

HOLDING A COMMUNITY ROUNDTABLE

THE IDEA

A “COMMUNITY ROUNDTABLE” IS.....

- Organized by community leaders, activists and groups.
- About a specific issue/problem/question important to residents.

TO.....

- Connect people/groups/agencies who share the same concerns or goals.
- Provide a chance for people to learn, talk, and work together.
- Get the attention of the community and important other stakeholders (government, business, non-profits, etc.)
- Make something happen.

IT IS CALLED A ROUNDTABLE because.....

- Everyone participates as equals. Each person’s ideas, information and experience are heard and considered.
- The main focus is getting neighborhood people talking, producing ideas and working together – **not** on hearing experts/government officials/developers and responding to **their** ideas.

A Roundtable is NOT:

- A public meeting called by a government agency or official.
- A public hearing where the public hears presentations and reacts to plans that have been made by others.
- A gripe session.
- A meeting where you just sit and listen.
- A conversation that leads nowhere.

A **Community** Roundtable is **community-organized** and **community-driven**.

The rest of this Guide describes how to organize and run a roundtable using the experience of the Near Southeast-Southwest Community Benefits Coordinating Committee and Collaboration DC in 2006 and 2007. Sample materials are referenced and included in the back.

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HOW IT'S DONE

The design and planning are done in a way that supports the idea and goals of the Roundtable. That means:

- Making the Roundtable as welcoming and convenient as possible. That means the details and arrangements are important.
- Having a clear topic and goal. That means having a meeting plan (or what we call a process) that is followed.
- Giving everyone the chance to meaningfully participate. That means -
 - There are ground rules *Resource # 3, sample groundrules*
 - Time is divided between table discussions, full room discussions and report-outs and presentations.
 - There are facilitators who make sure the process runs smoothly and everyone gets a voice
- Useful information is provided which means advance preparation and thinking about handouts, presentations, etc.
- All ideas and action items are written down which means that notes are taken, and flipchart used. These are turned into a written report that is a shared, and is a spur to action.
- It produces results – the goal is for something concrete to happen because of the Roundtable. People have to be committed from the start to follow-up and follow-through.

A Planning Checklist is Resource # 1

GETTING STARTED

⇒ SPONSORS

WHAT ARE SPONSORS?

- Several local organizations and leaders from different parts of the community who together put on the Roundtable.
- Co-sponsoring the Roundtable is a cooperative effort that can be a way to connect people and groups that don't usually (or never) work together. This makes connections you can build on.
- Examples: civic/neighborhood association, ANC commissioners, community coalitions, non-profit organizations in the neighborhood that serve residents, churches.

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WHAT DO SPONSORS DO?

- Their names go on all materials as supporting the Roundtable.
- They contribute to the success of the Roundtable in all or some of these ways: planning and organizing; providing resources (funds and/or facilities, etc.), inviting and encouraging attendance, doing publicity.
- They are present and visible at the Roundtable, making welcoming and closing remarks.

⇒ PLANNING COMMITTEE

You need a Planning Committee

- Having a committee spreads the work and the “ownership.”
- Include the sponsors as well as any other community residents you think would be good to have involved.
- Members need to be prepared to come to planning meetings, to do work outside of the meetings, and to attend the Roundtable.
- The Planning Committee needs someone/s whose job it is to:
 - Schedule and run planning meetings, and take and distribute notes
 - Monitor what people are doing, give reminders, and make sure tasks are completed.

ORGANIZING THE ROUNDTABLE

⇒ **Choose the Topic and Name of the Roundtable**

- What is a pressing issue or problem for community residents that would benefit from bringing different people, groups and sectors together?
- What’s a way of presenting the topic that will create interest?

⇒ **Decide who you want to attend. Who should come?**

It depends on the goal-- you need to think about it.

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- You want **residents only** if your goal is to create unity and better understanding among residents, and develop shared priorities. Are there any groups of residents you especially want to target?
- You want more people if you want to work on solutions/actions that engage other sectors. Your scope then may be people/organizations --
 - Is impacted by the problem (might be all residents, youth, small business owners, seniors, etc)
 - Having responsibility for the problem (e.g. government, developers, schools, ANC, other neighborhood leaders)
 - Able to contribute to the solution of the problem (all of the above)
 - In a position to block a solution if they aren't part of it.
- Do you want some participants to present information – be “presenters” or “panelists” as well as join in discussion with others?

The Near SE-SW CBCC's first Roundtable included government and nonprofit representatives because people wanted to hear about workforce and business development programs and see how the community could connect with them. Panelists stayed and joined in the table discussion. The 2007 Roundtable was for residents only because the goal was to develop the community's priorities for community benefits. No one else belonged in that conversation.

⇒ **Figure out your available resources and budget**

- Identify any funds you can tap to pay for the Roundtable
- Identify any “in-kind” resources you can get donated (volunteer time, donated space, supplies, food, etc.)
- Get volunteers who will go after resources and funds. Make plans in line with the resources you put together.

For the Near SE-SW Roundtables free space was provided by Southeastern University and Second Baptist Church. CVS provided free disposable cameras and developing for a photo display, a local small business donated funds for food, a neighborhood grocery store discounted the cost of sandwiches. A non-profit (Collaboration DC) provided facilitation, staffing and supplies through a grant.

⇒ **Recruit a Lead Facilitator (or Co Facilitators)** The lead facilitator/s:

- Works with the planning committee to create a meeting process that serves the goals of the Roundtable.
- Is in charge of the process at the Roundtable. This means being “at the front of the room” to:
 - Create an atmosphere of fairness and impartiality
 - Lead people through the planned agenda

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- Keep participants focused and on task
- Make sure that everyone can participate and no one dominates.
- Facilitate questions and answers, discussions and large group work like report-outs, prioritizing, etc.
- Handle conflicts in a positive manner.

The Lead Facilitator also can train table facilitators to handle their responsibilities during small group discussions.
See Resource #3 - Tips for picking a lead facilitator

⇒ **Set the day and starting/ending times**

- Look at what else is happening in the community (events, meetings, holidays) and avoid major conflicts
- How much time do you need to achieve your goal? What time and day will maximize attendance of those you want to attend?

The 2006 Near SE-SW Roundtable was 6 hours on a Saturday (time for presentations and work sessions.) The 2007 Roundtables were shorter: 3 hours, one on Saturday morning and the other on a weeknight (giving people a choice of when to come.)

⇒ **Pick the Site and Decide How the Roundtable Should “Look”**

- You want a space that everyone will consider inviting and comfortable, and ideally that is centrally located and/or easy to get to. An alternative is two meetings in different locations.
- You need:
 - A big enough room, roughly square, to handle the number of people expected.
 - Movable chairs and tables that seat up to 10 people each (preferable round)
 - Permission to serve food, and tables for doing that.
 - Microphones if you have a panel or presenter/s or acoustics are not good (or the room is large)
 - Handicap accessible

A sample room set up is Resource #2

- Try to get space that's free (no cost). “Donating” space gives a neighborhood institution/organization the opportunity to be a partner with its neighborhoods and support community building.

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- Think about making the physical environment pleasant and attractive. Music during the pre-meeting registration is nice. Displays can feature a photo exhibit of the neighborhood, local artists, maps, useful information.
- What food/refreshments? Do you need to provide a meal or just snacks? Coffee and cold drinks? What do your resources allow? Can you get donations/discounts?

⇒ Identify any other logistical needs and make plans for providing them

- Babysitting? Translation services?

⇒ Advertising and Outreach

- “Early and often” is the guideline
- Use several different methods. Not everyone has or reads email so use other methods as well. Some people need a personal approach. For others it’s good to put something in their hands like a flyer.
- The **message** needs to tell people why they should come - what it's about and what will happen.
- Methods:
 - Make and distribute flyers to post on bulletin boards, pass out door to door, take to meetings, etc.
 - Advertise in community newspapers and newsletters
 - Send Email messages on list serves that reach residents
 - Contact neighborhood groups and churches
 - Word of mouth – talk it up.

CREATING THE AGENDA and PROCESS

⇒ Decide the activities and schedule of the Roundtable

The Lead Facilitator and Planning Group develop a process and agenda. These are elements to consider. The starred bullet points are what make it roundtable as opposed to some other kind of meeting.

- Providing information on the topic of the Roundtable (options could be a presentation, panel, video, powerpoint, handout)
- Question and Answer time

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- Table discussions – facilitated and recorded *
- Full group discussions to hear and discuss the work done at each table *
- Identifying priorities
- Setting Actions steps

Once the activities are decided upon, you assign times so that you can get through everything and end on time.

The 2006t Near SE-SW Roundtable had a panel presentation by several agencies and organizations about jobs, workforce development and business opportunity. A Q and A session followed. Also, a booklet was prepared for each participant that had information on these topics. Two rounds of small group discussions took place and these groups reported to the whole group on the ideas they developed. The Roundtables that took place a year later had no panel, just a brief presentation by the lead facilitator to explain some of the terms and concepts being discussed (using a handout), with the bulk of the time used for small group discussions about community benefits. After the report-outs from small groups, the Lead facilitator led the whole room in merging similar ideas to make a list of options. Everyone in attendance then voted by placing sticky dots on their top choices. This produced the priority community benefits. But all the ideas were included in the written report produced after the meeting. The first Roundtable was 6 hours. The second ones were three hours long.

Sample agendas are in Resource #5

⇒ **Recruit volunteers to facilitate the table discussions**

- These people need to be able to follow a plan, be “democratic” and encourage participation, and not get into the discussion themselves. *Resource #4 is a sample recruiting notice.*
- Table facilitators receive a short (2 hour) training before the Roundtable.

⇒ **Invite Presenters/Panelists (if you will be having this activity)**

- Think about who is the best person/s to do the inviting
- Clarify what the “ask” is – to present for X minutes about Y, to stay for discussion, to bring information, etc.
- Make sure you are clear with them about what the goal is, and the meeting design
- Have the Lead Facilitator talk to presenters before the Roundtable to review their role.

⇒ **Decide What Materials you want to have for participants**

- Is there information that would be helpful to people to have “in hand”?

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- Decide who from the planning committee will get it, make it, copy it
The 2006 Roundtable had a handout with information about the neighborhood (unemployment and poverty rate, etc) and about employment programs and services in the city. In 2007 people were give a short paper defining community benefits, and giving a "starter list" developed by the planning group. People were invited to add to, or modify the list.

⇒ Identify the Supplies you will need

- Easels, flipchart paper and markers for table facilitators and the lead facilitator
- Sign in sheets and name tags
- Masking tape for putting flipchart sheets on the wall
- Displays/decorations?
- Paper for people to use at the tables. You may decide to have simple worksheets.

⇒ Decide on the jobs (other than facilitating) needed on the day of the Roundtable and assign:

- Setting up
- Greeting at the door
- Sign- in table
- Check-in person for facilitators
- Check-in person for presenters
- "Floor coordinator" (someone to keep an eye on everything and trouble-shoot)
- Giving the Opening Welcome
- Note taking (including typing up)
- Cleaning up
- Writing Thank-yous to presenters, donors, hosts, volunteers

⇒ Decide on any "Product" of the Roundtable and how it will get done, as well as other post-Roundtable tasks – ideas:

- A report or other written document and a plan for getting into the "right hands" for implementation
- An action plan with follow up steps
- A campaign/organizing effort
- A newspaper/newsletter article
- A research project to find out important information

REVIEWING HOW IT WENT

- Hold a post-roundtable meeting of the planning committee to talk about how it went, outcomes, products, next steps. Etc.
- Discuss feedback forms (if you used them)
- Develop Future Action (examples)
 - Write an *Action Summary* that will Lay out the needs and issues that have to be addressed, and specific action steps developed by participants at the Roundtable (This can be used as a blueprint that neighborhood groups and leaders can use to represent the community's needs and interests to city officials and developers as they develop their programs and partnerships)
 - Develop a *research project*; gather resourced and partners
- Consider planning a follow up meeting to discuss the report with the public

After the 2006 Roundtable, an Action Summary was written recording all of the ideas about developing job and business opportunities and distributed in the neighborhood and to relevant leaders. In 2007 a report detailing the community benefits identified and prioritized at the Roundtables was prepared and widely distributed. It was also turned into testimony presented to a Council hearing by a panel of neighborhood leaders from the Community Benefits Coordinating Committee

Resource #1
A COMMUNITY MEETING PLANNING CHECKLIST

GETTING STARTED

- Form a planning committee
- Identify and recruit sponsors
 - Involve someone who understands meeting process (this might be the person who will be the lead facilitator-moderator)

ADVANCE PLANNING

- Decide event topic and name
- Decide who you want to attend
 - Determine your budget and available resources (and if you need to raise more)
- Set the day and starting-ending times
- Pick the site
 - It is inviting
 - It will provide the space you need (matches your activities)
- Identify any other logistics needs (transportation, babysitting, etc)
- Advertising and outreach – make a plan and schedule
 - Messaging is important
 - Methods should address the desired audiences
- Design the activities and schedule of the meeting
 - Will you have panels, presentations, small group discussions, rotating discussions (tables around the room), etc?
- If relevant, decide how (and by whom) panelists and/or presenters will be recruited
- If relevant recruit table facilitators and notetakers
- Decide what materials you want to provide participants and how they will be produced
- Identify supplies needed and how they will be obtained
- Decide on any “product” of the meeting and how it will be created and disseminated
- Identify and recruit volunteers for “Day of” tasks (besides facilitators-moderators)
 - Setting up (includes putting signs outside, tables & chairs, etc)
 - Greeting at the door
 - Sign- in table
 - Check-in person for facilitators

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- Check-in person for presenters
- “Floor coordinator”
- Giving the Opening Welcome
- Note taking (including typing up)
- Cleaning up

TIMELINE A WEEK OUT

Week before

- Order food – opportunity to involve community partner
- Get supplies
- Hold an orientation for table facilitators
- Finish any displays
- Finish any materials being handed out
- Confirm with any presenters/panelists and send them orientation info
- Hold an orientation for table facilitators
- Confirm Space

Day Before:

- Visit space –set up if possible (tables for discussion, presenter table if going to use, any technology, area /table for food, tables for sign-in, materials, any information table/s)
- Run through the check list- make sure everything is done.
- Confirm food delivery

Day of:

- Finish Setup
- Have all facilitators, presenters, volunteers, etc report early – “take attendance.” Give any last minute instructions
- One person is in charge of logistics – handling all problems, knows who is supposed to do what
- At end, gather up all the notes or flipchart paper and give to the person who will be typing up

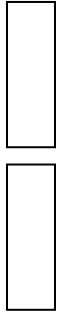
Week after:

- Debriefing meeting – how did it go, lessons learned, follow up steps

Resource #2

Sample Room set-up:

Tables for food and registration



Tables of participants

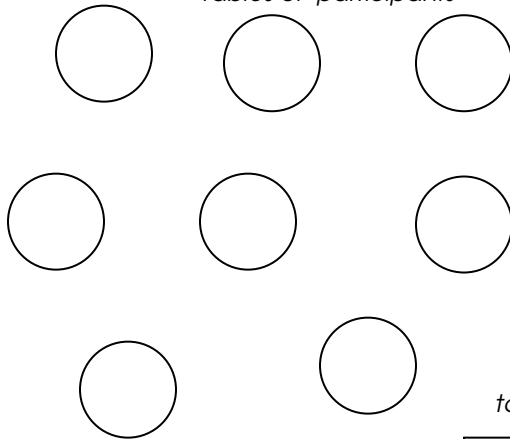


Table for panel presenters (if needed)

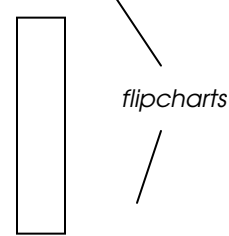
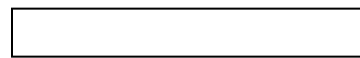


table for information/materials



NOTE
It's ideal if each table has an easel with flipchart paper. You can also arrange tables near walls so paper can be taped up.

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Resource #3

SAMPLE GROUND RULES

- ◆ *Listen carefully.*
- ◆ *Respond to the question at hand.*
- ◆ *Keep responses short and to the point.*
- ◆ *Respect the diversity in the room.*
- ◆ *Be open to other points of view*
- ◆ *Help to create a respectful atmosphere.*
- ◆ *Turn off cell phones.*

Resource #4

ABOUT SELECTING A LEAD FACILITATOR (OR CO FACILITATORS)

Look for a person experienced in facilitating *participatory* meetings who knows how to help a group have a good discussion and get work done.

There are people who like to make speeches, and take charge. They could be great sponsors but probably poor facilitators since they tend to talk too much and play too dominant a role. So look for someone with a track record of facilitating. If the person doesn't know what that term means, it's likely they are not the right person for the job.

Think about whether it is better to have someone from the neighborhood in this role, or whether it's fine (or even better) to have an outsider. The Near SE-SW group used a professional facilitator (not a resident) who was paid from grant money, for the first Roundtable. For the later Roundtables, two neighborhood leaders with good facilitation skills were the co-lead facilitators. The planning group felt that using locally-based people was important at that point.

Some Options:

Professional facilitators who usually work for a fee (but might volunteer)

Residents who are mediators or use facilitation skills in their work as ministers, social workers, teachers, organizers, human resource professionals, managers and the like.