SHORT GUIDE TO FACILITATING MEETINGS

(Taken from the North American CoHousing Network web-page resource library)

Good meetings are planned meetings. Good facilitation is planned facilitation. A plan allows the group to express its goals and focus its efforts on reaching those goals.

Some groups rotate facilitation so each member gets a chance. Other groups use a small group of members that have had facilitation training. It is a large benefit to the group if one or more people specialise in facilitation and become expert. Having a small team of facilitators gives the group added benefits and lets any facilitator who is conflicted or who wishes to contribute to the discussion to step aside for a particular issue.

A good facilitator

* has the confidence of the group
* is aware of the different positions within the group in question
* is engaged with *how* things are done (the process) rather than *what* is done (the content)
* takes a neutral position on the issues being discussed
* sees the value of the group as greater than that of its parts
* is comfortable with conflict and conflict resolution
* is empathetic
* enhances the ability of the group to work through processes and achieve its task
* keeps the meeting purpose in mind at all times
* gets the job done and done on time

During the meeting:

The facilitator has to

* manage the agenda and progress of the group
* adjust time, tasks and process
* give the group feedback on progress
* encourage the group
* keep the meeting objectives before the group
* ensure that all participants and ideas have a chance to be heard
* help the group to reach consensus and make decisions in other ways
* help the group resolve differences
* track ancillary issues (issues that can’t be deal with at the time)
* track follow up or action items

FACILITATOR’S CHECKLIST

Before the meeting

* make a plan. think about how to approach each agenda item. Are there any specific agenda items which need a special format for discussion or resolution? Are there issues which will evoke strong feelings or emotions? Plan some *what-if* scenarios - *what if we split on this issue, what process will I use*? *What if Susan gets loud again?*
* check the environment - enough chairs, stuffy, warm enough, enough space?
* write the agenda for all to see using action words to describe goals
* review outstanding decisions/discussions from the last 2 meetings’ notes. Is follow up needed?
* set a goal for the meeting and write it down so all can see
* assign volunteers for meeting tasks such as scribe, doorkeeper etc.

At the beginning of the meeting

* check the body language. Is there tension in the room? Does someone have an obvious vibe that you might need to tap before the meeting?

As the meeting begins

* a warm up exercise is useful to help members make the transition from being individuals to thinking as a group. Some initial fun activity is a good idea.
* Check in yourself to the group. Explain how you are feeling, any special things happening today. Ask for feedback and help to make the meeting work well. Share your goal(s) for the meeting with the group
* Check in with the agenda

1. Review the agenda and prioritise. Ask for any additions or deletions.

2. Set times for discussions and assign each item an owner

3. Be sure that the items on the agenda are appropriate for large group discussion rather than small group work

As the meeting runs

* for each item on the agenda summarise previous discussions about it to bring everyone up to date
* watch for dominance of speaking time and ask those who are quiet for ideas and thoughts. Eg. say ‘*I’d like to ask those who have not spoken yet to contribute’*
* summarise points and clarify discussion. If an agreement is being sought, grab elements as they emerge in discussion and trial test them. It helps to write down the topic or issue under discussion so everyone can refer to it
* when a decision is reached, summarise it - and do this regularly. This is especially helpful to anyone who is taking notes.
* catch any items that have not been resolved or come up in discussion and ask the group what to do with them
* note digressions and remind members to stay on task. Write related digressions up as points on the board and ask the group to delay consideration of this till later - then after the current issue is finished, ask the group what to do with it
* make sure you have eye contact with the people you speak to
* listen for and watch body language to catch any unexpressed issues or feelings. Note it to the group
* watch for comments which create a negative environment and point it out to the group
* guide members who speak a lot to be briefer
* watch for restlessness and take breaks when you sense the need for one
* be sure any tasks generated are assigned to specific individuals or groups

As the meeting ends

* run through all task assignments and list any decisions made so any misunderstandings can be cleared before people leave
* debrief the meeting with yourself at least or with the group. What went well, what could be improved