

To build responsive services in your community you have to gather the voices of the users of community services. Responsive and sustainable services are successful because they are built on trust and respect for their service user group – those people most affected by service delivery decisions. Trust occurs when service users feel an openness to share ideas and feelings. Respect occurs when service providers, government officials and service users develop a willingness to listen to the ideas and feelings of others. Both trust and respect are the foundations of effective communication.

Communication is a two way street – an interactive activity in which people share their ideas, needs, information and feelings. Our skill and ability to communicate come from our past experiences and the modeling of others. In other words, our communication skills are based on, and effective by, what we know. Although we are born with the potential to communicate, we must learn to speak and communicate effectively.

Communication is neither the act of speaking nor the act of hearing. Communication does not occur until the listener receives the message that the speaker *intended* to send. Only 7% of the spoken message comes from the words themselves. The remaining 93% come from the tone of your voice and body language such as what you are doing with your arms or your eyes. So to be an effective listener you have to learn how to listen actively to those who are speaking – beyond just the words that you hear.

Being a CARS facilitator is about learning how to listen and how to summarize groups of voices into one collective message. To do that, CARS Facilitators must develop their communication skills, especially their active listening skills.

### **Tips for Active Listening**

Listening takes concentration and energy. The first step is to show others you are listening. Here are some ways to show you are listening.

- **Use creative questioning**  
     Tell me more about.....  
     Why do you think.....  
     In what way.....
- **Repeat the speaker's message** back to them (paraphrasing or parroting)
- **Acknowledge you understand** the speaker verbally or non verbally
- **Show you are listening** through eye contact, body posture and other nonverbal communication techniques like smiling
- **Always allow the person to finish speaking**
- **Never judge what the person is saying**

## **Tips for Effective Facilitation**

### **1. Provide a comfortable space to meet**

Make sure you have picked a place that is physically comfortable to be in. Initially you will be facilitating small meetings - informal and relaxing. These first few meetings will be a test runs for larger community gatherings so don't be upset with a few mistakes along the way. Try new approaches in this safe environment and use the time to identify skills you will need to build for the future.

### **2. Provide space for people to speak**

It is your role as facilitator to ensure that everyone has a turn to speak. This might mean you may have to direct the group process by saying things like "I'd like to give those who have not had a chance to speak an opportunity to share their ideas". Sometimes people need that invitation to participate. If everyone wants to speak at once, a speaker's list usually does the trick!

### **3. Active listening is critical**

A good facilitator shows that they are actively listening to each speaker by:

- Focusing on the person who is speaking
- Rephrasing what the speaker has just said
- Summarizing the main points of the conversation

When a facilitator is modeling active listening skills, he/she is encouraging other participants to do the same.

### **4. Record the points**

There is nothing more important than keeping track of all the great comments and conversations happening in your group. Some facilitators find it difficult to both listen and write, but it is a skill worth developing. What you must learn is how to create a "summarized" version of what is being said, as you will probably not be able to track word for word what people are saying. Periodically take the time to check back with the speaker to see if what you have recorded adequately represents their message or thought.

Practice this skill whenever you can by volunteering to take minutes at meetings or taking a moment to summarize a conversation you just had with a spouse, partner or friend.

### **5. Respect the Agenda**

Try to stay on track. If a meeting is running late, ask the participants what they would like to do - keep going or reschedule.

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