

Facilitation in the MAPP Process

Facilitation is an important component of many of the MAPP phases. The facilitator moderates discussions during the visioning sessions as well as the town hall meetings, focus group sessions and other activities outlined in the Community Themes and Strengths Assessment. The facilitator also moderates discussions regarding the results of the data analysis during the Community Health Status Assessment and encourages the free expression of ideas during brainstorming activities in the Forces of Change Assessment.

Facilitators must be effective at drawing participants out, involving everyone in the discussions, and helping the group to reach consensus. Given the importance of such an individual, how does a MAPP Committee identify this person?

Several types of individuals can be tapped to play the role of the facilitator. The advantages and disadvantages of different types of facilitators are outlined below, along with some criteria for selecting an effective facilitator.

What to Consider in Selecting a Facilitator.

Selecting the right facilitator is an important leadership function of the committee overseeing the MAPP process. In identifying and selecting a good facilitator, the MAPP Committee should consider the questions below. The community's resources will also have an impact; many communities may not have the resources to retain a consultant facilitator. In such cases, individuals from neutral organizations within the community or volunteers from neighboring communities could fill this important role.

Questions to consider in identifying a facilitator:

Perceived Neutrality and/or Fairness

- Is this person perceived as being neutral?
- Are there any individuals, organizations, or population groups that may feel uncomfortable with this person acting as facilitator?

Skill level in Facilitation and Managing Large Group Processes

- Is this person effective at managing large group processes?
- Is he/she able to ensure that all participants have a chance to speak?
- Is he/she effective at keeping individuals from dominating the discussion and protecting participants from personal attacks?
- Can he/she get the group to acknowledge and deal effectively with conflict?

Understanding of the MAPP Process

- Does he/she understand and agree with the purposes of the MAPP process? The facilitator needs to be an effective advocate for MAPP as well as being capable of moving the process forward.
- Will he/she organize — or suggest strategies for organizing — information that is generated from sessions?

Where Can a Good Facilitator Be Found?

Facilitators can be identified from many sectors within or outside of the community. The facilitator may or may not be involved in the MAPP process. In some communities, it may make sense to use the chair of the MAPP Committee or another MAPP Committee member as the facilitator. An external facilitator may also be considered. An external facilitator may be a consultant or a volunteer from a neutral organization either within the community or from the outside. United Way chapters may be useful in identifying a facilitator; some chapters even conduct facilitator training. Community colleges and universities are yet another good resource for facilitators. External facilitation can help to minimize internal politics, turf issues, distrust between organizations, and other issues.

Working with the Facilitator

Once a facilitator has been selected, the core support group and MAPP Committee should work closely with the facilitator. Coordination with the facilitator may include the following:

- Ensure he/she understands the goals and objectives of each session or discussion and the results that need to come out of the sessions.
- Agree on what the facilitator will do versus what support staff will do. This is especially important for consultants who serve as facilitators; specifics should be included in a written contract.
- Evaluate how sessions are run to ensure that the facilitator is effective. If issues arise, work them out immediately so that the process is not negatively affected.
- Discuss with the facilitator how participants should be engaged before, during, and after the process. The facilitator should be aware of all aspects of the MAPP process, so that he/she can share important information as it arises during session discussions.
- Work with the facilitator in analyzing and compiling the results of each discussion. The facilitator should play an important role in preparation and follow-up.