

Tips for Facilitating a discussion after The World According to Monsanto movie showing

Optional materials ~If there is an organizer who is going to facilitate the discussion following a movie showing here are some recommended methods that you might find helpful.

Get the Most Out of Your Movie Showing:

It's possible to hold the first organizational meeting immediately after a public showing of the video. Time and time again we have seen that moments after seeing The World According to Monsanto video prove to be the most motivated that people are in their lives to take action to stop GMOs. By facilitating a short discussion after the meeting you can turn passion and outrage into action to stop GMOs in your area.

Below is a specific method of facilitating discussions that will help mobilize viewers to become activists. We have had terrific results using the following format for the initial meeting following the video presentation and Q & A. Typically, these are held at night, and many people need to get home. This is an agenda for a short, but effective meeting.

Sample First Meeting Agenda

1. **Gather everyone into a circle of chairs.**
2. **Hand everyone a sign up sheet to fill out.** Don't collect them until the end, since some information may be added later.
3. **Facilitator should allow time for everyone to read the description of the campaigns that we offer on the sign up sheet, or review it out loud.** This will help people focus their energies into a turnkey program if they wish.
4. **Announce the agenda** and confirm that the meeting will be short (or find out how much time people have). Explain that anyone may pass in any round. [The facilitator should count the number of people and calculate how much time is available based on the number of rounds and the time available.]
5. **Arrange for a person to take notes.**
6. **Introduction Round.** In the first round, everyone introduces their name. They can also say where they work or what related organization they are from. If they wish, they can add a sentence, maybe two, about what resources they bring, or what particularly focus they want in this campaign. Emphasize beforehand that this is a whip round, that is, not a time for long or even medium talks; Just a whip around the circle to get acquainted.
7. **Short brainstorm.** For short meetings, this can be VERY short. It is a chance for people to get something out that they are holding and for a bit of synergistic magic to happen. People can raise ideas for strategy, angles, anything on topic. All ideas are accepted at this point, but nothing is decided. Effective time management and facilitation should be used to end this brainstorm and complete

the rest of the meeting agenda. The phrase “share the air” may be helpful for the facilitator to announce so that people are not talked over or cut-off.

8. **Resource Round.** In this round, people are asked to list what resources are available in the community. This might include people in key positions, organizations, vendors, farmers, reporters or radio stations, medical people, like-minded school employees, etc.
9. **Propose a second meeting.** First ask how many weeks should go by before the next meeting. (For some enthusiastic groups, it may be days. We have seen groups meet 2, 3, or 4 weeks after the very first meeting.) Try to come up with a date and time that works. A list serve or email group will support those unable to come.
10. **Action Round.** Ask everyone to state what they personally want to accomplish by the next meeting. This may be: finding out about a particular resource, inviting people they know, calling about a festival booth, etc. There is magic in this round. Don't leave it out. It creates an instant momentum and gives everyone a sense that things are already happening. There is no pressure for people to have a plan, but whatever people say they will do is recorded by the person taking notes.
11. **Collect sign-up and volunteer sheets.** People can finish filling out the sign up sheet, adding any points that came up at the meeting. (The sheet may now include a description of what the person plans to do before the next meeting, or a resource they thought of, etc.) Emphasize legibility for emails and see if they are readable when handed in as people leave. (See Sign up Sheets available on at www.responsibletechnology.org.)

Facilitating Meetings

Using facilitation in your meetings will ensure that your meetings run smoothly and are productive. Seek out any experienced volunteers in your community that may be willing to facilitate. IRT has developed a separate [guide for facilitation](#) and we highly recommend that all community organizers or individuals taking leadership roles within the Campaign for Healthier Eating in America review this before kicking off their efforts.

General Advice For Meetings:

- Find out why the people are concerned about this issue, and see if there are folks who would like to work together to organize events.
- Encourage participants to deepen their understanding of the issue and share our materials with them.
- As your effort grows and brings in new people, naturally your group will start to identify collective goals and want to start making demands on local officials. Ideally, you first want to have a solid coalition that has determined collectively the best way to move forward .
- Bring up the issue of having fun while working together. The facilitator can say that the group should figure out ways to have fun during group events and meetings.

- Elect an email account administrator, and person to approve people into your a list serve or email group..
- Always attempt to divvy up tasks for people to take on before your next meeting. Our Volunteer sign-up sheets will help you identify potential task divisions. We recommend that you rotate tasks among different people in your group.

Facilitation: The Secret to Smooth and Timely Meetings

The word "facilitate" doesn't mean to lead, control, or direct. Facilitate simply means to make easier. In a practical sense, the job of a facilitator is to help create a space that is comfortable and productive for a group of people. Facilitators make meetings, discussions, and events of all sorts run *smoothly*. To be a facilitator a person doesn't have to have tons of knowledge or experience, but in general it's a good idea to have a few concepts in your toolbox for when group decisions become controversial. Often times the role of facilitator is easier for someone who doesn't have a strong opinion to express on the meeting's topics. As a facilitator, if you want to say something, call on yourself in turn, but make sure you don't use your role to dominate the discussion. Furthermore, you should not allow people with race, class, gender, or other subtle or non-subtle privilege to dominate a meeting. As a facilitator, you should encourage everyone to participate while moving the meeting along to meet time limits.

This document is an effort to summarize many of the most important concepts, but feel free to investigate into these issues further. Within this document, the word "meeting" could be exchanged with some variation with "group discussion", "conference call", or other group events

The Secrets

In addition to having savvy and well-prepared facilitator(s), smooth facilitation requires a group in which *everyone*:

1. Understands the **goals** of the meeting (i.e. the agenda), the organization's mission as well as its **ground rules (Appendix A)**
2. Keeps the group on the **agenda** and moving forward towards the goals
3. **Respects** everyone in the meeting helping to create a space where shy people are comfortable enough to speak, and where people who tend to dominate a discussion feel compelled to defer to others in the group
4. Makes sure decisions are made **democratically**, with input from many different voices. We recommend striving to use **consensus** whenever possible (please share the Appendix B with your group to see if this sounds like a method your group will be comfortable using).

To Do Before The Meeting:

Materials:

See the document titled:

The World According to Monsanto

~Host a public showing of this blockbuster film~

Agenda: At every meeting, clear goals and an agenda should be set beforehand. Your goals are what you want out of the meeting.

- Prepare a complete agenda based on your goals. Ask people for input on the agenda in person or through email. Before you begin the meeting, make sure everyone approves of the agenda.
- Try to stagger easy agenda items with more complex ones
- If you are holding this meeting directly after a movie showing, remember to honor people's time, especially if it is in the evening and they may want to get home. Think about limiting your discussion to a half hour or whatever seems appropriate.
- If you absolutely must go longer, the facilitator should make sure everyone is alright with adding extra time onto the meeting. If people aren't okay with it, the discussion should be tabled until a later date.

People: Make an effort to get the right people in the room.

- Remind everyone who needs to be there more than once, including once the day before the meeting.
- Ask a different person to be responsible for preparing and introducing each agenda item.
- Having multiple voices leading the meeting will make everyone feel more welcome.

Space

- Reserve a comfortable and accessible space for the meeting.
- Pay attention to temperature, arrangement of chairs, insulation from noise, bathrooms, and windows.

Starting The Meeting

Remember, meetings should be enjoyable, efficient, and build organizational morale.

1. At the minimum, ask for volunteers or assign:
 - A **note-taker** (see appendix F for tips on keeping effective notes/minutes.)
 - A **scribe** (writes all ideas, announcements, and other items on the board) is a great way to involve folks who are visual learners and helps eliminate redundancy.
2. We strongly suggest assigning:
 - A **timekeeper** to help the facilitator(s) move the agenda along.
 - A **vibes-watcher** (assesses the mood of the group and asks for breathers when necessary), and other helpers can be useful as well (see Appendix C for full explanation of roles).
 - A **presenter** (summarizes complex ideas or issues, and answers related questions)
3. You may also wish to assign:
 - A **stack-keeper** (keeps track of who raises their hands and calls on them in order)

4. Start on time whenever possible to encourage good habits. If you must wait for latecomers, thank people for arriving on time.
5. Welcome/introduce everyone present. Ask someone to think up a juicy icebreaker a few minutes before the meeting and use it during your opening go-around.
6. Quickly review the agenda at the start of the meeting and ask if there are any items to add.
7. Explain the ground rules. Two good ones are: A) if you tend to talk often in group settings make an effort to speak less, trusting that your point will be made by someone else, and B) if you tend to talk little in group settings make an effort to speak more often, helping others who are shy or hesitant to feel more comfortable.

During The Meeting

1. Be sure to start and end on time.
2. Schedule short breaks during the meeting. Even a quick stretch can lighten the mood and make everyone more productive and civil.
3. Stick to your agenda whenever possible. It's there to keep the group on track to achieve your goals. If you have to depart from the agenda, ask for the group's consent.
4. Use appropriate facilitation tools to get the most out of the voices in the room. Use a go-around to make everyone heard, and small breakout groups to generate lots of ideas quickly. Silence is good sometimes, but a good trick if you need discussion is to say, "Turn to the person next to you and discuss this."
5. Ask everyone to use hand signals to indicate agreement (fingers twinkling), confusion (arms out, bent, and hands outstretched), and other feelings ([See Appendix D for more](#)).
6. Try to keep the conversation flowing and summarize fairly often. Elicit responses from each member when addressing a key topic.
 - Consensus does not mean that each person gets to say the same thing five times. If people seem to be saying the same thing in different ways, try to summarize and move forward. Ex: "So what I'm hearing people say is that we're... Do people have other ideas for a more strategic next step?" ([See Appendix B for other miscellaneous tips and a sample discussion](#).)
7. Utilize the meeting roles. They're there to help the meeting go more smoothly but they only work if people understand what they're suppose to do and others help reinforce them. ([See Appendix C for tips](#)).

Closing The Meeting

1. Spend a few short minutes recapping your plan of action at the end of the meeting. Did you meet your goals? What are the next steps? Who's doing what? Answer these questions quickly and remind everyone to read the meeting minutes ([see Appendix on effective minute-posting](#)).
2. Assign roles for next time and schedule the next meeting.
3. Try to end on a positive note.

Appendix A: Establishing Ground Rules for Meeting

Having ground rules can help eliminate feelings of being disrespected. Often times, ground rules are the norms and unspoken codes of the conduct in your group which you might not think are necessary to formalize. However, when unwanted behavior arises in your group, it helps to have a statement to refer the offending individual to. This can help you address the problem person impartially and to get quickly back on track. Some ideas for ground rules include:

- Turn off your cell phones
- Sharing the air, don't get on the stack a second time until everyone has had a chance to speak
- No interruptions
- No name calling (Hopefully this won't arise!)
- No personal attacks
- Speak for yourself

Appendix B: Miscellaneous Facilitation Tips and Sample Conversation

Good phrases:

- "Let's hear from some people who haven't spoken yet."
- "The veteran members have been talking a lot, let's hear from some of the new people."

Keep it positive:

- Instead of using "but", use "and". Ex: "That's a good idea **AND** this is also a good idea" or **AND** "I think we should hear from some others"

When in doubt, resort to the small group!

- Often logistical discussions like meeting times, contentious topics, and project details can get carried away and take up unnecessary amounts of time in the big group meeting. These discussions can and probably should be dealt with by a small group of people after the meeting which reports back to and works with the bigger group later.

If the discussion is contentious and/or people aren't respecting each other, try this:

- Declare who the next three speakers are, and don't let people raise their hands until those three are done. This way everyone concentrates on what's being said, instead of sighing, moaning, and planning his or her response.
- Have someone in the group other than the facilitator summarize the discussion before starting a new agenda item. This brings a sense of closure to that agenda item. More importantly, it allows the group to feel more involved as they are summarizing the discussion.

Appendix C: Meeting Roles

Time Keeper

Keeps track of how much time is left for each agenda item and pushes the group to stick to time limits by notifying the group and facilitator when there are 20 minutes left, 10, 5, etc. If the group has run out of time but has not finished the discussion, the group needs to make a concerted decision to extend the discussion/agenda item and set a time limit for how much longer it wants to take.

Stack Keeper

Keeps a list of who wants to speak. Makes the facilitator's job easier when there are a lot of people or a complicated discussion. The stack keeper should always be looking around the room for people raising their hands and nod to them to let them know that they are "on stack" so that they can put their hand down, or this can be written out visually on a white board. You may not always want to use a stack keeper:

Some advantages:

- More accessible to folks with English as a second language or people with hearing impairments

Some disadvantages:

- Conversation can become fragmented, out of sequence, or in some cases take longer

Scribe

Takes notes from brainstorming, discussion, announcements, and proposals and puts them on a big sheet of paper or a white board so that everyone can refer to them. The scribe is also helpful when good points get raised then lost in discussion or go unnoticed.

Note Taker

Writes the official notes that can be sent out to the mailing list and kept in the group's archives for future use. See Appendix A for tips. It is the note taker's job to send the meeting notes out asap (preferably that night) so that people can review their tasks easily and those who missed the meeting can stay in the loop as much as possible.

Vibes Watcher

Monitors how people are feeling to ensure that no one is being ignored or personally attacked. A vibes watcher should also be aware of people that are getting sleepy, restless, or generally too unhappy to make decisions. The vibes watcher can remedy these situations by calling for short breaks, stretching exercises, a moment of silence, or bring to the group's attention the injustices s/he has observed. It is also the Vibes Watcher's role to check on any upset or frustrated person that may leave the meeting.

Appendix D: The Point of Hand Signals and How to Use Them

The Point:

Hand signals are ways for people to comment without having to disrupt the meeting. When everyone is willing to use them, they can save a lot of time, help the meeting run much more efficiently, and encourage everyone to actively participate. For instance, often in meetings people will end up repeating in different ways what other people have already said. Many people feel the need to say things like, "I also really think that we should reevaluate our goals and blah blah blah blah blah." Instead of having to raise your hand to basically say, "I support that", people can give the Silent Cheer (see below). This helps the Facilitator and everyone else read the mood of the whole group rather than being blinded by the attitudes of a few aggressive speakers.

Silent Cheer/Twinkle: Hold up your hands and wiggle your fingers in the air.

Focus/Get to the Point: Move your hands back and forth bringing them together in a 'V' shape. Get back to the point. Use this signal when people go off on tangents and aren't sticking to the agenda.

Jargon: Throw up your hands with palms upside down. Use this for acronyms or when people refer to things you haven't heard of. If you think other people haven't heard of it you should do this too so that others who might be too embarrassed to ask a question themselves can know what's going on.

Appendix E: Using Consensus

While absolute consensus in groups is rare, striving for this form of decision making can be highly beneficial for a group's morale.

Steps in facilitating formal consensus

1. **Present Proposal.** Your group's structural agreements should address format and timing of proposal presentation. Do you expect proposals in writing? How much lead time do your meeting participants need to read proposals in advance of the meeting?
2. **Call for clarifying questions.** List all clarifying questions where all can see them. Try to avoid lengthy Q & A style conversation between meeting participants and proposal makers. Allow quick answers if it will contribute to the efficiency of the discussion.
3. **Open discussion.** Try to keep the discussion moving and varied. When a concern is raised, not the concern for future resolution and encourage the conversation to return to the proposal as a whole.
4. **List concerns.** Rather than engaging in a conversation when a concern is raised and allowing everyone to speak to that concern until it is resolved (or not!), try to get all concerns listed and visible for all to see. Once the list of concerns is

generated, discuss each concern one at a time. As concerns are resolved, remove them from the list. When all concerns have been resolved, or when holders of concerns have agreed to move forward without total resolution, the group has, in essence, reached consensus.

5. **Call for Consensus.** Your group's norms and operating principles will dictate the exact style of calling for consensus. Some groups use a thumbs up method, some call for blocks, stand asides and consents ([see below for more info](#)), some just make a final call for unresolved concerns and, if none are raised, the facilitator declares the group to be consenting.

When consensus is blocked

1. **Determine if the block is based in stated values of the organization.** If the block is not based in the stated values (mission, vision, values, etc.), ask the blocker to stand aside.
2. **Ask the group if further action is needed.** Does the blocked proposal represent an issue that needs to be acted on? Will further discussion time be useful in resolving blocking concerns? Should the issue wither on the vine or be put onto a future agenda?
3. **If yes, determine the best course of action.** Send the issue to committee to resolve the specific concern. Ask the blocker to suggest an appropriate alternative. Assign the issue to individuals or teams based on job description. Who will be responsible for seeing that the issue is brought back to the group? Whose voices need to be part of the solution? What time pressures apply to the issue?

Types of Consent, Blocks and Stand Asides

Consent

1. I agree, I love this plan!!
2. I agree this is the best we can do at this time!
3. I agree, I and the organization can live with this.

Stand Aside (This still means that you are expected to implement the group's decision unless this is noted)

1. I have a personal conflict of interest
2. My personal values and the organization's values are not 100% in alignment and I need to have that noted.

Block

1. I believe the organization's values or capacity will be seriously harmed by this action and I must stop it from happening.
2. I do not believe we have the unity required to move forward at this time.

Appendix F: Drafting the Agenda

Some ideas for agenda items particularly if this is a second meeting:

- Introductions
- Recap of last meeting
- Title of an item
- Name of the presenter
- Brainstorm of an action or outcome
- Report back from a committee
- Open discussion
- Evaluation activity
- Proposal/Decision
- Break

Appendix F: Make Your Meeting Minutes Brief And Beautiful

Good meeting minutes shouldn't be a script of every word uttered at your meeting. If something isn't relevant to the goals of your meeting and your group, leave it out of the minutes (unless it's funny). People reading the minutes only want to spend time reading about the essentials. No full sentences or fancy language needed.

A good format for meeting minutes includes:

- The name of your group/committee, date, place and time of the meeting
- The names of voting members present and absent
- Proposals made and passed
- Tasks people are responsible for (with names in bold) and deadlines
- Reports people made on a topic
- Announcements people made

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