

# Working Collectively

Women's Self-Help Network

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Canadian Cataloging in Publication Data  
Main entry under title: Working Collectively ISBN 0-919537-17-0  
Self-help groups - Handbooks, manuals, etc.  
Cooperative societies - Handbooks, manuals, etc. I. Women's Self-Help Network.  
HQ1885.W67 1984 306'.344 C84-091178-5  
Copyright © 1984, North Island Women's Services Society  
Revised digital edition, 2013. Original published by Ptarmigan Press,  
1372 Island Highway, Campbell River, B.C. V9W 2E1  
Distributed by The Comox Valley Women's Resource Centre, Courtenay, B.C. V9N 5N4

**Acknowledgments**  
We wish to acknowledge Health and Welfare Canada, and Secretary of State for funding this project. The ideas and opinions expressed in this booklet are not necessarily those of the funding bodies, but rather, those of the Women's Self-Help Network. We also wish to acknowledge the following collectives for contributing information about their collectives:  
The Vancouver Women's Health Collective  
The Vancouver Women's Bookstore  
Women Against Violence Against Women  
Wild West Food Distributors  
Rape Relief  
Press Gang Publishers

Thanks to all the collective members of the Women's Self-Help Network who contributed during the three years of this project.

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Special thanks to Emma Haley and Wendy Berke Derbyshire for book design, layout and graphics.

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## Why operate collectively?

Working collectively is difficult for people used to managing in a hierarchical individualistic society. Those of us working collectively do so because we are looking for respectful and kind ways of working together. Learning co-operation and sharing is difficult when our experience is individualistic and competitive.

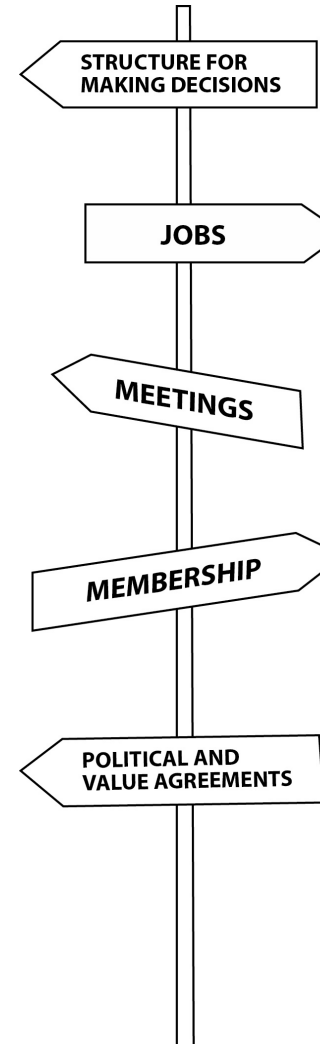
Collectivity offers us more control over our lives, helps us learn to respect others ideas and contributions and allows us to share tasks, rewards and mistakes. It's a joyous and trying process that will be improved and refined as we learn more about collectivity.

*We're a collective.*



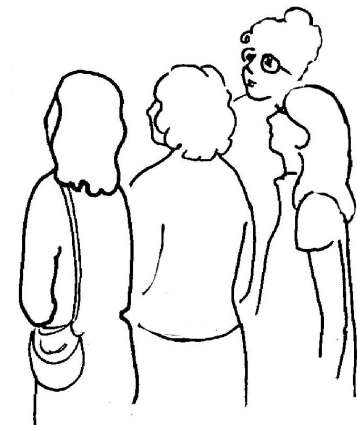
*We're a collective!*

*We're thinking of becoming a collective!*



## DECISIONS

After electing to work collectively there are some decisions to be made regarding how you will operate.



## Structure for making decisions



### How is the collective going to make decisions?

Most collectives use consensus as the structure for making decisions.

Consensus requires that all members participate equally in the reaching of a decision.

### Procedure for consensus Dennison-making

The issue is presented by either the facilitator or a group member.

The members connected with the issue explain it and begin discussion.

Agreement may be reached at this point and a decision made. If, however, there are differing viewpoints, consensus is not reached.

A round may then be initiated.



In a round each person comments on the issue. A round is not interrupted.

Each member has her say without other commenting on it. Questions are asked only for clarification (if something wasn't understood or clear).

A round may be timed. Each member receives equal time ( $\pm 2$  or 5 minutes). Equalizing time helps to equalize participation.

When the round ends the facilitator summarizes what was said and clarifies the current status of the issue.

Another round may be needed if consensus is not reached. On the other hand, individual differences may have merged after hearing other group members viewpoints. The facilitator may then ask if there is agreement on the issue.

In most cases, a facilitator will ask the group to try to address the concerns of dissenters. Sometimes group members cannot resolve their differences after making some effort to do so. In these cases, if there are one or two dissenters, the facilitator may ask if they would be willing to stand aside so the group can move forward. Consensus is reached when everyone agrees or when those who have concerns agree to stand aside.

The decision is the recorded along with the views of those who agreed to stand aside.



## JOBS

### Who is doing what job?

The collective decides together what jobs there are to do and how to do them.

Collective members may then volunteer for different jobs. If there are some jobs remaining one member might ask another if they are willing to undertake it.

Jobs may also be divided evenly and rotated weekly, monthly, etc. Each member receives equally desirable and undesirable tasks.

Some collectives share tasks with more than one member. This means that a specific task is undertaken by two or more members. Sharing tasks helps to:

Provide support

Reduce isolation

Initiate learning from each other



Some collectives encourage members to learn new jobs through job sharing. One method of job sharing is to have one member with the specific job experience and the other not. This allows the member without experience to learn new skills and to be able to assume more responsibility for that task at a later time.

Undertaking new jobs helps to:

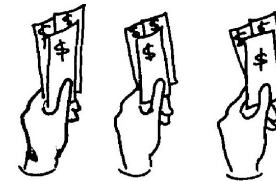
Diffuse power

Share knowledge

Initiate learning of new skills

All work positions in a collective are treated equally. There is no hierarchy of positions.

All collective members are paid the same salary.



## MEETINGS

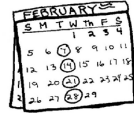
### How often is the collective going to meet?

How often the collective meets depends on the collective's purpose and how to accomplish that purpose

Some collectives meet weekly

Some collectives meet bi-month

Some collectives meet monthly



### How long will the meetings be?

The collective group will need to choose a time suited to its needs.

Some collectives meet 2 hours

Some collectives meet 3 - 4 hours

Some collectives meet 6 hours



Most people are not thrilled with long meetings. Long meetings (six hours or more) may cause members to become drained, frustrated, irritable and saturated.

### How much time will be spent on process and how much time on business?

Process refers to time spent on resolving feelings, emotional problems or working together, human crises or work crises.

Business or task refers to time spent working on the practical objective goals and purpose which includes the specific tasks to accomplish this, i.e. typing a letter, answering the phone, servicing the client population, etc.



A collective cannot operate efficiently without both process and task. They are interrelated. Ignoring feelings or problems in working together means the problems are there, but are not being dealt with and the working efficiency will decrease. Spending a lot of time on feelings means the work is not getting done. There needs to be a balance.

The collective will need to reach a balance between process and business that works for you.

Some collectives have a time built-into their agenda for process. This assures that process is not neglected, and it makes it easier for someone to bring up a problem.

Some collectives set a designated amount of time for process so that it does not consume their meeting time.

## What about an agenda?

A meeting is usually helpful. An agenda helps the flow of the meeting by everyone being able to see exactly what is going on in the meeting.

<u>Agenda</u>		minutes
Pressing Process		-
Check-in		5
Process		15
Jane	- 5	
Terry	- 5	
Anne	- 5	
Recap of last meeting		5
Budget		15
Task assignment		5
Contract work		20
Community outreach		20
Committee review		10
Evaluation		15
Appreciations		10

## A SUGGESTED AGENDA

This should require only a few minutes to establish.

Appoint time keeper, recorder and facilitator for next meeting

Agreement on length of meeting, lunch, breaks, light and livelies, rituals and care-taking

Be careful that process does not consume the meeting. It may be helpful to allot a designated Time-span.

Pressing Process (problems, feelings that can't wait)

Check-In (a round)

Process: Gripes, Constructive Criticism, Paranoid Fantasies, Resentments and Pleasures

Helps continuity and accountability

Read the agreements from last meeting (especially parts related to task)

Prioritize and Time Collective Business (Budget, task assignments, workshops, etc.)

Review tasks assigned, agreements made, decisions reached

Don't eliminate these; they're important for working together effectively and provides an ending that feels good.

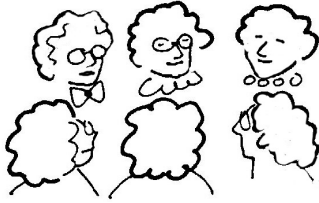
Evaluation: What worked? What didn't? How can we do it better?

Appreciations, Affirmations

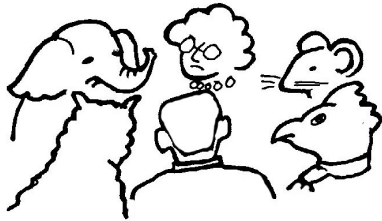
## MEMBERSHIP

### Who is eligible?

That depends on the goals and purpose of the collective.



A homogeneous group makes decision-making easier, but the group may stagnate.



Differences between individuals in the group may spur growth; pain and frustration may accompany it.

### How many members is the collective going to have?

Most collectives operate with 4-12 members.

Too few members may lead to insufficient input.

Too many members may make decision-making time consuming and cumbersome.

### What about new members?

No new members means there will be no replacements for those leaving.

Too many new members can cause disruption, loss of continuity and stability.

The number of new members coming into the collective depends on the size of the group and the overall purpose.

### Is the collective going to have an orientation procedure for new members?

It is helpful to have some kind of plan regarding the integration and orientation of new members. There are several options:

Present orientation material in a written package form for the new member/s to read and have one or more old members meet with the new member/s to answer questions or demonstrate practical matters.

Have a special committee such as the ritual care-taking committee develop and provide orientation.

Have old members of the collective each spend a specified amount of time ( $\pm$  one hour) with the new member/s.





## POLITICAL AND VALUE AGREEMENTS

### Is the collective going to have a statement of what brings us together?

Many collectives have a basis of unity. A basis of unity is a statement of political or value agreements related to the work and/or service being done. The basis of unity is usually the first piece of work that is done together.

Make the basis of unity feasible.

Make it relatively short so new members can easily relate to it.

Try to emphasize what the group has in common.

The basis of unity can be revised periodically (especially if there are new members).

### Does the collective need to make agreements on how to work together?

Many collectives need time to assess which tools work for them and which do not. At some point it is probably a good idea to write down how the collective will work together.

Will the collective choose to use:

Constructive Criticism (if not used, will something else replace it?)

Peer Counseling, in or outside of the group, if at all?

Check-In or another method

Time keeping

Structured Agenda

What kind of Accountability?

### BASIS OF UNITY

#### *Women's Self-Help Network*

- 1. We value emotional support as a means of empowering women to counteract their negative social conditions and oppression.*
- 2. We are committed to education around power with reference to sex, race, class and sexual preference. We will attempt to be sensitive and responsive to issues of power imbalance in our work.*
- 3. We value working in groups as a means to power sharing. We are committed to empowering all group members equally.*
- 4. We recognize the importance of addressing and making visible the issue of child care as part of any group work with women.*
- 5. The resources of this project are committed to:*
  - a) Developing emotional support, skill sharing and educational materials for women in rural communities.*
  - b) Training women in rural communities in the use of these materials in various group settings.*
  - c) Adapting these materials and training schemes to the needs of women in various types of rural communities.*

## DIFFICULTIES

You've decided to work collectively, and you have agreed on how your collective is going to function.

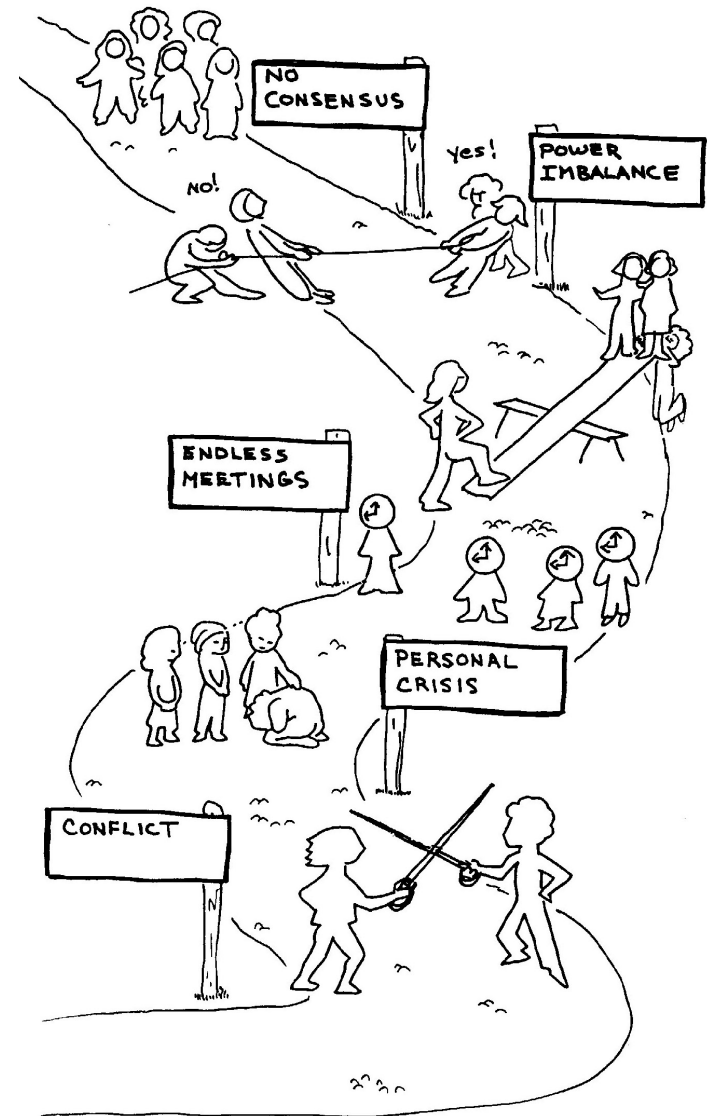
But you may encounter difficulties putting your plans into action.

Our society is so individualistically oriented that we all have some difficulties adapting to a collective structure. Often the practice we've had at fitting into hierarchies is a further problem.

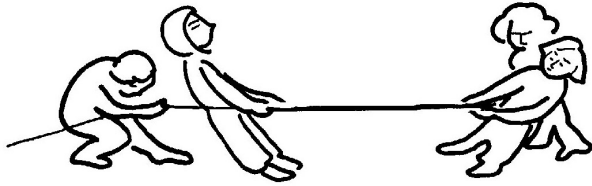
Effort is required from each collective member, and from the collective group, to find and learn new ways of functioning that enhance the collective process. Working together isn't necessarily easy.

Here we will look at the most common problems collectives encounter, and suggest some courses of action.

See the resources at [citizenshandbook.org](http://citizenshandbook.org), especially the sections on grassroots wilt, non-violent communication, bad apples, IAF organizing, and conflict resolution. See also *The Magic of Dialogue* by Daniel Yankelovich, *Positivity* by Barbara Frederickson, and *Fierce Conversations* by Susan Scott. (Added for this digital edition of Working Collectively.)



## NO CONSENSUS



Making decisions by consensus can be a difficult, time consuming, and frustrating experience. It can also be a creative and dynamic process enabling individuals to share in decisions affecting themselves and their work.

It takes practice. Be patient and kind with yourselves and when things bog down, try:

### Reviewing your decision-making process

Has everyone had the opportunity to explain their position?

Has everyone listened to each explanation?

Have all the options been listed and explored?

Have the objections been clearly expressed?

### ROUNDS

Remember, no interruptions and everyone must listen.

### SILENCE

This gives people time to consider what they have said and what they have heard.

## CONTINUING DISCUSSION

This might be helpful if, on reflection, the collective feels all the options have not been discussed fully.

## POSTPONING THE DECISION

Can the discussion be set aside for people to consider all its aspects?



### CAUTION!

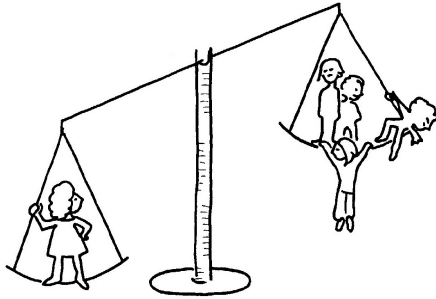
Because decision making is difficult there is a temptation to put decisions off. Be honest! Are you avoiding a decision, or thinking over the possibilities?

## MEDIATION

This is an important tool for serious problems that the collective feels incapable of resolving. Mediation is a delicate skill so choose your mediator with care.



## POWER IMBALANCE



A power imbalance can be the result of an inadequate sharing of knowledge or skill within the collective.

The individual differences in knowledge and skills that each person brings to a collective can be a source of strength and growth, as long as the information and skills are shared.

Some ways to help this sharing happen are:

### STUDY SESSIONS

A person with particular knowledge about an aspect of the collective work shares that knowledge with other collective members.

### JOB SHARING

A person skilled in some aspect of the collective's work (ie. book-keeping or counseling) trains another person for a set period of time and then moves on to another task. The trainee then becomes a trainer to another collective member.

### JOB ROTATION

People rotate through all the jobs to be done in the collective. This ensures that every collective member will have a personal

understanding of the problems and difficulties as well as the joys and rewards of each job. Job rotation ensures that no one gets involved in a thankless task.

A power imbalance can also be caused by the unwillingness of some collective members to take responsibility for the decisions made in the collective and the willingness of others to impose their own views or decisions upon the collective.

This is a common interpersonal problem which can affect every aspect of the collective's operation. Avoiding or ignoring this problem does not help. Try:

### TALKING

What is there about the way your collective works that makes you feel good? What makes you feel bad? What can you do about it?

### CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

State as concisely as possible the action or circumstance you are critical of.

State your feelings.

Ask for a specific behavioral change and explain your reason.

It is often useful to work out a criticism with a partner before presenting it, so that angry feelings can be discharged and the criticism can be a specific and clear message.

Please see tools section for a more detailed description of constructive criticism.

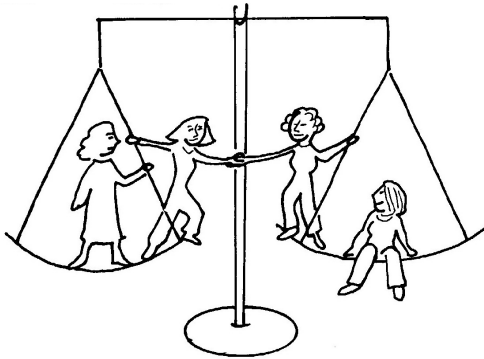
### PARANOID FANTASIES

If you cannot be specific about something that is upsetting you it may be appropriate to state your feelings as a paranoid fantasy.

First ask permission to check your fantasy out. Then, either set a fairly close time when it will be done, or state it immediately.

Once the fantasy has been stated, (e.g. I'm afraid you don't like me) all those involved must look for the grain of truth that has given rise to the feeling.

Please see the Tools Section for a detailed description of paranoid fantasy.



#### AGREEMENTS FOR CHANGE

A constructive criticism that has been listened to attentively can lead to an agreement whereby certain changes are expected.

Write these agreements down. Be specific about what changes are expected within specific times.

Review agreements frequently to applaud progress and provide support where difficulty is being encountered.

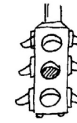
Broken agreements must be discussed.

Was the change required too large?

Was the agreement specific enough?

Was the person trying hard enough?

Are there factors that were not considered when the agreement was made?



#### CAUTION!

This discussion may lead to a new agreement but remember that no single collective member has the right to misuse collective energy and time by consistently failing to 'keep agreements.

#### MEDIATION

When the collective feels unable to resolve the problem it may be helpful to ask a neutral person to mediate.

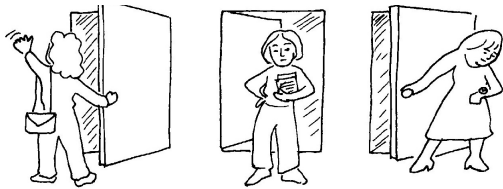
#### FIRING

This is, obviously, a last resort, but it is important that a collective consider how it will respond if a collective member is either unable or unwilling to meet their responsibilities to the collective.

Clearly, firing is only considered after tools such as constructive criticism, agreements for change, peer counseling and support groups have been tried.

If firing is the course that must be followed, the reason for the firing must be very clearly stated to the individual.

## ENDLESS MEETINGS



Working collectively can take a great deal of time. Help prevent your group from wasting time in endless meetings. Try:

### POSTING THE AGENDA AHEAD OF TIME

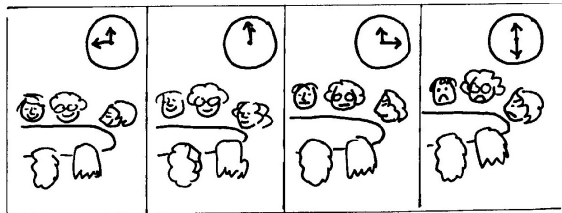
Group members can then come prepared.

### PRIORITIZING THE ITEMS ON YOUR AGENDA

This ensures that the most important items are dealt with.

### SETTING TIME LIMITS AND STICKING TO THEM

Decide how long the meeting will last and then allocate an appropriate amount of time to each item. Appoint a timer to see that the time limits are kept.



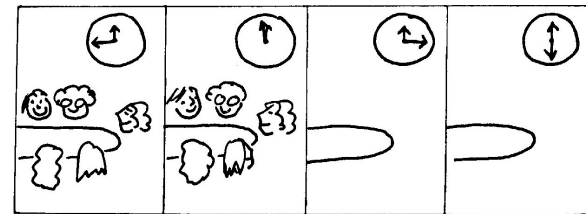
Remember that for one item to go overtime another must have its time allotment cut, and the whole group must agree to the change.

### DELEGATING APPROPRIATE DECISIONS AND TASKS TO SMALLER GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS

This ensures that the larger group isn't wasting time on things more easily accomplished by delegation.

### ENSURING FACILITATION SKILLS ARE USED

Appoint a facilitator for each meeting. Clearly state what the facilitator's duties are. Consider improving the facilitation skills of your collective by holding or attending workshops.



## INDIVIDUAL CRISIS



Collectives allow us to support fellow workers in times of stress. Doing this effectively without disrupting or halting the work of the collective is not easy. Depending on the nature of the crisis, try:

### PERSONAL SUPPORT

Allow time at the beginning of each meeting for people to share events in their lives. A little support at this time can allow people to give their attention to the work at hand.

### BURN-OUT SELF EXAM

The Women's Self-Help Network collective set aside one day each month when collective members met and discussed the issues that were brought up for them by the self exam. The day helped us understand each other and allowed us to help each other solve problems.

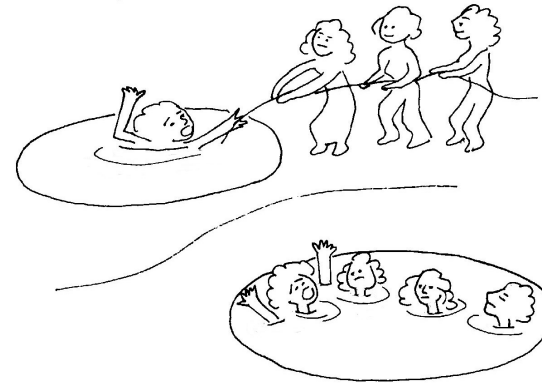
The Burn-Out Self Exam is included in the Tools Section.

### PEER COUNSELLING/SUPPORT GROUPS

The collective's work can be neglected or forgotten if a great deal of time and energy must be spent on providing support to individual collective members.

When an individual's life crisis results in a requirement for more support and attention than the collective can realistically provide, it may be possible for the person's needs to be met in a support group or a peer counseling relationship.

Support and help in finding appropriate assistance may be provided but the energies of the whole collective should not be absorbed by anyone's personal problems.



### LEAVE OF ABSENCE

If an individual is not able to meet their commitments to the collective with the support that is available, a leave of absence may be considered. This decision should take the needs of both the person and the collective into consideration.

Will a leave of absence be helpful to the individual? Can the collective continue to function short-handed or with a temporary replacement?

If the answer to either of these questions is no it may be necessary to consider letting the individual go.

## CONFLICT



Sooner or later conflicts are going to arise. If they are dealt with as they arise, and not left to build, they are easier to handle.

Try:

### CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

State as concisely as possible the action or circumstance of which you are critical

State your feelings

Ask for a specific behavioral change and explain your reason

Please see Tools Section for a more detailed description of constructive criticism

Remember, giving and hearing criticism is not easy. Be clear about what you want to say and sensitive about how you say it.

Constructive criticisms can be given by one individual to another, by one group to another, by a group to one individual, and by one individual to a group.

### AGREEMENTS FOR CHANCE

See section under Power Imbalance

## PEER COUNSELLING OR SUPPORT GROUPS

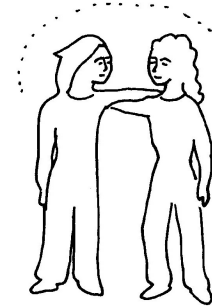
See section under Individual Crisis.

Counseling or support groups may help if there is conflict between individuals that is sapping collective time and energy.

## MEDIATION

See section under Power Imbalance

Mediation may be useful if people are refusing to listen to other points of view.





## ACCOUNTABILITY

Groups form to achieve stated goals. To reach the goal it is essential that individuals within the group complete specific tasks. Because collectives lack a central authority, it is sometimes difficult to keep track of who is doing what, and when the task is to be completed.

Try:

### UNDERSTANDING THE TASK

Be sure you have a clear understanding of the nature of the task and consider the task in relation to a person's other responsibilities. Does the person taking on the task have enough time to properly complete the task?

### UPDATING

At the beginning of each meeting read out the tasks previously assigned. Each person should report on the progress made.

### DEADLINES

At the time that a task is assigned, a date by which it must be completed should be stated.

### CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

See the Tools Section for a detailed description of constructive criticism.

It is important to learn from mistakes and constructive criticism in conjunction with discussion are valuable tools in the learning process.

### RESENTMENTS

When tasks are not completed, for whatever reason, resentments can develop. It is important that these requirements not be allowed to smolder.

## APPRECIATIONS - W. :r

Tasks that are completed and done well should be noticed and applauded.

See the Tools Section on giving appreciations.

Sometimes one person is consistently unable to meet their task commitments. Usually this is the result of upheavals in their personal life. Please refer to the section on individual crisis for suggestions on how to work with the situation.

If the goals of the group are continually being jeopardized you may have to consider firing the person. Please refer to the information on firing included in the section on Power Imbalance.

Accountability often breaks down when the tasks are unrewarding, daily clean-up, for instance. To help with these tasks try:

### JOB WHEEL

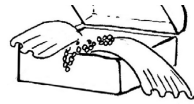
Write the tasks that no one wants on the outside of a large circle. Write the names of all group members on a smaller circle. Cut to fit inside the circle of tasks. Put the circles together and for a week (or a month) each person is responsible for the task next to their name. At the end of the specified time period the inside circle is turned so that each person is responsible for a different task.

### WORKING IN PAIRS

Unrewarding and boring tasks go faster if they can be done with company.



## REWARDS AND RECOGNITION



People who choose to work collectively are usually committed and concerned individuals. That is the good news. The bad news is that the commitment and concerns can create an atmosphere of pressure and urgency which allows no time for fun or play. To do our best work we need to take care of ourselves and have some fun.

Try:

### DISTRIBUTING THE FUN WORK

Jobs usually include things we enjoy and things we don't find much fun. Be sure in allocating the tasks to be accomplished that everyone has a fair share of the fun jobs.

### STAFF DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

Plan staff development sessions to meet staff needs but use your imagination.

For instance, a theatre play may be a rewarding and educational experience that can be related to the collective's work goals.

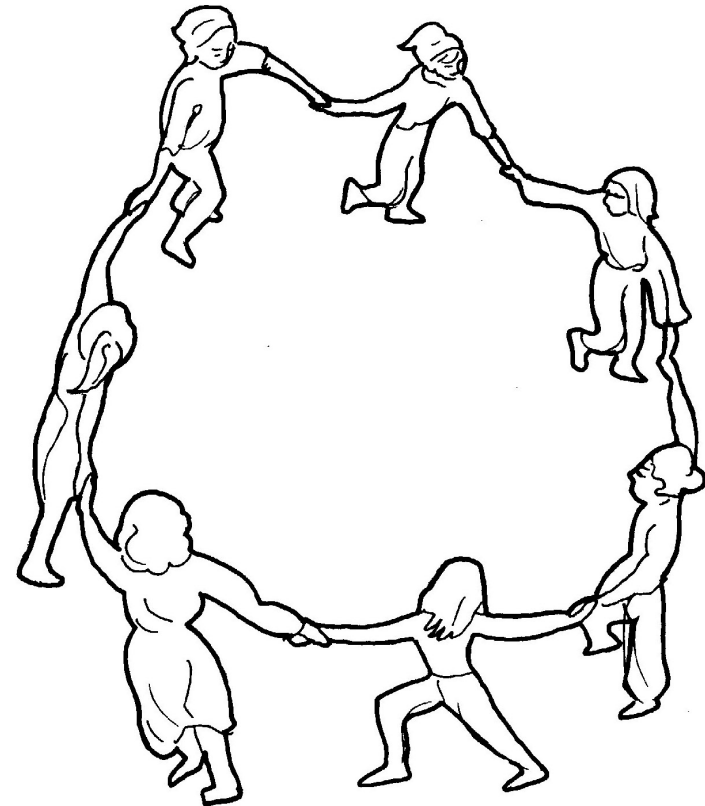
Allot enough time for planning and organizing staff development sessions. Too often staff needs are relegated to the bottom of the priorities list.

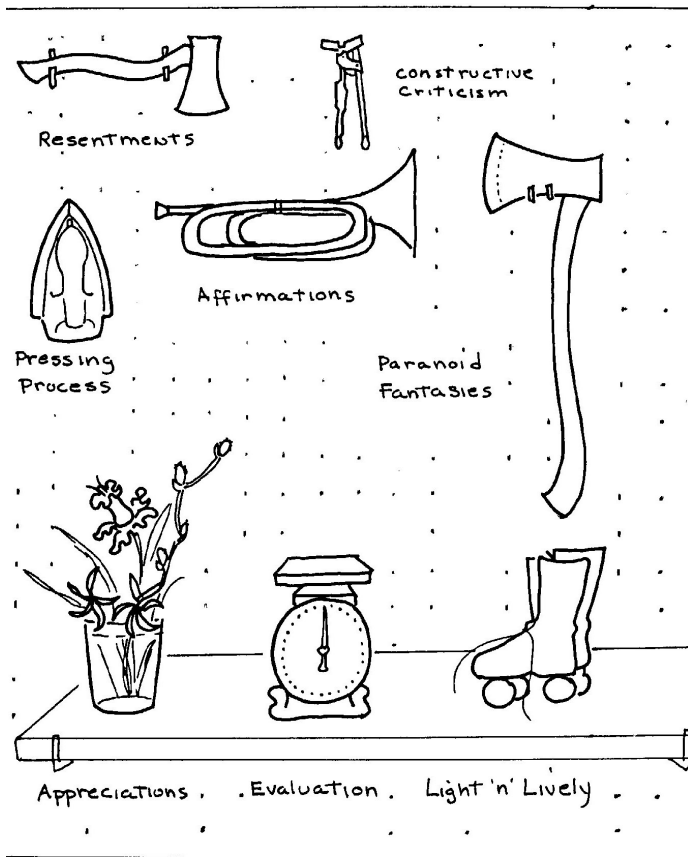
### CELEBRATIONS

Plan celebrations and social gatherings where work is not planned or discussed.

### APPOINTING A RITUAL AND CARETAKING COMMITTEE

Please see the Tools Section for a description of ritual and caretaking committees.





## TOOLS FOR WORKING COLLECTIVELY

Pressing Process

Check-In

Constructive Criticism

Paranoid Fantasies

Resentments

Prioritize and Time Collective Business

Postponement

Time Out

Light and Livelies

Rounds

Evaluation

Appreciations

Affirmations

Facilitators Duties

Burn-Out Self-Exam

Ritual and Caretaking Committee

Peer Counseling

Mediation

## Pressing Process



A collective member has something to relate that is of such urgency she cannot wait until later in the meeting. The member is unable to concentrate or relate to what is going on in the meeting until the matter is dealt with. This may arise in relation to work, a personal crisis, or something which just happened to her on her way to the meeting. Sometimes providing a few minutes at the beginning of the meeting can provide enough support for that person to focus for the rest of the meeting.

## Check in



Each collective member shares briefly, in a round, how they are feeling. This is a temperature gauge of the group and helps members to be aware of other people's situations and feelings. Sometimes how one is feeling may be given in a creative way, such as: pick a letter which describes how you feel, or a saying, or a number, etc.

## Constructive Criticism



Feedback is a way people have of helping each other see how behaviour affects situations or individuals. Feedback is communication which gives information that can be useful when individuals or groups want to consider changing behaviour.

Some useful guidelines for feedback:

**It is balanced.** Looking at the positive aspects of a situation as well as those that cause concern not only makes it easier to hear about the behavior that needs changing, but keeps the picture balanced.

**It is asked for** or agreed upon ahead of time rather than imposed. Feedback is most useful when the receivers have formulated the kind of questions which those observing them can answer.

**It is well-timed.** In general, feedback is most useful at the earliest opportunity after the given behavior. This depends on the person's readiness to hear it, support available from others, etc.

**It is specific rather than general.** To be told that one is 'dominating' will probably not be as useful as to be told that 'just now when we were deciding on the issue, you did not listen to what others said, and I felt forced to accept your arguments or face attack from you.'

**It is descriptive rather than judgmental.** Describing one's own reaction leaves individuals free to use it or not use it as they see fit. Avoiding evaluative language reduces the need for the individual to react defensively.

**It is directed toward behavior** which the receiver can do something about. Frustration is only increased when people are reminded of some shortcoming over which they have no control.

**It takes into account the needs of the receiver** and the giver of feedback. Feedback can be destructive when it serves only our needs, and fails to consider the needs of the person on the receiving end.

**It is checked to insure clear communication.** One way of doing this is to have the receivers try to rephrase the feedback they receive to see if it corresponds to what the sender had in mind.

**It is checked for accuracy.** When feedback is given in a group, both giver and receiver have the opportunity to check with others in the group for the accuracy of the feedback. Is this one person's impression or an impression shared by others?

Feedback is a corrective mechanism for individuals who want to learn how well their behaviour matches their intentions and how it affects others.

## Paranoid Fantasy Agreement:



The Women's Self-Help Collective agreed to use paranoid fantasy as a communication tool. We agreed that when some one feels paranoid, that is that something is going on which is making her feel uneasy or afraid, there is indeed something going on. Even though she may be misunderstanding or misinterpreting the situation, she still has a real reason to think that something is happening that she needs to make sense of.

For instance, I have a paranoid fantasy when I feel afraid because of something you said or did so I attempt to find for myself an explanation of your attitude or behavior. That is, I am afraid that you are angry with me and I think you are angry with me because of something I did.

When we state these paranoid fantasies the other person or the group can help us find the grain of truth it contains. We can get reassurance that there was indeed a reason to feel uneasy or afraid, as well as information to explain the other person's attitude or behaviour. Sometimes there will be only a grain of truth, sometimes there may actually be exactly what we fear going on, and sometimes it will become clear that there is more happening for us than belongs to the particular situation.

Our paranoid fantasy may be coming from larger more general fears about our situation in the world, and these can be explored in the group or in Peer Counseling. This may be what is happening in those few situations when we can't find even a grain of truth.

It is important to enter into an agreement with those we intend to share our paranoid fantasies with so that we can be sure we won't be lied to and that we agree to work together to find the grain of truth.

The steps in a paranoid fantasy agreement are these:

I have a paranoid fantasy about you so I ask your permission to check it out.

You and I agree to do so right away or we set a time when we can.

I state my paranoid fantasy

Together we search for the grain of truth

## Resentments:



Sometimes we have resentments that need to be aired so that they do not get in the way of our communication with each other. Because our feelings are not always subject to the rules of logic, we may think we have no right to feel the way we do and try to repress these feelings. Here is a simple way to deal with this problem. As with Constructive Criticism, it is important to ask if the person is ready to hear the resentment right then, and to arrange another time if not. It may be a current or a held resentment.

Formulating a resentment is essentially following Guidelines Zero, One and Two of Constructive Criticism: checking good intentions, stating concrete behaviour and describing feelings. The person receiving the resentment listens and does not reply (to prevent defensiveness). If further talking is needed it can be done at another time.

If a change in behaviour is required, the resentment would become a criticism. Resentments are used when no change is required and the person's behaviour is acceptable to me but I still feel resentment. For example: If you and I work in the same office and you get a promotion with more pay, I may feel resentful that it happened to you and not me. I may think I am just as deserving as you. Although you are my friend and I am happy for you, my resentment may

affect my behaviour to you in subtle ways. If I have a way of saying my resentment out loud it can clear the air so I am not sitting on held feelings.

Resentments often turn out to be not really towards a person, but about a situation which neither of us can change. By putting them out in the open we can stop taking our feelings out on the person.

### **Prioritize and Time Collective Business**



It is helpful to time all items on the agenda. Those items relating to process may have a fixed time which is decided at the first couple of meetings.

To prioritize the collective business means that the things which must be addressed in the present meeting come first. Giving a time to each item, for example ten minutes for some items and a half hour to an hour for larger ones, provides a check to see if all items can be included in this meeting. If not, some business items may need to be postponed until the next meeting or have their time altered.

It is most helpful to prioritize and time agenda business when the collective is pressed for time or to improve the collective's efficiency.



### **Postponement**

When consensus is not being reached and looks as though it will not be attained within the present meeting, the collective may decide to postpone the issue until the next meeting. Postponement gives everyone more time to think about the issue and perhaps do some outside work on it. A new perspective may arise in that time.

Be careful not to use postponement too frequently or decisions will not be made, but avoided.



### **Time Out**

Time out is a break from the discussion or matter at hand. The break may be an activity, it may be silence. The break activity may be done as a group, or separately (each person going off alone for 5 minutes). Time out helps to remove the emotional charge from a disagreement, gives breathing time and can allow a new perspective to arise.



### **Light and Livelies**

A light and lively is a playful, fun activity that occurs during break times. The activity can be a game, sport, mime, or an exercise. It is best, if it is as it's name implies, light and lively (active). Light and livelies are used when the energy of the meeting is sinking or sunk, when a break or rejuvenation is needed. It helps attention to be drawn away from the subject at hand and refreshes.



### **Rounds**

A round is where each person in the collective comments on the issue. Each person has her say (which is sometimes time  $\pm$  2 or 5 minutes each) without others commenting on it. The person is not interrupted and the next person has their turn without comment in between. Questions may be asked only for clarification if something is not understood. This method provides an opportunity to hear everyone's point of view and helps us to listen more openly and attentively to others.



## Evaluation

Evaluation is assessing how the meeting has gone. It can also provide feedback for the facilitator or individual collective members.

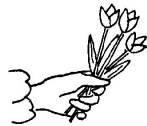
Three questions which give focus to the evaluation are:

What worked?

What didn't work?

How can we do it better?

Paying attention to these questions can improve meetings.



## Appreciations

At the end of the meeting appreciations are shared with each other. Appreciations are positive statements recognizing a member's contributions. Appreciations can be formalized and given in a round i.e. where everyone gives an appreciation to the person on their left, or informally, i.e. where those who feel moved express an appreciation. Other collective members do not interrupt or disagree with an appreciation and the receiver of the appreciation listens and accepts it, rather than denying or altering it.

We all deserve appreciations. Appreciations help us see the positive reality, help us be co-operative and keep us aware that strokes, are rewarding. It may feel awkward at first to give and to receive appreciations, but with practice it's enjoyable.



## Affirmations

Individual collective members, or the group as a whole, make statements that validate themselves, their work, or something they would like to have happen. The statement is made as though the desirable event will happen, thus affirming it. Making positive, validating statements contradicts the tendency to sink into negative patterns or hopelessness and provides an encouraging meeting atmosphere.



## Facilitators Duties

The facilitator facilitates the basic structure of the meeting. The position of facilitator is rotated amongst all collective members. It is important to note that individual collective members may assume one or more of the facilitators duties thus providing a supportive and cooperative meeting environment.

The facilitator:

Presses for focus, involvement, adherence to time (with the help of a time keeper)

Watches group energy-calls for breaks and exercises

Strives to keep task and process clear and power balanced

Introduces rounds, brainstorming, silence

Makes clear when group is in discussion vs. decision-making

Facilitates decision-making process and is responsible for paraphrasing and summarizing

Tests for consensus

Makes clear statement of decision and sees that it is recorded

Facilitates implementing of decisions:

States tasks to be done

Makes sure they are allocated

Makes sure there is agreement on time required and deadline

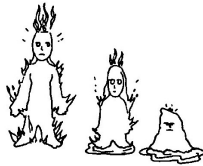
Makes sure decision is recorded

Summarizes what's been covered, what's going on, moves to process if the collective is having difficulties

Encourages members to be open and not to sit on issues

Calls and asks for process on:

blocking, unequal balance of participation, side-talking, topic jumping, aggressiveness, interrupting, no consensus, withdrawn behaviour, people not being heard or not contributing



### **Burn-Out Self Exam**

To help prevent Burn-Out, The Women's Self-Help Network Collective set one day each month aside as a process day. On this day each woman got some time (usually 45 minutes) to talk about her problems and pleasures, using the outline below. The group could help individuals problem solve when that was appropriate.

This exam was developed by the Vancouver Women's Health Collective.

#### **Have you been taking time for yourself?**

Time alone

Spontaneous, unscheduled time

Taking breaks (at work, weekends, holidays)

#### **How's your health?**

Regular exercise Diet

Addictions Sickness Sleep habits

What's your work pattern lately?

#### **Overextended**

Forgetful

Compulsive

Responsibilities you can't catch up with

Difficulty concentrating

#### **How are you with your co-workers?**

Change of behaviour, humor (put-downs, sarcasm)

An increased need for support that doesn't seem explainable by change of circumstance

Critical of self

Defensive

#### **How are you with others? (public)**

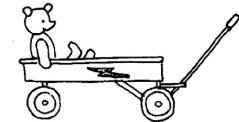
Sarcastic, resentful, abrupt

Using formula to deal with people

#### **How is your personal/political life?**

Relationships

Contradictions



#### **Ritual and Caretaking Committee:**

This is a committee which is responsible for rituals and nurturing. Rituals can be visualizations, spiritual exercises, meditation, or singing. A ritual can be any symbolic activity for the purpose of uniting the collective. The ritual activity provides an opportunity to reiterate core values and remind people why they are together.



Caretaking is nurturing and consists of knowing when someone is in need of a little extra or of providing the whole collective membership with a “goodie”. Maybe the “goodie” is flowers, a poem, a poster or individual non-commercial (so money isn’t involved) gifts – a little something to make each other feel good. Usually this committee consists of at least two persons and the positions are rotated so that all members have an opportunity to participate. The length of time the committee serves depends on what the needs of the collective are, i.e. the committee membership can be rotated every collective meeting, or once/month, weekly or bi-weekly.



### **Peer Counseling**

Peer counseling is a process whereby two people exchange emotional support. Usually peer counseling is done with a partner. Each person takes a turn at counseling and being counseled. The person counseling listens attentively, encourages and supports the person being counseled. The person being counseled talks, expresses and lets go of the emotional hurt associated with the topic. Through this process, clearer thinking results. The exchange is usually timed equally (one hour or less) for each person.

Some collectives use this process on an on going basis in their meetings, It is used as a way of getting clear for the meeting, or to lessen feelings of conflict between individuals which may interfere with the meeting. It is important to note that you do not counsel with the person you have a conflict with, but with someone else.

Some collectives use peer counseling only when there is a conflict. Some take time out from their meeting to do it, while others do peer counseling outside of the collective group on their own time.

### **Mediation**

A person outside the collective is asked to mediate. The person acting as mediator is neutral regarding the situation or issue. Neutral means the mediator is open equally to both sides. A mediator performs many of the same duties as a facilitator except that she may point out options leading to resolution of the disagreement. The options are:

Agreement by the parties involved to change their behaviour and specific steps for attainment.

Contractual agreements-Individuals write or make verbal contracts with each other about what each will do to remedy the situation.

The mediator offers a plan of action that is acceptable to the members involved.

## Resources

### **Dry Bones Rattling:**

#### **Community building to revitalize American democracy.**

Mark Warren, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2001.

The best book about the Industrial Areas Foundation and its methods.

Known for community organizing in cooperation with churches, the IAF has developed sophisticated techniques for identifying, training and developing large numbers of community leaders.

### **Non-violent Communication: A Language of Life.**

Harold Rosenberg, 2003

Rosenberg's four part process is a technique for preventing anger, resentment and conflict. Ury (below) says, "This is one of the most useful books you will ever read".

### **Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In**

Roger Fisher & William Ury, Penguin, 1983.

Fisher and Ury's best-seller on conflict resolution has been translated into eighteen languages. The authors show how conflict can be quite healthy if you can separate the people from the problem, and focus on interests rather than on positions.

### **The Springboard: How Storytelling Ignites Action**

Stephen Denning, 2001

Denning shows how to win people over by telling stories instead of making arguments. Storytelling has become important technique for progressives.

### **Fierce Conversations:**

#### **Achieving Success at Work and in Life One Conversation at a Time**

Susan Scott, 2002

Scott presents a set of practices to make conversations authentic and productive.

### **Solving Tough Problems:**

#### **An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities**

Adam Kahane, 2004

A great book. Kahane extracts useful principles from his international experience working with groups of people who at the outset do not trust one another.

### **The Change Handbook:**

#### **The Definitive Resource on Best Methods for Engaging Whole Systems**

Peggy Holman, Tom Devane, Steven Cady, 2007

A giant 732 page compendium of group processes. Each comes with a 'how-to', how long it will take, how many people can be accommodated, and when it will be useful.

### **A Paradise Built in Hell:**

#### **The Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disaster**

Rebecca Solnit, 2009

Chosen as the best book of the year by seven different newspapers. Solnit tells detailed stories of how people came together to help one another after disasters in San Francisco, Halifax, Mexico City, New York and New Orleans.

### **When Everyone's a Volunteer:**

#### **The Effective Functioning of All-Volunteer Groups**

Ivan Sheier, Energize Inc, Philadelphia, PA, 1992.

Here is a booklet for those who have become queasy riding the roller-coaster of an all-volunteer group. It is written by an expert on building organizations with volunteer support.

### **Building Communities from the Inside Out**

John Kretzmann & John McKnight, Centre for Urban Affairs and Policy Research,

Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, 1993.

The authors argue we can bring communities back to life if we focus on local assets rather than on local needs.

Most of the book consists of hundreds of one-sentence examples of what happens when these and other fragments of community begin working in partnership with one another.

**The Democracy Project, A History, a Crisis, a Movement**

David Graeber, 2013

Anthropologist David Graeber includes a well-written description of his participation in guiding New York's Occupy Movement, the best available description of how to make consensus work, and a section on anarchism that will convert the toughest critics.

**The Spirit Level, Why Equality is Better for Everyone**

Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, 2010

The Spirit Level is a good book for a dark age. It summarizes hundreds of research projects on the impact of income inequality from different countries, and different states in the US. It shows almost everything is affected not by how wealthy a society is, but how equal it is.

**Bowling Alone**

The Collapse and Revival of American community

Robert Putnam, Simon & Schuster, NY, 2000.

This is the classic text on the decline of social capital in North America. Charts and graphs show not only the decline of social capital, but how much better off everyone is with high levels of social capital.

**The Troublemaker's Teaparty**

Charles Dobson, New Society Publishers, 2003

An extension and revision of *The Citizens Handbook*. A succinct guide to community organizing and community building.

**Many other books from New Society Publishers**

<http://newsociety.com>

**WEB Resources**

<http://citizenshandbook.org>