

## PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING CORE VALUES

### FULL PARTICIPATION

In a participatory group, all members are encouraged to speak up and say what's on their minds. This strengthens a group in several ways. Members become more courageous in raising difficult issues. They learn how to share their "first-draft" ideas. And they become more adept at discovering and acknowledging the diversity of opinions and backgrounds inherent in any group.

### MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

For a group to reach a sustainable agreement, members have to understand and accept the legitimacy of one another's needs and goals. This basic recognition is what allows people to think from each other's point of view. And thinking from each other's point of view is the catalyst for innovative ideas that serve the interests of all parties.

### INCLUSIVE SOLUTIONS

Inclusive solutions are wise solutions. Their wisdom emerges from the integration of everybody's perspectives and needs. These are solutions whose range and vision are expanded to take advantage of the truth held not only by the quick, the articulate, the influential, and the powerful, but also the truth held by those who are disenfranchised or shy or who think at a slower pace. As veteran facilitator Caroline Estes puts it, "Everyone has a piece of the truth." \*

### SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

In participatory groups, members recognize that they must be willing and able to implement the proposals they endorse, so they make every effort to give and receive input before final decisions are made. They also assume responsibility for designing and managing the thinking process that will result in a good decision. This contrasts sharply with the conventional assumption that everyone will be held accountable for the consequences of thinking done by a few key people.

\* Caroline Estes, *Everyone Has a Piece of the Truth*.  
U.S. Cohousing Association, <http://www.cohousing.org/cm/article/truth>

## PARTICIPATORY GROUPS

Everyone participates, not just the vocal few.

People give each other room to think and get their thoughts all the way out.

Opposing viewpoints are allowed to co-exist in the room.

People draw each other out with supportive questions. "Is *this* what you mean?"

Each member makes the effort to pay attention to the person speaking.

People are able to listen to each other's ideas because they know *their own ideas will also be heard*.

Each member speaks up on matters of controversy. Everyone knows where everyone stands.

Members can accurately represent each other's points of view – even when they don't agree with them.

People refrain from talking behind each other's backs.

Even in the face of opposition from the person-in-charge, people are encouraged to stand up for their beliefs.

A problem is not considered solved until everyone who will be affected by the solution understands the reasoning.

When people make an agreement, it is assumed that the decision still reflects a wide range of perspectives.

## CONVENTIONAL GROUPS

The fastest thinkers and most articulate speakers get more airtime.

People interrupt each other on a regular basis.

Differences of opinion are treated as *conflict* that must either be stifled or "solved."

Questions are often perceived as challenges, as if the person being questioned has done something wrong.

Unless the speaker *captivates* their attention, people space out, doodle or check the clock.

People have difficulty listening to each other's ideas because they're busy rehearsing what *they* want to say.

Some members remain quiet on controversial matters. No one really knows where everyone stands.

People rarely give accurate representations of the opinions and reasoning of those whose opinions are at odds with their own.

Because they don't feel permission to be direct *during* the meeting, people talk behind each other's backs outside the meeting.

People with discordant, minority perspectives are commonly discouraged from speaking out.

A problem is considered solved as soon as the fastest thinkers have reached an answer. Everyone else is then expected to "get on board" regardless of whether s/he understands the logic of the decision.

When people make an agreement, it is assumed that they are all thinking the exact same thing.

# THE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATORY VALUES

Full Participation

Mutual Understanding

Inclusive Solutions

Shared Responsibility

## **Stronger Individuals**

- Improved leadership skills
- Stronger powers of reasoning
- More confidence
- More commitment
- Better communication skills
- Greater ability to assume broader and more difficult responsibilities

## **Stronger Groups**

- Greater ability to utilize multiple talents
- Access to more types of information
- Development of a respectful, supportive atmosphere
- Clear procedures for handling group dynamics
- Increased capacity for tackling difficult problems

## **Stronger Agreements**

- More ideas
- Higher-quality ideas
- Better integration of diverse goals
- Wiser decisions
- More reliable follow-through

The participatory values discussed in this chapter provide the members of a group with a set of grounding principles for conducting their meetings. Adherence to these values produces significant results: stronger individuals, stronger groups, and stronger agreements.

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