Program Development Committee

Basic Facilitation: Tools for Generating and Prioritizing Ideas

As a facilitator, you focus on the process of helping groups accomplish necessary tasks. Basic facilitation tools can be used to help Program Development Committee (PDC) members identify and prioritize important community issues and then to direct local programming efforts to address those issues.

Tools for Generating Ideas

The Probing Question Technique

This technique helps engage participants by asking them the right questions. Effective probing questions can be used to draw out information and ideas or to clarify issues. Select from the list of possible questions or develop your own to target a specific program focus such as: food, water, health, developing tomorrow's leaders, or community vitality. Giving participants a list of questions before a meeting will allow them time to reflect and better respond.

Needed: List of probing questions, markers, large sticky-note pad/newsprint and tape, or whiteboard

Sample Questions:

1. What demographic trends over the past few years affect our community?
2. What community changes or needs — related to these demographic trends — can you identify?
3. What topics or issues do you often hear about in local media reports — newspapers, social media, radio, or television — that affect individuals, agricultural producers, or families in the community?
4. What challenges, issues, or concerns facing our community or organization tend to keep you awake at night?
5. What community issues are being discussed at the local coffee shop or at community events?

An example is an *Environmental Scan*. This questioning technique provides an opportunity to think creatively and helps answer the question, "Where are we?" This quick technique can help groups begin to identify trends that might influence program planning.

Brainstorming

The brainstorming technique can generate a large number of ideas in a short time. It works best when group members know each other and have some degree of trust. The most important thing to remember about brainstorming is that it is intended to generate ideas — not to critique those ideas.

Needed: Markers, large sticky-note pad/newsprint and tape, or whiteboard

Begin the brainstorming session by clearly stating the topic/question. It is a good idea to remind participants that this activity is to identify or generate ideas — not to evaluate the ideas. No idea should be rejected as being "impractical," "silly" or "off-the-wall." Instruct participants to call out ideas as quickly as they can. Write the ideas on the paper or board exactly as they are stated.

Brainstorming continues as long as people have ideas. End the session by telling participants that brainstorming will close in two minutes. This allows them to finalize and state their ideas.

Brainstorming is not the ultimate decision-making activity. The results of a brainstorming session will probably be used in other decision-making processes, such as prioritization.

Sticky Wall Technique

Needed: Pencils/pens with small sticky notes, large sticky-note pad/newsprint and tape

This is a brainstorming technique that provides participants with sticky notes to capture their ideas in writing. It gives participants an opportunity to collect their thoughts and express them in writing,

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rather than thinking quickly and sharing their ideas aloud. Participants write each idea on a separate sticky note. When finished they bring the notes to a designated space on the wall/large sticky-note sheet/newsprint.

Have participants discuss each sticky note and reach consensus on how to group similar ideas.

Prioritization Tools

When using prioritization techniques, it is helpful to first have the group discuss and agree on criteria. These criteria will serve as a guide to setting program priorities. Some ideas for possible criteria include the following:

- Relevance to the organization's educational mission
- Number of people affected
- Political environment
- History (Has this been addressed in the past? Are there implications from other programs?)
- Ability of the organization to respond
- Interests of the local unit extension council members
- Culture of the county, district, and communities
- Efforts of other organizations and agencies

Dot Method

This is a group voting process used to prioritize based on criteria. This tool makes group decision-making an easier and faster process.

Needed: List of ideas/issues generated by the group on newsprint/sticky-pad sheets, sticky dots/stickers

Use the following procedure:

1. Identify options and post them on a wall or board.
2. Give participants a predetermined number of votes, to be indicated by "dots" or stickers.
3. Review criteria for voting.
4. Participants place their "dots" by their choices, based on criteria discussed.
5. Tabulate the number of "dots" for each option to show results.

Issues with the most "dots" are indicated as priorities.

Simple Voting

If an agreed-upon set of criteria has been determined, remind participants to consider those criteria before voting. Each participant votes for a single item on the priority list. Votes are counted, and the items with the most votes are designated as highest priority.

Nominal Group Technique

The *nominal group technique* is a widely used small-group process that can produce a large number of ideas in a relatively short time. It can help prioritize ideas based on criteria and member preferences.

References

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