VII. Ensuring Success: Meetings and Management

Collaboration requires people to come together to work through problems and define solutions. At the heart of every collaborative process is the meeting, the side-by-side, give-and-take, education and deliberation sessions that occur between citizens, community leaders, experts, and others.

A meeting is an intentional effort to bring people together to do three basic things: present information, exchange information, and make decisions. Though this seems quite obvious, we can all remember attending a meeting during which none of these things happened. Despite the best intentions of the meeting planner and the participants, these meetings were a waste of our time and energy.

The problems that plague meetings are easily identified: expectations may be unclear; people may question the "real" intent of the meeting; the facilities may be inconvenient or inappropriate to the meeting's purpose; and presentations may fail to relay information in a clear, understandable way. With a little planning, these mistakes can be avoided. But what you really want to do is avoid the long-term consequences of bad meetings.

Poorly designed and mismanaged meetings can worsen unstable relations in a community. If meetings are not well planned and managed, several things can happen: ideas and proposals may be misinterpreted; loud participants may control discussion and debate; and levels of mistrust and cynicism may escalate. These problems can damage more than the outcome of a single meeting. Bad meetings can hurt your chances of bringing people together in the future.

This portion of the manual offers advice on how to avoid these pitfalls. The first section, "Effective Meetings," addresses the different kinds of interaction you can plan for, the different ways we communicate, and meeting logistics. The following section, "Keeping on Track," offers tips on how to keep meetings productive and the participants focused on the issues.

A. Effective Meetings

1. A Typology of Meetings

Groups tend to work well if they understand and come to agreement on what they will do and how they will do it. For good reason, people get angry when they expect one thing and get another. A great deal of controversy in public processes can be eliminated by defining clearly the purpose of a meeting, the type of communication that will take place, and when and where meetings will be held.

The common notion that meetings are of a single type is incorrect. To reach consensus, several distinct kinds of interaction are required. During the initial stages of a process, meetings must be designed to permit the exploration of interests and the sharing of information and ideas. Later in the process other types of meetings are necessary. Parties need to work through differences to build stable, realistic agreements. To allow for the different kinds of interaction, a collaborative process must include these three basic meeting types: presentation and reaction, information exchange, and decision making.

a. Presentation and Reaction

The most common meeting involves the presentation of information to a group or the solicitation of information from a group. The meeting type is quite simple: during a presentation, an individual or panel provides information to a larger interested or affected group. Reaction works in the opposite direction: information flows from the audience to an individual or panel. In each case, communication occurs in primarily one direction. Questions may interrupt a presentation or feedback session, but the focus remains on the one-way flow of information.

Most everyone knows what to expect from a presentation. Audiences are routinely gathered to hear reports on new programs and learn about public and private decisions, plans, and proposals. The premeeting work required to prepare for these meetings is a fairly easy activity. The presenter prepares educational materials (slides, maps and charts, handouts) and makes sure that the room is sized and organized to accommodate the expected audience. All everyone else has to do is show up at the prescribed time and place and listen to the presentation.

Presentations can also be planned as less-formal affairs. A good model is the open house. The open house works like this: citizens are invited to drop by a convenient place to learn about an issue or proposal. Resource tables and informational displays are arranged around an open room, thus allowing citizens to move through the space at their own pace, ask questions, and discuss the material with local staff members and their friends and neighbors.

Reaction, or "feedback," meetings are another type of presentation used fairly often. Public officials routinely provide opportunities for the public to comment on recommendations, proposals, and public improvement plans. Citizens and interest groups are invited to an informational or advisory meeting to learn more about a plan and offer their ideas and concerns. Officials, and occasionally a mayor or council member, are present to hear feedback and answer questions.

Feedback sessions require a bit more planning. These sessions must be designed so everyone interested in expressing concerns has the opportunity to do so. The most useful feedback will be produced when people with diverse perspectives have a chance to discuss an issue. The focus-group format offers an effective vehicle for gaining the insights of a small group. For large groups, presentations to the entire audience may be followed by a series of small-group sessions. In this model, a mechanism should be built into the process to organize the feedback from the smaller groups. Otherwise, there may be resistance to breaking the larger group into discussion groups.

b. Information Exchange

Information exchange meetings involve a more dynamic level of interaction. Participants are brought together to share information and ideas in an open forum. Communication flows *among* group members rather than *to* or *from* individuals.

Information exchange requires an environment that promotes the free exchange of ideas. Rather than focus on a single presenter or a series of prepared "feedback" statements, participants are asked to share their ideas or concerns on a topic, consider the ideas of others, and identify points of agreements and disagreement. Usually these sessions begin with a short presentation, then the participants break into focus or work groups to discuss an issue or a component of a larger problem. Participants with different backgrounds and interests should be encouraged to sit together and share their concerns. With the proper facilitation, participants can learn from each other and begin to respect different points of view.[1]

Here's an example: during the early stages of developing a comprehensive plan, work groups could be established to consider individual elements of a plan—transportation, housing, and so forth—and help define issues and public concerns. Staff members responsible for each topic can be available to answer questions, provide background information, and record comments. Such sessions can serve two important functions: local officials learn more about the public's specific concerns, and the public has a chance to influence the local planning agenda early in the process.

Regardless of the issue, it should be made clear to participants that the information exchange meeting is held simply to promote discussion and mutual education. Participants are not being asked to commit to a specific program or recommendation. Decision making is a separate function.

c. Decision Making

In decision-making meetings, people are brought together to discuss an issue, explore alternatives, and agree on an acceptable package of solutions or recommendations. Participants are encouraged to find common ground and, ultimately, commit to a plan, program, or recommendation. Like the exchange meeting, communication is two way. Participants are encouraged to work together. The difference between the two lies in the level of authority granted to group members. Decision-making groups are formed to identify *and* solve problems.

Because a very specific outcome is expected, decision-making meetings require a great deal of careful planning. Representation should be fair; information

Meeting Types

Presentation and Reaction

- Public Information Meetings
- Hearings
- Open Houses
- Community Meetings

Information Exchange

- Workshops
- Focus Group Meetings
- Brainstorming Sessions

Decision Making

- Negotiation
- Consensus Building

should be evenly distributed; participants should feel secure in their ability to be heard by other members; and sufficient time and resources should available to explore and test alternatives.

Defining the type of interaction required will help you define the proper meeting type and clarify public expectations about what will happen. This in turn molds the tone, scope, size, and depth of participation. The better everyone understands the overall structure, the more likely that each will behave appropriately at each stage.

2. Communication

a. Horizontal versus Vertical Communication

Information usually comes to people from the top down, from those with official or symbolic authority to those without. In public meetings and judicial proceedings this sort of vertical transfer of information shapes the way decisions are made. Information and ideas are exchanged according to strict rules of procedure. Decision making and problem solving are concentrated at the top. Those outside this circle of authority try to influence the process through public hearings, letters to the editor, or voting, but the power to make decisions remains in the hand of a few leaders, city council members, judges, or CEOs. It can be very difficult to negotiate, build consensus, or even communicate effectively when a meeting allows communication only between those on the speakers' platform and those in the audience.

Top-down

Horizontal communication, on the other hand, requires an even distribution of decision-making authority. Communication flows among participants, not from more-powerful individuals to less powerful. Consensual decision-making processes, which require everyone to agree to a final package of recommendations, serve to "level the playing field." Group members have to work toward a mutually acceptable agreement rather than try to gain the sympathies of others to build a majority. Meeting rooms where everyone is situated around a table or seated in a semicircle facilitate horizontal communication.

Bottom-up

b. Visual versus Verbal Activities

Information is shared in two ways—visually and verbally—and it appears that a combination of the two forms is most effective. According to research reported in Doyle and Straus's *How to Make Meetings Work: The New Interaction Method*, people retain only about "10 percent of what they hear in a presentation and 20 percent of what they see, but about 50 percent of what they both see and hear."[2] Comprehension increases dramatically when we take in information with both our ears and eyes. This is even more true when we consider the implication of plans and proposals on our built environment. You cannot expect someone to understand the effect of a new building or regulation on a neighborhood without a series of plans and renderings.

The use of graphics has a number of additional advantages. Graphics provide a focus of attention for an audience. When people focus on a visual presentation, they share a definite point of reference. Too often, work groups get caught up in abstract word play, losing sight of the real issue. Charts, maps, even simple lists of information can help keep discussion focused.

Visuals also help the facilitator or discussion leader prepare for a meeting. The simple exercise of preparing a series of charts, diagrams, or maps forces you to organize information and anticipate the course of the group's deliberation. When the meeting planner shows up prepared and ready to begin, group members will know what to expect.

c. Nonverbal Communication

In nonverbal communication, people send messages to each other without talking. They communicate (1) by facial expressions, head positions, arm and hand movements, body posture, positioning of legs and feet, (2) by using space, or (3) by carrying or displaying objects that "say" something about themselves.

Being aware of nonverbal communication, one can interpret the signals of others or send signals that will promote the productive resolution of a dispute. Awareness of nonverbal communication helps people to

- project an image of confidence and knowledge;
- demonstrate power or influence;
- express sincerity, interest, and cooperativeness;
- create trust;
- recognize personal tension in self and others;
- identify discrepancies between what people are saying and what they are actually thinking; and
- change their behavior and environment to encourage productive discussion.

Three cautions should be mentioned about nonverbal communication. First, an awareness of nonverbal communication is not a panacea for conflict resolution. Recognition and use of nonverbal skills is only one more tool to aid conflict managers or disputants in understanding conflicts. Second, awareness does not necessarily mean that something can be done about unwanted nonverbal communication. A lot of nonverbal communication is unconscious.

And third, the meaning of nonverbal communication depends on both the sender's and the receiver's culture—their race, ethnicity, class, status, sex, and individual differences. Some common interpretations of nonverbal behavior cross cultural boundaries, but others do not.

d. Use of Space

Space can be manipulated by disputants or third-party interveners to escalate or deescalate conflicts or to promote or detract from effective problem solving. For example, the seating arrangements at a negotiation table may be used to indicate personal authority, the legitimacy of a particular viewpoint, or the distance between the parties' interests. If one is behind a desk or dais while others sit in folding chairs in the middle of the room, a definite power imbalance is suggested. Giving members an equal place at the problem-solving table legitimizes their right to participation.

Distance between parties also communicates a strong message. Parties who sit long distances from each other may be communicating how far apart they perceive their interests to be. If closer together, they may be indicating a desire to cooperate or to force a point. The placement of parties side by side with a common focus toward a blackboard or flip chart has an important influence on problem solving. Conversely, face-to-face encounters across a negotiating table may escalate a dispute.

People use space, the distance that they keep between them, to communicate many things. It has been observed that each individual is surrounded by several invisible zones or distances that he or she regulates or attempts to control. Depending on the type of relationship or interaction, people are allowed to enter another's personal space without permission. The context of the relationship or interaction determines how one responds when one's zone is invaded or how barriers are constructed for protection or dominance.

The more dominant a person is, the more space that person maintains around himself or herself and the more freedom he or she has in invading the space of others. Subordinates yield space, not only bodily but also in square footage of office space or at the negotiating table. Both the amount of space and its locations are important. The head of the table or the central seat in a negotiating team may be an indication of actual or claimed dominance. Dominant people tend to be space grabbers—they tend to enlarge their space or the territory that they control. Subordinates, while often yielding space, may also seek power by attempting to locate themselves close to those in power, either for protection or to gain a vicarious share of power and territory.

e. Active Listening and Feedback

Good communication requires more than acceptance of feeling or empathy for another person. A listener must also have an accurate understanding of the content or substantive message of a speaker. Accurate feedback of the content may eliminate unnecessary communication conflicts caused by misinformation or misperception. The process of reframing a statement can make an item more manageable in size or scope or acceptable in terms of its tone or value.

Several content-feedback techniques may be used to broaden, deepen, or affirm both the listener's and the speaker's understanding of the substance of a message.

- *Paraphrase.* The listener restates the exact meaning of the speaker's statement using different words.
- *Summarization.* The listener condenses the message of a speaker into fewer words and in a more succinct manner.
- *Expansion.* The listener receives a message, expands and elaborates on it, feeds it back to the speaker, and then checks to verify accurate perception of the expanded meaning.
- *Ordering.* The listener helps a speaker order his or her ideas into some form or sequence (such as historical, size, importance, or amount).
- *Grouping.* The listener helps a speaker to identify common ideas or issues and combine them into logical units.
- *Structuring.* The listener helps a speaker to organize and arrange his or her thoughts and speech into a coherent message.
- *Separation or Fractionating.* The listener dissects an idea or an issue into smaller component parts.
- *Generalization.* The listener identifies general points or principles in a speaker's presentation.

3. Logistics

> "Realtors are fond of saying that the three major factors that influence the marketability of a piece of property are location, location, and location. The same can be said of successful public meetings."
>
> Elaine Cogan, *Successful Public Meetings: A Practical Guide for Managers in Government* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992), 48.

a. Where?

The meeting room itself should be chosen to fit the size of the expected audience and the kind of interaction expected. Small groups can feel intimidated in a large hall or formal chamber. Hearing the sound of your voice echo off the walls of a large auditorium can be rather intimidating. So can the stiff formality of a council chamber or hearing room. These spaces have been designed to support a prescribed kind of interaction and are consequently inappropriate for small, interactive sessions. Formal spaces may also be inappropriate for larger meetings and open houses. With their raised council dais and fixed seating, these spaces have been intentionally designed to discourage dynamic group interaction.

Open, unprogrammed spaces like school and church meeting halls provide the best spaces for public meetings. Typically these places are conveniently located, have adequate parking, and provide facilities to accommodate the disabled. They are also likely to include the requisite items to support different sorts of meetings, such as movable seats and tables, adjustable lighting, slide screens, easel, a speaker's podium, and sufficient wall space to tape up visuals and meeting notes. And unlike meeting rooms in banks or city halls, community meeting halls tend to be viewed as neutral.

As experts Michael Doyle and David Straus advise, "A good meeting room won't guarantee a good meeting, but a bad meeting room can contribute to a bad meeting."[3]

b. When?

Public meetings should be scheduled to meet the needs of your audience. If you are working with a group of business owners or professionals, early morning, lunch time, or afternoon meetings may be fine, but if you are hoping to engage the general public in a process, evening meetings are preferred. Early evening start times, at 7:00 or 7:30 p.m., seem to work well. People have had time to eat dinner and prepare for the meeting. In some cases, maybe for a charette or open house, afternoon or weekend meetings may work best. Again, these decisions depend on local circumstances. You should know the customs and preferences of your audience and plan accordingly.

One additional bit of advice: start and end your meetings on time. If you announce a start time of 7:00 p.m., the room should be set up and open to the public at least 15 minutes prior to the start time, and the proceedings should begin promptly at 7:00. If your notice declares an ending time of 9:00 p.m., you should wrap up promptly at 9 o'clock. Sticking to a strict schedule will be recognized as a sign of respect by those volunteering their time and energy to the effort.

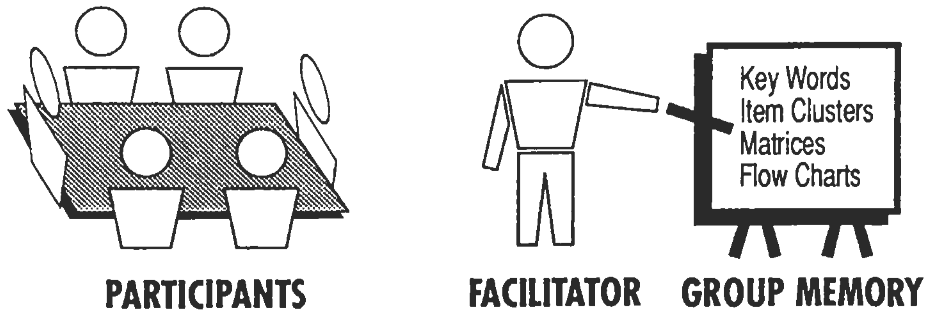
c. Meeting Summaries and the Group Memory

The role of the meeting recorder, introduced in chapter V, is an important one. The recorder acts as a neutral servant of the group, maintaining a record of the group's deliberations. As the meeting unfolds, the recorder creates the group memory from what participants are saying. By writing down the group's comments and concerns on large sheets of paper, a map, or flip chart, a readily accessible record of the group's interaction is created. As the meeting proceeds, items that have been recorded can be discussed openly. This method allows group members to test specific language, and participants can see what they have said in text. If the idea is not translated clearly, it can be corrected on the spot.

Habermas

Most consensus-building meetings make extensive use of flip charts. At the beginning of a meeting, the draft agenda and ground rules are usually posted. During the meeting, ideas, agreements, items for future meetings, and any other lists the participants desire are recorded on pages from the flip chart. Some uses of a flip chart are shown in figure 11. It serves as the group memory, with information displayed in the form of key words, clusters of related items, matrices of relationships, or flowcharts showing the sequence and timing of events.

Figure 11
Using a Flip Chart as Group Memory



The group memory provides a neutral focus for debate. Rather than concentrate attention on a charismatic group member or a group leader or facilitator, members concentrate on the items that have been recorded. To depersonalize ideas, information is recorded without attribution. Participants can argue about an item on the chart rather than with one another. Ideas are thus transferred from individuals to the larger group.

The pages of the group memory provide the basis for the writing and publication of a meeting summary. Meeting summaries should be concise records of the meeting and include the basic who, what, why, and where of the meeting along with a brief account of the topics discussed, agreements reached, and the items left unaddressed.

Meeting summaries should be prepared as soon after the meeting as possible and be available for distribution to participants, decision makers, and interested parties. For long or multilayered processes, meeting summaries can be published in a newsletter format and used to keep others informed of the group's progress.

B. Keeping on Track

1. Building a Good Working Relationship

While short-term citizen involvement is often driven by crisis or conflict, ongoing citizen-participation programs offer an opportunity to build good working relationships. Those relationships can help each stakeholder and interested party avoid crises and conflict, pursue common agendas, and resolve conflicts. Good working relations allow people to deal constructively with differences. It is not the same as a good personal relationship. You don't have to like someone or agree with others in order to work well with them. But you do have to be prepared to listen carefully, respect the interests of others, and keep your emotions under control.

These are six qualities that are the foundation of productive working relationships:

1) ***Balancing emotion with reason.*** You should be aware of your own emotions and their effect on your motivation, understanding, and judgment. Prepare for emotions before they arise, and if they do, acknowledge them, if appropriate in the context. Be responsible for your own behavior.

Building Good Working Relationships

- Be aware of your emotions and balance them with rationality.
- Try to understand the perspectives and behavior of others.
- Communicate clearly and listen carefully.
- Be reliable in your promises and actions.
- Be open to persuasion based on acceptable criteria.
- Accept the legitimacy of others as serious partners.

Understanding. You should be prepared to learn how the other side sees the situation and what that side wants to get out of it.

Communication. You should listen actively, making sure you understand what another has said before offering your own thoughts.

Reliability. You should be honest, predictable, and clear in your conduct, and live up to your promises and commitments. This allows others to accurately assess your commitment to the process and your support for any agreements.

Persuasion, not coercion. Attempts to coerce or force another to do something will inevitably damage relations among group members. You should rely on the power of persuasion, not threats. You should also be open to the introduction of convincing evidence from the other side.

Acceptance. You should accept the legitimacy of the other side if you want that group to participate seriously in processes with you. Rejection will create psychological obstacles.[4]

The best basic strategy for improving the quality of a working relationship is to be unconditionally constructive—that is, to act at all times consistent with the six qualities listed above. The skepticism of others can be overcome by practicing constructive behavior and acknowledging positive responses. In a public process, you cannot control the behavior of the other parties and participants. Therefore, you should concentrate on your own behavior, not criticizing or trying to control the behavior of others. To be unconditionally constructive requires you to follow the guidelines for building a good working relationship, whether or not the other parties do.

2. Facilitative Interventions

Several strategies have been developed to defuse conflicts and facilitate open, productive communication. Here is a brief list of ways to prevent unwanted behavior and intervene when someone breaks the rules.

a. Preventions

Establish ground rules. These items set the standards for acceptable behavior and provide guidelines for constructive interaction.

Define everyone's roles. Participants and those in support roles should know what is expected of them.

Have a neutral party enforce the process agreements. It is often helpful to have an outside, neutral party enforce the ground rules and other agreements and make sure meetings start and end on time.

Clarify expectations. Make sure everyone understands the group's purpose. Are participants coming together to negotiate the details of an ordinance or define a long-range vision?

Be positive. Reinforce the positive behavior of group members. Focus on the group's progress rather than the inevitable digressions and false starts.

Carefully plan the meeting environment. Prepare for productive meetings, produce clear plans of action, and choose a setting conducive to the kind of interaction required.

b. Interventions

Maintain, regain, and state focus. Focus on the agenda and the issues. Don't let temporary digressions, setbacks, or interruptions stand in the way of the group's progress. When progress slows it may be necessary to stop, restate the group's immediate goals (develop options, test ideas, and so forth), and start fresh.

Say what's going on. If someone's actions are slowing progress or the group is straying from the agenda, someone should state what is happening. For example, "We shouldn't worry about the cost of that idea right now. Let's continue to add new ideas to the list. We'll start to evaluate these options at the next meeting."

Check for agreement. If it seems like members are close to consensus on an item, deliberation should be put on hold for a moment and participants should be asked if they support an option or idea. "It sounds as if we agree on this approach; is this the case? If so, can we work toward language we all can support?"

Enforce process agreements. If someone violates a ground rule, it should be pointed out. "We agreed not to criticize ideas during the brainstorming session. Please share your concerns with us during next week's meeting."

Encourage participation. Not everyone is comfortable speaking in public meetings. It may be necessary to provide an opening. "We agreed to allow everyone the opportunity to comment, but we haven't heard much from this end of the table. Would you like to offer your ideas on this matter?"

Accept and legitimize, then deal or defer. The ideas, comments, and thoughts offered by participants should be accepted unconditionally. Everyone's contributions, whether they seem useful or outrageous, must be taken seriously. Once the contribution is on the table and recorded, it can be discussed or held for later consideration.

Don't be defensive. Even when under direct attack, it is best to avoid the temptation to fight back. Defensive behavior may worsen relations, leading you further from your goals. To stop an attack and invite positive participation, these questions should be asked: "Can you slow down? I want to make sure I understand what you're saying." "How do you want this to be recorded in the record?" "What do you really think we should do?"

Use body language. Through the manipulation of body position and the distances between participants, certain behaviors may be encouraged or discouraged. For example, making eye contact and leaning forward indicates a positive interest in the speaker.

Use the group memory. The flip chart is an important tool. It provides a neutral, common focus for the group as well as tangible history of the group's progress.

Ask for clarification and reframe. It is critical that the record reflect the actual ideas or comments of the participants. If a comment is unclear or is open to interpretation, "feed" it back to the speaker using the techniques introduced in the previous section on active listening.

Summarize and check progress. On occasions when participants become frustrated, it may be helpful to put the negotiations on hold, retrace the path that led to the current situation, and remind the group of progress that has been made. "We may be proceeding slowly now, but we have come a long way from the first session. Let's take a break and review our progress."

Provide useful feedback (sometimes privately). If someone continually interrupts the group or otherwise disrupts the process, it may be necessary to speak to the objector privately during a break or before the next session and propose more constructive behavior. "I know it can be hard to sit quietly and listen to so-and-so's comments, but we agreed at the beginning to give everyone a chance to speak without interruption."

3. Breaking Impasses

Sometimes, despite everyone's best efforts, deliberations falter. In the midst of a process, when it seems that there are no new ideas, options are exhausted, and group members are frustrated, progress can be quite slow. One of your options is to quit and accept the current alternative. You can always blame the other parties for being intransigent. Or you can make concessions to get things moving again. But in each of these cases, you are getting less than you might get through continued, productive negotiations. Why should you accept less?

Deadlocks and impasses are just mirror images of progress. Just as constructive agreements are made up of many elements, a successful negotiation is the result of many smaller negotiations, trade-offs, interventions, and temporary setbacks. No single tool can solve all of the problems you'll encounter, but if you are better able to identify the underlying causes, the symptoms will be much easier to cure.

a. Understanding the Causes

The root of a deadlock may be traced to three broad problem areas. Typically, a process falters because of procedural, substantive, or relationship problems. Procedural problems grow from breakdowns in the basic structure of the process. If members are unsure about the nature of the agenda-setting, problem-solving, or decision-making processes, or are uneasy about the way certain interests are represented or issues considered, they may block the group's forward motion.

Substantive deadlocks result from concerns about the substance of the dispute or negotiation. Participants may have trouble agreeing on the basic problem or generating acceptable or realistic options. Information sources may be in dispute, or members may be having a hard time talking about their interests rather than their positions.

Relationship deadlock occurs when communications break down. When members fail to listen to one another or certain parties begin to dominate the negotiations, the focus of attention will shift from the substance of the negotiations to the personalities involved. A process will stall when parties are too aggressive or too passive, or personalities clash.

Figure 12 offers a summary of the three broad categories of deadlocks and related strategies to get the group moving forward again.

b. Ways to Move Forward

Once the root cause of an impasse or deadlock is recognized and addressed, there are several ways to reestablish the group's forward motion. Group members or a facilitator may take advantage of any or all of the tools listed below to maintain or reestablish open channels of communication.

Trading. This is a classic bargaining technique. I give you something if you give me something. This is less sophisticated than the tools that follow.

Eliciting. A tool for extracting interests that underlie positions. More than just asking, "Why the hell did you do that?"

Eliciting questions/statements include:

- "I didn't get that completely."
- "Could you explain?"
- "How do you see that working out?"
- "What do you really need in this situation?"

Active listening/restating. Noninterpretive acknowledging and legitimating of what the other parties have just said.

Active listening questions include:

- "I heard you say XYZ. Did I get that right?"
- "I think you're offering ABC. Is that what you mean?"

Reframing. Literally, imagining that you are looking at a problem from a different point of view (a different frame). Getting parties to reframe is a powerful tool for refocusing attention on the problem.

Reframing questions include:

- "How can I explain that to my boss?"
- "Does that meet my needs?"
- "Why should I accept that?"
- "What would Charley say if he were here?"

Acknowledging. This is always a powerful tool for building relationships. Acknowledging is not the same as agreeing; you are simply recognizing the legitimate interests of another.

Acknowledging statements/questions include:

- "You have a good point. I'd like the following information to evaluate it fully."

Figure 12
Deadlock Categories and Strategies

WHAT CAUSES DEADLOCK?	WHAT CAN YOU DO?
Procedural Deadlocks	
Unrepresented interests	• Break to consult • Create links to constituencies • Consider expanding the group
Unacknowledged issues	• Put the issues on the table
Unagreed-to agendas	• Confirm issues • Revise agenda • Get agreement!
Unsatisfactory pacing (too fast or too slow)	• Take a break • Analyze time constraints • Articulate the pressures you feel • Consider a facilitator
Unauthorized deals	• Verify authority • Strengthen links with constituents
Substantive Deadlocks	
No options seem to work	• Take another look at the party's interests • Reexamine the alternatives • Generate more options
Data disputes	• Examine underlying assumptions • Agree on a common data source • Agree on data analysis criteria
Positions are hardening	• Add parties • State what you see • Reframe problem • Restate stakeholder interests
Relationship Deadlocks	
Parties abrasive	• Clarify interests • Describe how you view the situation • Ask what the parties want • Ask what they want you to do
Unauthorized representatives (representatives can't go forward)	• Clarify authority • Seek stronger links to constituents
Parties passive	• Clarify their interests • Elicit participation • Ask what they want
Personality clashes	• Take a break: consult privately with others • Consider new representatives • Say what you feel • Ask others to play your role
Domination	• Review ground rules • Consider third party

• "I disagree with your statement on XYZ, but I understand that you feel you are right."

• "I hear you say that more money is needed. Can we find another way to meet your needs?"

Legitimating. A key tool, closely linked to acknowledging, for getting other parties to listen to you.

Legitimating statements/questions include:

• "I hear you. That's a fair statement. Will you consider my point of view?"

• "You know a lot about regulations. Maybe my knowledge of development could help you."

Referring/deferring. Separating those problems that the parties can solve from those outside their realm of power or authority.

Referring/deferring statements include:

• "I don't think we can settle whether a nuclear power plant can be built. That is a decision for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Perhaps we can discuss ways to make this plant safer."

• "Let's come back to that this afternoon when it is scheduled on the agenda we agreed to at the beginning."

4. Building Agreements

Agreements may take many forms. They can be tentative and general in nature, or highly specific and binding. And different sorts of agreements occur throughout a process. There is the initial agreement to enter the process; there are agreements about scheduling and agendas, and final agreements on recommendations or actions. For these agreements to work, they must be realistic and satisfy the substantive and psychological needs of the participants and stakeholders.

a. Forms of Agreement

Decisions or agreements take many distinct forms, each of which is discussed separately below.

Substantive agreements. These are agreements on a particular issue. They are decisions about how a particular need is met. "The city agrees to design and build the parking deck and the developer agrees to contribute *X* percent of the construction costs."

Procedural agreements. These are agreements on how a problem will be solved. "During the next two weeks, we will do preliminary research, and then we will meet again on Wednesday the 23d to complete our settlement."

Nonconditional agreements. Nonconditional agreements are ones that will be carried out regardless of the response of other parties. "Staff will analyze the ordinance and provide a list of recommended amendments to the group for consideration."

Contingent or conditional agreements. Actions pursuant to contingent or conditional decisions or agreements are dependent upon a sequence of future events. "If you agree to construct streetscape improvements and a small park, the city will grant a density bonus of 10 percent and agree to maintain the park facilities."

Stronger and Weaker Forms of Agreement

Stronger	Weaker
• Substantive (agreement on an issue)	• Procedural (agreement on a process)
• Nonconditional	• Contingent
• Binding	• Nonbinding
• Permanent	• Provisional
• Comprehensive	• Partial

Binding agreements. These agreements require a party to uphold the decision regardless of the eventual outcome. "The county agrees to waive impact fees for affordable housing."

Nonbinding agreements. This sort of agreement may suggest that a certain course of action will be followed, but group members are not required to adhere. "I agree to present my development plans to local environmental groups before seeking city approval, but I may not do as they advise."

Permanent agreements. Permanent agreements lock in a course of action or are designed so that they cannot be modified later. "The southern road alignment is the most efficient, and funds will be committed to the project immediately."

Provisional agreements. These agreements stand for a limited period of time and are then dropped, reevaluated, reinstated, or modified. "For the next nine months, zoning disputes will be referred to a third-party arbitrator for resolution. At the end of this time, the process will be reevaluated."

Comprehensive agreements. Comprehensive agreements cover all disputed issues. "The preservation community and building industry agree that the redevelopment plan and development guidelines represent a fair balance between economic development and preservation interests."

Partial agreements. These agreements cover only a portion of the issues under dispute. "We agree that the existing airport is too small and that a new one should be built on the western edge of the county, but we do not agree on the precise site."

b. Testing Agreements

Simply reaching an agreement isn't good enough. You and other parties want to reach an ultimate agreement that is going to last, that is going to be implemented with the minimum of enforcement and future renegotiation. To ensure that an agreement is a solid one, it must meet a three-part test: it must satisfy the substantive needs of the participants; it must have been reached in a fair manner, and the parties must feel that their interests have been heard and considered.

Agreements must be satisfactory on these three levels:

Substantive. Most parties enter negotiations to get something. Although their ideas about their needs may change over the course of a negotiation, they need to come away with some sense of substantive satisfaction—a sense that they got what they came for.

Procedural. Even if they get what they want, parties will not be satisfied if they think the procedures were not fair. This is a subjective but powerful measure. Particularly, if a party thinks the procedure was irregular, the party may distrust others and work against implementation of the agreement.

Psychological. Everyone needs to feel heard and respected. If the "deal" is good and the procedure is OK, but a party feels that the other parties did not listen to his or her points, the deal may not prove durable. The bad relationships developed in the negotiation will overshadow the otherwise-acceptable results.

These elements form a "three-legged stool." If any of the legs is missing or weak, the stool (the negotiated agreement) may collapse under future pressure.

Solid, fair, realistic agreements have a fringe benefit. When they work, they improve the climate for future cooperation and collaboration, increase the problem-solving skills of the participants, and increase the likelihood that future differences will be resolved efficiently.

Characteristics of a Durable Agreement

Durable agreements are HONEST, because they are

- based on the best-available, jointly developed information;
- founded on realistic projections of capacities and costs;
- ensured by all parties' intent to implement them; and
- developed with the involvement of all parties.

Durable agreements are ACCEPTABLE because they

- resolve the grievance that brought the dispute to a head;
- acknowledge past problems and address them;
- meet the underlying needs of the parties; and
- are arrived at by a process perceived as fair by all parties.

Durable agreements are WORKABLE because they

- provide incentives (benefits) for all parties to implement;
- do not disadvantage an excluded party;
- recognize possible problems or changes in the future and include procedures to deal with future change or acknowledge the need for renegotiation; and
- build working relationships among the parties to implement the deal.

Notes

1. Elaine Cogan, *Successful Public Meetings: A Practical Guide for Managers in Government* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers, 1992), 34.
2. Michael Doyle and David Straus, *How to Make Meetings Work: The New Interaction Method* (New York: The Berkeley Publishing Group, 1976), 264.
3. Ibid., 186.
4. Roger Fisher and Scott Brown, *Getting Together: Building a Relationship That Gets to Yes* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1988), 9–12.