

FACILITATION GUIDE FOR A PRODUCTIVE GROUP DISCUSSION

This brief guide was developed to assist individuals and organizations in reflecting on the various components that should be part of a strategy for solving poverty in Canada. It contains a number of questions designed to stimulate discussion and debate so that everyone is able to participate in the development of such a strategy.

This facilitation guide is quite structured but, as its name suggests, it is intended as a guide only. We recognize your experience and above all your creativity, and we believe the guide offers a starting point that you can improve upon, adapt and develop according to your specific realities

and contexts. We hope it will help you organize a lively group discussion that produces valuable ideas.

Clearly, an activity of this type takes time. The outline provided below is based on a half-day session of about 3 hours, but you can certainly adjust it to suit your own needs. You could divide it into two or three sessions if you prefer or, for individuals, you could go straight to the discussion questions and reflect upon them as suits you best. What matters most for us is to stimulate discussion and ideas. The rest is up to you!

A LIVELY GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Starting off on the right foot If participants have not read <i>Solving Poverty: Four Cornerstones of a Workable National Strategy for Canada</i> , or the Fact Sheets that are part of the Information Kit, we suggest presenting a summary to the group so that everyone can participate fully in the discussion.	10 minutes
2. Clarification period A question period may be necessary to explain and clarify the content of the presentation on <i>Solving Poverty</i> . We suggest not opening the debate at this stage but concentrating instead on making sure everyone understands the content.	5 minutes
3. Spontaneous reactions It might be interesting to ask participants to comment on the very idea of a national strategy for solving poverty. To keep the discussion of this question from taking too much time, we suggest asking people who want to speak on the issue to convey their views in a few key words, which will be written on a flipchart or other visual medium. Then, the group can decide whether it wants to discuss any of the points raised in greater detail.	5 to 15 minutes

<p>4. Presentation on the four cornerstones</p> <p>If the participants agree, we suggest a lively reading of each of the cornerstones, where participants would take turns reading the passages from <i>Solving Poverty</i> or the Fact Sheets to the group. Another interesting idea might be to designate participants to represent the countries or provinces mentioned in the document (e.g. Sweden, Ireland, Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador). Then, during discussion, the appropriate participant would present what “his” or “her” jurisdiction has done in connection with the cornerstone in question. One member of the group could also be assigned to read quotes from the individuals and organizations that answered the NCW questionnaire. To dramatize the process, the facilitator could play the Secretary-General of the United Nations and call on each representative to defend what his or her country has done on each cornerstone. This could make the process still more dynamic and creative. Obviously, many other approaches could be used to present the material.</p>	20 minutes
<p>5. Questions</p> <p>A series of questions on each cornerstone is provided. We suggest reading them to the group to make sure everyone understands the purpose of the process, which is to discuss the components that should be part of Canada’s strategy for solving poverty.</p>	10 minutes
<p>6. Clarification of content and question period</p>	5 minutes
<p>7. Workshops: What do we think?</p> <p>We suggest dividing into four groups and assigning each group the questions related to one of the cornerstones (a different cornerstone for each group). Each workshop chooses a facilitator, a person to take notes and a person to report on the discussion. Each group could be given a large sheet on which to write key words that sum up their ideas, which will be tacked up on the wall during the plenary session.</p>	30 to 45 minutes
<p>8. Pooling ideas in the large group</p> <p>Each team presents a summary of its answers to the questions and explains why it chose a given option in support of a Canadian strategy for solving poverty.</p>	20 minutes
<p>9. Discussion: Points of agreement, disagreement, questions, new ideas!</p> <p>This is the time for debating ideas. Participants could simply take turns speaking and try to reach consensus. Alternatively, coloured pencils could be used: green for key points of agreement; red for disagreement; yellow for questions, doubts and qualifications; blue for additions and new ideas. On the large sheets, each participant circles the points on which he or she wants to express an opinion, using the pencil that matches his or her position. This usually helps people clarify the issues in the debate and work towards a common understanding.</p>	20 minutes
<p>10. Summary, follow-up and evaluation</p> <p>The facilitator attempts to summarize the activity, with the help of all the participants. If the group wishes, the summary may be noted down for future use (e.g. in a newsletter). Then the group may consider what it wishes to do with the content generated by its discussion and make a decision. Finally, the activity is evaluated (verbally or in writing) by answering questions such as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What did I like/dislike about the activity and why? 2) What did I learn? 3) What would I change for the next time? 4) How will I continue my reflection on this topic? 	30 minutes

WHAT NEXT?

What can you do with all your good ideas? Here are a few suggestions:

- Send your summary to the National Council of Welfare;
- Publish an article in your in-house newsletter or write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper;
- Send your summary to your Member of Parliament and your member of the provincial/territorial legislature;
- Encourage other groups to organize a similar discussion for their members;
- Tell people you know about the need for a national strategy to solve poverty in Canada and about your work;
- Any other action you think will help promote the idea of a national strategy for solving poverty in Canada.

Have a productive discussion!

For more information:

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CORNERSTONE #1

A national anti-poverty strategy with a long-term vision and measurable targets and timelines.

- What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of the visions of other countries and some Canadian provinces?
- What should Canada's vision for solving poverty be?
- What targets should a workable national strategy have?
- What should be the stages of this strategy?
- What timelines should we adopt to make sure we achieve our targets?
- If you are not living in poverty, do you think your opinion would be different if you were? How?

CORNERSTONE #2

A plan of action and budget that coordinates initiatives within and across governments and other partners.

- What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of the plans in other countries and some Canadian provinces?
- What exactly should be the federal government's role in a national plan?
- Aside from the provinces and territories, who should be the main partners in an action plan of this type? Who should be involved?
- What type of partnership approach should we adopt with all the provinces and territories, with the other levels of government, and with the other partners?
- How can common goals be reconciled with the specific needs and circumstances of disadvantaged groups (women, Aboriginal people, lone-parent families, etc.)?
- What are the existing holes in the social safety net? What measures or programs could plug those holes?
- Do you know of programs that work at cross-purposes? What should be done to make them fit together and work towards a common goal?

CORNERSTONE #3

A government accountability structure for ensuring results and for consulting Canadians in the design, implementation and evaluation of the actions that will affect them.

- What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of the accountability mechanisms and structures that exist in other countries and some Canadian provinces?
- What structures (government ministry, auditor general, monitoring agency, etc.) are the most efficient and effective in delivering concrete results, in your opinion?
- What mechanisms (public reports, legislation, forums, etc.) are the most efficient and effective, in your opinion?
- How often should we be able to monitor the strategy?
- If you have experienced poverty, or can imagine yourself living in poverty, what role would you want to have in the process of developing, implementing and evaluating a strategy of this type?
- Who should be responsible for a national strategy for solving poverty?
- Which actors should be involved in the monitoring mechanisms? Why some rather than others?

CORNERSTONE #4

A set of agreed poverty indicators that will be used to plan, monitor change and assess progress.

- What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of the indicators being used in other countries and some Canadian provinces?
- Is it preferable to have one or several indicators to achieve the objectives of a national strategy for solving poverty?
- What indicators would enable us to clearly measure progress?
 - Possible wording: "There will be less poverty in Canada when... (indicator)."
- How do you think we can best balance the need for information about poverty and people living in poverty with the need to protect individual rights, and respect their privacy and dignity?