

## Preparing to facilitate a consultancy meeting or session with a congregation or small group

There are five important bases to cover in preparation for leading any meeting within a consultancy process. Careful preparation can avoid awkward meetings and sometimes alert you to potential difficulties.

### **Purpose**

It is critical that consultants are clear on the 'purpose' of each meeting held. Why are we holding this session? What has indicated that this specific meeting or session is required? What specific issues are we seeking to address or steps are we hoping to take.

### **Outcomes**

Be clear about what you want to gain from the meeting. Early in the consultation process we are often seeking information and insight. Have a series of clear questions in your mind (even better on paper). What information are you looking for? Are you also interested in assisting people understand and respond to each other, and for individuals to gain self insight through the meeting? How will you have the sense that this has worked?

### **Participants**

It is important for consultants to be well informed about who will be attending the session and to have some idea of participant's roles especially in small group meetings such as staff and leadership gatherings. Is it likely that there will be individuals present who are in conflict with each other? Will there be people who do not want to be there? In larger congregational gatherings will everyone know each other? Reflecting on these questions prior to the meeting will help to inform the process used.

### **Probable Issues**

Within a consultancy once the objectives have been identified is not difficult to anticipate the common issues that are likely to arise in a given situation. These will often be about the future, what is going to happen. Be aware that there may be specific topics that should not be discussed in some sessions. Have a response ready for this. Think ahead about how you will handle certain issues if they come up and maybe even jot a few notes down in preparation. E.g. the pastor's tenure

### **Process**

The most important element of preparation is to let the four previous aspects inform how you design the meeting process. Do you need to be introduced? How will you begin and create a safe environment allowing this specific group of people at this time to settle and feel like participating? What will the key segments of the session involve? How will you facilitate these? What participatory involvement can be used? Are there processes or exercises that might draw out the information in a gentle and yet clear way? How long will each aspect of the meeting take. How will you work together as a team? What roles will each of you take? How will

you deal with difficult individuals or incidents?

Along with the above, there are several logistical questions that should be answered in your preparation, such as: Where will the session be held? What are the start and end times? What materials might need to be prepared or distributed prior to the session? Who will document the session?

**Running Sheets**

Document these on a running sheet for the meeting including date and title at the top. List who is likely to be present with space to note who actually was. Have an outline containing time, description of the activity, resources needed and who will facilitate it. Again leave space for 'on the fly' annotations like; *Took twice as long to get through this!!*, *This brought out a strong emotional reaction!!!*

**Follow Up and Evaluation**

Always allocate some time for follow up of a meeting. There will usually be some tasks related to the consultancy, individuals and the church and also some documentation to put together for use in the report. There is also evaluation of your own facilitation and the impact this meeting or event had on you personally. This should be debriefed with a supervisor periodically.

**Five time zones in facilitation**

