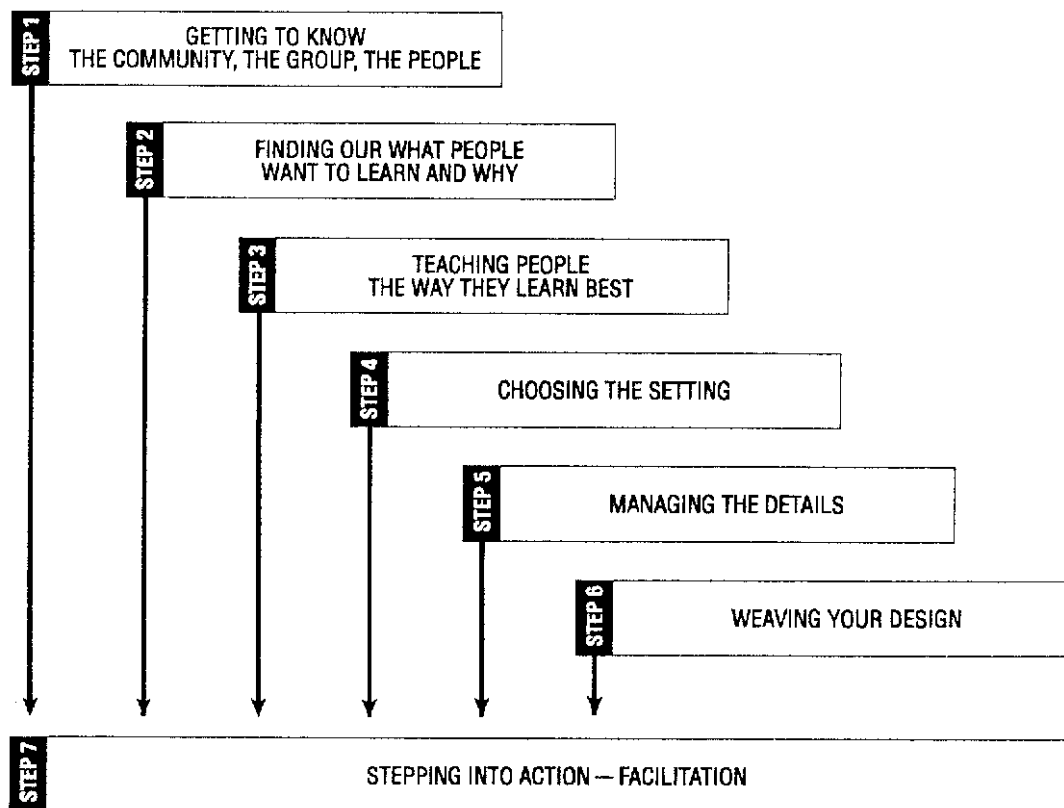


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# Strengthening Communities

*A Series of Community Development Skills Guides*

- ▷ Discovering Why Are We Here
- ▷ Living Our Values
- ▷ Thinking Creatively
- ▷ Making Choices
- ▷ Building Community Alliances
- ▶ Planning and Facilitating



## Planning and Facilitating

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A guide to help use the Strengthening Community Series

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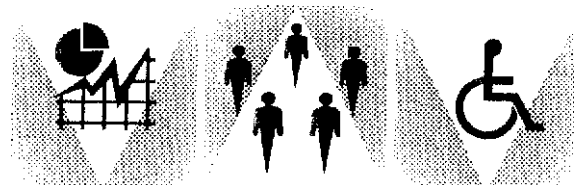
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**Social Planning and Research Council  
of British Columbia**

SPARC of B.C. is a provincial voluntary association which conducts research and planning and provides public information and education to help people cooperatively plan for the social well being of their communities. For this Guide series, SPARC has drawn from its more than 25 years of experience with community work.

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# Before you begin...

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*What binds your group together?*

## **How We Define Community**

We don't. People do that themselves in the many ways they create communities — by getting to know neighbours, sharing common interests, joining different clubs and associations, taking classes, making friends at work, maintaining strong ties to extended families, and joining with one another to address an issue.

*Can you describe your community development process?*

## **How We See Community Development (CD)**

Community development involves community people taking democratic control by participating in planning, bottom-up decision making, and community action. The process and outcomes of community development reflect common values, conflict and compromise, and the shifting of power to the community.

*Have you talked about the values that guide your CD process?*

## **Some Community Development Ground Rules**

Community development is a way of working together based on shared concerns and respect for one another. Its values — equality, caring and sharing, social justice — guide what we do and how we do it.

Being welcoming (inclusive, open to others, friendly), sharing resources in an equitable (fair) way, being willing to compromise or reach consensus, basing decision-making in the community, and involving the public are all part of the community development process.

*Do you take the time to think about the way you are doing your community development work, and why?*

## **Learn While Doing**

Community development involves action (doing), reflection (thinking about, talking about, and understanding what your group is doing) and action (doing it again but doing it better, with more understanding), and so on...

Opportunities for improving skills are often found during times of reflection.

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## ***Tips...***

▶ *These are your key to  
quick skill ideas*

# Introduction

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*The Planning and Facilitating Guide is intended to help facilitators use any one of the Community Development Skills Guides. The step-by-step approach we have chosen involves participants in both the planning and implementation stages.*

*These seven steps will take you through what we think is a logical order for thinking about planning and facilitating. Each step includes some theory as well as some practical exercises, and builds on information gathered in the preceding steps. However, since community work is often not logical or orderly, please use the steps in any way they make sense to you. We have included work sheets to help guide your planning (pages 25, 26 and 27).*

*The first six steps in this Guide lead facilitators through a planning phase. Steps #1 and #2 suggest ways of getting to know the community, the group and the people in the group. Information gained in these first two steps will be helpful when selecting and managing techniques, settings, and organizational details in Steps #3, #4 and #5. Step #6 weaves all of this information together to create a complete plan for working with your group. Here we introduce you to the Learning Loom, a popular education tool used here to reinforce the “practice, theory, practice” approach to planning and facilitating woven into each of the Community Development Skills Guides.*

*In Step #7, we invite you to “step into action” by offering you some tried and true facilitation techniques that we think work particularly well in community development settings.*

*Good luck!*

# Getting to know the community, the group, and the people

See work sheet #1  
(page 25)

Groups develop their own personalities, and an important part of the facilitator's work is getting to know the individuals in the group and how they relate to one another. There are many ways of finding out about the group you are working with, the people in that group, and their community. Doing this work up front can make a big difference in the success and personal enjoyment of those taking part in the skills development process.

## Practical Exercises to Get You Started

### *Getting to Know the Community*

Find out all you can about the place and the people who live there. Understand how the community sees itself. This will make it possible to prepare programs based on group members' own experience so that what they learn will be relevant to them. Here are some ways to become familiar with the community.

#### **Observe**

Read the local newspaper, have coffee in local coffee shops, review past research — in other words, be creative.

What you are looking for is a picture, or profile, of this community. Think about age, gender, ethnic mix, how people make their living, what they do for fun, how they feel about their environment, what language people are comfortable speaking, and so on.

#### **Listen**

Facilitators able to spend a lot of time in a community can learn a great deal from just listening. Find out what issues come up again and again in conversation. Pay attention to words, feelings and emotionally-charged language. Ask questions.

## *Getting to Know the Group and the People in the Group*

Groups develop their own personalities and are made up of people with their own personalities.

### **Observe**

Attend one or two of the group's meetings. Buddy up with someone from the group or (where applicable) one or two staff people. Read minutes from the group's meetings. Study existing strategic plans and read their status reports.

### **Ask**

What are the real life situations of the participants? How do they describe the way they live and work?

What is their individual experience in community life? What is their experience in community development work? How do they describe their efforts to try to improve their situation?

How do they see the way they are operating now? In what way do they think they need to change? You will also need to know about their goals, how long the group has been working together, how well (if at all) the members of the group know one another, what experience they have with the issue(s), as well as the group's strengths and weaknesses.

### ***People learn community development skills best in an action setting.***

*Groups seldom form for the sole purpose of learning community development skills. Instead, people develop their skills as part of the process of resolving community concerns — like plant shut-downs, unemployment or child care — or planning community celebrations. Along the way, group members discover the need for particular skills as they struggle to answer questions which confront them.*

# Finding out what people want to learn and why

See work sheet #1  
(page 25)

It is important to find out why the group wants to learn something new, what it is group members expect to learn, if and how the group has already tried to improve its skills, as well as what worked for them and what did not.

Find out what and how and where people want to learn. This information will help to shape group learning activities, allowing them to be tailored to fit the needs and experiences of the group.

Remember, however, that often “people do not know what they do not know.” Facilitators may need to challenge groups by questioning their existing understandings and introducing new ideas.

## Practical Exercises to Get You Started

There are many ways of finding out about the group and its members. The methods you choose will depend upon how well you know the group. Whether you choose to use formal interviews and surveys or informal conversations, choose methods that the group will find comfortable.

### *Find Out What the Group Wants to Learn*

Use personal interviews and questionnaires to find out what people expect. The following questions can be useful:

What do you want to improve about the community development process you are engaged in now?

How do you expect your community development activity to change as a result?



## *Determine Objectives*

### **Overall Objective**

The overall objective answers questions such as: What is the overall purpose of this learning event? What would people like to learn to make this community development process more effective? (e.g., planning, priority setting, building community alliances, etc.)

### **Guiding Thread**

The guiding thread is the community development value which people share when learning and working together as a group. The guiding thread tries to trace the real reason people have for wanting to learn about something as a group.

### ***Learning and teaching should be a positive experience.***

*Learning should be an enriching and enjoyable experience. Events or activities intended to develop skills are more likely to be successful if groups feel comfortable with them. People feel more comfortable with a learning activity which respects and takes into account the unique perspective and experience which they bring to the learning process.*

# Teaching people the way they learn best

See work sheet #1  
(page 25)

Facilitators can use a wide variety (and combination) of techniques or processes to help groups improve their community development skills.

People tend to learn more when they are engaged on many levels. Techniques that invite group members to use more of their senses (listening, seeing, talking) have a good track record.

However, both low participation and high participation techniques have their place. Well planned sessions are generally organized using a combination of the two. Make your choices based on how the individuals like to learn and the desired outcome of the session.

## High Participation

Techniques like visualizing or buzz groups enhance the critical thinking and understanding of group members. These high participation techniques make room for a wider range of responses, reactions and experiences.

**Skill practice** techniques involve coaching or repetitious drills. While not normally a community development favourite, the skill practice approach can be useful for learning basic skills like writing letters and the like.

**Participatory techniques** fully involve participants in learning through listening, talking, creative thinking, reflection, and more. The key here is that participants become full partners in the learning activities. **Simulation** (role playing, dramatizations, and imaging) helps people learn by stepping out of their own lives and taking on the role of someone new or different.

## Low Participation

Some techniques, like presentations or discussions, are characterized by one-way communication. Group members participate very little as they go through the learning process. At most, people take part in brief question-and-answer periods.

**Presentations** include lectures, panels, audio-visual or other methods which involve low-level participation.

**Discussions** (a first step towards more participation) include question and answer periods, reaction panels, expanding panels, guided discussions, book based discussions, case study discussions, and problem solving discussions. Small group work may be involved (see page 8 for more on small groups).

## Practical Exercises to Get You Started

We have highlighted participatory techniques in the Community Development Skills Guide Series because they fit well with community development practice. We have included a selection in each of the Guides in the section called "Getting Down To Work." These sections on techniques will be useful in working through Step #6, the "how" section of the Learning Loom. Since many of the exercises rely on small group work, we present these guidelines to help you work in groups.

### *There is more than one way to teach.*

*Highly participatory community development groups involve people from a variety of backgrounds with different learning needs. Fortunately, facilitation or teaching can and does happen in many different ways. Facilitators need to be skilled at a number of techniques or approaches, and to be able to shift easily from one to another as circumstances and the individual needs of community participants require.*

## *Small Group Work*

Many of the ideas discussed are only effective with small groups of people. Using structured methods to divide a large group into smaller ones saves people the discomfort of trying to find others to work with. Here are a few to try.

### **Breaking into Groups**

- ▶ **Arrange chairs in groups.** This is quick and easy to do before people arrive, but people tend to work with others they already know.
- ▶ **Self-selection** relies on peoples' own preferences. Identify four or five sub-themes of the topic that you are discussing and poster each of them at different locations in the room. People can then select the sub-theme they wish to work on. If there is an awkward imbalance (ten in one group and two in another) you may ask some people to switch.
- ▶ **Pre-formed** working groups allow for a quick start in group sessions, and can be pre-assigned in more formal workshop settings. People are directed to their groups when they arrive. Assignments may be made according to interest or in order to achieve a good mix in the groups.
- ▶ **Numbering off** is a tried and true method of organizing small groups. First decide how many small groups you would like to work with. If you want to create five groups, ask people to number off, "one, two, three, four, five." All those with the same number are in the same group.
- ▶ **Labelling chairs** makes it quick and easy for participants to find their group. Prepare as many symbols as you want groups. Participants are asked to form a group with others with the same symbol on their chairs.

## Reporting Back

Reporting back gives the whole group an opportunity to hear what people have learned/concluded in their small groups. The main goal in reporting back is to see that groups have equal time, the group work is acknowledged, important information is shared, and no one falls asleep.

### *Round Robins*

Try using a series of round robins (move around the group in sequence). A different group in the sequence starts each round. Try moving one person (or group) to the right each time you start a round.

### *Avoid Repetition*

Allow each group time to make one or two points before moving on to the next group. Remind groups that it isn't necessary to restate points which have already been made. It is useful to ask at the end of each contribution if other groups had the same findings. Continue the rounds until no new points are introduced.

### *Limit time*

Allow each speaker a period of time that has been agreed to by the group. If groups are really large (over 50) break this larger group up so that no more than five working groups are reporting back. (This seems to be the optimum number for holding participants' attention.)

### *Display Information*

Display or performance are two other ways of getting information back to the large group. The findings can be posterized around the room on large sheets of paper.

## ***Different people learn in different ways***

*One of the facilitator's challenges is to find out how different people learn. Some people find out everything they need or want to know through reading. Those for whom the medium really is the message are happiest if state-of-the-art technology is involved. Others would rather get together in informal, comfortable surroundings, to exchange information and ideas. Groups with an oral tradition may prefer to pass on information through story telling, or just plain talking.*

# Choosing the setting

See work sheet #1  
(page 25)

Consider a variety of settings in which information can be shared. Some settings (like “learning as you go”) are fairly unstructured. Others (like “conferences”) are highly structured. Each has its place.

Listed below are some typical settings for you to think about. We start with activities which require participants to be highly involved.

<b>Learning As You Go</b>	Learning as you go requires individuals to consciously make skills development a part of their day-to-day community work. For the facilitator, it means identifying in advance the skills that people want to learn (time management, public speaking, letter writing, etc.), and making sure that participants have a chance to practice these skills. Coaching plays a big role in these settings.
<b>Kitchen Table Discussions</b>	These discussions take place in peoples’ homes. People talk about things that are important to them. These sessions tend to be relatively informal, and work well around kitchen tables or in peoples’ living rooms. They need little facilitation.
<b>Learning Circles</b>	Learning circles involve a small group of people — usually six to 15 members — who agree to meet for a specified number of times to discuss a topic of their choosing. They share experiences, ideas and insights. In this way, each person plays the roles of both teacher and learner. Groups can keep their discussions fairly informal, or follow a specified curriculum. Peoples’ homes can be ideal settings for circles.
<b>Action Projects</b>	Typically, these projects are structured to organize a group of people around a particular issue — another form of learning while doing. Many action projects focus on finding out more about an issue in order to bring about social, environmental or economic change. Intentionally or unintentionally, people tend to learn a variety of community development skills along the way.

<b>Clinics</b>	Clinics are short intensive learning activities. The goal is to diagnose, analyze, and solve a problem. Mostly those who take part are familiar with the general topic, and are interested in improving on/learning more about a specific aspect of it.
<b>Institutes</b>	Institutes consist of intensive learning experiences in which people can develop knowledge and skill in a specialized area of interest or community development practice. These sessions are generally fairly short — usually no longer than a week or two. In that time, people are able to take part in some or all of the sessions offered. With this flexibility institutes can reflect an issue broadly (community development issues in the environment and the economy) and can use a variety of techniques — from lectures to bus tours — to help different people learn different things in different ways.
<b>Forums or Large Meetings</b>	Forums are relatively effective for getting a lot of information to a lot of people at one time. They also provide a large venue in which people in a community can hear one another's concerns. Unfortunately, they are not very effective for creating a comfortable learning environment since it is hard for people to interact with one another. Information is typically delivered in presentations.
<b>Workshops</b>	Often referred to as the laboratory, workshops emphasize the development of individual skills. These sessions are fairly structured, hands-on events in that the goal is to learn something fairly specific in a reasonably short period of time. Sometimes several workshops are held in sequence, so that participants can build on the experience they gained in previous sessions.
<b>Conferences</b>	These are generally formal affairs. Emphasis is on involving a large number of people in learning about various aspects of a particular topic or theme. Sometimes parts of the program are participatory in that smaller workshop settings (break out groups) are involved, but the process is generally highly structured and meant to elicit a response to a pre-stated problem or issue.

# Managing the details

*See work sheet #2  
(page 26)*

This is the nitty gritty of planning. Any good plan can fall to pieces if the details are not attended to carefully, particularly where participation is concerned.

However, it is possible to make arrangements which encourage participation. This is where your knowledge of the group and the community comes in. So even if someone else is going to be "managing the details," be sure to follow up with some critical questions about arrangements being made for the session you will be facilitating.

Good communication is essential. To ease that process, find out what language(s) people in the group are comfortable speaking. Be sure to arrange ahead of time for translation/interpretation services you might need.

## **Practical Exercises to Get You Started**

It is good practice to involve participants in answering these questions. How long will the whole process take? How many sessions will be needed? What is the optimum length of a session? Will child care be a concern? Remember, inclusion is the key here.

Listed below are some questions for you to consider in planning your learning activity.



<b>Location</b>	Where will the planned event be held? Is the site accessible to all group members? How will people get there? Is it close to public transit?
<b>Time</b>	How much time do you need to cover enough information? How much time is the group willing to commit? Should you meet once? Should you meet more than once? Is it better to have one long session or should you have two short ones? Is the time chosen appropriate for the group? Would offering the program at a few different times make it possible for more people to participate? Is the program so long that some people are unable/unwilling to take part?
<b>Facility</b>	Will all group members be comfortable in the facility that has been chosen? What could be the barriers to using this facility? Is there room enough to do what you want to do? Is there room for "break out groups" if you need them? What room layout will facilitate learning? Are there enough chairs? Is the room temperature comfortable? What can you do to make the facility more comfortable?
<b>Audio-visual equipment and materials</b>	Will you need audio/visual equipment? If you plan to use equipment, is it available at the facility or do you have to make arrangements to get it there? Are the materials you intend to use appropriate for the group? Are there enough copies to go around? Is the written material in plain language? Are illustrations clear? Are language and illustrations culturally (and generally) sensitive?
<b>Meals and refreshments</b>	Will meals and refreshments be provided? Who will provide them? How many meals/snacks will be offered? Does the facility have an equipped kitchen? Who will prepare the food? Have cultural sensitivities and other eating preferences been considered? If meals and refreshments are not provided, have you prepared a list of options for people? Have you considered those options in choosing the facility? Have you remembered to provide water/coffee/tea/juice to drink?

# Weaving your design

See work sheet #3  
(page 27)

The Learning Loom is intended as a guide to planning and facilitation, and is structured on the approach (practice, theory, practice) we use in each of the Community Development Skills Guides. This approach involves starting with the experience of group members, comparing the group's experience with that of others, and gaining new insights from the theory of what does and doesn't work in a community development context.

Here's how the "practice, theory, practice" approach works in this planning model.

## **Practice: Other People's Stories**

Sharing experiences is an important part of learning. It demonstrates that life experience is a valued resource. The stories people tell about their lives help them and others to understand why they see things a certain way. Sharing stories is also an important exercise in building a trusting relationship between the facilitator and participants.

## **Theory: Something to Think About**

Most groups find that they need to compare their ideas with what others are thinking. This often means looking critically at the theory behind our practice, and asking questions. What have others experienced? What are others doing now? What can you learn from their experience? How will this change the way you operate in the future?

## **Practice: Making New Ideas Work**

Once groups have decided how they would like to change their community development practice, their next step is figuring out a way to integrate this information into day-to-day activities. It may involve developing action plans. It may mean coming up with principles to guide your group and its community work. Or it may simply mean doing things in a different way.

## Practical Exercises to Get You Started

Learning Loom						
LOGIC	WHY Objectives	WHAT Themes Sub-Themes	HOW Activities Procedures	WITH WHAT Resources	WHEN Time	WHO Facilitators Participants
1) <i>Practice:</i> Start with experiences and perceptions of participants						
2) <i>Theory:</i> Deepen analysis, develop new skills, tools						
3) <i>Practice:</i> Develop plans for action/apply learning to community development setting						

As you work across the Learning Loom (the weft threads), explore each of the six key questions in the planning process. The answers to these questions were gathered in Steps 1 to 5.

**Why** What specific objectives are you attempting to achieve? The Guide *Discovering Why We Are Here* will help the group decide what they need to learn. (See Step 2.)

**What** What are the themes (the main ideas) and sub themes (the ideas that make up that idea) to be touched on within each objective? (See Step 2.)

**How** What activity or technique will be the most effective and appropriate for this group and this theme? What are the procedures (or steps) in carrying out each activity? (See Steps 3 and 4.)

**With What (Resources)** With what resources will we implement this activity? What materials do we need (readings, films, markers, etc.)? (See Step 5.)

**When & How Long** When will we carry this out and how long will it take? (See Step 5.)

**Who** Who will be responsible for organizing or facilitating each activity? Who will participate? (See Step 1.)

As you work down the loom (the warp threads) think about these ideas:

**Practice** Reflect and talk about your experience. Find out what you share in common.

**Theory** Pull in some new ideas (theory). Add these new ideas to your own theory.

**Practice** Use these ideas to guide your community work.

# Stepping into action

This step readies facilitators for action. But before you begin, think for a moment about the role of the facilitator.

The facilitator is the one who is chosen by the group to guide, teach, nurture, direct, and collaborate with participants in planning and organizing an activity.

Facilitators may be chosen from within a group or from the larger community. Sometimes groups will choose a facilitator from outside the community.

Whomever the group chooses, there are some qualities to look for. One essential quality is a commitment to building on the skills and resources of people in the group. Other qualities to look for include a great sensitivity to the group, sparked with/by spontaneity, creativity, and a sense of humour.

## Practical Exercises to Get You Started

### *Creating an atmosphere of openness and trust*

#### **Room Layout**

The layout of the room and the seating arrangement for the session is very important and can strongly influence group dynamics. Make sure that both the room and the seats are set up so that everyone feels included.

#### **Review Agenda**

Go over the agenda and objectives for the day, as well as the background and objectives of the overall project. This is also the time to discuss the roles of the facilitator, recorder and participants, as well as the ground rules for the session. Key ground rules, such as respecting all participants, and valuing all views and opinions, should be highlighted.

## **Introductions**

Introductions are important. The way people (including facilitators) introduce themselves can set the tone for the session. The kind of information given and the way it is given will shape the way in which all parties in the activity interact.

When you introduce yourself to the group, you (and the workshop recorder(s), if any) may want to talk about what interests you about the session. These introductions make you accessible and “real” to participants.

Participants should also have an opportunity to introduce themselves, perhaps sharing a little about why they are interested in taking part in the session. Participants should also be encouraged to share their expectations for the session. What do they hope to get out of it? What concerns do they have?

Learn participants’ names as quickly as possible. Drawing a seating chart and putting down each person’s name at the appropriate place on the chart can be helpful in doing so.

## ***Listening, observing and communicating***

One of the facilitator’s main tasks is to keep the conversation on track and to encourage active participation from all members of the group. Here are some hints on developing these key skills.

### **Listening**

Careful listening is harder than most people think. What most of us do when we think we are listening is formulate what we are going to say when it’s our turn to speak. That isn’t listening. Listening involves processing what the speaker is saying, and trying to understand it from his or her perspective rather than our own.

One way to develop listening skills is to attempt to summarize what the speaker has said, and to present the summary to the speaker (“reflect back”). The speaker’s feedback will provide good information about how well both people are really listening to one another.

### **Observing non-verbal communication**

It's extremely important to remain alert and aware of what is going on in the group. These are the kinds of questions you ought to be asking yourself (and recorders should be noting) as you observe the group process. What are people saying with their body movements and/or with their silences? Are they restless? Having private conversations? Do people seem tense? Are they holding back in conversation? Are silences "comfortable"? Are participants making eye contact with one another? With you? Do they continue to respect each other, and give equal "air time" to all speakers?

### **Communicating within discussions**

Encourage group members to participate, but *respect those who do not want to participate.*

### **Deciding when to move on**

The facilitator must gauge the extent to which a topic or question has been dealt with, and when it is time to move on to the next. It is important to allow some time for conversations that do not immediately seem on topic. *Remember, different cultures view time in different ways. For some, watching the clock is not so important.*

### **Using humour**

Humour is one of the facilitator's best tools. Humour can be used to break tension or to reduce boredom or restlessness exhibited by group members. By doing or saying something unexpected, you not only provide a touch of (well-deserved) levity, you also signal to participants that spontaneity and creativity are encouraged. Generating new, and even off-the-wall ideas may be a primary objective of the workshop.

### **Summarizing**

Summarizing is an important role for the facilitator to play in a group activity. The facilitator's job is to listen carefully for common patterns. What are the similarities and what are the differences? What do these mean for the rest of the group's work? Is there any theory or new ideas that you can add to enrich these reports? Summarize the main points of the discussion.

## *What to avoid*

### **Personal bias**

We all have a tendency to welcome and be most open to views that support our own beliefs and attitudes. As a group facilitator, however, you need to be especially aware of this tendency. This is critical because your role is to ensure that you do not “side with” participants whose view you endorse (through your body language or allocation of “air time”).

### **Inconsistency**

You also need to be aware of the tendency to encourage and reinforce participants’ views that are internally consistent or congruent with one another. This can happen if “minority” opinions are not recognized and fully discussed.

### **Leading questions**

The best discussion questions are those which stimulate participants to do their own thinking and reach their own conclusions. A question such as “What do you think about free trade?” is far more thought provoking than “Do you think that free trade will lead to loss of jobs?”. The former opens the door to infinite possibilities; the latter, a “yes” or “no” answer, and very often, discomfort.

### **Humour at the expense of others**

Remember! Your humour should never be at the expense of any group member. Neither you, nor any group member can break a session ground rule *in the interest of comic relief!*

***Activities intended to teach  
community development skills must mirror  
community development values.***

*Facilitators need to work with groups in a way that is consistent with community development values (see frontispiece). If grassroots participation is valued in community development, then grassroots participation must also be valued in any activity designed to teach people community development skills.*

# Other people's stories

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*We've provided you with a story to help illustrate how to weave the information you gathered in the steps into the Learning Loom.*

A local food bank group was investigating self-help alternatives. A coordinator was hired to organize community kitchens, to provide opportunities for food bank users to collectively plan and prepare low cost meals. The program was so successful that within six months, eight different kitchens were running. Two things became clear. The coordinator did not have time to support more kitchens, despite the growing demand. As well, leaders emerging from within the group were interested in taking on more responsibility. Observing this, the coordinator identified a choice skill development opportunity.

The coordinator began to explore this opportunity by finding out more about the community. She talked to each of the women interested in participating. She asked them why they wanted to participate, what they hoped to get out of the session, about their dreams for the future. She also found out other information important to planning, like their life experience, and the language they were most comfortable using.

## ***Step #1***

### **Getting to know the community, the group, and the people**

#### *Community:*

The coordinator found out that the participants live in a community in the southeast portion of the city. It is a multi-cultural neighbourhood made up of people with low to middle incomes. The area is quite transient.



*Group:*

Five women have expressed an interest in participating in the skills development program. The group has been cooking together twice a month for three months. While relationships have started to form, they have been working together fairly informally.

*Individuals:*

The women in the group expressed a keen desire to learn about and change their living conditions. Since the group is multicultural, those conditions may be different for each of them. Although each has their own life experience, all are responsible for caring for their families. For more than half of the group, English is their second language. Most have had some experience with the high school system.

## **Step #2**

### **Finding out what people want to learn and why**

The community kitchen participants wanted to learn flexible skills that could help them do more than organize community kitchens. They wanted to learn skills that would be useful in other settings. Since the kitchens were about much more than preparing low cost meals (e.g., reducing dependence on the food bank, learning about nutrition, balancing budgets, building self-esteem, developing leadership), the group suggested that "Discovering Why We Are Here" would be a good place to start the skills development portion of the program.

*Overall Objective:*

To develop skills in helping groups understand the reasons they come together. Developing an understanding of each other's reasons for joining the group would be a useful skill in other settings.

*Guiding Thread:*

People participate in community kitchens for many reasons. Understanding these reasons would help participants work together more effectively.

## **Step #3**

### **Teaching people the way they learn best**

In the first three months that the kitchens were operating, the coordinator found out a lot about the way the group learned. Generally, the women enjoyed talking about things more than they liked reading about them. They liked to keep things like kitchen planning meetings very informal. Because English was the second language for many of the participants, printed materials were kept to a minimum. The group saw their get togethers as social outings, and preferred that they happen outside of the home. They described themselves as practical people, with no time for a lot of “airy-fairy stuff.”

#### *Learning styles:*

Group members like to learn from one another by talking together in informal settings. Many have said that they would rather “learn while doing.”

## **Step #4**

### **Choosing the setting**

Because the group preferred to learn by doing, skills development activities will be part of the regular planning meetings of the community kitchens. The group wants to learn using the most enjoyable and least intimidating methods — in this case coaching and role playing.

## **Step #5**

### **Managing the details**

The process of *Discovering Why We Are Here* (Strengthening Communities Guide #1) will be covered in three one-hour sessions over a period of a month. No special arrangements are required.

## Step #6

### Weaving the design

*Practice: Start with experience and perceptions of participants*

In the first session they decided to share their experience with the community kitchens. In telling their stories, many of the women talked about how nervous they had been about joining the group. Some were concerned about preparing meals with other people. Most said they had only joined to save money and time on food preparation. A few were also interested in learning new recipes.

As time went on, the women began to realize that there were other benefits to being part of a kitchen. For some, it was the support they felt from the group. Others talked about the sense of accomplishment they got from making their food money go further and preparing healthy meals for their kids. Still others said they had started to feel a sense of control for the first time in many years. All of the women agreed that they enjoyed coming because they had fun.

*Theory: Deepen analysis, develop new skills, tools*

In their second session the coordinator took about twenty minutes to talk about why it is important for group members to share their reasons for being part of the group. She told them of groups she had worked with who had taken this step for granted. Two of the groups had fallen apart a couple of months into the process.

She also talked about other groups, like theirs, who had taken the time to think about and to share their reasons for joining the group. This step had given people a chance to see what they had in common, as well as to see how they differed. In some instances it gave people a chance to opt out of the process early on.

*Practice: Develop plans for action*

In their last session the women talked about ways they could get people to share stories when they led community kitchens. Each made a list of techniques that were comfortable to them.

**Learning Loom**

LOGIC	WHY Objectives	WHAT Themes Sub-Themes	HOW Activities Procedures	WITH WHAT Resources	WHEN Time	WHO Facilitators Participants
<p>1) <i>Practice:</i> Start with experiences and perceptions of participants</p>	<p>To help participants identify all of their reasons for participating in the community kitchens.</p>	<p>To discern the differences between implicit and explicit reasons for joining.</p> <p>To help participants understand the notion of skills and self-reliance.</p> <p>To show participants what they share in common.</p>	<p>Give each of the participants at least 20 minutes to tell their own story. After each person is finished, ask everyone to think about and talk about the things they shared in common and how they differed.</p>	<p>A large piece of paper and felt markers/pens.</p>	<p>The first hour of the planning meeting.</p>	<p>The participants led their own session.</p>
<p>2) <i>Theory:</i> Deepen analysis, develop new skills, tools</p>	<p>To look at the theory behind <i>Discovering Why We Are Here.</i></p>	<p>To look at the advantages and disadvantages of discussing reasons for coming together.</p> <p>To discover reasons for remaining in the group and reasons for leaving the group.</p> <p>To review different techniques for getting people to talk about their reasons for joining the group.</p>	<p>Mini-lecture</p> <p>Case studies (stories of other groups)</p>	<p>A large piece of paper and felt markers/pens.</p>	<p>One (1) hour at the beginning of a planning session.</p>	<p>Facilitator</p>
<p>3) <i>Practice:</i> Develop plans for action/apply learning to community development setting</p>	<p>To apply what we just learned to real settings.</p>	<p>Different techniques will work for different people in different settings.</p>	<p>Brainstorming different techniques.</p> <p>Develop personal plans of action.</p>	<p>A large piece of paper and felt markers/pens.</p> <p>Pads of paper.</p>	<p>One (1) hour at the beginning of a planning session.</p>	<p>Facilitator and participants.</p>

# Worksheet #1: Planning Summary Sheet (Steps 1-4)

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**Step #1: Getting to know the community, the group, and the people**

Community: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Group: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Individual: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Step #2: Finding out what people want to learn and why**

What?: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Why?: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Which becomes the:*

Overall Objective: \_\_\_\_\_

Guiding Thread: \_\_\_\_\_

**Step #3: Teaching people the way they learn best**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Step #4: Choosing the setting**

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\_\_\_\_\_

# Worksheet #2: Planning Summary Sheet (Step 5)

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## Step #5: Managing the details

Location:

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Time:

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Facility:

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Equipment:

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Meals:

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Comfort:

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# Worksheet #3: Learning Loom (Step 6)

LOGIC	WHY Objectives	WHAT Themes Sub-Themes	HOW Activities Procedures	WITH WHAT Resources	WHEN Time	WHO Facilitators Participants
1) <i>Practice:</i> Start with experiences and perceptions of participants						
2) <i>Theory:</i> Deepen analysis, develop new skills, tools						
3) <i>Practice:</i> Develop plans for action/apply learning to community development setting						

# The Series

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## *Use the Guides...*

*...to direct an activity*

*...to get back on track*

*...when all else fails!*

## **Discovering Why We Are Here**

Help your group figure out what it is about, and why.

## **Living Our Values**

Help your group be clear about what is near and dear to its heart. It will make working together a lot easier and a lot more effective.

## **Thinking Creatively**

Help your group put its creative energy to work.

## **Making Choices**

Ideas are a dime a dozen. Help your group sort through the list and choose what is best for your own work.

## **Building Community Alliances**

Help your group figure out who else to work with and why.

## **Planning and Facilitating**

A guide to help use the *Strengthening Communities Series*.

Although each booklet stands on its own, most will find that the booklets *Discovering Why We Are Here* and *Living Our Values* are a good place to start.

Apart from that, the choice is yours!