

## How to Organize and Facilitate a Community Meeting

- Announce a meeting to discuss the needs in your community. If possible, talk to other community leaders and announce the meeting together. Make the announcement to as many members of the community as possible, including both women and men.
- Schedule the meeting at a time that would be convenient for many people (e.g., on a weekend or weekday evening). The meeting should have a clear start and end time.
- Identify a space that people can travel to easily and that can accommodate a few more people than you expect to attend.
- Develop an agenda or a list of items that will be covered at the meeting.



- Identify a facilitator (or facilitators) for the meeting. The **role of the facilitator is very important**. She/he is responsible for the following:
  - Review and confirm the agenda with participants. An opportunity to suggest additional agenda items should be given.
  - Ensure that the meeting progresses smoothly and remains focused.
  - Keep on schedule, spending the necessary time on each agenda item.
  - Be flexible and open to modifying the agenda if necessary. For example, if a relevant item *not* on the agenda leads to a discussion important to the community, allow for time to have that discussion, and shorten the time

dedicated for other less important agenda items (preferably, with everyone's approval).

- Be aware of the dynamics in the room (e.g., female-male balance, dominating personalities, overly sensitive individuals, aggressive behavior), and create a safe and comfortable space where all participants can share their thoughts without feeling threatened.
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- Be enthusiastic and energetic, as that will determine how engaged participants are.
  - Quickly address and manage possible conflicts or tense moments.
  - Make certain that those who want to participate in the conversation are given an opportunity. Make space for and gently encouraging quiet participants to contribute their thoughts. Tactfully interrupt participants who have a tendency to be wordy and long-winded.
  - Connect ideas, comments, and recommendations, and share those connections with participants.
  - Remain constantly engaged in the meeting. Make eye contact with all the participants. Do not have side conversations as people are talking.
  - Write down key points on blackboard, butcher paper, etc.; ideally, this task should be performed by another person.
  - Do not abuse facilitator role to talk more than everyone else or to give those with similar viewpoints greater talking time.
  - Secure commitments for possible work on an identified issue.
  - Schedule a follow-up meeting.
  - (Remember that facilitation is a skill that improves with practice).
- Identify a note-taker to record at least the main points of the meeting, including tasks and commitments.
  - Circulate an attendance sheet, requesting name and telephone number (and possibly, email).