

# Facilitate Effective Public Meetings

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## **Objective**

The objective of this activity is to provide strategies for conducting effective public meetings, hearings, and forums as part of the Consolidated Plan process. Effective meetings help to maximize feedback and input from residents regarding the planning process.

## **Summary**

A strong facilitator is a key component of an effective public meeting. Grantees can designate a staff member as the facilitator or hire a facilitation professional. This person is responsible for managing meeting participants and for guiding the meeting toward its objectives. The facilitator is responsible for the following tasks:

- *Develop Agenda:* Establishing and publishing the agenda well in advance of the meeting along with any supporting documents will allow participants to review and prepare for the meeting.
- *Establish the Meeting Purpose:* Confirm the purpose and desired outcomes of the meeting for all participants at the onset of the meeting.
- *Set and Implement Meeting Ground Rules:* The facilitator should also establish ground rules, which may include the process for sharing ideas or tabling off-topic comments for future discussion.
- *Manage Time:* Manage time during the meeting to ensure that meeting goals are met and the desired outcomes are reached.
- *Be an Active Listener:* The facilitator should remain a neutral, active listener to comments and feedback and facilitate ongoing dialogue among participants. The active listener focuses their attention solely on the speaker and then summarizes the speaker's points in the listener's own words before moving on. This process helps the speakers confirm that the audience has understood their message.
- *Encourage Participation:* Encourage active participation from all meeting attendees and prevent a subset of the group from dominating the conversation. The facilitator should ensure that the meeting environment is one in which all participants feel comfortable sharing comments and thoughts.

## **Application to the Consolidated Plan**

Public meetings are one of the most fundamental forms of citizen participation outreach used by grantees and a minimum requirement for the Consolidated Plan. Good meeting facilitation is a primary factor in achieving successful public input on Plan issues and priorities.

## **Logistics and Materials Needed**

In addition to employing the standard facilitation practices outlined above, a number of techniques can be employed to increase participation and to create an interactive meeting environment. Strategies include:

- *Rotating Flip Charts:* For meetings in which the grantee wants to generate a list of brainstormed ideas, the rotating flip chart activity can be useful. To do this, divide participants into small groups (4-8 people). Ask participants to respond to certain questions and record their answers on a piece of flip chart paper. After 5-10 minutes, the facilitator should rotate each group's paper to a different table to allow each group to review another group's brainstorm and comment/expand upon their

ideas. Once the papers have been rotated several times, review each flip chart list with the entire group and have a discussion about the brainstormed ideas.

- *Dot Voting:* For meetings in which the grantee wants feedback on a number of ideas or proposals, dot voting is an interactive activity that involves all participants. The facilitator should affix a number of ideas or proposals to a wall (either a title or a more detailed proposal). Depending on the number of ideas, participants are given 1-4 sticker dots and asked to place a dot next to their favorite idea(s). After everyone has voted, the facilitator should tally the votes and lead a discussion on the ideas receiving the most votes.
- *Sticky Notes Comments:* Similar to the dot voting strategy, sticky notes comments allow participants to post comments anonymously on ideas or proposals. Each participant is given a number of sticky notes and is encouraged to write comments about the presented ideas and attach their sticky notes to proposal descriptions affixed to the wall. The facilitator then leads a conversation reviewing the comments on each proposal.
- *Consensus Pairing:* Consensus pairing works best with smaller groups. Participants are asked to brainstorm three responses to a question posed by the facilitator. After brainstorming the responses, each participant finds a partner, compares the two lists, and comes to consensus on three responses between the pair. After five minutes, the pair is asked to find another pair, share lists, and come to consensus on three responses between their two lists. Depending on the size of the group and type of question, this can be done again. The facilitator should then ask each group to report on their brainstormed consensus list and facilitate a conversation discussing all ideas reported by the groups.
- *Use of Visual Aids:* Use of maps and other visual aids can encourage feedback from participants. Some participants may be able to better recognize issues or prioritize needs if they are depicted visually in addition to narrative text or data tables. Prior to the meeting, the grantee can use CPD Maps or another mapping application to create maps that indicate community needs, existing facilities or services, concentrations of populations, or housing market features. These maps can be printed or displayed electronically during the meeting.