the tires on John's car were slashed. A lot has changed. His employees no longer stage a sick-out on public meeting days. Local residents sometimes even thank them for the work they are doing rather than try to run them out of town. In order to bring about this enormous change, John made many small changes in the way his agency handles the public involvement issue. First, all of his staff underwent training on listening, framing, and facilitation skills. They use these skills to convey to citizens their sincere empathy for the situations they face and to build rapport. They will even meet concerned citizens one-on-one when possible to answer their questions and diffuse their anger before the public meeting. The bureau has developed a brochure that explains their mission, the mining law, and the extent of their authority. Although the bureau cannot lobby for changes to the mining laws, they have included the contact information for state elected officials on the relevant committees so that if citizens wish to convey their concerns to the appropriate person they can do so. The brochure also includes a list of other agencies the citizens can call with their specific concerns: concerns about trucks and roads go to the state's Department of Transportation, concerns about the safety of drinking water go to the state's EPA, and so on. At the public meeting, the format has been changed. Instead of a head table with a speaker

in the middle of the room, the room is set up in round tables that seat six to ten people. At each table, a bureau employee sits ready to record public comments and answer any questions he or she can about the process of licensing, the public record of the specific mining company that seeks the license, and to refer people to the appropriate agency or individual who can answer questions about groundwater, noise, or other concerns. Instead of holding only one public meeting at the beginning of the process, the bureau has set up three meetings so that people can get information when the license application has been received, and also later in the process, as more questions or concerns arise. Bureau employees stay as long as it takes to answer questions, although this rarely exceeds the ninety minutes allotted for these meetings.

Officials from the mining company are invited to attend, meet the local residents, and share information about the ways in which they will be good neighbors, making a positive impact on the community. In fact, this is the accomplishment about which John is the most proud. He has asked a number of mining companies around the state to meet with concerned citizens' groups to negotiate voluntary actions that mining companies can do to address some of the citizens' concerns. For example, one mining company, Voltron, has agreed to hold a pancake breakfast for the whole town in which the CEO will shake hands, meet locals, and tell them why the town will be better off after the mine opens. After meeting with concerned residents, Voltron reached an agreement to do the following: no fewer than 70 percent of the mine's employees will be hired out of the local population rather than brought in from outside, thereby guaranteeing local job creation; Voltron will build a public park with a playground near the mine so that property values will increase for those living closest to the mine rather than decrease; Voltron has agreed not to blast on weeknights after 8 PM, even though state law would allow blasting until 10 PM; and Voltron has agreed to form a problem-solving task force with the mayor and a representative group of stakeholders to address ongoing problems or issues as they arise, even after the mine is up and running. These changes cost the company very little but did a lot to show their willingness to be a good neighbor. When interviewed for the local paper, the CEO was asked, ''Why would you agree to these requests when you clearly didn't have to under current

state laws?'' He replied, ''Our managers and employees will be living here, too, as neighbors in this community. We want to make this a workable partnership for everyone involved. When we open a mine in another town a few years from now, the residents will hear about our good reputation and know they have nothing to be afraid of. This is the right thing to do and it is good business.'' As the leader of the Bureau of Reclamation, John's job has become much more pleasant since these changes were implemented. These changes have been noticed by other agencies, who are now asking John for his advice about how to improve their public engagement processes, too. John is now seen as a leader on public engagement issues, as is Voltron's CEO.

KEY TERMS

Collaboration fatigue

Consensus

Convening

Deliberative democracy

Process sponsor

Spoiler

SUGGESTED SUPPLEMENTAL READING

Addor, M. L., Cobb, T. D., Dukes, E. F., Ellerbrock, M., & Smutko, L. S. (2005). Linking theory to practice: A theory of change model of the Natural Resources Leadership Institute. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, *23*, 203–223.

Pyser, S. N., & Figallo, C. (2004). The "listening to the city" online dialogues experience: The impact of a full value contract. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, *21*, 381–393.

Sachs, A. M. (2000). Understanding public disputes resolution in community mediation. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, *17*, 341–349.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Think back to the most productive meetings you have attended. Make a list of the characteristics that described these meetings and the people leading the meetings. Now, make a list of characteristics to describe the last meeting you led or participated in as a manager. Compare the two.

Share these with a classmate or colleague and consider the changes you could do to implement positive changes.

2. Which of the qualities of a skilled facilitator do you already have and which would you like to work on?

EXERCISES

1. Go to the website of any local, state, or federal government agency to find one or more upcoming public meetings on a topic of interest. Alternatively, if you are a shareholder or manager within a corporate environment, attend a shareholder's meeting. Answer the following questions:

   - How was the meeting advertised? Was it advertised adequately so stakeholders were aware and able to attend?

   - How was the room arranged?

   - What was turnout like? If it there were too many or too few participants, was it handled appropriately?

   - Was there a clear agenda and did the facilitator stick to it? Alternatively, if it became clear that the agenda was not working, did the facilitator make reasoned changes?

   - Take the temperature of the room. What was the level of interest, anxiety, excitement, or anger?

   - Was the decision-making process or the purpose of the meeting clear to attendees? Was their role in that process clear? How was it received?

   - What mechanism was used to gather public input or share information with the public? How effective were these mechanisms?

   - How did the meeting end? Were next steps discussed with those present? Will there be minutes shared publicly? Will there be additional opportunities for input or information sharing?

   - What recommendations for process improvements would you make?

2. Select a current hot topic of debate in your community, such as the siting of new public facilities, zoning issues, plans to build or widen roads, changes to policies regarding public health or welfare, and so forth. Screen this issue using the screening tools supplied here (www.wiley.com/college/raines) to

determine whether this issue would be a good candidate for a large-group consensus and collaboration process.

3. Use an online chat or bulletin board to post discussion questions from this chapter with your classmates or colleagues. Take turns facilitating the group discussion online, seeking feedback at the end of the exercise so as to work on continual improvement of your facilitation skills.

GOAL SETTING

At your next opportunity, ask one or more trusted colleagues to observe your facilitation skills and provide feedback after the meeting. Consider videotaping yourself to review and critique yourself.