Community at Work:

A Guide to Leadership and Problem Solving for Small Community Groups

From Your Friends at the
United States Attorney's Office
District of Minnesota

B. Todd Jones, U.S. Attorney

This manual was produced in an effort to provide members of small community groups with ideas about leadership, meeting structure, group problem solving, program evaluation, planning, fundraising, and grant writing. While the producers of this manual hope the material is helpful, they warn readers that problems may still arise within their groups, even when the manual is followed closely. In fact, readers are urged to use the material as a "starting point" only and sharpen their skills further by reading some of the books and articles cited in the manual.

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Facilitation and Group Leadership

"A facilitator is an individual whose job is to help to manage a process of information exchange. While an 'expert's' role is to offer advice about the content of a discussion, the facilitator's role is to help with HOW the discussion is proceeding."

Robert Bacal
Leadership Writer and Speaker

"...if there's a clear and distinguishing feature about the process of leading, it's in the distinction between mobilizing others to do and mobilizing others 'to want to do.'"

James Kouzes and Barry Posner
From *The Leadership Challenge*

In many situations, group leaders also must act as facilitators. This is a difficult task since facilitators are meant to be objective "process helpers," while group leaders usually have a stake in the proceedings. The following passage illustrates the struggle.

> **"*Engaged in the dance, it is nearly impossible to get a sense of the patterns made by everyone on the floor. Motion makes observation difficult. Indeed, we often get carried away by the dance.... To discern the larger patterns on the dance floor - to see who is dancing with whom, in what groups, in what location, and who is sitting out which kind of dance - we have to stop moving and 'get to the balcony.'"***

R. Heifetz
From *Leadership Without Easy Answers*

While playing the role of facilitator and group leader simultaneously is not recommended, we offer the following tips for those who occasionally must play both parts. Others involved in group work may find these pointers helpful too.

The Work of the Facilitator/Group Leader

A. Do pre-work

- ✓ Plan the agenda
- ✓ Arrange the meeting room and obtain supplies and refreshments
- ✓ Mail the complete agenda packets out to the membership in a timely fashion

B. Open the meeting

- ✓ Make introductions
- ✓ Explain the purpose of the meeting
- ✓ Review the agenda
- ✓ Review the ground rules for the meeting (e.g., how to be recognized to speak)
- ✓ Review committee guidelines for voting, etc.
- ✓ Initiate the discussion

C. Facilitate the meeting

- ✓ Proceed through the agenda
- ✓ Help the group stay on track
- ✓ Ensure participation
- ✓ Build consensus
  - ✓ Manage conflict
  - ✓ Handle disruptive behavior

D. Close the meeting

- ✓ Review decisions made and needed actions (Who's doing what? By when?)
- ✓ Preview the business for the next meeting
- ✓ Evaluate the meeting (Did the group meet the objective of the meeting?)

A Facilitator/Group Leader Must Work to Improve Skills

❶ Improve your ability to communicate effectively

❷ Improve your ability to balance unity and diversity

❸ Improve your ability to establish an atmosphere of trust

❹ Improve your ability to foster creativity and sound decision making

❺ Improve your ability to define group goals

❻ Improve your ability to obtain resources

❼ Improve your ability to provide direction and support

❽ Improve your ability to reward achievement and overcome adversity

❾ Improve your ability to recognize that group members - leaders and followers - influence and empower each other

Adapted from *Leadership for the Common Good*, by J. Bryson and B. Crosby

Evaluate Yourself as a Facilitator/Group Leader

After a meeting at which you served as facilitator, ask yourself the following questions or ask an experienced facilitator to observe you and then answer these questions about you

① Was the purpose for the meeting clearly stated?

② Did the group keep on task for the most part?

③ Was the communication open, honest, respectful, productive?

④ Did everyone participate?

⑤ Were distractions handled appropriately?

⑥ Were the accomplishments of the group summarized at the end of the meeting?

⑦ Were "next tasks" set forth at the end of the meeting?

⑧ Did the group achieve its objectives for the meeting?

Keep the Group's Goals in Mind When Making Agendas

- **Define desired results—** What do you want to achieve by the end of the meeting? Remember your ultimate goals.
- **Identify the meeting time frame—** What is appropriate given the subject matter to be discussed?

- **List the topics to be covered—** Are the subjects relevant to the group's ultimate goals?
- **Allot time frames by each topic—** What tools would help you address each topic with the group?
- **Do a sanity check—** Can all of this be done on time?

Adapted from *Facilitation Resources - Understanding Facilitation,* U of M Extension Service and the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs

Develop Meeting Ground Rules

Ground rules are normally established at a group's first meeting and then restated at the beginning of every meeting thereafter. Simply put, ground rules are the rules that the group creates to ensure a safe and friendly meeting environment. It is the duty of the facilitator/group leader to make sure agreed-upon ground rules are followed. Ground rules may include—

☺ One person speaks at a time.

☺ Clarifying questions are welcome.

☺ Speakers must focus on the subject at hand.

☺ Feelings may be expressed freely.

☺ Everyone is welcome to share.

☺ Discussions are to be about positions, not personalities.

☹ No one dominates the discussion.

☹ No one interrupts a speaker.

☹ No one criticizes another.

Keep the Group on Track at Meetings

The facilitator/group leader must keep the group on track. These tips may help

- ➢ Do not overload the agenda. Leave time for a thorough discussion of each topic.
- ➢ In your introductory remarks at each meeting, remind the group that one of your tasks is to keep the group on track.
- ➢ If time is running out, and you have many items left on the agenda, ask the group to identify one or two items that they truly want to discuss, leaving the rest for the next meeting.
- ➢ Set time limits for discussions, if necessary. But, if you do so, explain how such a move enhances the process.
- ➢ Consider the level of intervention needed by you as facilitator. Some groups require on-going intervention, while other groups need intervention only once in a while.

Adapted from *Facilitation Resources - Managing Groups*, the U of M Extension Service and the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs

Build Consensus

Although the "majority rules" approach may be the quickest way to make group decisions, it often leaves group members feeling like "winners" or "losers." So, instead, you may want to try to build "consensus," which is "general agreement." In building consensus, group members discuss decision options and ultimately agree on one as "best for the group in the particular instance," even if they personally prefer another decision option.

To facilitate consensus—

- Seek proposals from everyone
- Use active listening skills
- Find similarities in what is being said
- Summarize frequently
- Ask if you are summarizing accurately
- Ask for objections to each proposal
- Seek suggestions on how to address those objections
- Limit comments that have been previously stated, and
- Review decisions and clarify tasks

Phrases that build consensus—

"I wonder if we could list some other possibilities."

"Let's brainstorm some advantages and disadvantages of each proposal."

"Peter, I understand you are not in support of Proposal B. Is there anything you can say to make a case for the proposal you prefer?"

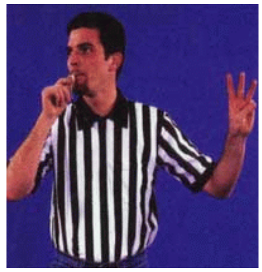
"Jim, help me understand your view better. Are you saying...?"

Adapted from *Facilitation Resources - Group Decisions,* the U of M Extension Service and the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs

Handle Conflict

People are predisposed to conflict because they possess different backgrounds, which prompt varying perspectives and beliefs.

Thus, conflict will occur within all groups. And, that's not necessarily bad. In fact, disagreements can actually aid groups in decision making since disagreements can cause group members to broaden their thinking. Conflict may be harmful, though, if it is directed toward people and not tasks.



Therefore, the facilitator/group leader must steer conflict away from personalities and toward tasks and positions. This can be done by using "active listening," which requires the facilitator to ask questions about the beliefs and feelings of those involved and then repeat the responses in order to confirm meaning.

Adapted from *Conflict Within Small Decision-Making and Problem-Solving Teams* by Valerie Sessa

Use Active Listening Especially During Disputes

1. **Give the speaker your full attention**
2. **Search for the feelings at play**
3. **Ask clarifying questions to make sure you understand**
   a. **"Are you saying that...?"**
   b. **"What do you mean by...?"**
4. **Ask open-ended questions to expand communication**
   a. **"Could you say more about...?"**
   b. **"How might that look?"**
   c. **"How do you feel about that?"**
5. **Don't use words that convey judgment, such as "should," "shouldn't," or "wrong"**

Adapted from *Facilitation* and *Facilitation Resources - Dealing with Group Conflict,* U of M Extension Service and the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs

Adversity does not build character. It reveals it.

The Facilitator/Group Leader Must Address Bad Behavior at Meetings

Dealing with Interruptions

When group members continuously interrupt a speaker, suggest that they jot down their thoughts and then wait their turn to speak. State that all group members deserve to make their points without interruption.

Dealing with Wandering

When group members talk about something other than the current agenda item, suggest that they return to the appropriate subject. State that other topics may be discussed following the meeting or may be placed on a future agenda.

Dealing with Whispering

When group members whisper among themselves, disrupting the group discussion, suggest that they hold their comments until a break or conduct their conversation outside. State that side conversations are very distracting for the rest of the group.

Dealing with Clashes

When group members verbally attack each other, immediately stop the discussion and insist that meeting conversations revolve around tasks, not individuals. State that a private meeting between those involved also may be appropriate.

Adapted from *Facilitation Resources - Group Conflict,* U of M Extension Service and the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs

Recruiting Group Members

Group leaders are often asked to recruit new group members. If you are asked to do so, remember to seek individuals who share the group's vision. Also remember to look for some people with the power and authority to accomplish the tasks necessary to achieve the group's goals. In addition, be aware that a few people may join the group for their own benefit. In other words, they may join with their own "agendas." And, while these people might end up being good group members, you must keep their biases in mind.

Diverse people provide diverse ideas, which lead to creative solutions.

Explore Your Leadership Capabilities

Leadership experts contend that potential leaders must be aware of their own strengths and weaknesses since employing those strengths and overcoming those weaknesses will be necessary when leading a group.

While many formal leadership-assessment tools are available (e.g., Myers-Briggs Type Indicator), informal assessment tools (e.g., journal writing) also may provide insight.

A popular informal leadership-assessment tool is called the "cares and concerns" exercise. To complete this exercise, subjects write down responses to questions, such as,

"What do I care about in my family, occupational, and community life?"

"Are my cares ethical?"

"What is the extent of my commitment to acting on these cares?"

"Is there a gap between what I really care about and how I spend my time?"

This self-examination may help potential leaders realize what is important in their lives as well as assist them in seeing any disconnect that exists between what they claim to value and how they actually behave.

To assess leadership capacity further through informal methods, subjects may want to consider their age, gender, position, religion, race, and position in the community or within a particular organization. Then, they may want to jot down leadership assets and liabilities associated with each of those characteristics. By doing this simple exercise, potential leaders may recognize the advantages and disadvantages found in all social hierarchy positions. Such recognition is valuable since organizational structures and how we fit into them will dictate how we will lead, at least to some extent.

Adapted from *Leadership for Global Citizenship: Building Transnational Community,* by B. Crosby

Make a point to do something every day that you find challenging. For when you want what you've never had, you must learn to do what you have never done.

Community Groups

Many community groups are created simply to provide a governmental body or a corporate board with advice. Such groups may operate without becoming independent, legal entities under the law.

True, these informal community groups lack the power to seek grant money or take legal action on their own. To accomplish those tasks, group members must work through entities that are legally recognized (e.g., non-profit agencies).

These loose-knit groups, however, are beneficial in many ways. They can be formed quickly to address specific problems and then just as quickly disbanded. In addition, they do not need to fulfill the legal obligations required of more formal groups, such as creating by-laws or submitting annual reports.

The meeting guidelines outlined below are offered as suggestions for informal community groups. Members of such groups may choose to follow all of the guidelines, as written, or draft their own guidelines, using the information provided simply to generate ideas.

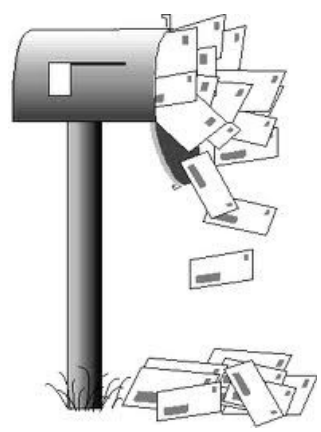
While those involved in groups recognized under the law as legal entities may also find value in these guidelines, they must note that the guidelines are not meant to take the place of any legal requirements imposed upon their groups.

Community Meeting Guidelines

I. Meeting Notices

A. The group leader - or group secretary, if appropriate - is to send to each committee member (voting and non-voting), through the U.S. mail, notice of each committee meeting, postmarked at least ten days prior to the meeting date.

1. Each meeting-notice packet is to include a copy of the proposed agenda, minutes of the last meeting, the "to do" list created at the last meeting, current financial reports, and all other documents that will be reviewed or discussed at the upcoming meeting.



Those who are quite satisfied sit still and do nothing; those who are not quite satisfied are the sole benefactors of the world.
-Walter Savage Landor

II. Meetings

A. All meetings are to be recorded. After every meeting, a minute taker is to develop written minutes from the tape. The minute taker is to keep all meeting tapes and bring them to all meetings until such time as the corresponding minutes are written and approved. Then, the tapes may be erased.

1. At every meeting, the group leader is to pass around a sign-in sheet, requesting each attendee's name, address, phone number, fax number, e-mail address, and company or agency affiliation, if appropriate. (This sheet is used by the group leader to update the membership directory.)

2. At the beginning of every meeting, after the ground rules are reviewed, the group leader is to announce the names of the people eligible to vote at that meeting. This announcement is always the first item of business.

3. During each meeting, the group leader is to develop a "to do" list, outlining each task that needs to be completed, the name of the person who has volunteered to complete it, as well as the anticipated completion date. Review of this list must occur at the end of each meeting, and then another review of the list should occur as one of the first items of business at the next meeting. This review will help group members keep track of completed work as well as work that remains undone.

B. No committee business is to be conducted without a quorum. A quorum requires the presence of a certain number of committee members who are eligible to vote.

C. No committee meeting is to exceed a known and agreed-upon length, such as two hours.

D. Only items noted on the agenda provided to members in their "meeting notice" packets may be subject to action, although other items may be "discussed," provided enough time is available to do so.

III. Committee Membership (Non-Voting and Voting)

A. Community groups are to be inclusive. Thus, after attending just one meeting, people should be considered "new, non-voting committee members." (They then will receive notice of the next meeting.)

B. "New committee members" become "voting members" at the beginning of a future agreed-upon meeting, such as the second consecutive meeting they attend.

1. Once people earn the right to vote, they retain that right until they miss a certain number of committee meetings, such as three in a row. (At that point, they are removed from the membership list and do not receive meeting notices until they again attend a meeting and restart the process.)

   a. Voting rights are re-established by following No. 1 above.

2. Voting by proxy generally should not be allowed.

3. Voting members with a conflict of interest regarding a particular issue or situation must excuse themselves from votes relative to that situation or issue.

   a. Failure to refrain from voting in a conflict-of-interest situation is grounds for permanent removal from the committee.

4. All committee decisions are to be made by a majority vote of eligible voters in attendance. (Building consensus, however, is encouraged.)

5. All votes are to be determined by a hand count or a private ballot. No decisions are to be made by voice vote.

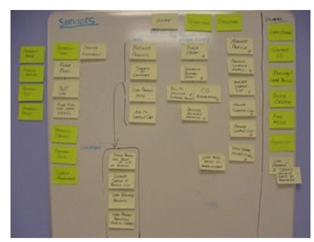
More detailed meeting guidelines, such as Roberts Rules of Order, are available through your local bookstore or library. Strict meetings rules, however, may discourage participation by average citizens. Thus, simple guidelines are encouraged for informal community groups.

Group Decision Making

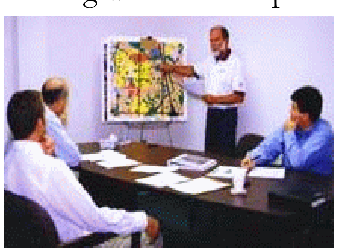
As a group moves through its work, it will have to make many decisions. As stated elsewhere in this manual, a "majority rules" approach may be the quickest way to make those decisions. And, relative to minor issues, it may be the most efficient. But, for complex decisions, such as what potential solution should be employed to solve a neighborhood crime problem, the group may want to build consensus among its membership. (See Page 4 for additional information about consensus building.) There are several ways to make group decisions based on consensus. For example

- **Brainstorming—**Group members call out ideas to a recorder, who jots them down on a blackboard or large flip chart. The goal of this exercise is to generate lots of ideas. No idea is to be considered "bad." A time limit is usually imposed for this exercise. Brainstorming is a great way to develop numerous potential solutions to a problem.

- **Categorizing—**Group members do their own brainstorming, writing individual ideas on separate large sticky-back cards and then sticking those cards to the wall. Next, a few members of the group arrange the cards into categories and provide each category with a heading. (This task must be done very quickly.) The group then makes adjustments to the categories. Finally, the group prioritizes the categories and takes action, first carrying out the work associated with the ideas listed under the category awarded the highest priority.



- **Worst-Case Scenario—**Group members who have difficulty prioritizing potential solutions may benefit from this exercise. To do this exercise, a group recorder jots down on a blackboard or flip chart all possible solutions, as determined by the group. Then, starting with the first potential solution, the facilitator/group leader asks, ***"If we take this action, what is the worst that could happen?"*** The recorder writes down all responses provided by the group. Next, the facilitator/group leader asks, ***"If we take this action, what is the best that could happen?"*** Again, the recorder writes down the replies. Finally, the facilitator/group leader asks, ***"If we take this action, what is likely to happen?"*** And, the recorder writes down those responses too. The process is then repeated for the other possible solutions. After all potential solutions are examined in this way, group members should be able to determine the best possible solution to the problem before them.



Adapted from *The Facilitator's Tool Kit,* by Lynn Kearny

Group Problem Solving

We now live in a "shared-power" world. When it comes to dealing with community problems, one person or entity is seldom the sole decision maker. Problems today often affect multiple professional disciplines as well as a variety of private citizens. Thus, to achieve long-lasting remedies for community problems, people must work together, sharing their power and authority. The following steps are recommended for group members who want to share in problem solving.

I. Reach an Initial Agreement—Group members must agree that the issue before them needs to be addressed, and that the group will work together to do so.

A. Identify and Analyze Stakeholders—Stakeholders include any people or entities affected by the issue at hand. For example, if the issue is neighborhood crime, stakeholders include business owners, school administrators, and government officials, as well as residents and police.

Initial group members must make sure that all appropriate stakeholders are represented in the group. If an important stakeholder has been overlooked, the group leader must extend to that stakeholder an invitation to join the group. Remember, long-term solutions to community problems can be created, implemented, and sustained only when all appropriate stakeholders work together.

Group work involves a lot of "give and take." Thus, it is important for all group members (stakeholders) to think about what they can contribute to the work of the group as well as how they might benefit from their association with the group.

II. Define the Problem—Many people will come to the group's first meeting certain they know the "real" problem facing the community as well as the "only" viable solution to that problem. For instance, if the issue at hand is a perceived jump in neighborhood crime, some group members may simply contend that, "Teenagers are out of control, and police need to arrest more of them." Of course, good problem formulation requires more research, discussion, and thought than demonstrated by such comments.

A. Research—Thorough research of any issue is a must! If group members are concerned about neighborhood crime, for example, they first must get statistics from the police to determine if neighborhood crime truly is on the rise. If it is, they need to determine the types of crimes now occurring in greater numbers. Auto theft? Street assaults? Property crimes? They also must look at when and where these crimes are taking place as well as by whom.

B. Frame—After researching the issue, group members must study the issue from their various perspectives. This process is sometimes called "framing." Through framing, group members (stakeholders) learn from the experiences of others. These people

often share their perceptions by telling stories. (E.g., "As I was closing my store late one night last week, two teenage thugs approached....")

Once group members have accomplished good research and framing, they should be able to define the actual problem facing them. (Is the problem an increase in all types of neighborhood crime? Or, is it just an increase in garage thefts by teenagers between the hours of 3:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. on school days?) The problem then must be put into writing.

III. Search for Solutions—

As noted above, a thorough search for potential solutions to an identified problem is extremely important. Searches should not be short or shallow.

A. Pick Solution Categories—A good search usually begins by determining, through group brainstorming, potential "solution categories." If the problem is a dramatic increase in weekday afternoon garage thefts by teens, for example, solution categories may include law enforcement, juvenile court, schools, community recreation centers, parent groups, and teen groups. Brief interviews with authorities in each of these categories will help group members determine the categories that offer the best opportunities for solving the problem.

B. Develop Ideas—Once group members have narrowed their solution search to just a few categories, they must discuss their problem with many people in each of those categories. Those interview subjects will be able to share solution ideas and suggestions, which should help group members in the development of a list of creative solution possibilities.

Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishment toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.
-Andrew Carnegie

C. **Prioritize Strategies—**Group members must then verify the information provided to them through the interviews. If additional research is necessary, they must also accomplish that.

When group members are satisfied that they have developed two or three good solution strategies, they must prioritize them. If they have trouble prioritizing the potential solutions, they may want to employ the "worst case scenario" decision-making tool explained on Page 11.

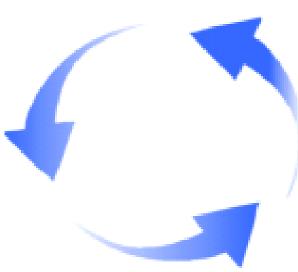
After prioritizing the top solution strategies, the group will want to record its findings, indicating the strengths and weaknesses as well as the projected costs and the staffing requirements for each potential solution.

Adapted from *Leadership for the Common Good,* by J. Bryson and B. Crosby

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.
-Margaret Meade

Oval Mapping

When a group has trouble "problem solving," as explained in the preceding section, it may want to try an exercise designed to help members better *see* the issue before them. That exercise is called "oval mapping."



To begin oval mapping, a group recorder jots down in the middle of a large sheet of paper the issue at hand. If, for example, a neighborhood crime-prevention group wants to *"decrease weekday afternoon garage thefts by teens,"* that becomes the issue statement.

Next, the group facilitator asks group members, "***What would it take to accomplish what is written in the issue statement?"*** The responses to that question are written in short phrases below the issue statement. In the example noted above, responses might include, *"Increase police patrols"; "Extend school hours"; and "Improve activities at the recreation center."* (Note, all responses begin with an action word.)

Arrows are then drawn in from each response to the issue statement. Those arrows indicate that the responses are possible solutions to the stated problem.

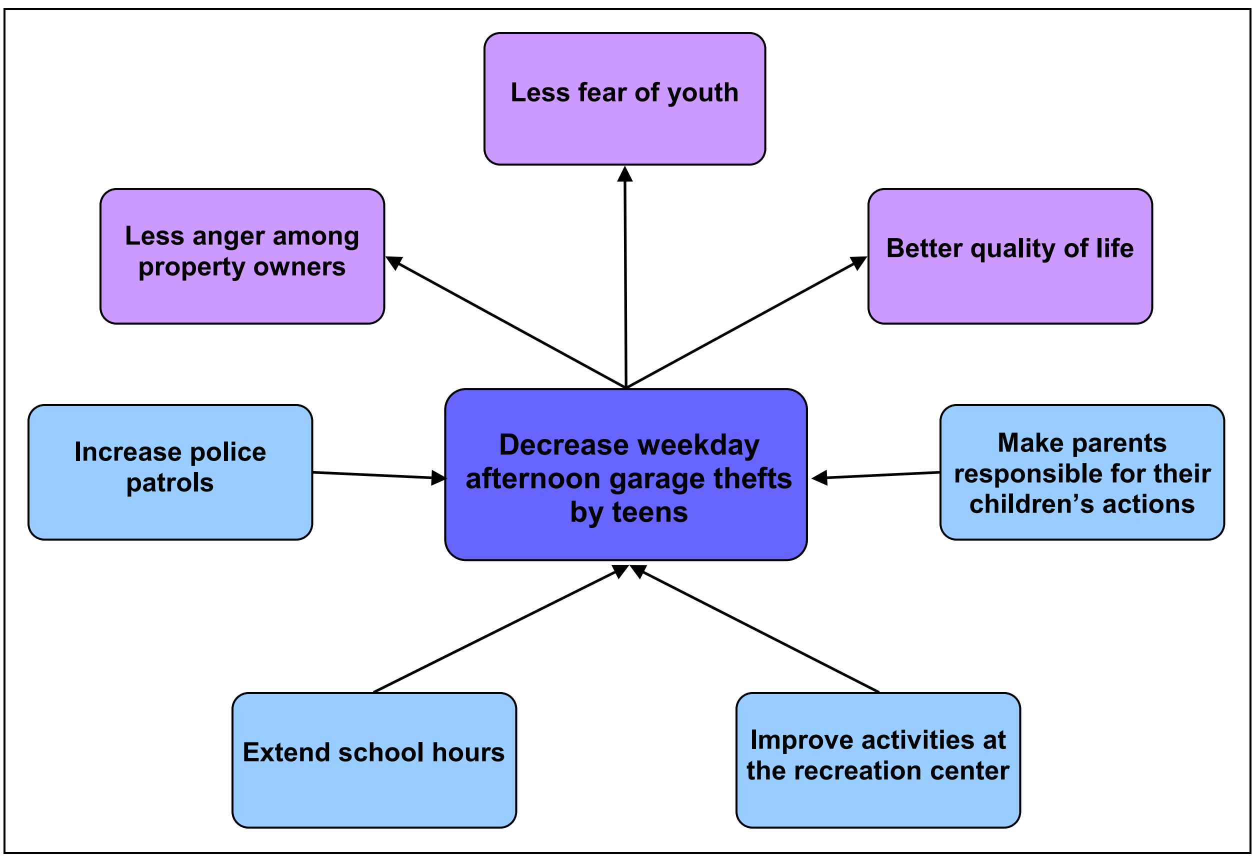
why? The facilitator then asks group members, ***"What would the results be if we took this action?"*** The responses to that question are written in short phrases above the issue statement. In the garage-theft example, responses might include, *"Less anger among property owners"; "Less fear of youth"; and "Better quality of life."*

Arrows are then drawn out from the issue statement to each of the responses. Those arrows indicate that solving the problem may very well result in the stated benefits.

The short phrases and arrows used in oval mapping help group members connect ideas. They help people see the problem, determine the action possibly needed to fix the problem, and contemplate the benefits of solving the problem.

Upon completion of the oval-mapping exercise, the neighborhood crime-prevention group in the example should be able to determine the potential solution categories that must be explored during the group's attempt to solve the problem of afternoon garage thefts by teens.

Adapted from *What to Do When Thinking Matters*, by J. Bryson, et al.



Group Proposals

After group members prioritize the potential solutions to the problem before them, they must develop a solution proposal that is likely to be adopted and implemented by the entity best qualified to take the action necessary to fix the problem. To draft a successful proposal, group members should make sure

- ✔ The proposal clearly states the problem at hand.
- ✔ The proposal explains in detail why group members believe the recipient of the proposal is the right entity to address the problem.
- ✔ The proposal highlights the preferred solution to the problem, as determined by the group, but also describes two alternative solutions.
- ✔ The proposal clearly links the problem to each solution option and supports that linkage with evidence acquired through research.
- ✔ The proposal outlines the advantages and disadvantages as well as the financial costs and the personnel requirements of each potential solution, focusing particular attention on the preferred solution.
- ✔ The proposal describes how implementation of each solution would be staffed and funded, again focusing primarily on the preferred solution.
- ✔ The proposal explains how implementation of the various solution options would be carried out with little difficulty.
- ✔ The proposal contains flexibility in the implementation instructions, guidelines, and time line developed by the group for each possible solution.
- ✔ The proposal describes how each solution option may be evaluated for success, with special attention paid to the evaluation of the preferred solution.
- ✔ The proposal contains a short summary of how the benefits of the preferred solution outweigh the associated costs.

Adapted from *Leadership for the Common Good,* by J. Bryson and B. Crosby

Remember—

- ✘ All potential solutions should have value in the eyes of those being asked to consider them;
- ✘ Those being asked to correct the problem should have a voice in creating the solution options; and
- ✘ The group that developed the proposal must be seen as credible.

Proposal Implementation by Groups

Once a policy proposal has been accepted, implementation must take place. The keys to successful policy implementation include

- ✓ Plan and manage the implementation process carefully
- ✓ Make policy changes easy to understand and quick to occur
- ✓ Consider providing incentives to gain acceptance of the policy by those most affected by it
- ✓ Develop a problem-solving strategy since problems are sure to arise
- ✓ Create an evaluation process to ensure that policy goals are achieved
- ✓ Monitor implementation to assure group members that key policy components are maintained
- ✓ Use "action plans" and "time lines"
- ✓ Ensure that there are enough resources for proper implementation
- ✓ Undertake the organizational changes necessary for the long-term success of the policy
- ✓ Maintain a group of policy supporters
- ✓ Communicate, communicate, communicate
- ✓ Establish "review points," at which times, the newly-implemented policy may be altered or even terminated, if appropriate

Adapted from *Leadership for the Common Good,* by J. Bryson and B. Crosby

Program and Policy Evaluation by Groups

Evaluating newly-implemented policies and programs is very important, particularly in these tough economic times. With limited dollars, funders do not want to support ineffective efforts.

Thus, many groups undergo program or policy evaluations to ensure that their work is worthy of funding. In addition, evaluations are conducted to assess the needs of potential target populations, identify ways of improving existing services, enhance planning, and maintain the support of key stakeholders.

If you're going to think anyway, you may as well THINK BIG.

Outcome-Based Evaluation

Before undertaking any evaluation, group members should possess a thorough understanding of the program they wish to assess. They should know

(a) the purpose of the program;

(b) the functions of the program;

(c) how the program differs from other efforts;

(d) those served by the program;

(e) the geographic areas covered by the program;

(f) the program's likely life span; and

(g) the stakeholders critical to the success of the program.

Additionally, group members should agree on

1. the expected results of program participation; and
2. the reasons why program activities should lead to those results.

In other words, they should agree that ***"If this is done, then that should happen, based on existing, creditable research."*** After all, groups will accomplish successful evaluations only if they are knowledgeable and in agreement about their programs.

Next, group members must look at the type of work being done by the group. The work of many community groups revolves around changing the behavior or status of program participants. Those changes are often called "outcomes." Before a program evaluation can be done in behavior or status-based work, desired outcomes must be identified.

To recognize outcomes, group members must answer the question, ***"What does the group want to accomplish through this program?"*** In answering that question, the group needs to keep in mind that all outcomes must be measurable if the program is to be properly evaluated down the road. To ensure that desired outcomes can be measured, group members should also ask, ***"How will this group determine if the program is successful?"***

To illustrate this process, let's suppose a neighborhood group wants to decrease juvenile crime through the use of an after-school program. The desired goal - or outcome - of decreasing juvenile crime is clear, but is it measurable? Can the group clearly determine the success of the after-school program?

The answer to that question, of course, is "yes." The group can measure program success simply by comparing neighborhood crime rates prior to program implementation to crime rates several months into the program.

Once measurable outcomes have been articulated, an evaluation plan can be established. In such a plan, group members must outline

i. the desired outcomes;
ii. how outcome measurements will be obtained;
iii. when outcome measurements will be collected;
iv. who will collect that data; and
v. from where the data will come.

After the evaluation plan has been created, the measurements can be collected, analyzed, and interpreted. Then, they may be reported to key stakeholders and funders.

The "outcome measurement" evaluation method is popular because it costs little, is fairly easy to do, and provides up-to-date information that can be used to attract funders and program volunteers alike. It does, have shortcomings, however. For example, it sheds little light on the true cause of program results - or outcomes.

For instance, if juvenile crime decreases in the neighborhood in the above illustration, group members will be unable to tell if the dip in crime is due to the after-school program or some other change in the community, such as the opening of a new store that offers after-school jobs to area youth.

Portions adapted from *Outcomes Measurement in the Human Services*, by Mullen and Magnabosco

Evaluation Surveys

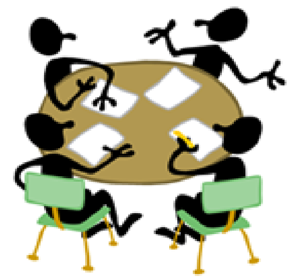
Surveys also can be very useful evaluation tools for community groups. Below is a list of items that group members may want to keep in mind when creating surveys.

- Explain the purpose of the survey.
- Provide easy instructions.
- Set forth specific close-ended questions for the most part. (Closed-ended questions allow for a "yes" or "no" answer or the selection of one of a limited number of balanced possibilities, such as "never," "infrequently," "frequently.")
- Use open-ended questions when you need more in-depth responses.
- Keep questions short and easy to understand.
- Allow for comments at the end of the survey.
- Pretest the survey before using it.

Focus Groups

Focus groups often provide good program feedback. In preparing for a focus group

- ✓ Identify the major objective of the focus group. In other words, determine the issue to be examined by the group.
- ✓ Develop five or six carefully-worded questions to aid the group in its discussion of that issue.



- ✓ Invite six to ten people to participate in the focus group, making sure they are of comparable status relative to the program.
- ✓ At the focus-group gathering, encourage equal participation.
- ✓ Repeat group findings to ensure accurate understanding.
- ✓ Record the group encounter.

Best Practices

When funding gets tight, groups often look to "best practices" in an effort to make their programs more effective and, thus, more attractive to potential grantors. Through employment of the "best practices" process, groups identify other organizations that do similar work and are known for performing well in the program area in question. Then, they compare the details of their program with those of the high-performing group.

Such an examination requires a thorough understanding of the subject program. It also requires the ability and willingness to assess that program honestly. Once group members honestly consider why particular differences exist between their program and the best-practices program, they will be able to make appropriate changes - and improvements - to their program.

Many groups, including the federal government, continuously develop best practices in an array of areas, including many areas wherein work is commonly done by community groups. In addition, some funders now require that grantees analyze best practices and implement them appropriately, so scarce money is not used to "reinvent the wheel."

Strategic Planning for Groups

There is not one right way to plan strategically. In fact, some groups may exist for which strategic planning may not be beneficial. Others, however, may be aided by the process, which merely entails thinking in a disciplined manner about what a group is, what it does, and why it does it. Strategic planning often consists of the following.

1. **Agree on a Strategic Planning Process—**Garner support from key decision makers inside and outside the group as to the planning process the group should employ.

2. **Identify Group Mandates—**Make sure everyone involved in the process understands what decisions the group has the authority to make and what activities the group has the responsibility to do.

3. **Clarify Group Mission—**A mission statement sets forth the group's purpose. When determining group purpose, think about key stakeholders and what they expect from the group as well as what they can provide to the group.

4. **Consider the Group's Environment—**In other words, decide the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats relative to the group. This consideration is called a SWOT analysis.

   A. Look inside the group to identify its strengths and weaknesses.

      i. Group members usually have control over strengths and weaknesses.

      ii. Strengths and weaknesses usually are relative to the present.

   B. Look outside the group to identify potential opportunities and threats.

      i. Group members usually have no control over opportunities and threats.

      ii. Opportunities and threats usually are about future possibilities.

5. **Identify the Strategic Issues Facing the Group—**What are the challenges facing the group? Think of this question in terms of "who, what, where, when, why, and how"?

   A. State each issue as a question that the group can answer through positive action.

   B. Make a list of the things that make each issue a challenge.

   C. Describe the consequences of failing to address each issue.

When a team of dedicated individuals makes a commitment to act as one, the sky's the limit.

6. Develop Plans for Addressing the Identified Issues—

A. Brainstorm ideas for resolving the issues, using action words (e.g., do, make, present) to begin each statement.

B. Discuss the barriers to making the identified ideas reality.

C. Keeping "A" and "B" in mind, create actual proposals for making the ideas reality. (These proposals are often called "strategic plans.")

D. Identify action that must be taken over the next few years to make the ideas reality. (Identifying such action, so that group issues can be addressed, is at the heart of strategic planning.)

E. Construct a work plan covering the next six months that details the implementation of the identified action. (This is how strategic plans stay "alive.")

7. Review and Adopt the Plans—

If group members keep in mind the goals and concerns of key stakeholders as they proceed through the strategic planning process, they should be able to obtain the support they need to implement the plans developed in the above steps.

8. Establish a Vision—

A vision statement describes how success will look. A vision statement lets group members and key stakeholders know what is expected of them.

9. Develop an Implementation Process for the Plans—

This process should outline

A. Roles and responsibilities of individuals and groups involved;

B. Action steps that must be followed by participating individuals and groups;

C. Expected objectives and results;

D. Schedules and time lines that need to be maintained;

D. Resource requirements and sources (personnel and money);

F. Communication procedures and requirements;

G. Review, evaluation, and modification procedures and requirements; and

H. Accountability procedures.

10. Reassess Strategic Plans and Planning Process—

Before undergoing a new round of strategic planning, reassess the previous process and resulting plans. Note, the process must be tailored to fit each group and every circumstance, and the plans must be flexible enough to change as the organization and the environment around it change.

Adapted from *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations,* by J. Bryson

Funding

Tight local budgets make grants more attractive but also more competitive. Therefore, the ability to write strong grant applications is essential. The following tips may help you secure the grant dollars you need.

Grant applications usually are comprised of approximately eight components. The most common components are described below. Note, however, some small funders do not provide instructions with their grant applications. In those instances, applicants may benefit from designing their proposals in accordance with these eight steps.

1. **The Summary or Abstract—**Write this section of the application last even though it is usually found at the front of a completed proposal. This component should be comprised of two or three statements from each of the other components. This section should consist of

    (a) a brief description of the applicant;

    (b) a short definition of the problem;

    (c) a statement of the goals and objectives of the initiative;

    (d) a list of the activities to be undertaken through the initiative; and

    (e) a statement of the initiative's cost.

2. **The Introduction—**Use this component to establish credibility with the funder. To do so,

    (a) describe the applicant's qualifications to perform the proposed initiative;

    (b) tell a bit about those who will benefit from the initiative; and

    (c) provide information, including statistical data, regarding the applicant's related accomplishments in the past.

3. **The Problem Statement or Needs Assessment—**This section is the most crucial component of the proposal. After all, if an applicant doesn't have a problem, it doesn't need money. Thus, through this component, an applicant should

    (a) identify the problem;

    (b) describe how a solution would benefit those served by the grant;

    (c) document the most likely causes of the problem;

    (d) list possible solutions to the problem;

    (e) recommend one of those solutions;

    (f) explain why that solution would best solve the problem within a reasonable amount of time and for a reasonable amount of money;

    (g) make a case for why the applicant should get an opportunity to work on the problem;

    (h) provide research and/or statistics to support the theories offered; and

    (i) include quotes from potential beneficiaries of the grant.

4. **The Program Goals and Objectives—**Often used interchangeably, goals and objectives actually are two distinct benchmarks. Goals are *broad* statements about what the applicant expects to accomplish through the proposed initiative (e.g., reduce violent crime in the neighborhood). Objectives are *specific* statements that detail immeasurable terms what must be done to achieve the established goals (e.g., decrease assaults in the neighborhood by 20 percent over the next two years). In the goals-and-objectives portion of the proposal, the applicant must clearly set forth each goal as well as the corresponding objectives.

➪ **Goals usually answer the question, "What do we expect to accomplish through this program?"**

➪ **Objectives usually answer the following questions:**

(i) Who or what will be changed through this work?

(ii) How much change will occur (in measurable terms)?

(iii) Over what period of time will the change take place?

Some people dream of success. Others wake up and work at it.

5. **The Program Strategy—**Through this component, the applicant must explain how the problem described in No. 3 above will be addressed. To do this, the applicant should provide

(a) a description of the participants - or stakeholders - in the initiative;

(b) a plan of action, detailing the work that will be done through the initiative as well as the participants responsible for doing that work;

(c) a time line, outlining the time period during which each activity will be completed;

(d) a staffing plan, explaining how the project is to be staffed; and

(e) a training agenda, providing information about how staff members will be trained.

➪ **The program strategy is made up of the action steps necessary to meet the objectives set out in No. 4 above (e.g., double police foot patrols in the neighborhood between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and midnight, when most assaults occur).**

6. **The Evaluation—**The applicant uses this component to explain how the objectives stated in No. 4 above will be quantitatively assessed. To accomplish this, the applicant should

   (a) document who will design and conduct the evaluation;

   (b) explain the data-gathering methods that will be used, such as surveys or focus groups; and

   (c) describe how the data will be analyzed and the evaluation reports generated.

7. **The Future Funding—** In this component, the applicant needs to explain how the project will be funded after the life of this grant is over.

8. **The Budget—**Through this component, the applicant must illustrate in numbers everything discussed in the other components. In particular, everything set out in No. 5 must be itemized here. And, remember, in grant budgets, personnel costs and non-personnel costs usually are separated.

The best way to predict the future is to create it.

Potential Funding Sources

DOJ, Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA

DOJ, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)
www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org

DOJ, Office of Victims of Crime (OVC)
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc

DOJ, Office of Justice Programs (OJP)
www.ojp.usdoj.gov

Other federal grants
www.grants.gov

Portions of the grant material was adapted from *Writing a Winning Grant Proposal,* by Jon M. Shane

Before you begin to write a grant proposal—

*Define the problem
(See Component 3 above)
*Decide on your goal
(See Component 4 above)
*Establish objectives to achieve your goal
(See Component 4 above)
*Determine action needed to meet objectives
(See Component 5 above)
*Consider evaluation options
(See Component 6 above)
*Consider future funding possibilities
(See Component 7 above)
*Create a budget based on the information
(See Component 8 above)

When writing a grant proposal, remember to—

- ✖ Follow the instructions.
- ✖ Focus on the client. In other words, focus on the people who will benefit from the services provided through the grant.
- ✖ Be positive. Don't accuse or indict others, and don't give the funder ultimatums.
- ✖ Use simple language. Don't' use acronyms or technical jargon. And, above all, don't be dramatic. You are writing a grant proposal, not a novel.
- ✖ Make the application interesting. Use quotes from experts and those who will benefit from the grant.
- ✖ Keep the application brief. Say what you need to say and then stop writing. Don't try to puff it up.
- ✖ Proofread!

Fundraising

If your group wishes to raise money through sources other than grants, you may want to contact your local Rotary Club, Junior Chamber of Commerce, or other leadership or business organization. Such groups often fund initiatives that benefit the community. However, these groups usually offer funding for projects, not operating expenses. In addition, they ordinarily provide financial support to non-profits only.

If your non-profit group is searching for funding for a community project, you may also want to contact your local charitable gambling operations (restaurants and bars that sell pull tabs). By law, these establishments must use some of their pull-tab earnings to support community activities. Traditionally, this support has gone to local athletic teams, from Little League teams to traveling basketball associations. But, they might be interested in your project too. Ask!

Finally, if your group has skills or staff but lacks program funding, you may want to partner with an organization that has funding but needs expertise or personnel. Although such partnerships require that you "share power," they also provide an opportunity for your group to complete its project.

Vendors

In order to meet their goals, community groups often contract for services. In doing so, group members must first make sure that the services offered by vendors can be linked to the goals of the group's target project. For example, if the purpose of the subject endeavor is to decrease after-school garage thefts by teens, group members will be uninterested in contracting for services offered in the evening and aimed at adults. Instead, they will want to finance teen services or activities, offered every day after school, perhaps at the neighborhood community center.

Second, community group members must be able to assure funders that services for which they contract have been found to be effective, based on reliable research and evaluation. For example, "boot camps" for teens, where young law breakers supposedly are shown the error of their ways through military-style work and discipline, were all the rage several years ago. But, subsequent research indicated that such reform efforts had little long-term affect on the young people involved. Thus, funders quickly began to reject requests for financial support of teen boot camps, illustrating the importance of wisely choosing services and activities.

Third and finally, community group members must contract with vendors who are experienced and reliable. Although some group members may want to work with a particular person because he or she is active in the neighborhood, the group must remember that its first responsibility is to the funder. The group has an obligation to obtain the best possible services available with the money provided.

Vendor Contract Tips

1. Vendor contracts should be approved by the community group that is requesting the work, although a community group without legal standing may need such contracts approved by its legal fiscal agent (see Community Groups, Page 10).
2. Vendor contracts should contain a list of the work to be completed as well as the dates by which that work is to be done.
3. Vendor contracts should contain reporting requirements. Community groups (and their legal agents) may want to hear from their vendors - in person or through written reports - on a monthly or quarterly basis.
4. Vendor contracts should outline how community groups (or their legal agents) will monitor vendor work.

5. Vendor contracts should contain an "enforcement clause," which outlines the action the community group (or the legal agent) will take if the vendor fails to keep to the terms of the contract.
6. Vendor contracts should set forth the terms under which vendors will become ineligible for future work with the community group.
7. Vendor contracts should be reviewed by a contract specialist before being executed.

Budgeting and Accounting for Small Groups

Community groups routinely have to work within a budget. For small groups, accounting for income and expenditures can be relatively easy. In fact, many computer programs are available to assist small groups with budgeting and accounting tasks. In addition, non-profit organizations can get assistance from area councils or associations that deal specifically with the needs of non-profits.

When groups work with funds obtained through grants or other awards, they must keep in mind a few things, such as how the grant money is to be spent. If, for example, a funder provided money for a youth after-school program at a neighborhood community center, group members cannot utilize those funds for an adult-education class without the expressed permission of the funder. Usually, funders establish detailed guidelines relative to the use of their money; but, if your group is unclear about what it can or cannot do with its awards, ASK! Don't assume.

Additionally, groups must be careful to adhere to the reporting requirements of their funders. Group members must remember that funders have the right to find out in a timely manner exactly what is being accomplished with their money. Again, if group members are unclear about reporting requirements or deadlines, they must ASK for clarification or assistance.

Public Relation Tips for Groups

Because groups often depend on the financial and resource support of others, group members must learn to promote their good works. The following tips may be helpful in small-group promotional work.

- Create a calendar of your group's up-coming special events.
- Establish a list of "community" reporters from area newspapers, radio, and t.v.
- One week before each special event, send an advisory to those reporters, briefly describing the upcoming event and providing a contact name and phone number.
- Follow the advisory with a phone call to those reporters.
- After each special event, send reporters a news release, detailing the "who," "what," "when," "where," "why," and "how" of the event.

Sample News Release

The ABC Community Group
111 First Avenue
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55555
Contact: Jane Doe, ABC Community Group Spokesperson (111) 321-1234

January 2, 2004

Minneapolis - The ABC Community Group announced today that it has received a grant in the amount of $50,000 from the Best Foundation for youth after-school programming.

The grant money will be used to expand existing after-school programming as well as create new and more diverse programs at the Favorite Community Center, located at 150 First Avenue, in Minneapolis. New programs will include a hip-hop dance class, an abstract art class, and a cookie business to be run by teenagers. In addition, grant money will be used to extend supervised "open gym" hours and "computer lab" hours to 7:00 p.m. Currently, the gym and lab close at 5:00 p.m.

The ABC Community Group was formed two years ago, after residents decided to take action against juvenile crime in the area. Since the group's formation, neighborhood juvenile crime has decreased by 20 percent. The group credits the decrease, in large part, to improvements in programming at the Favorite Community Center.

"We worked hard to establish the Center's computer lab as well as some other supervised after-school activities," said John Smith, the chair of ABC Community Group. "With this generous two-year grant, we will be able to build on those efforts. And, I am certain we will see a further drop in teen crime in the area. After all, we know that if we give young people a safe and nurturing place to be after school, they will be less apt to be causing trouble in the neighborhood."

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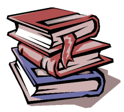
English



In community work, communication is important. The following tips are offered to aid you in your oral and written communications.

Pronouns as Subjects and Objects

The subjects of sentences are the "action doers." The objects of sentences are the "action receivers." Pronouns are words that take the place of nouns. Some pronouns, such as "I," "she," "he," "we," and "who," can only be action doers. Other pronouns, such as "me," "her," "him," and "us," can only be action receivers.

Wrong
- *"Cindy and me like to get things done."*
- *"Her and me go to meetings every chance we get."*
- *"Us girls do a lot of good work in the community."*
- *"The mayor assigned the project to him and I."*

Right
- *"Cindy and I like to get things done."* ("Cindy and I" are doing the action.)
- *"She and I go to meetings every chance we get."* ("She and I" are doing the action. We are going to meetings.)
- *"We girls do a lot of good work in the community."* ("We" are the action doers.)
- *"The mayor assigned the project to him and me."* (The mayor is the action doer. The action receivers are "him and me.")

When the words "each," "every," "no," "neither," and "either" are used as modifiers, the pronouns and verbs involved usually remain singular.

Wrong
- *"Each of the women have their own car."*
- *"No manager or coordinator have been fired."*
- *"Every city worker and every resident must remember their role."*
- *"Either the mayor or the city manager will help you in any way they can."*

Right
- *"Each of the women has her own car."*
- *"No manager or coordinator has been fired."*
- *"Every city worker and every resident must remember his role."*
- *"Either the mayor or the city manager will help you in any way he can."*

A Little Reminder—
When someone calls you on the telephone, you reply, "This is she," or "This is he." Do not say, "This is her," or "This is him."

The Subjunctive Mood

The verb used to describe an action or a condition *known to be contrary to the facts* usually appears in the subjunctive form.

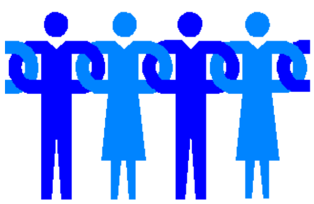
Wrong

- *"I wish he was here."*
- *"If he was here, he would know what to do."*
- *"If his statement was true, our case would be in jeopardy."* (This is correct only if you are unsure about the truth of his statement.)

Right

- *"I wish he were here."* (He isn't here, so you must use the word "were" instead of "was.")
- *"If he were here, he would know what to do."* (Again, he isn't here, so you must use the word "were.")
- *"If his statement were true, our case would be in jeopardy."* (This is correct if you know his statement is false.)

Be Careful with Linking Verbs



While adverbs, which usually end in "ly," are used to describe verbs (action words), they should not be used to describe linking verbs (words that describe the *quality* or *condition* of a subject). Linking verbs include, but are not limited to, "am," "is," "are," "was," "were," "have," and "been." "Become," "seem," and "appear" usually are used as linking verbs too. In addition, "prove," "grow," "remain," "feel," "taste," "smell," "look," and "sound" are used as linking verbs sometimes. Linking verbs usually are described by adjectives, which, as a general rule, do not end in "ly."

Adverbs Describe Action—

- *"Her speaking has improved considerably."*
- *"The entire matter was handled poorly."*
- *"The hiring system is unnecessarily complicated."*
- *"She feels her way blindly through the dark hall."*

Adjectives Describe Linking Verbs (words that show *quality or condition*)—

- *"Her velvet dress feels soft."*
- *"She feels bad about what happened at practice."* ("Bad" describes the subject's condition. Don't say, "She feels badly," unless you mean she isn't very good at feeling.)

"Well" is often used as an adverb (to describe action).

- *"She speaks well."*
- *"She played well in last night's game."*

"Well" also may be used as an adjective to mean "in good health."

- *"She is feeling well again."*

"Good" usually is used as an adjective. (Adjectives usually describe nouns.)

- *"She is a good leader."*
- *"Today is a good day for a picnic."*

A Little Reminder—

Adjectives of more than two syllables usually form the comparative and superlative forms by adding "more" or "most," respectively. For example, "difficult," "more difficult," "most difficult." Don't say, "difficulter" or "difficultest."

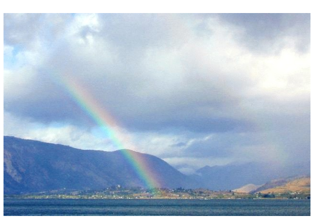
"I feel bad for him." **Don't say, *"I feel badly,"* unless you are explaining that you are not very good at feeling.**

Problems with Prepositions

Prepositions give words "relation." Prepositions include, but are not limited to

about	**above**	**across**	**after**	**against**	**along**
among	**around**	**at**	**before**	**behind**	**below**
between	**but (except)**	**by**	**concerning**	**during**	**for**
from	**in**	**of**	**on**	**over**	**through**
to	**under**	**upon**	**with**	**within**	**without**

Prepositional phrases consist of a preposition followed by an object. Pronouns that appear in prepositional phrases, therefore, must take the "objective" form. That is to say, in prepositional phrases, pronouns appear as "action receivers" only (see Page 29).



"Over" the Rainbow

"Under" the Umbrellas

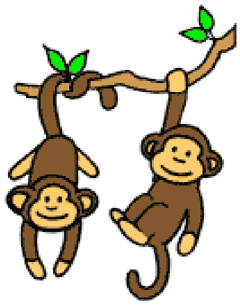
- *"Between you and me, I like the new mayor."* (Don't say, "Between you and I.")
- *"Please report to the manager and me."*

Do not end sentences with prepositions, especially in written material.

Wrong	*"Where is the meeting at?"*
Right	*"Where is the meeting?"*

Do not use *over* or *under* unless you mean "physically beneath" or "physically above". If you mean a lesser or greater quantity or amount, use *less than* or *more than.*

Wrong	*"Where is the meeting at?"*
Right	*"Where is the meeting?"*



Don’t Dangle Your Modifiers

Modifiers are said to “dangle” when they fail to modify, or describe, the word that immediately follows the modifying phrase.

Wrong - *“Dribbling the ball down the court, the crowd cheered her.”*

Right - *“Dribbling the ball down the court, she was cheered by the crowd.”* (She did the dribbling. The crowd didn’t dribble.)

Don’t Split Your Infinitives

Infinitives are verb forms not limited in person or number. Infinitive phrases start with the word “to.” For example, “to go,” “to see,” “to have seen,” “to be seen,” or “to have been seen” are infinitive phrases. Don’t split up an infinitive phrase with an adverb. Instead, put the adverb at the end of the phrase.

Wrong - *“To boldly go where no man has gone before.”*
(The most famous split infinitive of all times.)

Right - *“To go boldly where no man has gone before.”*

> **A Little Reminder—**
> **Make sure the words you use go together. For example, use “who” to refer to persons. “The girl who is playing for us is good.” Don’t say, “The girl that is playing for us is good.”**

Keep These Words Straight

- **“Affect” means to influence; “effect” means to bring about (verb) or the result (noun).**
- **“Angry” means enraged; “mad” means insane.**
- **“Anxious” means nervous; “eager” means desirous.**
- **“Biannual” means twice each year; “biennial” means every two years.**
- **“Compare to” means to show similarities; “compare with” means to show differences.**
- **“Farther” is a distance word; “further” is a time or quantity word.**
- **“Fewer” modifies nouns relative to individual people, places, or things. “Less” applies to quantity or bulk.**

Ex. - “Your book has fewer pages than my book.”
- “To lose weight, you must eat less chocolate.”

- **"Has got" or any form thereof should be avoided. Simply say, "She has the part."**
- **"Imply" is when you suggest something but don't express it; "infer" is when you deduce something from evidence.**
- **"Irregardless" is not a word. Just say, "Regardless."**
- **"Lay" is what you do to an object.**
  Ex. - "Lay the book on the table." But, when you are tired, you "lie" down.
- **"Lend" is something you do; a "loan" is something you get.**
- **"Pair" is the singular form; "pairs" is the plural form.**
- **"Real" is an adjective; "really" is an adverb.**
- **"That" is a restrictive pronoun; "which" is a non-restrictive pronoun.**
  Ex. - "You can use the car that is parked in the driveway." The speaker is distinguishing the car you can use from the other cars available.
  - "You can use the car, which is parked in the driveway." The speaker is saying there is one car available for your use, and it is in the driveway.
- **"Try to" do more and "come to" visit more often. Don't say, "Try and" or "come and."**
- **"Unique" means without equal; so there can be no degrees of uniqueness. Don't say, "That is the most unique book."**

Commas

➢ **Words and phrases in apposition (used to explain in more detail a preceding word or phrase) should be set off by commas.**

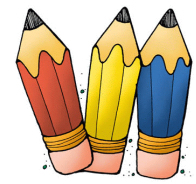
- *"December 25, 1976, is a Christmas I will never forget."*
- *"Minneapolis, Minnesota, is one of my favorite cities."*
- *"John Doe, the new mayor, will address the committee."*
- *"The meeting will take place Tuesday, June 1, 2004."*

➢ **Nouns used in direct address should be set off by commas.**

- *"Please listen, Mayor Doe, to the people of the community."*
- *"You can see, ladies and gentlemen of the council, the problem we are facing."*

➢ **Words and phrases used in a series should be separated by commas.**

- *"Old Glory is red, white, and blue."*
- *"We need to complete a narrative, a budget, and a time line for this project."*
- *"We went to the site, surveyed the damage, and reported our findings."*



- **A comma should be used before a direct quotation that consists of a short sentence.**
  - *Edison said, "Genius consists largely of the capacity for hard work."*
  - *In my last report, I stated, "We are beginning to see the signs of success."*

- **A comma should be used to separate two phrases that could stand alone as sentences but, instead, are joined by a conjunction (e.g., "and," "or," "but").**
  - *"We arrived late, but we still heard most of the speakers."* (Each of these phrases has a subject and an action word, so each could stand alone. "We arrived late." "We still heard most of the speakers.")
  - *"I like running, and Jane likes swimming."*
  - *"The police will investigate the matter, and then they will get back to you."*
  - *"The police will investigate the matter and then get back to you."* (In this sentence, the second phrase does not have a subject, so it cannot stand alone as a sentence. Therefore, no comma is needed before the conjunction.)

- **A nonrestrictive (non-essential) clause should be surrounded by commas.**
  - *"Inspector Jones, who is one of the best police officers on the force, will investigate the case."* (The information between the commas adds information, but that information is not essential to the sentence.)
  - *"My dog, which isn't the brightest animal in the world, keeps getting lost."*
  - *"My brother, John, is running for office.* (The use of the commas in this sentence indicates that you only have one brother, and you simply are telling the reader his name.)
  - *"My brother John is running for office.* (The absence of commas in this sentence indicates you have several brothers, but John is the one running for office. His name, therefore, is *essential* information, so commas are not used.)

- **An introductory phrase should be followed by a comma.**
  - *"After waiting for John for more than an hour, I went home."*
  - *"Grabbing the thief by the leg, I held on until the police arrived."*
  - *"By making our streets safer, we improve life for everyone in the community."*

  Note, the subject in each of these sentences immediately follows the introductory phrase. Such structuring is helpful to the reader.

> **A Little Reminder—**
> **Commas and periods always go inside quotation marks.**

Writing Style Hints

✤ **Use an active voice, not a passive voice, whenever possible.**

- *"He ran across the street."*
  (Active voice)
- *"He was running across the street."*
  (Passive voice)

✤ **Put sentences in positive form whenever possible.**

- *"He didn't succeed very often."*
  (Negative form)
- *"He often failed."*
  (Positive form)

✤ **Use parallel construction when writing sentences.**

- *"The committee chair drafted the agenda, facilitated the meetings, and carried out the work."*
  (Parallel construction)
- *"The committee chair drafted the agenda, would facilitate the meetings, and ended up carrying out the work."*
  (Not parallel in construction)

✤ **Make sure your nouns, pronouns, and verbs agree in number and make sense together.**

Wrong - *"The committee signed the application."*
(A committee cannot sign anything.)

Right - *"The committee chairperson signed the application."*

✤ **Don't change verb tenses unless you have a sound reason for doing so.**

Wrong - *"I ran home. I call to mother. She doesn't answer."*

Right - *"I ran home. I called to mother. She didn't answer."* Or,
- *"I run home. I call to mother. She doesn't answer."*

Much of the material for this section was adapted from
The Elements of Style, by Strunk and White, and
College Business English, by the Rowe Company

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