

Effective Group Problem-solving

Bring together stakeholders who can provide analytical thinking to move toward solutions for specific organizational challenges. This process in problem solving is effective because group evaluation will result in creative, diverse solutions and action plans. The goal of the group is to generate progressive, effective and practical (but nimble) resolutions.

The process can involve a large or small group and can be completed as a one hour exercise – or a process carried out over weeks or months. A facilitator or designated team member(s) should ensure that there is active listening during this process. All interests should be heard, considered, documented and acknowledged.

Effective problem solving process

1. Establish a problem solving team

- a. Carefully select collaborative representatives with various skills, expertise and views (internal volunteers, board members, staff, external professionals, etc). The team will need to include a facilitator and a note taker

2. Clearly define the issue

- a. Clearly articulate the problem to be addressed
- b. Break the issue down into components

Suggestions: This critical step is also the most challenging. The group is required to collectively recognize the scope of the problem as well as the need to resolve it.

** Note that this phase is not a time to address solutions.*

- Each person writes the problem and any related issues down – can then be shared – or collected and read by one person
- *Possible questions to consider:*
 - *How are things now versus the way you would like them to be?*
 - *How long has the problem existed?*
 - *How frequently does it occur?*
 - *Look for the cause of the gap between the present (what's now) and the desired (future) state or resolution.*
 - *Who is affected by the problem?*
 - *Why does this problem exist?*
 - *What needs to be changed in both the immediate future and for the long term?*
 - *What special interests need to be satisfied by any given solution*

3. List the possible solutions (options)

- a. Brainstorm a variety solutions and ideas

Suggestions:

- *Write exactly what is said. Capturing specific words can be powerful.*
- *Make a list of as many solutions as possible*
- *Facilitator ensures that everyone feels there are no unacceptable ideas*

4. Evaluate the solution options.

- a. Discuss each option
- b. Discuss impact, efficacy, viability, pros, cons of each option
- c. Assess consequences of implementing each option

Possible questions:

- *Who is affected?*
- *What funding or resources would be needed?*
- *Are there uncontrollable challenges?*
- *Who or what will be affected by this solution?*
- *What are the possible side effects . . . immediate and long-run?*
- *What would be the likely consequences of this solution?*
- *What would be the reaction [of community/employees/patrons/stakeholders]?*

5. Select an option(s)

- a. Prioritize top options
- b. Identify best option(s) to move toward solution
- c. Establish an action list for implementation.

Suggestion: This might be done by individuals marking their top priorities in a vote on a flip chart page. Review group priorities – then a discussion– on what can be dropped as an immediate an option, and what are best options for now.

- *Responsibility—who is on team and who is project leader.*
- *Time line*
- *Needed resources*
- *Process parameters*

6. Clarify how to track and evaluate implementation. Accountability structures ensure transparency in the process and ongoing communication of progress.

- a. Establish a plan to monitor accountability – KIPs (key indicators of progress)
- b. Establish a plan to evaluate and adjust actions at a set interval to ensure desired outcomes.