COLLECTING DATA / DOCUMENTING THE PROCESS

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Collecting data and documenting the process is a must, both during and after a meeting. Here are some suggestions to make the process easier and more effective.

GENERAL

- Use visual methods to record important summary information. Dry-erase or black boards, flip charts, blank overhead projections, storyboards, or even computer-based projection technologies can all serve to visually present the information to all. This allows everyone in the meeting to see what is being recorded, and gain understanding and clarity. This process can also give you authority to move forward in the agenda.
- Use only the actual words spoken by participants. Don't paraphrase or truncate what is said without the expressed permission of the person making the statement.
- These days, most of us use computers to support our work. After the meeting, put your notes into a computer file as soon as possible. It's amazing how much of the actual conversation you will remember if the report is drafted that same day. Likewise, the longer you wait to put the data into the computer, the more you will forget.
- Circulate your draft notes for others to review and comment.
- Where items are not clear to you, note your confusion in the margin of the report so others can focus on filling in the blanks.
- Don't forget to put your action plan into table format. This gives everyone a clear understanding of what is to be done, who is to do it, and by when it will be completed.

RECORDERS (electronic)

- Some jurisdictions require public meetings to be electronically recorded, and there are also times when it just makes sense to have a way of reconstructing a conversation. Unfortunately, sometimes these devices can be intrusive and disruptive to the discussion. When using a recording devise, make sure everyone participating knows that the meeting is being recorded, what the recording will be used for, and what help they might be able to give the person responsible for transcribing the meeting.

RECORDERS (human)

An independent recorder can be a real asset to your meeting and an important part of the small group process.

- Recorders are not part of the group, and should never make content comments about what is said. They need to be sensitive to their unique role in this process. Also, body language is a powerful communication medium. Recorders need to be sensitive to their posture and facial expressions. Having a "poker-face" is a real plus to a group process recorder.

- Recorders should sit out of normal view of most participants, in a place where they can hear the proceedings but not intrude in the process.

- Recorders should avoid interrupting the group during the session. If the recorder has questions about what was said, or what was meant by a comment, they should mark the item on their notes and be prepared to ask questions at the end of the session. Time to ask clarifying questions should be arranged between the facilitator and the recorder before the session starts.

- The recorder should first identify participants by name and their location in the room. Assign them a logical number, and use that number when recording their comments. By using this method, the recorder can later determine if comments from the group were equally distributed and represent an even cross-section, or whether the discussion was skewed by one or more participants.

- If a formal recorder is not available and when necessary, you may ask the group if anyone would volunteer to take notes. This has several downsides to it. First, the volunteer may feel constrained from participating fully in the discussion. Second, the other participants may feel the volunteer has undue influence in the decision process and the report that is generated. Finally, they may be very poor listeners and/or writers … so you will have difficulty using their notes for the meeting report.