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Huairou Commission Background

Mission

Forging strategic partnerships to advance the capacity of grassroots women worldwide to strengthen and create sustainable communities.

The Huairou Commission fosters grassroots women's groups' participation in decision-making processes focusing on promoting urban and rural livability and sustainable development, local to global, and promotes the awareness of a pro-poor, women-centered development agenda among key bilateral and multi-lateral institutions.

The Huairou Commission, established in 1995 at the 4th World Conference on Women, is a global coalition of networks1, institutions and individual professionals that links grassroots women's community development organizations to partners for access to resources, information sharing and political spaces. Driven by grassroots women's organizations from around the world, this unique network partners with individuals and organizations who support the belief that it is in the best interests of local and international communities for grassroots women to be full partners in sustainable development. The Huairou Commission is a collaboration among development professionals and locally focused women's networks that aims to highlight and upscale the effective local development approaches of grassroots women's groups and to establish development policies and programs that foster their replication. Organizing their work by thematic Campaigns, Huairou Commission members focus on network building, knowledge sharing, and advocacy activities associated with three crosscutting themes:

- ►Sustaining grassroots women's leadership in redeveloping families, homes, communities, and economies in crisis situations (disaster, post-conflict, and HIV/AIDS);
- ►Local governance and asset-securing approaches that anchor grassroots women's participation;
- ►Collaborative partnerships that strengthen and upscale grassroots local knowledge and advance alternative development policies.

Following Huairou's strategic planning meeting held in 2003, member organizations working on basic needs and human settlement issues committed themselves to campaign initiatives organized around five themes:

- ►Governance
- ►Community Response and Resilience
- ►AIDS
- ►Land and Housing
- ►Peace Building

[1]Huairou network members are Federacion de Mujeres Municipalistas, GROOTS International, Information Center of the Independent Women's Forum (ICIWF), International Council of Women (ICW), Habitat International Coalition-Women & Shelter Africa, Women & Habitat Network-LAC, Women & Peace Network, Women in Cities International

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These Campaigns, identified bottom-up from the work of grassroots women's organizations, concretize and advance the contributions poor women are making to reduce poverty, meet basic needs, re-establish collective self-help approaches, and change local decision making to include them. The Huairou Commission's core goal is to *win the development community's recognition that grassroots women's groups' participation in local planning, implementation, and evaluation is a prerequisite for effective poverty reduction and decentralization*[2].

The Huairou Commission seeks partners to join with it and its member organizations to:

- ►Identify, pilot, replicate, and upscale effective strategies by low income women's groups to meet basic needs, respond to conflict and emergency situations, and cooperate with local authorities to promote women's involvement in solving local problems and engendering formal decision making.
- ►Document and disseminate these strategies as well as the Commission's set of capacity building methodologies to promote recognition among the general public, policy makers, and development institutions of why and how women must be supported to act as development agents in poor communities.
- ►Share and analyze our lessons learned, areas of influence, and partners, in order to coordinate and collaborate in thematic and cross cutting advocacy at the regional and global levels.

The Huairou Commission was granted special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in 2004.

The Huairou Commission's Land and Housing Campaign

The Huairou Commission's Land and Housing Campaign is working with grassroots women's groups to identify innovative on-the-ground strategies and practices that women are using to fight for their rights to land and property at the local, national and international levels. Our focus is to build the capacity of grassroots women's groups and to highlight the strategies and practices they are implementing to improve women's social, economic and political status within their communities. *Empowering women working at the grassroots is essential to increasing poor women's access to land, housing and property.*

[2]Please refer to the Huairou Commission's website for more information on its work and Campaigns: http://www.huairou.org.

Foreword the Huairou Commission Secretariat

The Huairou Commission was founded with a commitment to supporting grassroots-driven learning processes including Peer Exchange that enable grassroots women to claim and share their own knowledge. As the value of knowledge increases and like in the case of private property owndership, theres a tussle over who owns and has it, this is a way for gros to own and claim their knowledge and control it versus other people. Groups that have been limited and left out of that are those at the grassroots level. This is part of the effort to support the initiatives that grassroots groups have to build their own peer learning processes. People go on exchanges to get ideast athat they are actually implementing

The exchange process, which is an essential element of peer learning, was developed by the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers (SPARC), in Bombay India in the early 1990's. GROOTS International members adopted and adapted exchange of practice as a cornerstone of its work in the early 90s and went to India to experience an exchange on savings and credit directly, hosted by SPARC and Swayam Shikshan Prayog. From then on, GROOTS members have incorporated exchange as a core methodology in their work. The Huairou Commission adopted the method and expanded and deepened the use of peer learning processes in its global work. This booklet is dedicated to SPARC, GROOTS International and the hundreds of grassroots women who have participated in exchanges and will continue on this work. We hope that this booklet will be a helpful tool, and we welcome comments and contributions.

GROOTS International

GROOTS (Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood) International is building a global movement of rural and urban grassroots women's groups who are improving quality of life in poor, marginalized communities in the South and North through bottom-up, pro-poor, socially just, pluralistic solutions. GROOTS International is committed to the empowerment of grassroots women to:

- Develop their communities using pro-poor socially just, equitable, policies and solutions
- Advance governmental and institutional accountability to grassroots women
- Strengthen women's leadership to access and transform power at different levels
- Bridge the local and global by bringing grassroots analysis, solutions and voices to local, national, regional and global decision-making.

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Globally, GROOTS runs five thematic programmes, each reflecting member's community development and advocacy priorities. The programs support peer learning and training opportunities, expand and strengthen grassroots women's organising and negotiating efforts, focus on shifting policy priorities and investments, and engage institutions and partners of influence to support grassroots women's agendas for short- and long-term change. The current programs are, a) scaling up grassroots women's strategies for strengthening local governance, b) fostering caring community development: recognising and supporting the alternative social support and education approaches of grassroots women, c) from crisis to opportunity: linking African grassroots women's groups leading the response to the HIV and AIDS pandemic, d) building resilient communities: women reduce risks, hazards, and the impact of disasters, and e) economically empowering ourselves through sustainable livelihoods, assets, and agriculture.

GROOTS International is a founding Member Network of the Huairou Commission.

Background of Women's Land Link Africa (WLLA) project

The Women's Land Link Africa project (WLLA), funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) since 2004, supports and strengthens linkages between regional stakeholders focused on improving grassroots women's access to, control over, and ownership of land and housing in Africa. The overall objective of the project is to ensure the involvement of grassroots women and their organizations as essential stakeholders and to increase knowledge transfer. WLLA coordinating partners include the Huairou Commission and the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE). The role of the Huairou Commission within the WLLA project is to involve women-led grassroots organizations and grassroots focused non-governmental organizations into a regional network and peer learning community focused on housing, land and property issues. As of 2007, the Huairou Commission has involved 16 grassroots member organizations from ten countries across three regions in Africa (Southern, Eastern and Western).

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What is a Peer Exchange?

Grassroots women's organizations place a high value on learning from each other. Often they encounter nongovernmental organizations, educational institutions, and government agencies that discount the experiences of grassroots organizations because they have less formal training and education and fewer resources available to them for development. However, grassroots organizations are the experts on their own experiences and these experiences are often critical to development. In order to understand the effects of AIDS on rural families in sub-Saharan Africa, the impacts of reductions in public support for the low-income women in US cities, or the effects of poor disaster planning on women and families in areas prone to natural disasters, it is important to engage the people most directly affected in exploring these issues and engaging them directly in the process of developing effective remedies. No one is better at this than grassroots organizations. They are who they serve, so the leaders of grassroots organizations value experience over many other kinds of learning because experience has been at the core of their own development.

Peer exchanges are a learning tool that grassroots women's development organizations have employed for many years to learn from the experiences and practices of each other. A peer exchange occurs when two or more grassroots organizations believe they have something to share with each other that can increase the capacity of all the groups involved in the exchange. They make arrangements to visit one another in order to see and experience how other grassroots organizations approach their work and to share their perspectives on development. It is not a training program, but an exchange of ideas and experiences. Most grassroots organizations that are effective in their communities have developed skills, approaches, and processes for effecting change and creating development in their communities from which others can benefit. A peer exchange is a tool for grassroots groups to share their unique talents and experiences with others and to learn from the experiences of other grassroots organizations.

When grassroots organizations gather at regional, national, or international networking events, they often meet others with similar values and ideas about the kinds of change they would like to affect in their communities. They develop relationships with leaders from other grassroots organizations around common interests, values, and goals and look for opportunities to learn from each other. One of the challenges of large networking events is finding time for grassroots groups to focus on how the work of one grassroots organization can specifically support the work of another. In order to do that kind of sharing, grassroots groups look for opportunities to spend more time together where they can gain a better understanding of the environment in which each group does its work. When a grassroots organization can visit the community of another grassroots organization, it has the opportunity to witness how the development process works in that community and members are better able to more effectively compare the experience of others to their own experience. A peer

Box A: Mother Centers International Network for Empowerment The German Mothers Center in Stuttgart, Germany and the WomanSpirit of St. Louis, Missouri are both long time members of GROOTS International. Leaders of these two groups (Andrea Laux of MINE and LaDoris Payne of WomanSpirit) met and developed a relationship through International forums where GROOTS was present. As their relationship developed they found that their respective organizations could learn much from each other. LaDoris learned from her relationships with Andrea the importance of public space for women. This was a concept that was not well understood in her community. By bringing Andrea and others from MINE to St. Louis and taking groups to Stuttgart, others in her organization and community were able to get a better understanding of how public space for women could be a benefit to them. WomanSpirit incorporated some elements of the German Mothers Center into their public space, the Imani Family Center. Andrea was interested in connecting to other groups in her community, building bridges among grassroots organizations, local government and business and creating social change. The Circles of Hope as developed by the Imani Family Center is a change process that engages women in creating their own futures. MINE benefited by having the women in their organization and other community partners learn the process and see it in action. MINE has since adapted the elements of the Circles of Hope to their community. Over the years they have held a number of exchanges. Sometimes the exchanges involved one or two people traveling from one community to the other. At other times exchanges involved whole delegations. In the process they have strengthened ties among the two organizations and between their communities, increased the capacities of each organization, and developed stronger connections with other institutions in their communities.

exchange is ideal for this kind of learning because it is group to group and focused on an agenda developed in collaboration among the organizations involved in the exchange. International events such as those hosted by GROOTS International, the Huariou Commission and other international networks often have sessions where the sharing of best practices takes place. These events incorporate some of the elements of a peer exchange, model some of the processes important to a successful peer exchange and are excellent venues for building networks and developing agendas around global issues that affect development across communities. These events bring grassroots women's organizations together around mutual development interests and connect the work they do locally to a broader agenda for change nationally and internationally, provide support and incentives for grassroots organizations as they develop their work, and serve as forums where grassroots voices are shared and included in the public development agenda.

Box B: GROOTS Kenya is a network of grassroots women community organizations with hundreds of member organizations. GROOTS Kenya has effectively used peer exchanges to facilitate the exchange of ideas among its members, connecting groups together so they can share their experiences providing home-based care to neighbors with HIV/AIDS, effectively creating a support system for these groups, encouraging the sharing of best practices, and facilitating the dissemination of high quality grassroots practices.

Peer exchanges focus on exploring the needs and the capacities of the organizations planning the exchange. For example, in 2003, the Huairou Commission in conjunction with its member organizations and other grassroots partners held a Grassroots Women's International Academy built around the experiences of grassroots organizations focused on combating AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. They took testimony from many grassroots women's organizations and exchanged many ideas. Relationships were formed among the grassroots women's organizations that participated in that forum and peer exchanges emerged from those relationships.

Table A: Comparing Peer Exchanges to Training Programs[3]

Peer Exchanges	Training Programs
Led by communities where they set the learning agenda, identify and develop the curriculum and facilitate the learning.	Led by professionals who set the learning agenda, provide the curriculum and lead the sessions
Teaching and learning is a shared responsibility for participants and facilitators	Clear distinctions exist between the learners and the teachers. The professionals teach and the participants learn.
Learning is experiential based on the sharing of practices that have been proven to work on the ground in communities.	Learning strategies are based on knowledge transfer—transferring what the teacher knows to the learner
Peer Exchanges often focus on the development of collective solutions addressing community problems	Many training programs are focused on the provision of individual services. Collective approaches are not often differentiated from individual approaches.
Peer exchanges provide opportunities for participants to interact in the work of the host gaining first hand knowledge and experience.	Learning strategies are often instructional. When experiential sessions are incorporated into the learning they tend to be focused more on a "show and tell" exchange of ideas rather than an immersion in the work of the host.
Community members evaluate and assess the value and transferability of the learning to their own contexts based on their own needs, priorities and standards.	Outside evaluators determine whether learning has occurred and whether or not what has been learned is valuable and transferable based on a predetermined set of standards and outcomes.

[3]Adapted from Peer Exchanges: How to Make Them Work by Suranjana Gupta

Values and Principles Reflected in the Peer Exchange

Principles are a reflection of the values of a group. They articulate what is important to people about their actions and provide guidance to how people interact and share with one another. Principles are often a reflection of the cultural norms and values of the group, and they describe what those values look like in action. For instance, one common value among peer education is co-learning. Co-learning means that those who would teach also learn in the education process and those who learn share some responsibility for teaching. There may be several principles that reflect a co-learning value but in general a principle for a peer exchange would broadly describe what that value looks like for the peer exchange. "The experiences of peer exchange participants are the building blocks of learning," is an example of a co-learning principle for a peer exchange constructed around a co-learning value. In this case it can also be used as a tool for evaluating the program at the end. For example, by looking at how often we incorporated the experiences of participants in the peer exchange we can get a measure of how well that principle was reflected in the peer exchange.

Establishing a common set of principles among the parties involved in a peer exchange is critical to the success of that exchange because often the groups may share values, but the way those values are expressed may differ from one community to the next. For instance, two groups interested in a peer exchange may share a core value of inclusion. Inclusion for one group may mean that everyone participates equally such as giving everyone equal time to speak. Inclusion for the other group may mean that everyone gets to participate in some manner, but their cultural norms dictate who gets to speak and when. These kinds of differences need to be explored together and principles should be crafted that bridge between the differences in how common values are interpreted by the groups involved in the peer exchange.

By establishing a set of overarching principles that govern how the grassroots groups will work together as they plan and implement a peer exchange, planners can avoid many of the misunderstandings that arise from differences in how values are interpreted and begin to build their relationship and learning experiences around those values where they share common ground. The following are samples of values and principles reflected in peer exchanges.

1. Place is important. During a peer exchange it is important for the host to ensure the visitors get to experience the place first hand. The visiting groups in a peer exchange often spend time in the community with their hosts experiencing what it is like to live and work in that community. When hosts show and share with their visitors the type of work they do and where they do it, learning takes place. Ownership is important to those groups whose norms and values exist in contrast to what exists in the broader community. Grassroots groups are often most comfortable talking about what they do in their own space. If a grassroots organization has its own place to meet and work, the space will be a reflection of their norms and values. Sometimes the work of the group is reflected in their places. The work of the German Mothers Center is closely linked to the place. It not only provides a central focus for their work, but also each center reflects the values and norms of the women who are part of that center. Visitors to one of the German Mothers Centers will see that the women are the focus of development; the rules are a reflection of their own culture. Visitors from the broader community understand that

Box C: The Woodlands Community Land Trust is a grassroots organization that provides land to low-income families in a rural Appalachian community in Tennessee. There is very little land available to people from the area, so the land trust was formed to accumulate land and offer long-term leases to families who want to remain in the area. Their work is so closely tied to the land that it is impossible to fully appreciate and understand what they do without visiting the community, seeing how the organization works and experiencing the strong connection they have for the land. Their identity is closely tied to the place when they visit a Mothers Center, the women make the rules, so things that would not necessarily be appropriate in the broader community may be part of the culture of the place. Everything from how the place is decorated, the types of programs that are conducted there, how decisions are made, and how people interact with each other is part of the identity of the group and can be reflected in the place. Therefore, it can be easier to understand the scope and the value of grassroots organizations when they are experienced in their places.

2. Participatory learning methods are central to the experience. Grassroots organizations value experience, so an effective peer exchange should include opportunities to see and experience the process or program they are studying. It is not a conference where participants passively sit and listen to others share their ideas. In a peer exchange, the expectation is that the program will be structured in a way that facilitates and encourages the participation of the women.

3. Collective Learning that emerges from shared practices and experiences is central to a peer exchange. Facilitators and organizers have an obligation to structure learning and dialogue sessions that explore the experiences of the participants because those involved in peer exchanges value the experiences and practices that they have developed through their own work and wish to share with each other.

4. Co-learning is a value expressed in the way peer exchanges are conducted; it builds on collective learning. Co-learning implies that the participants, facilitators, hosts, partners and allies share responsibility for learning and sharing at a peer exchange. Co-learning expresses the value that everyone has experiences that are valuable to the learning and everyone has some responsibility to share their experiences. Conversely, the organizers need to ensure that opportunities and processes are in place to facilitate that type of interaction.

5. Evaluation and Dissemination. One of the outcomes of a peer exchange is that the groups involved have begun to create a collective history together. They have a responsibility to share what they have learned with other grassroots organizers who may come later making it possible for them to build on this history rather than having to recreate it. The work of each peer exchange should serve as a guide for the future. Evaluating the peer exchange and figuring out how to share what was learned with other grassroots groups is a means of marking trail as they go, making it easier for those who may choose a similar path in the future.

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Deciding if a Peer Exchange Is Right for Us

One of the primary benefits of bringing grassroots women together in their networks, at conferences and international forums is the sharing that takes place among the women who are able to attend. They value the opportunity to share their best practices with one another, explore issues that bridge differences in culture and ethnicity, and develop regional, national, and international agendas that give voice to their concerns and focus on those issues important to women and families. One of the core values of many grassroots organizations is peer learning—that is that other grassroots groups are best able to teach other grassroots groups how to work in grassroots communities. One of the core concepts of peer exchanges is that grassroots groups learn best from other grassroots organizations who have faced similar challenges and issues successfully. Grassroots groups dealing with housing issues best learn from other grassroots housing groups; grassroots organizations addressing AIDS will best learn from the practices of other grassroots groups addressing AIDS issues; and grassroots organizations addressing issues of economic development will learn best from other grassroots economic development groups.

A peer exchange is one means of peer learning that GROOTS International has facilitated among its organizations to encourage the sharing of best practices among grassroots groups. In a peer exchange grassroots organizations visit other grassroots organizations to share their experiences, strengthen connections with other grassroots organizations, explore the similarities and differences of grassroots development in different communities, and share best practices. When a group is thinking about exploring the possibility of hosting or participating in a peer exchange they should consider the following:

1. What will our organization gain by hosting or participating in a peer exchange?
Many obvious potential benefits can be seen, such as stronger networks with other grassroots organizations at home and abroad, the sharing of best practices, and an increased capacity for the work that the organization does. The closer the benefits can be tied to the actual work of the organization the easier it will be to justify the expense of participating in a peer exchange.

Box D: Key Benefits of Participation in a Peer Exchange

1. Learn from other grassroots organizations that have dealt with similar issues and compare your experiences with other groups who have similar values and share an understanding of the work you do

2. Strengthen relationships with local community partners, develop new relationships with potential local partners, and strengthen ties to local, regional, national and international networks of grassroots women.

3. Understand the contexts in which other grassroots organizations work

4. Identify and learn about practices that can be adapted to your own community

5. Opportunities for people in your organization to assume new leadership roles

6. Documentation of the work of grassroots groups that can be shared with other groups, donors, and policymakers interested in the work of your organization and your peer exchange partner

7. Hosting a peer exchange is an opportunity to reflect on the work and the programs that have worked, as well as the challenges, and to develop tools to help others learn from your experience.

8. Expand the capacity of your organization through the exploration of other cultures and their experiences.

2. Are there others in the host community who would benefit from the program?
Sometimes the work of a visiting organization may be appealing to other groups and organizations in the host community that have an interest in the work of a group involved in the peer exchange. Participating may provide an opportunity to work more closely with these other community groups and open doors previously not accessible.

3. What are the costs of participation?
This analysis should go beyond the obvious consideration such as housing, food, and transportation. Consider the amount of time and energy involved in preparing and following up an exchange. If it is too taxing for the organization, it may be a good idea to postpone or look for other collaborators before making a final commitment.

4. Who are potential collaborators?
Consider community allies and partners who have worked together in the past, but also consider others with whom there is no existing relationship. If the program is centered around HIV/AIDS, are there other groups that have an interest in that topic who would be interested in participating in some way?

5. What are the obvious challenges to successfully participating in this exchange?
If there are obvious challenges, consider them before making a decision. For instance, if the proposed exchange is international, decide whether or not the capacities exist within the groups to overcome the costs of travel, differences in culture and language, and contexts in which the groups work to make the proposed exchange beneficial.

6. What are the possibilities for follow-up?
A peer exchange is best when it is a step in the development of an ongoing relationship among grassroots organizations. When planning a peer exchange, consider whether or not it will be possible to sustain the relationship over time. Are there common networks, venues, and forums where the groups can continue to develop and grow their relationship? Will there be commitment from the groups to move forward?

7. What do we have to share?
A peer exchange means that all the parties will actively share their experiences with one another. Before committing to an exchange, it is a good idea to assess what you have to share. Sometimes a group may need more experience or time with a project before they can effectively share their work with others.

The process of deciding to participate in a peer exchange requires looking at the experience from a variety of angles. Consider the work and financial implications, the learning and networking benefits and the opportunity to build stronger relationships with groups in our communities. It is something that should be discussed extensively within the organization and among those who are considering the exchange.

Worksheet 1 :: Is a Peer Exchange Right for Us

1. What do we do well enough to share with other grassroots groups?

____

____

____

2. What grassroots networks do we belong to? (Regional, National, International?

____

____

3. Are there organizations in these networks with similar values, concerned about some of the same issues as our group that we would like to work with to develop a peer exchange? If so, who are they?

____

____

____

4. What do we do that these groups can learn from?

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5. What opportunities exist for peer exchanges among the groups we know?

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____

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6. What are the potential benefits and pitfalls of this exchange?

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____

7. How can we prepare ourselves to share our experiences with other groups?

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8. What resources will we need for this exchange?

____

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9. Who else in our community would benefit from the exchange?

____

____

How do we prepare to host a Peer Exchange?

Organizing a Peer Exchange for the first time can be a daunting task. There are logistical issues to address, travel plans to facilitate, food and lodging arrangements to make, and a program to organize. The following framework, checklists, and worksheets should make it easier to pull together the pieces necessary to host a successful exchange. The process begins with the formation of a host committee responsible for coordinating the local arrangements for the peer exchange, coordinating program planning with the peer organizations participating in the exchange, and developing a program.

The host committee is the heart of the effort. There are a number of tasks that they will need to do directly, such as facilitating contact with the exchange partners, setting a time and place for the exchange, training staff, and developing group standards, which will govern the relationship, in collaboration with exchange partners. In addition, the host committee is responsible for managing the local arrangements necessary to ensure that the exchange is a success. Arrangements include developing a program, researching and preparing background materials for the exchange, courting partners, developing a budget, arranging for food and lodging and making transportation arrangements. The host committee plays a leadership role in coordinating and managing all the planning activities required to successfully host a peer exchange.

Remember as you plan the Peer Exchange to constantly communicate with those who will be visiting. Both parties should work together to lay out objectives, agreements and expectations, all of which should be set down in writing prior to the exchange. This should include standards on who should participate, whether they be staff members, youth leaders, grassroots organizers or others. Logistical arrangements should also be set down in writing so that Exchange participants will know what to expect.

Direct Responsibilities of the Host Committee

The host committee will play many roles in putting together a peer exchange. Many tasks that need to be completed can be delegated to smaller groups or staff that can make the necessary arrangements. However, there is a management and oversight function that the host committee will need to play in order to ensure that the various tasks are completed. In addition, there are several key tasks that they will need to engage in directly.

1. Maintain a relationship with the peer organization(s). The host committee is the focal point of the exchange for those who come as visitors in the exchange. Members of the host committee will communicate with the visiting organizations and assist with their preparations for the exchange. Visitors often want to know what will happen on the exchange, where they will be staying, who they will visit, what type of clothes they should bring, if there are special protocols that need to be observed for certain events, how much money they will need and what they will be expected to do. In collaboration with the visiting groups and the volunteers and staff who are making the plans and arrangements, the host committee will make sure that the visitors are well prepared for the exchange.

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2. Selecting a time and place for the exchange. This is important to both the visitors and hosts. If a host organization has the facilities to accommodate an exchange, choosing a place may not be too difficult. However, when the hosts have to arrange for facilities to use as a base for the exchange, they may need to work with local partners and make arrangements for a site to host the visitors that is appropriate to the work that the participants wish to accomplish.

When planning the timing of the exchange, organizers should consider the schedules of the hosting organization and the visiting organization. It is generally a good idea to try to avoid times when either group has other important work happening at the same time as the exchange. Hosting an exchange is a big event; trying to do it while working on another big project may make it difficult to do well with either the project or the exchange. It may be tempting to have an exchange when another event is occurring, so the visitors can see how the organization works during a big project or event. If this is the case, remember that it may require more assistance and collaboration in order to make the exchange work. An ideal time for an exchange is when there are things to see and do that illustrate the work of the hosting organization but is not such a busy time that it becomes difficult to effectively manage the exchange. A peer exchange is not just a show and tell. Hosts also have learning objectives for the exchange and need to ensure they schedule the event so they can also be engaged participants.

3. Preparing staff and volunteers. The host committee will need to directly oversee and in some cases provide training to the staff and volunteers who will help host the peer exchange. This may include training in some of the basic tasks associated with planning such as making budgets, coordinating trip arrangements, contacting local partners, and arranging for transportation. In addition, they will need to be prepared to serve as hosts by learning about some of the customs and protocols of their visitors, thus ensuring the arrangements are all in order and helping the visitors feel at home in their new surroundings.

4. Developing group standards. The collaborators in an exchange will likely have their own way of working and making decisions. Developing group standards means that before too much work is done there should be agreed upon standards for making decisions regarding the planning and conduct of an exchange and convening the group. Standards that have been used in peer exchanges in the past include those found in Box E. These may or may not be suitable for your exchange, but can serve as a place to begin when negotiating a set of standards to guide the process for your exchange.

Box E: Group Standards

- Determining who should be at the table—ensure all the people important to the success of the exchange are equal partners.
- Granting participants equal access to decision-making—all participants are important to the success of an exchange and should be included in decision-making
- Transparency regarding plans and funding—conflicts often arise when people do not understand how plans were developed, decisions, were made, and resources were acquired and allocated. Transparency helps minimize these misunderstandings.
- Framework for establishing goals and a timeline for accomplish ing them—goals drive the success of an exchange. An effective framework helps to ensure that the goals are well understood by all and the timeline serves as a benchmark to let us know how we are doing in the completion of our tasks.
- How will we evaluate our success—determine up front what constitutes a successful exchange and decide how we will know when we have accomplished the goals of the exchange. It is much harder to agree upon the conditions of an evaluation after the program is complete.

5. International considerations. If the peer exchange is international, additional concerns such as assisting with visa applications, making travel arrangements, arranging for translation, and accommodating differences in diet are issues that the host committee will need to consider as it plans the exchange. The visitors are often responsible for making their own travel arrangements. Occasionally it becomes a joint responsibility. For instance, if the host committee has a local partner or sponsor who is paying for the plane tickets, then it may be necessary for the host committee to make some of the travel arrangements. In addition, if visas are necessary for international participants, the host committee and other local partners may be asked for letters of support, itineraries, and lodging arrangements as a requirement of the visa application process. These issues are often time sensitive and may require direct action from the host committee.

Management responsibilities—local arrangements

The set of actions described above are activities that the host committee will need to be directly involved in facilitating as they develop the peer exchange. In addition, there are a number of planning activities that they will need to coordinate or manage. It is the careful planning and preparation that will ultimately ensure that a good experience will result from the exchange. The degree to which a host committee will need to delegate tasks will be dependent on their experience, the resources available to them and the complexity of the exchange. The process is simpler for a shorter exchange involving a handful of visitors than it is for an exchange with two-dozen visitors coming for a week or more. Many of the tasks are the same for either type of exchange, but the amount of help needed to accomplish the tasks may vary.

Host Committee

Program | Partners | Transportation | Logistics | Budget | Research

Research and preparation of background information

A number of resources need to be developed for a peer exchange including general information about the community, an analysis of the issue that forms the context of the peer exchange, a description of the places that will be visited, biographies of potential presenters and information about how the best practices will be shared to relate to the issues being discussed. Once a topic has been selected as the focus of a peer exchange such as living with HIV/AIDS, affordable housing, or providing for orphans, there is a certain amount of preparation a group will need to complete in order to effectively share their best practices within a larger community context. A group wants to be able to explain why their practice works and the impact it has on the broader community. What makes this practice a best practice? Why does the method we have developed effectively address the issue?

Why do we believe that what we have learned will be effective in other communities? In preparation for the peer exchange the group wants to be able to answer these questions and others. Preparing for a peer exchange means being able to provide information to peer organizations that will make the learning experience useful to them and help them decide what aspects of the best practice being shared can be replicated in their communities.

Box F: Research Questions Important to Planning an Exchange

1. What do we want to share about our community with our peers?
2. Why is the issue we are studying in this peer exchange important to our organization and our community?
3. What factors affect our community's ability to effectively respond to this issue?
4. What is the practice that we want to share with our peers?
5. How does this practice effectively address this issue?
6. Why is this practice important to the community?
7. Why have other approaches to the issue failed?
8. Why do you believe this practice will be useful to other peer organizations?

In preparing to host a peer exchange the hosting organization needs to be able to answer a few questions that will help them make the exchange an effective learning experience for their peer organizations and guide the development of resources that can be used to inform those involved in the exchange and potential partners and sponsors. For example, the group THETA (Traditional and Modern Health Practitioners Against AIDS and other diseases) in Uganda has developed an important understanding of the context in which they work. They know that over 80% of the population lives in rural areas where hospitals and doctors are not easy to find. There is one traditional healer for every 200 people and only 1 doctor for every 20,000 people. Most people in these areas rely on traditional healers for their health care needs. THETA knows that communities trust the traditional healers and can afford their services. Traditional healers are highly respected members of the community, so the messages they pass on to others living in the community through their patients and other relationships can go a long way in affecting HIV/AIDS in rural Uganda. THETA developed a program that reaches out to traditional healers by reaching out to parishes, local councils and community leaders to create traditional healing centers that use traditional healers to teach others how to talk to their clients about sex and HIV/AIDS.

Preparation for a peer exchange is the process of studying the condition that the practices being shared were designed to address, analyzing why those practices are effective, and developing background materials for participants in the peer exchange that will help them understand the value of the practices and consider ways that it can be adopted. For instance, when THETA put together their information the focus was on their community and why their program worked. It may be difficult for others to adopt a literal version of the THETA program because there may not be a network of traditional healers. However, there may be others in their communities that people trust and respect who could play a similar role, thus making the THETA experience relevant to others trying to address health issues in rural areas.

Identifying allies, potential partners and funders

One of the many benefits of hosting a peer exchange is the opportunity to work with other organizations in the community that may benefit from the exchange because they share a similar interest as the hosts in what the visitors bring to the community. When preparing for a peer exchange there are three types of collaborators that a host committee can target to help with the exchange. One is an ally. This is a group that shares similar values and perspectives with your group. They are a group with which your group shares an existing relationship and mutual expectations on how business is conducted. They are most likely another grassroots organization that understands the value of learning from other grassroots organizations. Allies often work on different types of development issues but share similar values and approaches to their work in communities. They work with each other when there is a mutual need for support or collaboration. Often allies can help bridge to other groups in the community that may offer additional support to the program. Allies may participate in the exchange as a full partner or simply offer their support because they share similar values and perspectives on development and would like the experience of meeting others from different communities and working closely with the host organization.

Table B: Local Collaborators

Allies	1.Organizations, often other grassroots organizations with whom we share long standing working relationships and basic agreements. 2. May share similar values and principles— trust levels are high. 3. Understand the value of peer learning and want to support our work. 4. Can serve as bridges to other groups and organizations.
Potential Partners	1. Organizations that you would like to work with more effectively. 2. Often potential partners have similar development goals but may operate from a different set of values and principles. 3. May have a resource that could potentially help the exchange. 4. Need to articulate formal agreement in order to effectively include in the peer exchange
Donors	1. These are groups who can support the exchange. They have resources that could either reduce costs or provide a service. 2. Donors may have no interest beyond their financial support of the exchange. 3. An exchange may be an opportunity to cultivate a working relationship with a potential funder that is low risk and high reward.

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Potential partners are groups with similar interests, but which do not share the same values or perspectives on development. It may be a group that the host organization has been interested in learning more about or working with for some time. The peer exchange provides an opportunity to get to know them better. It may also be a group that you have a good working relationship with, but you would not consider them an ally because they operate from a different set of values than your organization. Potential partners many include government agencies, NGOs, or businesses with an interest in the peer exchange with whom you would like the opportunity to develop a working relationship that could lead to other collaborations in the future. A peer exchange, when carefully planned is a good way to get experience in working with a potential partner because the risks are low and the potential rewards are high. Potential partners are often interested in the exchange because of the topic or issue being discussed or because of the visitors themselves. However, they may have their own approach to development that is not likely to be aligned with the host, so developing a relationship with a potential partner should have some formal agreement outlining the nature of the collaboration, explaining how responsibilities will be shared and providing for sanctions for failures to deliver. This is particularly important when groups do not know each other well or there are issues of unequal power. For example, a potential partner may have resources that can help the exchange such as vans that can be used for transportation. The vans could potentially save the exchange a lot of money, but at what cost? To lose control of their peer exchange is the last thing a grassroots organization wants, so a simple contract can be a great benefit.

The third collaborator is the potential donor. This is the group that we often focus much of our attention on attracting because of the cost factors involved in planning an exchange. However, often the best funding strategy is to reduce the costs as much as possible and thus minimize the amount of funding necessary for the exchange. It is good policy to try to avoid having the success or failure of an exchange rely on the support of an outside donor with whom the organization does not have a current relationship.

Often it is simply not possible to avoid cultivating a donor that will support the program. This can be especially important if the exchange requires plane tickets or other support that is hard to acquire without cash. There are occasionally donors available who will support an exchange program—either local, regional, national or international foundations interested in the work of the participating organizations. They may be interested in supporting a program because they believe in the work of the organization but are not necessarily interested in participating in the program other than to provide resources to the exchange. For groups like this you may just need to be prepared to account for how the resources were used and make a report outlining how their resources contributed to specific outcomes.

Planning the Program

The program is the centerpiece of a peer exchange. Planning the program should include time to meet as a group, time to share program ideas, site visits and training. One of the most common mistakes is to schedule more activities than the participants can effectively process. It is also best to try to schedule the more intense activities early in the day and save the tours and interactive workshops for the afternoon. Think of the schedule as being composed of two four-hour blocks of time per day. One major event or activity should be the centerpiece of that block of time. An exchange occurring over 2½ days would have five four-hour blocks of time for programming. Each of the time blocks should include everything associated with the program such as travel, breaks, and time for debriefing. So for any 4 hour block of time there may actually be less time available for the program itself.

Evenings are a good time for social activities and building relationships. Receptions, tours, and other social events are appropriate, but try not to schedule a program session such as a meeting, workshop or presentation in the evening unless it is unavoidable. When a program is scheduled for the evening, try to compensate by finding time during the day when exchange participants can relax and unwind. This will keep people fresh and able to fully participate.
Trying to schedule additional meetings and workshops during the evening will tire the participants and limit the productivity of the exchange. It is better to add an extra day or half day if there is something that really needs to be included rather than trying to squeeze an extra activity or two into a crowded

Box G: Peer Exchange Program Activities

Support Groups	A support group is a good way to begin each day during a peer exchange. It is a good time to check-in with the group, get a sense of how the peer exchange is being received and make adjustments to the program if necessary. Support groups are an effective way to process the experience as it is taking place and can serve as an ongoing barometer for the exchange
Dialogue Sessions	A dialogue session is a facilitated discussion among program participants focused on a topic or best practice. The main point of a dialogue session is to share perspectives on a topic or issue, learn from each other's experiences and gain a broader understanding of an issue through the diverse perspectives of the group.
Workshops	A workshop is a program lead by one of the peer exchange participants exploring a best practice and its application to the other organizations in the exchange.
Presentations	Presentations may be opportunities to learn from other organizations and groups who live and work in the community hosting the exchange but may not actually be a peer exchange participating organization.
Meetings	Meetings are planning sessions held amongst the program participants, allies and partners evaluating part of an exchange or planning next steps.
Tours	Tours can be used as way for visitors to get to know the community and to see how the hosting organizations or one of its allies or partners does their work in the field.
Trainings	Trainings are "how to" sessions that can be lead by a group involved in the exchange or one of the partners or allies.

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agenda. It is important to remember that the visitors may find the whole experience exhausting, especially if they are coming from another country. The difference in time zones, culture, food, customs, sleeping arrangements, and activity adds a level of stress and contributes to fatigue. When planning a program agenda it is important to be sensitive to these additional stresses and try not to over-schedule the program.
Constructing the agenda occurs on two levels. First there are goals for the overall exchange. What is it we would like to accomplish with our time together? Second there are goals for each day. What do we want to accomplish today? When planning the exchange program it is good to keep both perspectives in mind so that each day is productive and contributes to the overall goal of the exchange.

Many different activities can be incorporated into a peer exchange. Some of the more common activities include support groups, workshops, dialogue sessions, presentations, tours, meetings, and training sessions.

When deciding which type of activities to use during an exchange, it is important to think about who the participants will be and what their goal is for the event. For example, if groups are visiting to see how the host organization serves its community, then most of the activities should reflect that goal, combining tours, trainings and workshops with dialogue sessions that provide an opportunity to reflect on the work of the host organization.

Peer education is characterized by experiential learning. Presentations, workshops, tours and/or training sessions should be interactive and provide opportunities for the participants to give input into the learning experience. A good program mixes up the learning activities. If a morning session is likely to be very intense and require a lot from the participants, a lighter session in the afternoon that gets them out in the community may be a good follow-up. Placement of dialogue sessions can also enhance the learning. Try to incorporate a dialogue session into the program after an experiential session. For example, schedule a dialogue session after a site visit when there are likely to be questions and a need to process the experience.

The following is a sample agenda for a five-day exchange. Note that every day except for the first day begins with a support group meeting. The support group is a short dialogue session in which participants check-in with each other and their hosts to see how the exchange is going. If issues arise, steps can be taken to resolve them before they negatively affect the overall goals of the exchange. The focus of the support group is on both the personal and professional aspects of the program because they are interrelated. If personal needs are not met, it can be difficult to concentrate and participate fully in the development agenda.

Planning the agenda should occur in collaboration among the exchange partners. Visitors will likely want time on the agenda to share their ideas and practices and the host group will want the visitors to share their perspectives on what they see in regard to the work of the host organization and its partners. Remember, responsibility for learning is shared, activities should be interactive and all participants should be able to share their practices and ideas.

Table C: Sample Agenda — Five-day Peer Exchange

Day 1	
8:00 to 9:00 am	**Breakfast**
9:00 to 12:00 am	Support Group/Meeting—Welcoming event, introductions, and overview of the program. The first program session should establish a process for working together, ground rules, expectations and introduce the primary topic of the exchange.
12:00 to 1:00 pm	**Lunch**
1:00 to 5:00 pm	Program Tour—Introduce the exchange participants to the work environment of the hosts and expose them to the work of the hosting organization. This provides the context for future sessions.
6:00 to 8:00pm	Dinner and welcoming event.
Day 2	
8:00 to 9:00 am	**Breakfast**
9:00 to 9:30 am	Support Group
9:30 to 12:00 am	Presentation/Dialogue—A presentation can be made by either the hosting organization or the visiting organization setting the stage for a dialogue about each other's work and reinforcing a co-learning environment.
12:00 to 1:00 pm	**Lunch**
1:00 to 5:00 pm	Workshop—Good time to share a best practice.
5:30 to 6:30 pm	Dinner and a free evening to socialize informally or see the broader community.
Day 3	
8:00 to 9:00 am	**Breakfast**
9:00 to 9:30 am	Support Group
9:30 to 12:00 am	Training Session—At this point in the program it is appropriate to have an ally or partner make a presentation sharing their work or a practice.
12:00 to 1:00 pm	**Lunch**
1:00 to 5:00 pm	Tour—Schedule a tour or event that is fun and doesn't require a lot of mental preparation or commitment.
6:00 to 8:00 pm	Reception—Plan to meet with sponsors, community members, partners and allies.
Day 4	
8:00 to 9:00 am	**Breakfast**
9:00 to 9:30 am	Support Group
9:30 to 12:00 am	Workshop—have the visitors lead the group in a learning experience.
12:00 to 1:00 pm	**Lunch**
1:00 to 5:00 pm	Tour or mobile workshop—have the hosts or an ally lead take the group on an off-site learning program where they are able to see in practice some of the things they have been discussing in previous sessions.
6:00 to 7:00 pm	Dinner and free evening
Day 5	
8:00 to 9:00 am	**Breakfast**
9:00 to 9:30 am	Support Group
9:30 to 12:00 am	Presentation/Leaders Panel—hearing from those who provide leadership to the various organizations in the form of a panel or presentation is a good tool for connecting the work completed in the exchange to what has been done in the past and how it may be applied in the future.
12:00 to 1:00 pm	**Lunch**
1:00 to 5:00 pm	Dialogue and closing session—process the peer exchange, discuss next steps and formally close the peer exchange.
6:00 to 10:00 pm	Closing dinner event

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Building a Budget

Budgeting is the process of deciding how much the program will cost and how to get the resources necessary to make the project work. In preparing a budget for a peer exchange it is a good idea to develop a preliminary agenda such as the one above and then assign costs to each item. In addition, there are a number of logistical items that need to be included. Think of the budget as including four primary components. The first budget item is the planning and preparation costs. What will it take to put the program together? This may not require a lot of money, but it will require a significant amount of time. The second item includes the non-program logistical costs. This may include transportation to and from the exchange, food and lodging, general transportation costs during the exchange and other incidental costs. The third item includes the program costs. This may include a meeting facility, speaker costs, materials, audio-visual equipment, and printing. The fourth and final piece of the budget is the post event evaluation and follow-up costs. This may include the cost of a survey, consulting fees, and realted follow-up expenses, such as communication costs. The budgeting process helps the program planners decide what the expenses will be and assign costs to those expenses.

You may also wish to include a budget line for contingency – or unexpected costs – as well. These can include unanticipated costs in travel, last minute increases in airfare, or covering the cost of an unanticipated medical bill that one of the grassroots participants may incur while traveling. There are different philosophies for calculating contingency; some organizations budget up to 10% while others set a flat fee of $1000. Use your own judgment in calculating your budget. Potential donors can be alerted that unused contingency money will be allocated to follow-up activities.

Generally a number of sources of support exist for a program such as a peer exchange. The first is internal or in-kind support. These are the resources we as the hosting organization bring to the program. This is usually the most important part of the budget and is often the part of the budget not accounted for when figuring out how much was invested in the program. This happens because the resources are already ours and we are unsure how to assign a value to some of our resources such as volunteer time. The second important source of support includes resources contributed by sponsors, partners, and allies. These resources can take the form of an in-kind contribution such as providing a meal, loaning equipment, vehicles or staff time or they can take the form of a cash grant contributed to the effort. Sometimes cash contributions are specified such as offering to pay for a meal or event and other times resources are offered as a general cash contribution which means the planners can spend the money as they see fit; no restrictions are placed on the use of the money. Unrestricted cash contributions are nice because they

give organizers more flexibility in allocating resources. The third category includes the resources participants pay to support the program. It may be that they will pay their own travel expenses or lodging or provide some other support that facilitates their participation in the exchange. These dollars are important and should be included in the overall budget for a program. These resources can often be used to leverage other resources in the budget planning, particularly if a potential donor requires the sponsoring organization to provide some kind of a dollar match in order to secure their support. Sometimes the ability of the participants to pay for some part of the budget will make or break an event.

In developing a budget planners will need a tracking system that makes it possible to compare what was budgeted to what was actually spent or used. When "cash" budgets are separated from "in-kind" budgets it is easier to see how much cash is actually needed. When putting together the budget there may be things that you expect to pay for such as lodging or transportation that later on may be donated. By tracking these separately it is easier to know how much actual cash will be needed for the exchange.

The sample budget is based on a 5-day exchange for 10 people traveling internationally. The largest single expense is the purchase of the plane tickets, accounting for more than 25% of the budget and nearly ½ the cash budget. If someone were to donate frequent flyer miles for two of the tickets, part of the budget could have moved from cash to in-kind in the in actual expense columns and reduce the cash expenses by a little over $2000.00. This would make additional cash available for some other area of the budget.

There are several reasons to keep track of the value of the donated items in the budget. First it provides a truer accounting of the actual cost of the event. Even when there is very little cash involved in putting on an exchange there are many hours and contributions made in order to make the event successful. It is good for the groups to take credit for generating the resources necessary to make the peer exchange a success. When there is a need for cash, potential donors like to see other resources invested in the project, so

accounting for the contributions of the organization helps to provide a clearer picture of the support the participating organizations are providing to the exchange.

Logistics

The logistical planning committee works hand in hand with the other groups but is very closely linked with the budgeting group. In fact, in a small exchange it may make sense to combine these two groups, while in a larger exchange it may be easier to divide up the duties between a logistics group and a budgeting group. Some of the basic functions of the logistics group include arranging for local transportation, planning meals, making lodging arrangements, planning special events, and identifying places to meet. You will see many of these items in the budget. For most of these items the role of this group is to identify options for meeting these needs and working with the other groups to make sure that an appropriate option is chosen.

Local transportation includes transport to and from events, between venues if activities are in more than one place, and back and forth to airports, bus or train stations if participants are not driving themselves. Exchanges in which participants are staying at the main venue will not have a great need for local transportation, but if there are multiple venues, few public transit options, and participants with special needs the transportation planning can be a significant duty. Things to consider include:

1. How many people will we need to move around at any one time? If there are fewer than five people, it may be possible to use volunteers to transport people in their own vehicles. If it is a larger group, it may make sense to arrange for transportation and a driver if the budget permits.

2. Where are people staying, working and visiting? If the venue and the lodging are close it can reduce transportation costs. If there are multiple venues or tours, additional transportation will probably be necessary for those days.

3. What are the transportation needs of the visitors? It is always a good idea to know if there are special needs among the visitors. If there are visitors who are older or have health issues, making plans that require a lot of walking is not a good idea.

4. Where is the lodging in relationship to other aspects of the community? It can reduce transportation costs if people are staying where there are services nearby such as shopping, restaurants and mass transit. If these services are not nearby then some accommodation may be necessary so that people are able to experience the community and have access to basic services.

5. Do we have partners or allies with transportation resources? Partners and allies may have access to some resources such as a van and driver. If not, they may have other partners and allies who do. There may also be churches or businesses in the community with these resources that would be willing to assist.

Lodging needs are often closely linked to the programming needs. Depending on the nature of the exchange, different lodging options may make sense. If one purpose of an exchange is to build a sense of community then a facility like a retreat center or dormitory may make sense because the participants will spend more time together. Small exchanges or groups on a tight budget may want to consider home stays. This is the least expensive type of lodging but can be the most difficult to arrange. Issues such as language, cultural norms, schedules, and transportation are much more complicated. If home stays are well planned and people are placed

Table C: Sample Peer Exchange Budget

Planning & Preparation

	Budgeted Expense		Actual Expense	
	In-Kind	Cash	In-kind	Cash
Staff time	$6,000.00	$3,000.00	$7,000.00	$2,000.00
Printing	$500.00		$350.00	
Resource Materials	$500.00		$550.00	
Subtotal	$7,000.00	$3,000.00	$7,900.00	$2,000.00

Non-program Logistics

	Budgeted Expense		Actual Expense	
	In-Kind	Cash	In-kind	Cash
Plane Tickets				$12,500.00
Food		$12,000.00	$450.00	$750.00
Lodging	$400.00	$700.00	$2,000.00	$4,000.00
Van Rental	$1,000.00	$6,000.00	$1,000.00	
Van Drivers	$500.00		$500.00	
Event Admissions		$350.00		$350.00
Insurance	$500.00		$500.00	
Staff Time	$2,500.00		$2,500.00	
Telephone	$150.00		$150.00	
Incidentals		$500.00		$250.00
Subtotal	$5,050.00	$19,550.00	$7,100.00	$17,850.00

Program Logistics

	Budgeted Expense		Actual Expense	
	In-Kind	Cash	In-kind	Cash
Meeting Facilities	$500.00		$500.00	
Speakers	$250.00	$250.00	$250.00	$100.00
Speaker Travel		$150.00		$75.00
Program Materials	$225.00		$225.00	
Audio-visual		$150.00	$150.00	
Printing	$200.00			$225.00
Incidentals		$350.00		$150.00
Subtotal	$1,175.00	$900.00	$1,125.00	$550.00

Evaluation & Follow-up

	Budgeted Expense		Actual Expense	
	In-Kind	Cash	In-kind	Cash
Printing & Postage	$200.00	$50.00	$250.00	$50.00
Survey				$250.00
Evaluation		$250.00		
Consultant		$1000.00		$1000.00
Telephone	$100.00		$100.00	
Subtotal	$300.00	$1300.00	$250.00	$1300.00

in the right situations, a home stay can be a highlight of an exchange. However, if things do not work out well, it can also be a disaster. Before planning a home stay it is a good idea to do some research about your visitors to find out what their expectations and tolerances are. For some, it might be an adventure and for others it may be a burden. It is not a good idea to do a home stay just because it is less expensive. Relationships with local partners may identify a wide variety of options ranging from hotels to home stays. Things to consider include:

1. What are the ideal housing arrangements for our peer exchange? It is always a good idea to start with what you would like in the perfect world. You can then identify the features of the housing that make it desirable and try to incorporate those features into your final arrangements.
2. How do our housing needs relate to our budget and program? Look at the resources in the budget and consider the program goals. Determine if it is necessary to have the program near the lodging.
3. What other services will our participants need to access while they are here? If there are special diet or health needs, try to incorporate those into your housing plans.
4. Is a home stay a viable option? Think this through carefully because home stays can be extra work especially if the group is large or youth are involved. Sometimes it can also be difficult to identify enough host families. When doing home stays consider:

   a. Culture—What are the cultural norms of our visitors and would they be able to adjust to our housing?
   b. Special Needs—If some of our visitors have special health needs, can we accommodate these with our home stay plan?
   c. Transportation—Will using home stays make it difficult to get people to the program and other events?
   d. Food—Meals are occasionally provided by the hosts. Make sure this is not a burden on the hosts and that diet differences will not cause problems.
   e. Communication—Language differences can sometimes cause issues with home stays, especially when people are not able to communicate specific needs. It is always a good idea to try to have a translator help get a visitor settled with a home stay family to ensure health and diet needs are understood and accommodated.

Identifying an appropriate venue is central to a successful peer exchange. Grassroots organizations are often sensitive to place. In order to feel safe participating in dialogues and sharing their stories it is important to be sure that the venue where people are meeting is comfortable, safe, an appropriate size, and reflect the norms and values of the par-

Box H: Places to Explore Housing Options

Religious Organizations—some churches and religious orders may have rectories, schools, retreat centers or other facilities with housing options.
Universities—many universities have dormitories that may be available certain times of the year and some have hostels and visitor housing.
Hospitals—some hospitals have housing for visiting doctors and staff that may be available.
Schools—boarding schools have dorms and some schools have teacher housing that may be available during breaks.
Community Centers—They may not have formal housing but may have rooms that can be made into temporary housing if housing needs are simple
Partners—community organizations will sometimes have training facilities with some housing options.

ticipants. An ideal venue is one that the host owns because it reflects the values and the sensibilities of the hosts. People will participate more easily and the space can serve as a gateway to understanding the organization because the visitors get to see where and how their hosts work.

When the hosting organization does not have an adequate space for hosting an exchange, it should carefully consider other options. A bad choice is one where participants do not feel safe to participate. For example, some churches and government buildings may not be appropriate for some groups but be perfect for others. While the visitors will not be able to see the place until they arrive, it is a good idea to speak with them about the options and see if they have any concerns. Considerations include:

1. What do we really need in a meeting space? Identify an ideal space and think about the features of the space that make it ideal. If you are unable to secure that facility, you can at least look for similar features in another venue.
2. Do our partners and allies have a space we can use? Sometimes the safest place is that of another grassroots organization that the hosts know very well and work with regularly. One concern in this kind of arrangement is to be sure that the hosts and their peers are still in charge of their exchange.
3. What amenities do we require? Make sure that you are able to have Audio/Visual equipment, access the Internet, telephone, and other amenities when they are important to the exchange. When using a hotel or conference facility make sure that you find out if there are additional costs for these services. Sometimes they can be very expensive.
4. Where is the facility in relationship to other events and the lodging? If the ideal venue is not handy, it may make sense to choose another venue that is not as nice but easier to access. For many people being able to get back and forth from their lodging to the venue is very important.
5. Can our staff and volunteers easily get to the venue? It can take a lot of people to make an event work. If it is difficult for the staff and volunteers to get there, it may not be an ideal place. Organizers can also consider housing the staff and volunteers with the visiting guests for the duration of the exchange to make their work easier. Remember to include these costs in the budget as well.

Coordinating staff and volunteers includes recruiting facilitators, serving as hosts and guides, finding translators, and identifying key resource people. When planning an exchange, it is important to look at each part of the agenda and consider who you will need to involve in order for this part of the program to be successful. One useful strategy is to break down Coordination into three elements. The first is the needs of the participants.

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Someone should be paying attention to the needs of the visitors. Support may include transportation to and from their lodging, food arrangements, entertainment, shopping, translation and other needs as they arise. The second staffing and coordinating element focuses on the program and events. There will be staffing needs for each session that will require different skills or people such as facilitators, equipment specialists, and translators. The third element is coordination and leadership. Someone should be coordinating the overall event; troubleshooting the staffing needs of the program as it goes along. The other volunteers and staff need to know whom to contact in case of an emergency or question about their role. The coordinator will be paying attention to how things come together to meet the overall goals of the exchange.

Remember that staff will be involved in the exchange as support people; the Exchange should be led by the grassroots participants and with their priorities always in the lead. Grassroots women should be involved in all planning committees from the beginning. Staff can help to facilitate their involvement and support them by playing roles such as documenters, report-writers, etc.

Things to consider include:

1. How many people do we need? Consider the three elements and how many people you will need. It may be that there are volunteers and staff who can fill multiple roles and reduce the actual number of people that are needed. For instance, someone who is facilitating a group dialogue during one session may also have the skills to monitor the technology.
2. What are the skills we need and where can we find them? Developing a list of skills will make it easier to place people in the right roles.
3. What kind of training will our staff and volunteers need? At a minimum they will need some orientation to the goals of the program and what the expectations are in regards to their work and performance.
4. How will we coordinate the work of the staff and volunteers? It is a good idea to make sure that staff and volunteers know whom they can contact at various times during the program when a problem or crisis arises.
5. How much time will we need from volunteers?
   It is easier to keep people engaged when they know how much time and energy they will need to commit to a program. A happy staff or volunteer will be a much better resource.
6. How do we involve them in the program?
   Staff and volunteers may want to be part of the program, so identifying places where they can participate will make it a more meaningful experience for them.

Meals play an important role in a peer exchange. The act of eating together can be a community building experience and serve as an important facilitation tool in terms of strengthening the relationships and bonds among the exchange participants and other partners and allies involved in the program. Planning for the meals should build on the program planning. Some of the meals may be independent of

Box I: Skills Needed in Staff & Volunteers

Facilitation	Coordination
Hosting	Transportation
Guiding	Translator
Cooking	Waiter
Computing	Technical Support
Planning	Fund raiser
	Recorder

the program and others may relate more directly to the program. For example, in a 10-person exchange where the visitors are staying in homes scattered around the community, it may be difficult to coordinate a schedule for all the meals. In this scenario it may make more sense to have the visitors take their morning meals with their host families unless there is a specific morning event planned that includes a meal. Some of the lunch and dinner meals may actually be incorporated into the agenda. Planning for the meals include identifying which meals will be group functions and which meals will be during free periods in the agenda where participants can go off on their own.

Planning group meals should be done in conjunction with the visitors. Some visitors may have diet restrictions and others may have eating schedules different from the hosts. Travelers normally expect to have a different experience with meals than to what they are accustomed and they plan to adjust. However, it is a good idea to explore potential differences before problems arise during the exchange itself. If there are great differences in eating patterns some accommodations may need to be negotiated so that the experience is positive for everyone. Things to consider when planning the meals:

1. How many meals will be group meals? This can have implications for the budget and facilities. It is a good idea to know as soon as possible how many meals will need planning.
2. Are there opportunities to link meals to events? A reception, or other event may also serve as a meal during the exchange. Look for opportunities to link meals to receptions or events because this will help stretch resources. It may be easier to find someone to sponsor a reception that has food than it would be to find someone to fund a meal.
3. Do the meal plans coordinate effectively with the program plans? Make sure that the meal is appropriate to the program. If there is a tour that leads up to lunch or dinner, plan a box lunch or meal near the tour site that compliments the program.
4. Does the host want to prepare meals? Sometimes grassroots groups have the capacity to do their own catering. If there is an opportunity to support a grassroots group by giving them the catering contract it is good to try do so but make sure they really have the capacity to deliver. Food does not usually improve a program, but it can make it worse.
5. Do the participants want to cook for each other? Sometimes in an exchange the groups would like the opportunity to cook for each other. If there is interest and access to facilities it could be an important part of the program and contribute to the goals of the exchange.

Planning for Evaluation and Program Monitoring

Many consider evaluation as something a group does after the program and to some extent that is true. However, in order to have good feedback in the evaluation it is important to develop a plan for evaluating the exchange prior to the event. Monitoring is something that takes place during the event to gauge how it is going as it is happening. Most groups are comfortable with monitoring but when it comes to evaluation they are often apprehensive.

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Program monitoring a peer exchange tends to focus on two levels. The first is logistical. Are people comfortable, is the food appropriate, and are people able to get where they need to go? The second level of monitoring relates to the program. Are the participants able to share their perspectives, is the venue a safe environment, are the sessions interactive, are the presenters effective, and are practices being shared that can be adapted in other communities? The primary role of monitoring is to learn what is happening while there is still an opportunity to make adjustments to the program and logistics.

There are three simple tools for monitoring a peer exchange that can assess both the logistics and the program. They include the use of daily feedback sheets, the support groups and key informants/temperature-takers.

1. Daily Feedback Worksheets are usually administered at the end of the day and ask questions that help assess how the day went. A sample daily feedback form is included in the chapter on monitoring and evaluation. Questions focus on the program that day, the quality of the presenter and provide a space for suggestions for the next day. A daily feedback can be made even more powerful when combined with a review. When a review is incorporated into the daily feedback process 2 or 3 volunteer participants meet with some of the organizers to review the feedback sheets, make recommendations for the next day and share the results of the feedback with the entire group the following morning noting changes that have been made to accommodate suggested changes. Keep in mind that written questionnaires or worksheets may not be appropriate for a group of people with low literacy levels. This is a common concern in grassroots women's exchanges.

2. Support Group Meetings conducted each morning can be useful monitoring devices because they provide a framework for participants to discuss how the program is affecting them personally and professionally. When a support group meeting includes a session on how things can be made to improve their experience it may provide meaningful information about how the program can be improved. Whenever participants are asked to share their perspectives on the program they should be encouraged or even required to make a suggestion for how to address the issue that concerns them. This helps focus the energy of the group on identifying ways to improve the exchange rather than simply providing a critique of the event. It helps build ownership of both the process and the outcome.

3. Key Informants or Temperature Takers are people involved in the exchange who watch how the process unfolds. They are responsible for paying attention to how people are interacting with each other and the facilitators, tracking how people relate to the facilities—is the room too hot or too cold, too big or too small? Key informants collect their information through observations and by asking people how they are doing in informal

discussions. They periodically report what they are learning to the organizers as the exchange progresses. This is sometimes the most valuable data because it is gathered informally in one-on-one conversations. Sometimes people will share their perspectives more easily in a one-on-one conversation than they will in a group setting.
When developing a monitoring plan it is a good idea to look at how the schedule unfolds and see if there are natural places where you can use some of the devices mentioned above. Remember it is not really evaluation data but data useful for making adjustments to the exchange as it is occurring. Sometimes monitoring data can provide good clues to key questions that should be addressed in an evaluation but the primary purpose is not to evaluate the outcomes of the program but to look at the process itself and to identify changes or adjustments that can be made as the program is evolving. Key questions to consider when developing a monitoring plan include:

1. What do we want to monitor? Normally it is a good idea to keep the monitoring plan fairly simple and open-ended. Open-ended questions such as "How did you feel the day went?" or "What suggestions would you make to improve the program tomorrow?" provide opportunity for participants to raise their concerns without the organizers spending a lot of time and energy trying to anticipate what those issues might be. As an organizing principle it is a good idea to anticipate difficulties and address those issues in the program planning but once the program has started it is often better to let the participants raise concerns themselves and focus on addressing the concerns that are raised.

2. Are there natural places in the program where monitoring can occur? It is a good idea to use at least two different devices such as a key informant and a daily feedback process to gather information.

3. How do we staff our monitoring effort? When putting together a monitoring plan it may seem like a good idea to include the facilitators in the review. Sometimes this is a good idea and sometimes it is not. This really depends on the relationship between the facilitators and the participants. Having more than one opportunity for feedback can address this as well.

Evaluation Planning differs from monitoring in that it focuses primarily on the outcomes of the program and the effectiveness of the process in helping the exchange get to those outcomes. A good evaluation plan serves as a guide for how the evaluation will be conducted both during the exchange and afterwards and answers the question, "Did the peer exchange reach its goals?" When developing the goals of the program and the process for reaching those goals it helps to keep the following questions in mind:

1. What are the primary goals of the peer exchange? There can be several goals of a peer exchange but there should be two or three that really drive the development program. These goals are the primary goals of the exchange and focus on the big questions. Peer exchanges have goals around the questions "How do grassroots organizations effectively address issues such as HIV/AIDS?" or "What role can grassroots organizations play in disaster relief?"

2. What are the secondary goals of the peer exchange? Secondary goals are often smaller scale and geared more to the specific needs of the participating groups. They may focus on things like developing stronger networks among the participants, learning specific skills and practices, and engaging with certain groups.

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3. How will we know when our goals (both primary and secondary) are met? This challenges organizers to think about how they are going to know whether or not they were successful. Are there specific indicators that we can point to? For instance if one of the peer exchange goals was to identify roles that grassroots groups can play in disaster relief an evaluation tool might include identifying roles and practices that grassroots organizations can employ in disaster situations.

4. What indicators do we want to use to measure progress towards goals? In an exchange program there are two things to keep in mind. One is to keep the measurements as tangible as possible. That is if one goal is to produce a proceedings of the exchange that shares "best practices" for grassroots organizations working on HIV/AIDS, then that goal is met when the proceedings have been compiled and disseminated. If the goal is to reduce the incidence of HIV/AIDS it might be harder to measure because there is unlikely to be a cause and effect relationships. However better prepared workers and stronger networks can reduce the incidence of HIV/AIDS and these factors can be assessed rather easily.

5. What tools do we want to use? The best evaluation is the one that works to pick a method that works for the group. A questionnaire at the end of the program can be used to measure learning. A follow-up survey can be useful if the goal is to see whether or not people are implementing new practices. Photographs, videos and audio recordings can be used to document change or the adoption of new practices. The proper use of these tools really depends on the goals of the exchange. Once again, keep in mind the literacy level of the group when selecting tools, and the language requirements, and design your evaluation so it caters to the least literate participant to ensure that all are able to participate.

6. What capacities do we have to do the kind of evaluation we want? An evaluation can be conducted internally, by someone involved in the peer exchange or it can be conducted externally, by someone not involved with the peer exchange. Sometimes donors will require an external evaluation. This is fine as long as the evaluators are brought into the project early enough to help identify the best means of getting the desired results.

Worksheet 2 :: Are We Prepared to Host a Peer Exchange?

How will we coordinate and manage our work? (Who will be responsible?)
____
____

How should we structure our host committee?________________________
____
____

How does the host committee relate to the visiting peers?_______________
____
____

Who else needs to be involved in planning the exchange?_______________
____
____

How do we get them involved?______________________________
____
____

Who is responsible for each of the planning activities (research and preparation of background materials, identifying allies, partners, and sponsors, planning the program, budget, logistics, and monitoring and evaluation)?
____
____

What skills will we need?_____________________________________
____
____

What spaces and services do we need in a program venue (meeting room, kitchen, speaker systems, etc…)? ___________________________________
____

How will the host committee monitor the budget and identify resources?__________
____

What will be the focus of the program? ___________________________
____

What are the primary goals? _________________________________
____

What are the secondary goals? _______________________________
____
____

How will we know when our goals have been met? ___________________
____
____

How do I conduct a Peer Exchange?

Conducting the peer exchange is often more than simply implementing the plan. This section has two themes. One includes key implementation themes that build on the previous section such as logistics and coordinating events. This discussion will focus on the day-to-day roles and responsibilities that will need to be addressed during the exchange itself. It is impossible to anticipate all the issues that will need to be addressed during an exchange but if a group is well prepared to host its peers there is a good chance the exchange will benefit everyone involved.

The second theme focuses on the use of facilitation and meeting methods during the program. This discussion is designed to inform the organizers about some of the different meeting methods. The intent is to inform the organizers so they can make choices about the methods that are most appropriate for their program, assess their capacity to facilitate these methods and make arrangements to get appropriate assistance if the capacities do not exist among the organizers of the program.

The coordination of the program and selection of the meeting methods is a joint responsibility that can be shared among all those involved in the peer exchange including the host committee, the visitors, and the other community partners. Sharing this responsibility can make the process of implementing an effective program much less daunting and may result in a better experience.

Coordinating the Program

A number of the coordination responsibilities were discussed in the previous section. Many of these functions are logistical issues and can be considered along with the other logistical arrangements. However, if the exchange includes a large number of participants and/or is of long duration it may make sense to consider the schedule needs separately from the basic logistics to ensure that there is not too much responsibility being placed on one group or individual. For larger exchanges having a team of people who meet each morning before the work begins or at the end of the day once the work is done is an effective way to keep everyone on the same page, learn from each other as the program is developing and troubleshoot problems as they arise. Things to consider in implementing the logistics plan include:

1. Who are the key people that need to coordinate their efforts? This may seem intuitive but often people will get so caught up in their own responsibilities they may forget about what others are doing. In addition, if the parties involved in the exchange do not know each other very well it may be a good idea to make sure that the leadership members of the visiting groups are involved in coordination. There may be instances where people from the visiting groups who have been working with the organizers preparing for the exchange may not be the same people who lead the exchange delegation. It is a good idea to learn the appropriate protocols of the groups who are visiting so that their leadership is appropriately involved and are not inadvertently slighted.

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2. How will we coordinate our efforts? Think about times during the exchange where it is appropriate to bring the coordinators together. If there is not time built into the program, look for appropriate opportunities to gather. It is more likely early in the exchange that there will be problems so look for more opportunities to coordinate efforts the first couple of days.

3. What are the issues we need to monitor? In most exchanges it is not difficult to know which aspects of the exchange are likely to cause problems. Identify those areas and monitor them during the exchange. For instance, housing is a common source of complaints, especially if there will be home stays. Have someone responsible for monitoring the housing arrangements and visit regularly with the leadership of the visiting groups to make sure their people are adequately housed.

4. How will we know when there are problems? Sometimes if there are problems the people affected may keep the problems to themselves until they are unbearable. By the time the hosting group learns of these issues they are at a crisis level and can be very difficult to resolve. Learn about the people who will be visiting and develop strategies with the visitors that make it possible to surface issues as they arise so they can be better managed.

5. How will issues be resolved? Whoever plays a coordinating role needs the capacity to do what is necessary to fix a problem. One of the most frustrating things about participating in a program is when you have a problem and the people who are assigned to help are not empowered to actually resolve the issue. If the person coordinating housing is not able to move people around if necessary or negotiate with the facility then she may not be the best person to serve in the role of housing coordinator.

Logistics

Three primary areas of logistical support need to be addressed during the exchange. The first is tending to the needs of the visitors. This includes ensuring the living arrangements are satisfactory, arranging for transportation, and ensuring participants are able to participate in the program among other things. The second area of logistical support is during the sessions themselves. Ensuring the facilities are adequate and the presenters, facilitators and others providing leadership to the program have the support they need to do their presentations and workshops.

Managing the Visit—A well-managed exchange can enhance the learning experience. It can be difficult to concentrate on the program when people are tired, hungry or worried about their families at home. In managing the visit the primary role of the hosts are to ensure the visitors have a pleasant stay. Core areas include the meals, lodging, transportation, special events, and travel.

1. Meals are core to the success of an exchange. It is important to ensure that the visitors get an opportunity to experience the local cuisine but also make sure that there are alternatives for those who may have difficulty with local foods. Food is an integral part of an exchange and so should be planned with care. Consider the following when planning meals.

a. Balance familiar with the local. The food should be a reflection of those who are hosting the exchange. However, differences in tastes, customs, and attitudes towards meals are important considerations when planning a meal. This is particularly true of international exchanges. If the menu is likely to be very different from what the visitors are used to eating, make arrangements for them to bring some of their own food or access foods locally that they can consume if they have difficulty with the planned menu. If it is possible to plan the group meals in collaboration with visitors, it may be possible to showcase local foods that the visitors will enjoy.

b. Diversify the meal plan. It is a good idea to have a group meal at least once a day. These meals should serve as opportunities to network and strengthen relationships. Meals are an important social event in most cultures so build group meals in ways that respect and reflect the sensibilities of the participants. If there is a very diverse group, it may not be possible to please everyone so think about strategies where everyone should feel appreciated at least once at a group meal during an exchange. It may be possible to arrange for the visitors to prepare a group meal for their hosts or plan the menu.

c. Schedule open meals. An open meal is a meal that is not planned by the hosts. Open meals are when participants are free to form smaller groups to find their own places to eat. Sometimes this allows delegations to meet and debrief the experience. Other times it allows people in the exchange to go in more depth on an issue or plan a project together. When scheduling an open meal be sure to coordinate with the transportation group to ensure that these times are scheduled in places where there are diverse choices for participants to choose from.

d. Think creatively about the meals. It is fine to have a goal in mind for a meal. If the exchange is a large group it may be difficult to plan many group meals, so set goals for the meals and think about ways that the meal can advance the goal. For example, if time will be taken during a meal to recognize the contributions of certain people, the recognition should be given during a group meal where everyone can participate. However, if a goal is to mix people up so they have the opportunity to get acquainted with others they did not know before, smaller more intimate meals would be more appropriate and could be organized in a way that facilitates interaction with new people.

e. Free time. When an exchange is more than a couple of days long, give the participants an afternoon or evening off that includes a meal. If the budget permits, it is a good idea to give people a per diem and point them towards some possibilities. Even if there is no budget, most people will appreciate the opportunity. If there is concern about money just make sure that there is at least one meal (afternoon or evening) where the participants are fed so that there is not as much pressure to eat a full meal during the free time. This freedom will help people connect to the community in their own way and give people a chance to re-energize themselves.

f. Meals are events. Think about each meal as an event and plan accordingly. It may be possible to work with sponsors for meals, have working meals, social events that include meals and functional meals, where feeding the participants is really the only goal. When meals are considered events it is easier to share responsibility. For example, it may be possible to find a local partner to sponsor a meal where they make the arrangements for the place and the food. In this way the meal is their contribution to the exchange.

g. Do not forget the volunteers. When calculating the number of people who will be participating in group meals do not forget to include those people who were serving as volunteers that day as drivers, facilitators, coordinators, or in other roles during the exchange. They provide important support to the peer exchange so if it is feasible try to include them in some of the meals. This is particularly important for lunches and other meals served during the day when the volunteers are working for the exchange. Sometimes the meals are their primary opportunity to interact with the participants of the exchange.

2. Lodging—Making living arrangements for participants is a challenge. The easiest arrangement is to have a hotel where everyone will stay and includes space for the program as well. Unfortunately this is also the most expensive and may not serve to connect people to one another and the community. The housing strategy should coordinate with the meals, the transportation, the program and the goals for the exchange.

People will have differing needs and expectations about living arrangements. Often it is difficult to know what people will tolerate until they get to the exchange, so it is important that the hosts are able to effectively monitor the housing arrangements and make adjustments as necessary. It is usually a good idea to try to balance affordability with comfort. If affordability is the primary consideration, make sure that the people who are participating understand what the arrangements will be. This is particularly true with unconventional housing plans such as home visits, dormitories, and hostels. They may work well for some exchanges and poorly for others. During the exchange it is important to have a back-up plan if the housing does not work for some of the participants. For example, if the housing plan relies on home visits or dormitories, make arrangements with a local hotel to take one or two of the participants if there are people who arrive and find that the lodging situation does not work for them.

When using home stays, it is a good idea to have more hosts available than is necessary for the group in case there are surprises. One common surprise is accessibility. Invariably someone who cannot climb stairs is placed in a home that has stairs or someone who is a light sleeper is a roommate with someone who snores. As a rule of thumb try not schedule home stays in the homes of the host planning committee unless necessary, since the planners will have their hands full with many responsibilities and may not have time during the days of the exchange to be good hosts. They can be used as backups, however, if someone else does not work out.

Box J: Keys to a Successful Housing Plan

1. Respect budget limitations
2. Assign someone to work with each of the visiting groups participating in the exchange.
3. Know the expectations of the visitors and clearly lay out in writing the selected arrangements
4. Link housing plan to the goals of the exchange
5. Address issues of accessibility such as access to:
   - The facilities for people with disabilities or other special needs
   - Venues where meetings are held
   - Communication technology so participants can contact their families and loved ones
6. Expect to move people and plan accordingly/make back-up plans
7. Check with people to make sure they are comfortable and be willing to make a change if necessary
8. Double check with the leadership to confirm that arrangements are working

3. Transportation—A good transportation program tries to keep things a simple as possible. Look at the range of transportation needs that the exchange is likely to require and build your plan around those needs incorporating public transportation when appropriate. Work closely with the housing team and the program team to ensure that the venues and housing plans make sense from a transportation perspective. Sometimes it may make sense to pay a little more for a venue or housing when they are close to each other or have ready access to public transportation. Most visitors appreciate it when they do not have to walk a long distance or take a cab every time they need to leave their housing for an event. Key transportation needs can be classified at four levels, to and from the exchange, between the venues and housing, during the program, and for recreation and shopping.

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Box K: Transportation and Housing

1. Pick housing that is near places people want or need to go. Participants should not feel trapped in their housing.
2. Housing should have access to items such as groceries and a pharmacy.
3. The venue for the exchange should not be more than a 10 minute commute by car or transit or a15 minute walk.
4. Be prepared to provide individualized services to people with special needs.

a. Getting people to and from the exchange. If participants are flying to the exchange or coming by train or other form of mass transit, it may be necessary to make sure they are able to get from the airport, train station or other location to the event. This is particularly true if participants are coming from other countries. If they have not traveled extensively or internationally, they may not have a good idea about what to do once they arrive in the city where the exchange will take place. If the transportation plan requires use of public transportation systems, be sure they know where to find these systems, feel comfortable negotiating the transport system, and how much it will cost. If most of the participants are coming from one or two places and are traveling as a group it may be possible to meet them and take them where they need to go as a group. In this instance it might be practical to rent or borrow a van to pick people up and transport them to the exchange.

At a minimum all participants should receive detailed instructions on what to do once they arrive. Always include a phone number they can call to talk to someone if they have problems. If there are international participants that speak another language make sure they get a contact number where they can speak to someone who knows their language and be sure they are able to get an accurate translation of the instructions. This can be developed in collaboration with the leadership of the traveling group. It can be helpful to have the instructions available in two languages. One in the language of the participants so they understand what to do and another in the language of the place hosting the exchange so they can get help in their destination city they need be.

Getting people home after an exchange can also be complicated. If the exchange is a fairly large group and people are not traveling together and will need a variety of arrangements the best strategy may be to have someone that knows the options serve as a point of contact for those who are traveling to help them get to airports, train stations, etc… It can be reassuring to travelers to have someone that knows how local systems work to make sure they are proceeding correctly and have enough time to get where they need to go.

b. Transportation from housing to the venue. The easiest transportation arrangement occurs when the housing is close to the venue and most people can walk. There may be some participants unable to walk but these needs may be few enough that they can be dealt with on an individual basis. This is why many conferences are at hotels; it is easy to get from your room to the venue. However, peer exchanges are not conferences and the venue and housing are often integral to the program and might require transportation. There are typically three options. One is to individualize transportation needs. This may be necessary if using home stays. Often this is addressed through the host families. One of their responsibilities in hosting is to provide transportation to the exchange venue at the beginning of the day and at the end of the day. The second option is to provide group transportation. If program participants are staying in one location that is some distance from the exchange venue, it may make sense to borrow or rent transportation and provide shuttle services. If there are many participants then two or more vehicles may be necessary at certain times of day. This option requires having someone serve as a driver and may require additional insurance and licensing. When thinking about providing transportation, look very closely at all the costs including the vehicle rental, insurance, fuel, and licensing. Ideally one of the community partners has an insured vehicle and driver that will meet the transportation needs of the exchange. The only remaining transportation expense to the exchange would be the fuel. For some partners furnishing funds for fuel may be a simple role to play and can save the exchange expense. The third option is to locate both the housing and the venue near public transportation. In larger cities with light rail, subway, or bus systems this might work well. However, if it requires a number of transfers or switches then it can become too complicated to be effective. It is always a good idea to have local hosts serving as guides to help people figure out the mass transit systems the first couple of times they use them. Guides should literally ride with participants from one place to the other until the guests are comfortable with the system. This is particularly important for international guests, especially grassroots women who may be on their first trip out of their home country. Try to keep the commute to 10 minutes if possible. A 20 or 30 minute commute can cause many problems for programming.

c. Arranging for site visits. Often exchanges will include site visits that require transportation. There may be a trip to a program site or transportation needs for an event. For a small event this may simply be putting people in 3 or 4 cars and going. For larger events it may require hiring a bus service. Either one can require some oversight. If there is significant travel time, the trip may be an opportunity to have program participants get to know one another. It is also an opportunity for programming. The programming can be as simple as interpreting the places that the group travels through or as complicated as having the group participate in a dialogue. Most people do not expect to do much work when they are traveling but they do often appreciate some interpretation of the community as they are traveling through it. If there will be some interpretation, make sure that there is someone serving as a driver and someone else providing the interpretation. It is not safe or reasonable to ask one person to serve in both roles. Even a small event may need a number of volunteers. For example if a site visit is going to split 12 people up into 3 vehicles each vehicle would need a driver and guide or six volunteers.

When organizing the transportation services for events it is important to consider the

Transportation Resource Partners

1. Churches—often have vans they only use on week ends that may be available during the week.
2. Service agencies—may have vehicles available in the evenings and on weekends.
3. Public transit systems may offer group rates or special services for events.
4. School bus companies may be able to offer services at a big discount to the commercial transportation companies.
5. Cab companies may offer discounts and personalized services for groups.

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distance that people will be traveling, the length of time they will be there and the extent to which travel will be required as part of an exchange. If there will be a number of site visits, transportation can get complicated so it is important to consider how much travel will be required as part of the program. If it will be extensive and there are transportation needs from housing to the exchange venue it may be practical to arrange for full-time travel services such as renting or borrowing vans.

d. Recreation. When people have free time they may want to visit the community. The housing, the venue or both should be accessible to the community. When the housing is accessible to the community via public transportation or within walking distance it can reduce the amount of scheduling necessary. When there are things to do within walking distance or near to the housing then it is possible to schedule free time. If not, then it is likely that more time will need to be scheduled. Provide maps or local tour books in addition to verbal orientation prior to the time for recreation. Also make sure the guests have the address of the lodging written down so that even if they are lost they can ask someone for directions.

e. Safety. When people are in places they do not know (this can be particularly true if the visitors do not know the language or customs) dangerous situations can arise because people inadvertently venture into places that are not safe or they do things that identify them as visitors and potential targets. In orienting people to the community it is important to help people understand what they need to do in order to be safe. When arranging for travel or site visits it is a good idea to identify potential hazards in each place and develop a strategy to manage the risk. Often the risks can be minimized by keeping people in groups whenever possible and by using local volunteers as guides.

Managing the Program

The program is the primary purpose for the exchange. People are there to share their ideas and best practices, develop and strengthen relationships with people with similar interests and values, learn about the community where their peers live and work and to learn from their experiences and practices. Managing the program is focused on facilitating interaction among the peers, providing support to the trainers, facilitators, presenters and others who will be working with the exchange participants, monitoring the agenda and ensuring the facilities and equipment are supporting the goals of the program.

1. Facilitating Interaction—Peer exchanges bring diverse groups of people together and sometimes this can be a challenge for participants that do not have a lot of experience with people outside their community, speak different languages, or have differing cultural values. Managing the program entails anticipating what some of these barriers might be and structuring the program so that people can feel safe participating in the program and still develop meaningful relationships with their peers. When language is an issue it can be difficult to facilitate interaction because of translation needs. However, with careful planning it is possible to facilitate a fair amount of interaction even when people do not share a common language. Some things to consider include:
a. Safety is the first priority. When people do not feel safe, they will not fully participate in the program. Often lack of participation is misinterpreted as shyness or lack of interest in the pro-

gram when in fact those who appear shy may not know what the rules are or they are being asked to do things that challenge their basic sensibilities. For instance, when picking a place pay attention to all the details, the size of the room, the colors, the location, and even the tables and chairs. All these things can affect how a person feels when they participate. A public facility such as a room at city hall or the basement of a church may be attractive to some groups and scary to others. Be sure that participants know enough details about the facilities when planning so they are able to help you effectively select a location. During the program it is a good idea to have someone monitoring the first few sessions to see how people are participating. If they are not participating the way it was expected, there is a possibility they do not feel safe. Maybe there is something about the place or the process that is challenging for them. Work with the partners in the peer exchange to ensure that the environment where the exchange will take place feels safe to the participants paying attention to the type of meeting rooms that are used, the facilitation methods that are selected for the workshops and the ground rules that are developed to guide interaction

b. Think creatively about translation. The use of translators can enhance interaction but how they are used should be considered carefully. In general sessions where everyone is together as a group having a simultaneous translator is often the best way to ensure that everyone understands what is happening. Simultaneous translators can listen to what is said in one language and simultaneously repeat what they heard in another language almost word for word. However, simultaneous translation can be very expensive and may not be necessary to facilitate interaction. Often in a peer exchange environment interpreters are used instead of translators. Interpreters listen in one language and then share their interpretation of what was said in another language Interpretation has its good sides and bad sides. On the good side interpreters are often less expensive, are sometimes available within the group, and are more accessible. On the down side they tend to be less accurate, more intrusive in the conversations and less reliable. However, most exchanges are likely to work with interpreters because it is easier to find people with a working knowledge in the languages and it is normally less expensive. Translators will sometimes come with the groups. That is they may have people in the traveling party who are bilingual and will be serving as a translator. If this is the case be sure they have multiple translators so that the group does not always have to work together. One translator will often mean that the entire group has to stay together making it very difficult for them to interact in small groups and even less likely they will have any private conversations in groups of two or three where relationships are formed. If it is feasible, try to have a translator for every two or three people who need translation services. This will give program planners more flexibility in the kinds of activities that can be used to encourage interaction.

c. Differing cultural values can enhance learning. One of the attractive aspects of a peer exchange is that it can bring together people from a wide variety of experiences to share those experiences with peers from very different realities. This can reinforce learning by exposing participants to different ways of dealing with similar kinds of issues in very different community contexts. However, this type of exchange is not automatic. Differences in culture and values can also lead to misunderstandings and conflict. In hosting a peer exchange it is important to be attentive to the cultural differences of the people visiting the community. Prepare them as much as possible for obvious differences such as language, food, housing, and transportation. Then be sure to include the perspectives of the guests in terms of how the program is structured, how the ground rules are developed, and how interaction will be facilitated. Minor differences can cause big problems, so be sure people have a good understanding of what to expect when they arrive so they are able to share their ideas in a positive learning environment. As the hosts it is also important to be sure that the volunteers, translators, and other community partners understand that differences in values are to be expected and ask them to suspend judgment. Even what some might consider subtle cultural differences such as those that might exist between rural and urban communities in the same state or county may need to be explored so that they can serve as a tool for enhanced learning and not as a source of conflict.

Box L: Keys to Effective Translation

1. Often the best translators are native speakers in the language they are translating from. For example, if going from English to Spanish then a native English speaker may be a better translator.
2. Provide translators lots of rest. It can be exhausting work.
3. Limit the number of people they translate for in small groups.
6. It is very difficult to be a participant and a translator, so recruit translators who are not necessarily interested in being program participants.
7. Arrange for more translators than you think you will need. It is easier to ask translators to work with fewer people than it is to ask them to work with more.
8. Have back-up translators in case someone is not able to work effectively.
9. Have a training session with translators so they can become familiar with the terms used in the exchange
10. Review the program plan with the translators so they know what the expectations are for their work.

Presenters Checklist
Please fill in the information below and return to:

Program Organizer ____________________
Address ____________________
Phone Number____________________
Email ____________________
Presenter Information ____________________
Name ____________________
Address ____________________

Number in your party ____________________
Audio/Visual needs ____________________
Will stay __________nights.
Will eat (number) ______breakfast ______ lunch ______ dinner meals while at the exchange
Will arrive ____________________
Will leave ____________________

Will you have handouts that need printing?
Yes or No

Will you need help with facilitation? Yes or No.
If "Yes, how many facilitators will you need?
Additional or Special Needs________________
____

2. Support System for Trainers, Facilitators, and Presenters—Providing support to the program presenters and facilitators is a process of finding out what they need, identifying and monitoring resources, managing and adjusting the agenda and ensuring that everything works and is available during the sessions.

a. Working with presenters, facilitators, and animators is a process of finding out what kind of support they need and making the necessary arrangements for them to have the support necessary for a successful program. The role of the host committee in providing services can vary. Sometimes it makes sense to rely on the presenters to bring what they need with them and other times the host committee may need to ensure that they have everything they need at the program venue. If presenters are traveling to the program, they are likely to need more support. It can be difficult to travel with a lot of equipment. In the context of the program think about the type of presentation that will be made and the kinds of support they are likely to need to make that work. Identify someone to moderate each session early in the program planning. These moderators should be in contact with presenters to learn about the session, what the presenter will do during their session and how they can best be supported. During the program the moderator can introduce the presenter and provide assistance as necessary. Even if the presenter does not need much help, the moderator should be there in case something goes wrong such as a projector that does not work. The moderator can serve as a troubleshooter for the presenter so the presenter can concentrate on their program.

This "Presenters checklist" was adapted from a presenters checklist used by the Community Development Academy at the University of Missouri.

Using a checklist will tell you what support equipment a presenter will need. A checklist for presenters is a tool for organizers that can help ensure the presenters have what they need to make their presentation or conduct their workshop. The checklist is sent to presenters prior to the program to gain their input on the kind of support they might need during their sessions. This information helps organizers determine what kind of equipment is needed as well as other information useful to organizing the program. The checklist also serves as a guide during the program helping facilitators make sure that each presenter has what they requested.

This sample checklist includes questions useful to the program coordinators as well as those working on the meals and lodging. It is a good idea to coordinate with the other logistics groups when putting together the checklist because those planning meals and arranging for lodging may obtain additional information that would facilitate their work. Even if all the presenters are local it is still a good idea to find out whether they plan to be at meals or other events. This helps organizers better estimate how many people they will feed for each meal or cater to at an event.

All presentations should have a moderator: someone to introduce the presenter, link the presentation to the overall exchange, keep the program on time, and troubleshoot issues should they arise during a presentation. Ideally moderators have been part of the program planning team so they have knowledge of the overall program goals, the agenda and the facility where the program is taking place. If there is equipment being used they should have some basic knowledge of how to use that equipment and who to contact if there is a problem. Other than a moderator, each type of presentation made at a peer exchange is likely to need a different kind of support. Common session types include:

Workshops—Interactive sessions that engage participants in a learning process. They are often used to introduce a best practice. Workshop leaders may need help with facilitation, recording responses and comments, keeping time and ensuring equipment works.

General Session Presentations are made to the whole group. They are generally informational sessions used to transfer an idea to a group. Not usually as interactive unless there is time for questions or the session is followed up with a dialogue session. A moderator may need to manage question and answer, ensure equipment works, and keep time.

Tours and Site Visits are used to facilitate the exchange of best practices by giving participants the opportunity to see how a practice is being used. It can also be used to educate participants about the community and context in which the work takes place. Equipment, facilitators, and guides may be needed at multiple sites. Moderators often serve as the overall guides to these sessions connecting the work of the exchange to what is being experienced in the site visit.

Meetings—There may be many meetings at an exchange and many are impromptu. It is best to have a set of resources (flip chart, easel, markers, computer, etc…) available for meetings because sometimes they are held as part of the formal exchange and other times they are unplanned, and held in response to what is happening during an exchange.

Dialogue Sessions are a staple of peer exchanges. They can be used to engage participants in the exploration of an issue or as a way to reflect on what has been learned. Often there is little equipment involved. However, facilitators often need someone

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to record the reflections and comments made during a dialogue session. If there are more than a dozen people participating, it may be necessary to facilitate more multiple sessions at the same time. Each one would need a facilitator and recorder.

3. Monitoring the Agenda —During the program planning process an agenda for the peer exchange is developed. One of the responsibilities of the program management team is to make sure that agenda is followed and changes are proposed during the exchange (changes are regularly proposed during a program). If a program has flexibility built into it, changes can be relatively simple to accommodate. If an agenda is packed with activities, changes can be problematic. However, even if a change seems relatively simple it is important to consider the ramifications of the change on the program (what will need to be left out if this activity is added?); the equipment (do we have the equipment and other resources necessary to make this change work?); the facilities (do we have the facilities available to effectively accommodate the proposed change?); and the manpower (do we have the people available to support the proposed change?).

The agenda is the outline for what the organizers believed would lead to a successful peer exchange. Protecting the integrity of the agenda entails making sure that the agenda is respected and that the goals of the program are being realized as the peer exchange progresses.

a. Ensuring the agenda is respected includes monitoring the program to be sure activities happen where and when they are supposed to happen. Keeping a peer exchange on time is always a challenge. For each activity, a time keeper should be selected who is responsible for letting the moderator know when the session is half way through, when there are ten minutes left, and when it is completed. One way to help the program is to make sure that adequate time is allowed for the program sessions. If breaks are to be included in an agenda item, make sure the presenters and facilitators know they need to give people breaks and make sure they do. Even when a session is going well, it is important to take regular breaks to sustain the energy of the group and to make sure that people are not worn out when they get to the sessions later in the day. Planning breaks is a challenge because it is difficult to know how long to allow for a break; however, there are some practices that can help. First, a ten-minute break (or less) is rarely respected. If there is not time for at least 15 or 20 minutes, it might be a good idea to revise your agenda to accommodate the extra time because people are likely to take the extra time anyway. Second, count the number of bathrooms. If there are two bathrooms and 30 people it may take a little longer for people to get back from a break. Third, most people do not like being yelled at when it is time to return from a break. A better plan is to use music or some other cue that the break is ending and they need to return. Some programs will start all their sessions with music, storytelling, or some other activity as a way of bringing people back together and getting them back to present time.

If for some reason the agenda gets off schedule (it can happen despite all efforts to keep things on time) try not to cannibalize the rest of the agenda to get it back on time. Being on time is not an end in itself. One of the best alternatives is to let the participants know what has happened, present alternatives to the group and let them decide what they would like to do. If the program is going to be delayed, be sure that the presenters later in the day who are directly affected by the program change are aware of what the changes are.

b. Monitoring the goals of the program is an important way of determining whether the program is meeting the goals. Monitoring helps organizers learn whether or not the program is on track and make changes if necessary. If the goals of the program are not monitored, the only time organizers are likely to find out whether or not they are making progress is at the end of the program when it is too late to make changes. Monitoring can contribute to evaluation and that relationship will be discussed in the last chapter. In terms of program management during an exchange the primary purpose of monitoring is to identify whether or not goals are being met early on so that changes can be made if necessary. Feedback questionnaires are often used on a daily basis to evaluate the program sessions. Meeting at the end of each day with a small group of participants can be an effective way to help contextualize what was written in the feedback and get suggestions for program improvement that can be implemented the next day. Another useful monitoring tool is to have someone participate in the exchange with the added responsibility of keeping an eye on the group to see if they are engaged and connected to the program. Finally, key informants from each delegation can meet occasionally during meals and/or breaks to provide input into how they see the program progressing. The important thing with monitoring is to pay attention to what is happening during the program and to be willing to make changes if they can increase the chances that the goals of the program will be met.

4. Ensuring facilities and equipment support the goals of the program—once a program starts it is hard to change facilities. However, some things can be monitored so that changes in how the facilities are used can be made to meet the demands of the program. If a group is using their own facilities, they may have more options than they would if they are renting rooms from someone or borrowing a room from a local partner. When a program is planned, certain assumptions are made that help determine where a program will be held such as the size of the group, proximity to where they are staying and suitability for the kinds of activities that are being planned. It may not be possible to change places so organizers may need to put limits on the number of people who can participate and/or think creatively about how the space is used. It may be possible to seat a small group at tables but not a large group. Small groups may not need a speaker system but a large group may. It is important to keep presenters informed about what is possible in the space they have so that activities can be planned accordingly.

Sometimes the realities of what actually happens may be slightly different than what was originally planned and may require a change in how resources are used. It is important to check the assumptions periodically to be sure that you still have the capability to make the program work with the resources you have. If there is an increase or decrease in the number of participants, will the facility still be adequate? What changes do we need to make if it is not? Do we have enough projectors, flip charts, easel pads, computers, etc…? Monitoring resources entails looking at the resources that are available to the peer exchange and ensuring that they adequately address the needs of the program agenda. This means staying abreast of the change in the number of participants, the development of the agenda, and the resource requirements that result from changes in the program. Since it is impossible to know what changes will be necessary ahead of time it is always good to build redundancy into the resource plan. Have back-up projectors, computers, and other equipment available if it is needed in case something does not work or the program grows or changes. To avoid these complications all together, it may be simpler to not rely on technology that most people are not familiar with or that is known to fail with some regularity. Physical flip-charts and posters are a great, low-tech alternative to Power Point presentations. They have the added advantage of being more accessible to grassroots participants who usually do not have access to computers on a regular basis.

Particpatory Meeting Methods

One of the hallmarks of peer exchanges is the use of meeting methods that engage the participants in the program. By engaging grassroots women in participatory processes that they control, Peer Exchanges often serve as tools for empowerment. Passive participation is rare. More often participants are engaged in the program through the use of dialogue processes and participatory meeting methods. In this section the goal is not to teach participatory meeting methods but instead to outline their use and discuss how they can be effective in a peer exchange as a means of engaging participants actively in the program. In order to create an environment where people feel safe participating, it is necessary to establish some guidelines or basic agreements among the participants so they know what the rules are in terms of how they participate and relate to one another in the peer exchange. It is important to establish a set of basic agreements at the beginning of the peer exchange and to provide opportunities early in the program so participants get a chance to see how they work and can develop a reasonable set of expectations regarding how they and others will participate.

Basic Agreements

The following is a set of basic agreements taken from The Neighborhood Women's Training Sourcebook first published in 1993 by the National Congress of Neighborhood Women . These basic agreements are fairly comprehensive and can serve as a starting point for program organizers as they develop a set of basic agreements that will work for their peer exchange. It is important to remember that when developing a set of basic agreements what is appropriate for one group in a given context may not be appropriate for another group. For this reason it is important not to just adopt this set of agreements verbatim. It is more important to start with a set of basic agreements and negotiate among the various groups involved in the peer exchange what are appropriate agreements. This is necessary because cultural differences can render some things inappropriate. Basic agreements may be negotiated by some of the program organizers that represent the groups involved in the peer exchange prior to the beginning of the exchange. This will help establish a range of possibilities. At the first general session of the peer exchange the basic agreements should be presented, discussed, amended and adopted by the participants. Sometimes this can take a little time but it is time well invested because participants who understand and support the basic agreements are more likely to participate fully in the sessions.

Basic Agreements	
Full attention	We listen respectfully, giving each speaker our full attention.
I-statements	We speak from our own experience, using "I" statements whenever possible.
Full participation	We encourage everyone to speak. At the same time, we "pass" (decline a turn to speak) when we need to, and respect the right of others to pass. Anyone who passes is asked again at the end of the session if she wishes to speak.
No putdowns	We do not engage in putdowns of ourselves or anybody else. We separate issues from people holding opinions on issues.
No advice	We do not comment on each other's contribution or give advice except when it is asked. If asked to respond, we ask supportive questions or share our own experiences.
Personal confidentiality	We keep confidentiality outside the meeting when people share personal information and do not refer to what was said (even to the speaker herself) without explicit permission from the speaker.
Culture and spirit	We bring elements of culture and spirit into our meetings to remind us of our shared values and visions. We are careful to welcome different approaches, not letting one cultural or religious view dominate.
Personal responsibility	We accept responsibility for taking initiative and getting our own needs met, such as going outside to smoke, getting questions answered, or getting the support we need to solve problems.
Stay with the group task	We accept responsibility for sticking to an agreed-upon agenda. We support the designated leader in helping us to do this.
Time limits	We aim to start and end meetings on time. Often responses are timed. We try to give everyone equal time.
Appreciations	We take time to share genuine appreciations of each other and use participatory meeting methods. Whenever possible we share good news before bad news.
Limit smoking	We abstain from smoking unless the group agrees to allow one smoker at a time.

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Participatory Methods

Participatory meeting methods are specific techniques that can be used in forums such as a peer exchange to maximize participation and interaction among the participants in the exchange. A peer exchange is often characterized by women sharing their stories and experience with one another, their reflections on those experiences and their ideas about how to incorporate what they are learning into new practices. Participatory meeting methods are useful tools that can be used in conjunction with one another and incorporated into the program agenda to make it safe and possible to facilitate the exchange of ideas in ways that give everyone an opportunity to share. Some participatory meeting methods can be used within the context of a workshop or presentation and others can be used as the framework for a program or activity such as in a dialogue session. The following participatory meeting methods were adapted from the Leadership Support Process of the National Congress of Neighborhood Women. [6]

Allies Panel—An "Allies Panel" is a group of people who work together as partners and want to demonstrate their ability to work across the lines of race, class and culture to achieve specific goals. It explores what works in the relationship and what is challenging. It works with groups to contradict ideas about oppression, help people understand cultural differences and share social identities and cultural backgrounds in a safe space with facilitated support and representing the diverse social identity groups within your meeting. An Allies Panel is conducted by bringing together a panel of people representing diversity (of age, race, tribe, religion, nationality, etc) in front of the whole group. A moderator then asks them each to answer the same set of vision questions. Their answers will demonstrate both their diversity and their appreciation for each other's diversity. Panelists should be volunteers with a working relationship. Facilitators guarantee safety by relying on the basic agreements, repeating guidelines established for the panel and by requiring respectful attention and not allowing for responses to the panelists.

Appreciations—A positive way to end a meeting or session is to conduct an "appreciation" by having participants verbally acknowledge something positive about each other or the group. Appreciations affirm the contributions of group members, reinforce self esteem, help build relationships, and contradict negative perceptions about women's leadership. It is a form of positive reinforcement that can be used to develop individual and/or group self esteem. To appreciate a group have each participant share a highlight or something that went well in the session; to appreciate

[6]The selected participatory meeting methods were adapted from the National Congress of Neighborhood Women Leadership Support Process workbook prepared for the Grassroots Women's International Academy held at the World Urban Forum, May 2006. More information on the origins and uses of LSP can be found in Annex A. For a more complete description of the participatory meeting methods contact the National Congress of Neighborhood Women, 249 Manhattan Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11211, Tel: (718) 388.8915, Fax: (718) 388.0285

oneself have each participant share something positive about themselves, or something they feel they contributed that day; and, to show appreciation to other group members have each person share something positive about another group member's participation in the meeting, either by going around in a circle and having everyone appreciate the person to their left, or in pairs.

Go-round—When the program or a session gets to a point where everyone in the group should have an opportunity to speak or respond to a question, a "go round" can be used where each participant is given a brief amount of time to share their perspectives on a question. Participants may pass if they don't want to respond. The go-round is strictly timed and no one speaks twice until everyone has had an opportunity to speak once. A new topic may not be introduced until the go-round is complete. This method allows everyone an equal opportunity to participate by responding to an issue, topic, or question. To conduct a "go round", the facilitator will raise the question or the issue that is to be discussed, clearly and in a manner that everyone understands. The facilitator decides what order people will participate, establishes time limits, and keeps the time for each speaker. Go-rounds require respectful listening for all participants and do not usually include feedback from other participants.

Check-in—A "check-in" is a "go-round", generally conducted at the beginning of a meeting or when it is apparent that energy levels are low. A check-in helps a group focus or refocus their efforts. Often a check-in includes a vision question but not-exclusively and allows participants to acknowledge who is present and what is on their mind. A "check-in" is a means of assessing a group, introducing them to one another and getting them all on a common level and in present time so that it is possible for them to begin or continue their work together. A check-in is facilitated the same as a "go round". A question is posed to which each member of the group responds. The question is designed to help the facilitator determine how the group is doing and what needs to be done in order to get them on track. Ideal questions can be answered quickly and still serve as barometers for the group. Examples of check-in questions are:

- Pick a word that describes how you feel right now
- What is something you would like to take away from this meeting?
- What is one thing that went well about this morning's session?

Opening Circle—The period at the beginning of the program that initially engages the participants is called an "opening circle". It usually includes a "go around" with a vision question that allows the participants to introduce themselves and envision what they would like to see happen in the exchange. It may include music, cultural sharing, poetry, or other ways to set the tone. The sharing should be linked to the agenda of the meeting. It is a community-building process that creates a safe place for the rest of a group's work together. An opening circle brings people into present time, introduces participants to one another and sets the tone for the meeting. The Opening Circle can be used to develop or review basic agreements, review plans or set the agenda for the day. To conduct an opening circle place the participants physically in a circle so everyone can see each other. The facilitator should make sure everyone is given an opportunity to speak with equal time. Questions for the opening circle are developed by the facilitator and should lead people into the program purpose or agenda. It provides a transition into the rest of the program.

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Closing Circle— is a segment that ends the meeting or program. The "closing circle" includes sharing appreciations of the meeting, oneself, and other participants. It may include poetry, music or prayer as a way to express the culture and spirit of the group. A closing circle is used to remind participants why they are there, summarize the primary elements of the meeting and embolden the participants to feel empowered to take the next steps in their own leadership. It also ensures that the primary elements of the meeting are remembered by the participants and allows the opportunity for appreciations because many women leaders often feel unappreciated or underappreciated. To conduct a closing circle physically create a circle with the participants and give everyone an opportunity to speak with equal time. Include a reflection to help participants think back over the peer exchange, review what they experienced and think about how they may use those things in their own work. End with a cultural or spiritual event so people leave on a high note and feel empowered about what has happened and their ability to do future work.

Culture and Spirit Segment— As Peer Exchanges are used to celebrate diversity, it is important to find opportunities to celebrate the culture and spirit each participant brings to the group. A "culture and spirit segment" is a portion of the program during which participants introduce elements of their own culture or spirituality in order to inform and inspire others. The culture and spirit elements within a Peer Exchange may include music, dance, talent nights, story telling, sharing a meal, poetry, readings, prayers, etc. The opening and closing circles each day are a good place for one participant each day to share an aspect of their culture and spirit. The culture and spirit segment should reflect the diversity of the group and no single culture should dominate. Culture and spirit segments provide inspiration and a chance to honor diversity by learning about each other's cultures, .Sharing of culture and spirit builds community by building trust. It is a way of sharing one another's lives and allows people to show their talents or gifts that may be important to their own leadership in a manner that doesn't normally occur in conventional meetings. A culture and spirit segment can be organized by each participant of the exchange. They choose how they want to celebrate their culture or spirituality. Another way is to have various participating groups in the exchange. Time is built into the agenda and it requires respectful attention. The facilitator should link the culture and spirit segment to other segments of the meeting.

Social Issues Discussion—At some point during an exchange there may be a need or opportunity for a "social issues discussion" where issues of concern to the group are discussed. There are different ways to initiate a social issues discussion such as: a presentation, video, readings, Allies Panel, etc. The discussion itself should follow the basic agreements and should be timed to recognize equal participation. A social issues discussion is a means for sharing information on a topic or issue and making sure that the members of the group all have the same information. It allows the group to reflect and think together about issues of concern and clarify the group's thinking by allowing the participants to better understand each other. A social issues discussion is lead by a facilitator who decides on the manner of presentation. The group will use basic agreements to discuss the information presented using reflective questions. A social issues discussion often includes some evaluation of the material before deciding how it will be used or acted upon by the group.

Individual Support Time— Issues can arise for individuals during the course of an exchange that may require special attention. A member of the group may request help in resolving a problem or issue or they may request that the group, an individual or subgroup listen to them for a specified period of time called "individual support time". The purpose is to provide supportive listening to individuals who may not be able to express themselves in the larger group or feel that they are not being heard. It also allows people to bring up topics that may not be on the agenda. Effectively facilitating individual support time requires the facilitators to make sure "I" statements are used and people are engaged in respectful listening. It is the only time when a person can ask for and receive advice.

Subgroup—Sometimes it makes sense to break groups into smaller subgroups. A subgroup is a method of breaking a larger group into smaller groups for one-on-one discussions, 3-way triads, and small groups of 4 or 5 people. When time is a problem a subgroup can be a means of making sure that everyone has an opportunity to speak and be heard. Subgroups are a way to manage large groups, complete

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tasks such as making basic agreements, budget time, and planning activities. They are effective whenever people need to speak directly to one another or when the group would be more effective if they work in small groups and report back to the larger group. It is a way to make sure that everyone is engaged. The size of the subgroup is determined by considering the task, time and question to be answered. What is the task to be accomplished, how much time is there to work with and what question is the group trying to answer? The facilitator will determine whether reporting back to the large group is necessary. If reporting is necessary, be sure to budget additional time for reporting.

Temperature Taking—At different times in a program it may be necessary to assess the mood of the group. "Temperature taking" questions can be used to help assess the mood of a group, measure the groups' understanding of the issue being discussed, determine a group's readiness to proceed and decide whether a group has reached consensus. In the process a person may share a complaint or grievance but also must share positive recommendations for resolving the issue or problem. Temperature taking can help ensure that a group has reached a common understanding of an issue before going forward. It makes it possible for a group to clear-up puzzles and unanswered questions and to provide members of the group an opportunity to make suggestions. A temperature taking exercise is lead by a facilitator who opens with questions developed ahead of time for the group. It is not a go-round, but a question posed to the whole group. A limited number of people are selected to answer. The ideas that emerge from the responses are sorted with some going to a parking lot (to be dealt with at another time), answered immediately, or given to specific members of the group for a response. Temperature taking should have a time limit. Decide in advance how much time to allow for group response. For a group of 10 people allow 10 to 15 minutes of temperature taking. It should not be a lengthy process.

Vision Questions—In order to elicit women's experiences, strengths and needs

"vision questions" are employed. They are open-ended and remind us of the values, visions and insights of the group of people engaged in the peer exchange. Vision questions are intended to get the entire group engaged and thinking about the future in positive ways. Always ask: "What is possible?" "What might be a solution?" Vision questions contradict resignation, self-defeating patterns, and the status quo and encourage people to imagine a future that has not yet arrived. Vision questions are carefully designed to be appropriate to the situation and the participants. The questions should be prepared in advance whenever possible. However, it is also important to be flexible and responsive to the discussion and the needs of the participants. Often a question may come up that is not planned or anticipated. The process should be flexible enough to accommodate these opportunities. Each participant should receive equal time to share her perspectives and those responses should be monitored and carefully timed. No one speaks twice before everyone has had an opportunity to speak once. A go-round process may be used or an open process where people speak at will. Sequential questions can be used such as, "What is going well?" "What is challenging?" and "What support would make a difference?" Vision questions can also be used as part of the evaluation and the closing circle. For example,
"What went well for you tonight?"
" What is something you can take away from this experience?"

Evaluation and Reflection—Assessing the peer exchange as a group in a reflective dialogue is a participatory approach to "evaluation and reflection". It is a means of assessing a meeting as a group and reflecting on what was learned during the course of the meeting or program. Vision questions are often used. Evaluation and reflection are normally part of the go-round during the daily closing circle. For example," What went well tonight?" "What is something you learned from this group?" It is

an opportunity for participants to give feedback and observations to the facilitators that can be used for the planning of future meetings and programs. This type of evaluation encourages participants to reflect on the work they have done together and to share insights as a way of helping the group take the next steps. In this type of evaluation a facilitator will use a vision question as part of a go-around at the closing circle. People are given equal time, nobody is allowed to speak twice until everybody has had an opportunity to speak once and it may include or be followed by appreciations. The statements should be recorded so the group has access to the information for future planning.

An important aspect of organizing and planning a peer exchange is incorporating participatory meeting methods into the agenda of the program to ensure that everyone has a chance to participate in the program in meaningful ways. It is an important means of getting the ideas and experiences out in the open where others can learn from them and it contributes to the development of their leadership when they are able to articulate the things they care about and the practices they have developed to address those tools. Participatory meeting methods can be incorporated into the agenda in the opening and closing events, the workshop and dialogue sessions and during reflection and evaluation sessions. Most peer exchanges do not use many outside speakers or presenters so it can be easier to incorporate participatory methods into the agenda of the program. It can be difficult to know how an outside presenter will share their perspectives, so it is a good idea to make sure that there is time available after an outside presenter to process the information they share just in case that was not part of their presentation. This can be done in simple and creative ways without impinging on the rest of the agenda. For instance, if there is a meal after the session participants can be asked to do a "go round" at their tables during the meal around a simple reflection question such as, "What did I learn this morning that I can use in my practice?" Travel time during field visits can be used as reflection times. On a bus or in a van participants can be organized into groups of two or three where they do subgroup work. The key is to commit the group to ensuring people have an opportunity to participate and then look for opportunities to incorporate participatory meeting methods into the program agenda.

Program Agenda

Many versions of the agenda are necessary for a peer exchange. The housing committee will want to see an agenda that identifies when people will need rooms; the transportation committee will want to see an agenda that tells them when people will travel and the committee responsible for meals will want to know when people will be gathering for meals. It is important to work closely with members of the visiting group in designing the agenda as well. One to two people from the visiting group should be included on the program planning committee. They can participate through conference call if possible. The program agenda will include detailed information about the program and can serve as a framework for other types of agendas.

Program Agenda

Day 1	**Breakfast**
8:00 to 9:00 am	
	Opening Session
	Welcome & Introductions
9:00 to 12:00 am	
9:00 to 9:30 am	
	Opening Circle
9:30 to 10:30 am	Break
10:30 - 10:50	Introduce Primary Topic
10:50 -12:00	**Lunch**
12:00 to 1:00 pm	**Program Tour**
	Travel to Program site
1:00 to 5:00pm	
	Tour of Program Site
	Break
1:00 to 1:45pm	Best Practice Workshop
2:15 - 3:00	
3:00 - 4:15	Return to Venue
	Free Time
4:15 - 5:00	
5:00 - 6:00pm	**Dinner &**
	Welcoming Event
6:00pm - 8:00pm	
	Event
Day 2	Breakfast
8:00 to 9:00 am	**Support Group**
9:00 to 9:30 am	
9:30 to 12:00 am	**Allies/Leaders Panel**
9:30 – 10:15	Leaders Panel
	Break
10:15 – 10:30	Appreciations
10:30 – 11:15	Reflection Dialogue
11:15 – 12:30	
	Lunch
12:00 to 1:30 pm	
	Closing Dialogue Session
1:30 to 5:00 pm	
	Evaluation and Reflection Dialogue
1:30 – 3:30	Break
3:30 – 3:45	Closing Appreciations
3:45 – 5:00	Free Time
5:00 to 6:00 pm	Closing Dinner Event
6:00 to 10:00 pm	

Participants will arrive at the program site between 8:00 and 9:00 am where they can register and help themselves to a continental breakfast.

Conference organizers welcome the participants, introduce organizers and talk about the goals of the exchange and establish basic agreements

Using a "go round" the participants introduce themselves to each other and respond to the vision question. "What would I like to see accomplished by the end of our time together?" Close the opening circle with music from each of the communities present.

Coffee, bagels and fruit are available to participants. Keep it light as lunch is at 12:00.

Social Issues discussion will be used to frame the topic of the exchange. A 10-minute presentation followed by a 20-minute video will introduce the topic. A 40-minute open discussion will follow. Each person will be given 3-minutes to share his/her perspectives on the topic. Notes will be kept on easel pads and compiled during lunch.

This will be an open lunch with no agenda. Participants will be seated at tables of 6 and will be asked to sit with at least 3 people they did not know before the exchange.

Load participants into three vans and travel to the program site. Each van will have a local volunteer guide that will explain community landmarks and provide a short prelude to the program

Program hosts provide a tour of their work site and an overview of their program

The hosts will conduct a workshop where they share their best practice followed by a facilitated "go round" reflecting on how participants can apply the practice in their own communities.

Return to the site of the peer exchange

Give participants some time to rest before the dinner

The dinner and welcoming event is being hosted by a local partner in the peer exchange. A local music ensemble will play for the event. Participants will get to meet a variety of local partners.

Instructions

A light continental breakfast is available.

The support group is a "check-in" facilitated by the host to see how participants felt about the previous day.

A panel of leaders representing the various groups involved in the exchange will talk about their work together, the challenges and the rewards.

The dialogue will begin with "appreciations" for the leaders panel. Each person will be asked to name one thing about one or more of the leaders they would like to emulate

Appreciations will be followed by a "go round" where each participant will be given 2 minutes to address the question, "What can I do to increase my capacity to be a leader in my community?"

The lunch will be provided by a local sponsor with a performance by a local youth community theatre group. —process the peer exchange, discuss next steps and formally close the peer exchange.

Two questions will be addressed: The first question is "What did I learn at this peer exchange that I can take home with me?" The second question is, "How do we continue the sharing we started at this peer exchange?" Both questions will be recorded on flip chart easel pads.

In this set of appreciations the participants will form a circle and each participant will take turns sharing something about that person that they appreciate so everyone will be given an opportunity to appreciate and be appreciated. The program will end with some words from the hosts and a poetry reading by several participants who had been writing poems about what they were witnessing during the exchange process.

Time to rest before the closing dinner

The dinner will be celebration of our work together. Members of the community will be present to meet the delegates of the peer exchange. A short presentation will be given to acknowledge the contributions made by the hosts and the delegates, some of who had to travel a great distance. The dinner will be followed with music and dancing.

The sample program agenda above is a detailed program agenda based on the first and last day of the exchange outlined on pages 16 – 17. The program agenda is intended to inform the organizers and to illustrate how all the parts of the program fit together and all the activities and arrangements flow from the program agenda. It includes detailed descriptions about what will happen and when. This is critical for program monitors because it allows them to look at the agenda, see the intent for each session and decide whether or not the intent was being realized. If problems arise, the agenda provides enough information that possible changes to the agenda can be effectively evaluated. It also helps committee chairs decide when they will need to have their work ready. Much of the information is not relevant for the agenda outline that participants will receive but is critical for planning the exchange. By looking at this program agenda it is possible to see when people are traveling, eating, enjoying free time and working in sessions. It is also possible to gauge the relative intensity. On the last day there are a number of dialogues. That break before dinner will be critical because people will be tired. Having an opportunity to rest will make the closing dinner more enjoyable. Finally, the agenda describes enough of what will be happening that it is possible to know when people will have an opportunity to interact and participate actively. This is critical for a peer exchange where active participation is expected.

Hosting a peer exchange is work, but it is good work in that the potential rewards are very high. The intention of the two sections on hosting a peer exchange is to provide a framework and way of thinking about planning and organizing a peer exchange that will make the hosting of the actual event more enjoyable and fulfilling for everyone including the organizers. The intention was not to provide a recipe even though it may appear that way in places. The intention was to provide a reasonable framework that could be used to begin to organize a local effort to host a peer exchange. The key is to be organized before the exchange so that it is possible to enjoy and participate in the program when the visitors arrive and be part of a rich learning experience. The next two sections will look at preparing to travel on a peer exchange. As a potential host it is always a good idea to understand what the travelers may face in their preparations.

Worksheet :: Are We Ready to Conduct a Peer Exchange?

1. Who is responsible for coordinating the housing arrangements, meals, transportation and program management? ____________________
____

2. How will the coordinators for housing arrangements, meals, transportation and program management support each other? ____________________
____

3. What are the primary issues that will need to be monitored during the peer exchange for:

a.Housing ____________________
____

b.Meals ____________________
____

c.Transportation____________________
____

d.Program Support ____________________
____

4. How do we plan to deal with surprises during the peer exchange? ____________________
____

5.How will program planners coordinate their work with the people making housing arrangements, planning meals and arranging for transportation?____________________
____

6.Have all the presenters and facilitators completed a "presenter checklist? Yes/No

a.What resources will the presenters need (what kind and how many)?

____
____

7.What are the basic agreements that we want to use as a framework for governing our interaction at the peer exchange? ____________________
____

a.What process will be used to discuss and adopt the basic agreements at the beginning of the peer exchange?

____
____

8. What participatory meeting methods have been incorporated into the program?
____
____

How Do I Prepare to Travel on a Peer Exchange?

Once a group has decided to participate on a peer exchange they will need to begin preparations to travel and participate in the exchange. Most of the responsibilities for planning the exchange will necessarily fall to the group hosting the peer exchange. However, if the program is going to be a success for everyone, those who will be traveling to the peer exchange will have to take responsibility for ensuring they are able to safely travel to the exchange site, participate in program planning activities, locate resources, communicate logistical needs to the hosting organization and be prepared to participate effectively in the program once they arrive.

Travel Preparations

The farther a group has to travel the more complicated (and sometimes expensive) it can be to make the arrangements. If a group is traveling to another country to participate in an exchange making travel arrangements can become very complicated. This is particularly true if it is necessary to obtain passports and visas to travel to the international destination. There are two things a group can do to dramatically simplify the process of making travel arrangements for their peer exchange. The first is to develop an effective travel plan. The plan should include an accurate timeline that identifies all the things that have to be arranged and has deadlines for making the arrangements. Some of these items can take a great deal of time so it can be helpful to create a timeline that shows what tasks have to be completed and when they need to be done. The second is to communicate effectively with the hosting committee. The hosting organization can be very helpful in identifying potential problems that travelers to their community may encounter. This is particularly true if international travel is involved. When making travel preparations it can be helpful to consider the following:

1. How will we get to the exchange? For most groups there may be several travel options including car, train, bus and air or some combination of the four. When there are options, cost and time tend to be the two most important criteria. If a group is traveling together it can sometimes be cheaper to rent a van and drive. However, if the travel is of any distance, car travel may need to include hotel stays. This adds cost and requires extra time. If time is a factor then air travel is often a better choice but may cost more. Rail and bus travel are viable options that may cost less than air travel. If the group is traveling a long distance and the costs are comparable to driving, bus or rail travel may be a viable alternative because no one in the group has to deal with the responsibility of driving. Both rail and train can be slower than traveling by car. The key is to consider the alternatives, determine budget limitations and time constraints and make the best choice for your group. Be sure to consult with the hosting group to confirm the most convenient airport, train or bus station, or to hear if having a car in the hosting city would be inconvenient.

2. Identify all the requirements for traveling. If the travel does not require crossing an international border, then there may be few requirements. However, if international travel is required do the necessary research. The embassy or consular office for the country that is being visited will have information about obtaining a visa to their country, but do not stop there. Visit

Costs to Monitor for International Travel

1. Exchange rates on some currencies can be volatile so monitor rates carefully.
2. Local tax rates for lodging can be as high as 20%.
3. Processing fees for passports, visas, and embassy interviews may not be widely publicized
   a. There can also be unwritten requirements like the use of an expediter that can greatly increase the cost.
   b. Travel expenses for visa interview appointments.
   c. Sometimes it may take two or three attempts to get a visa and each attempt may include separate processing fees.

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with a good travel agent to find out what the requirements are for traveling to the destination. Often the travel agents will know if there are any peculiarities about working with the consular office or embassy in your area. For instance, it can sometimes take much less time to arrange for a visa if a local expediter is used. An expediter is someone who shepherds the paperwork through the visa application process. This information will not be published in the embassy materials but may be well know to travel agents. A travel agent can often provide lots of good tips about preparing for international travel. Keep in mind that may countries will require those who want visas to visit a consular office for an interview. In some countries this may require a trip to another city. Sometimes the trip that is required for an interview may be a significant additional cost as well, particularly if participants live outside of the capital city.

3. Develop an accurate estimate of potential travel costs. It may be difficult to know exactly how much it will cost to travel on a peer exchange, but if a careful assessment is done the budget can be remarkably accurate. Surprises can be very painful. For example, a hotel may quote a rate of $100 per night. However, in some communities the local fees and taxes can add as much as another 20%. Unless the hotel is asked directly how much the fees and taxes are when a reservation is made, travelers may not find out about the additional costs until they get ready to pay the bill. If a group is staying for several days or needs several rooms it can add up to a considerable additional cost.

4. Research the destination. The local host committee should be putting together background materials for the travelers. It is good to review those materials and work with the host committee to develop a basic understanding of the community and the people that will be visited. It can help to get a sense of cultural norms and to identify issues that may cause hardships for the travelers. If you have access to the Internet, you may want to do some of your own research so you can focus on the things that might concern you the most. The host committee should be able to assist but they will be more effective if they are trying to answer specific questions about the things you are interested in knowing or seeing. This is particularly important if there are cultural differences between the hosting community and the visitors. The hosts may not know enough about what the visitors will need so as a visitor it is important to let them know your concerns.

5. Include the hosts in making travel arrangements. The hosts can be very helpful to the travelers. A peer exchange should be a true collaboration, so the hosts may sometimes provide a lot of assistance to travelers. In fact, the hosting group may have access to a wider variety of resources than the travelers and may be able to collaborate with the travelers on things like finding support for plane tickets and other making travel arrangements. This should be a two way street. The hosts can be very helpful to those who have to travel and the travelers can be very helpful to the hosts as they make program arrangements.

6. Who will be traveling in the exchange? Sometimes the delegation traveling to the event is inclusive of groups that may not know each other very well before they travel together to the exchange. Guidelines should be established for traveling as a group to ensure safe travel and to make sure that expectations are realistic. If travelers have unrealistic expectations, they can put undue stress on the host committee once they arrive at the event.

7. Establish expectations for the delegates traveling on the exchange. It is important for the delegates to understand what is expected of them in terms of how they represent the organization, participate in the exchange and share what they learn. The leadership of the traveling delegation needs to develop a set of expectations and select delegates who understand and support the expectations.

Participating in Program Planning

The delegations traveling to the peer exchange need to take responsibility for participating in the program planning for the peer exchange. The goals of the exchange should be negotiated among all the participating delegations. As travelers you may have practices you want to share, projects you want to develop, and specific topics or issues that you would like to discuss. Do not just expect that they will appear on the agenda or that there will be an opportunity to change the agenda once you arrive. The organizers balance many interests when they develop an agenda, so it may not be simple to make changes once participants arrive. Travelers bring skills that can make the exchange a richer experience to the exchange as presenters, facilitators, and grassroots leaders. These contributions should be reflected in the program. The hosts will be looking for that kind of input. As part of the peer exchange it is important to think about how you can best provide input to the program planning process. Some possibilities include:

1. Include program planning as an expectation for the travelers. The delegation should develop goals that they would like to achieve as a result of participating in the peer exchange. The delegation should meet regularly in preparation for the exchange, develop ideas that they would like to share, communicate regularly with the host committee, and respond to drafts of the program as it is developed. Remember it is likely that potential funders and other partners supporting the travel of the delegation to the peer exchange will have expectations about what will happen because of their support. It is important to make sure those expectations are reflected in the agenda. If the peer exchange does not meet their expectations in terms of what the delegation brings back from the exchange, it is the delegation they will hold responsible.

2. Inform the host committee of specific needs. There may be specific needs that should be incorporated into the program planning. Some of these may be logistic such as the kind of equipment that you will need to do presentations and workshops; others may be religious or cultural, such as taking breaks certain times of the day; and some may be supportive such as the need for translation. It is important to discuss a range of needs with the others participating in the exchange so that the final program satisfies everyone's needs and meets their sensibilities. It can also save money. For instance, when the hosting group clearly understands the translation needs of the visitors, it is more likely they will make appropriate arrangements.

3. Study your own work. Many opportunities to share best practices with others at the exchange will occur. Look critically at the things in your organization or community that

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can be shared at the exchange. In addition, visit with the hosts and others in the exchange and learn more about their interests and then prepare to communicate practices with others at the exchange formally and informally. That may include developing a brochure or poster or simply writing a few things down, so that it is easier to recall exactly what others need to know about the practice you want to share. Key questions to think about include:

a. What are the goals for our organization and community in the exchange?
b. Are these goals well represented in the program that is being developed?
c. What are the practices, core values, issues, ideas that we wish to share or present?
d. How can we effectively share these values, issues and ideas with our peers?
e. What kind of support will we need?

4. Learn about the facilities. Early in the program planning it may be possible to make changes in arrangements. If there are people in the delegation with special needs the sooner that the program planners know these needs the easier it will be to make appropriate accommodations. Do not just assume the accommodations will be available. Food and lodging expectations should be discussed and clarified so that everyone in the traveling delegation knows what to expect. It may be that some will choose not to participate. It may be better that they choose not to go than to have them go with an unrealistic expectation and not be able to tolerate the arrangements that are available. Food restrictions should also be discussed. Travelers should be prepared to try new things but at the same times if there are foods that are not part of the traveler's normal diet or that travelers are not permitted to eat for religious, cultural or health reasons, it is important to inform the hosts so they do not inadvertently offend someone in the delegation.

5. Negotiate guidelines for participating in program planning. It is a good idea to think about exactly how decisions will be made if disagreements arise in the program planning process. Disagreements will happen. Effective guidelines can help manage the stress that results from disagreements. Guidelines also provide an opportunity to develop joint expectations that all the participating peer groups can understand and support. Most conflict arises from misunderstandings about expectations. Guidelines help clarify expectations.

Resource Development

Traveling can be expensive, especially international travel. The travel budget will include the costs plane tickets, travel documents, food, lodging, and other incidental expenses. A visiting delegation needs to develop realistic strategies for identifying the resources needed to finance travel. Grants can sometimes support travel but most funders will require that organizations have some capacity to leverage resources. For example, a delegation of 6 people that plans to travel to an international peer exchange is not likely to find a single funder that will buy all six plane tickets. However, if the group finds the resources for two tickets, a funder may buy the other four because the group has committed to obtaining two tickets on their own.

There are two general approaches to resource development. The first is to focus on fundraising. There are a variety of ways to do fundraising such as hosting events, writing solicitation letters, developing grant proposals and creating projects that may generate the revenue necessary to participate in the program. The other approach is to look for ways to reduce the costs of travel such as obtaining a donated vehicle or finding low cost

or free housing. It can sometimes be easier to find someone with a resource willing to share that resource that can reduce the cost of participation than it is to find money (such as a vehicle). A church may loan a van or a company may donate frequent flyer miles. Cost reduction strategies and fundraising often work together. For example, one strategy for a group needing six plane tickets might be to look at people and organizations that can donate frequent flyer miles. Many airlines have low cost procedures for transferring frequent flyer miles to nonprofit organizations. Often grant making organizations will require that a group raise as much as 50% of the cost of the project they would like funded. If a group is able to get three tickets through donated miles, they may be able to use those three tickets as a match in a grant application that will pay for the other three.

Resource development is most effective when it is done collaboratively among the groups participating in the peer exchange and their local partners. Budgets should be considered collectively, with each group taking responsibility for identifying resources they can access that would support some aspect of the exchange. This will increase the profile of the event and increase the range of funding opportunities available to the exchange. Supporters like to see the program organizers receiving support from a variety of potential supporters. When the budgets of the various groups are combined along with the sources of support, the result can be impressive and can facilitate access to other funding sources.

Participating in Peer Exchange

Participating in a peer exchange is a privilege for most people. It can provide a rich learning experience that strengthens networks and develops the voice of grassroots participants. Peer exchanges are often multicultural events that bring women together from different cultures, backgrounds, and economic circumstances. There is no recipe for how to prepare to participate in a peer exchange. However, if a participant can take responsibility for meeting their personal needs and doing what they can to be an active participant in the program, it should help them learn more about the people and places they are visiting, practice their own leadership and learn from the experiences of others. Things we can do to prepare ourselves for participating in a peer exchange include:

Keep an open mind. Whether traveling across town or to a different country it can be helpful to not make judgments about what you are experiencing. Part of the learning experience is learning how other people view some of the same issues that you do. Simply because we do not understand something does not mean we need to reject it. If we are able to suspend judgment long enough to understand another person's experience, we may be able to learn something that can have a lasting impact on our own experience.

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Practice active listening. Active listening means staying in the present. Often when we are in a conversation with someone our tendency is to think about how we will respond to what the other person is saying rather that actually listening to what they are saying. This is particularly true when we are in groups. Many of us get nervous about sharing our ideas and consequently miss what others have to say because we are too busy preparing our own thoughts. When we practice active listening, we do things such as let people know we understand what they are trying to say. We ask questions that help people elaborate on an idea, and as a result people are better able to express their ideas effectively.

Be prepared to share. A peer exchange is an iterative process. This means that as people share their experiences with one another it can help others better understand their own experiences and they become motivated to share their perspectives which adds to the learning of the group and may stimulate someone else's thinking. This is a critical part of the learning process in a peer exchange, so showing up ready to share is critical to the success of the peer exchange.

Stay with the group task. Sometimes it can be difficult to see where a discussion is going, tempting participants to steer the conversation off track. Remember that there are multiple goals in a peer exchange and the program agenda is carefully crafted to meet most of those goals. When we get off track, we interrupt the learning of others in the group who find that session important and we may put some of the goals in jeopardy. If there is a concern that something important is being left out, let someone know during a break or during a reflective dialogue session where feedback is being sought. During a program session itself it is important to stay on the task of that session so that the overall goals of the program are achieved and the learning goals of others are respected.

Critical thinking that avoids making judgments. When we participate in a session, it is important to ask ourselves, "Is what I am learning or experiencing applicable to my own situation?" This is not intended to be evaluative in terms of determining whether or not a practice is good or bad. Instead it is a challenge to look critically at our own work to determine if there is something that can be enhanced by the experiences of others.

Determine how you will report back to your organization and community. We all have different ways of reporting. Some of us take notes, some take photos or make videos. The important thing is to decide what method will be used and how we plan to share the information with our organizations and community. Will we make presentations, write newsletters, do radio programs, or something else? The point is to think through these questions so that we are prepared to gather the necessary information during the exchange that will help us effectively report what we saw, learned and accomplished during the exchange.

Provide feedback to the hosts. The hosts for the peer exchange may be doing this type of event for the first time. Let them know how they are doing so they can learn from the experience and make changes as they go along. They need to know what they are doing well in addition to to what needs improvement. When providing feedback try to praise one thing they are doing well for each suggestion for improvement. They want the experience to be good for everyone. but they also need positive reinforcement. It is hard work.

Complete evaluations and provide follow-up. A number of opportunities to provide feedback and participate in evaluations will be given during and after the peer exchange. Sometimes they may not make a lot of sense to us as participants because we may not care too much about what people are trying to measure. Sometimes there are things that are required by the organizers which have been placed on them by funders and other supporters. This support is often critical to the ability of organizers to host the exchange. The feedback is also important to the work we do and the goals we set for future learning activities.

Remember it is work not a vacation. A peer exchange can be a lot of fun. Participants will meet new people, go to new places, and experience different cultures. Sometimes it is easy to lose track of the real purpose for being there. It is important to have fun, but a peer exchange is also important work. The results of an exchange often impact the work of many organizations including some that are not able to actually participate in the exchange itself. There are others who would have liked to participate but were unable and are counting on the participants to do good work and report their learning. It is critical that the work of the exchange is the primary focus of the participants.

Relax and enjoy the experience. The experience can be very energizing for participants. Participants may start working and making plans for things they will do when they get home. Sometimes participants work all day during the exchange and then work all night making plans for what they will do when they get home. It is important to be sure that time is taken to relax, get to know the community where the exchange is taking place and reflect on the experience. The exchange can serve multiple purposes including our own growth and development.

Worksheet 4 :: Traveling on a Peer Exchange

1. What are the critical travel arrangements that need to be made to get our group safely to the peer exchange? ____________________

____

____

a. If traveling internationally, do we need visas? Yes/No
If yes, who will coordinate making arrangements for the group?

____

____

b. What arrangements will be necessary to obtain visas?

____

____

c. How much time will it take to make travel arrangements and how much will it cost?

____

____

2. What is our plan for acquiring the resources we need to attend the exchange?

____

____

____

3. What are the issues (housing, lodging, cultural differences, food, etc…) that concern us the most about participating in the exchange? ____________________

____

____

4. Who is responsible for communicating with the host committee?

a. How will we decide what we want to contribute to the program?

____

____

5. How are we organizing ourselves to be sure that we are prepared to share our best practices with our peers? ____________________

____

____

Worksheet 5 ::
Participating in a Peer Exchange

1. What do I plan to accomplish during the peer exchange? ________________
____
____
____

2. Do I understand and support the basic agreements? Yes/No

    a. Which of the agreements do I believe will be most difficult for me?

    ____
    ____
    ____

    b. How do I plan to address these challenges?

    ____
    ____
    ____

3. What can I contribute to the exchange? ______________________________
____
____
____

4. What can I do to prepare myself to participate in dialogues and other sessions in the exchange?

____
____
____

5. What can I do that will allow me to suspend judgment and relax in a foreign environment? How can I prepare myself to consider ideas different from my own, and appreciate new insights? ___________________________________
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How Do I Know If My Peer Exchange Was a Success?

Evaluation Options

Evaluation is a dirty word for many people. It often means extra work collecting information that may or may not be useful or asking someone we do not know to decide how well we do our work. Evaluation within the context of the peer exchange has a different focus. It is possible to do the kind of evaluation where an outside consultant comes in and makes an assessment of the effectiveness of the program. These kinds of assessments are usually driven by the needs of the funders. If a peer exchange is receiving outside funding a professional type of evaluation may be required.

The purpose of this section of the manual is not to facilitate the work of an outside evaluator. There are things the organizers of a peer exchange will want to know about the success of the exchange regardless of what others need. In future peer exchanges organizers will want to model those aspects of the exchange that went very well and modify those elements that did not meet expectations. Evaluation in this context is a process of deciding what needs to be reported, documenting the exchange, and then using the information to inform our peers, and to make changes to the design of future peer exchanges.

Deciding what to Evaluate

Deciding what we want to know is normally determined early in the planning stages of the peer exchange. What we want to know is often a reflection of the goals of the exchange. If one of the goals was to exchange best practices, then one of the things that should be studied is to what extent the program facilitated the exchange of best practices. Another goal may be more focused on developing a specific type of capacity in the program participants. For instance, the peer exchange may have an overall theme focused on housing, AIDS or another issue that the participants share in common. If the exchange is focused on AIDS, then one of the goals may be to reduce the incidence of AIDS in the places where the participants live. In this case it is not likely that the exchange itself will reduce the number of people who get AIDS. However, it may be possible to find out from the participants how they plan to use what they have learned during the exchange to reduce AIDS in their community. Six months after the exchange it may be possible to follow-up with some of the participants to discover the extent to which participants were able to reduce AIDS in their community and how much of that reduction they attribute to what they learned in a peer exchange.

It can be difficult to determine the factors important to the success of a peer exchange. The key is to develop assessment tools in conjunction with the planning of the program. Each of the committees working on the peer exchange should be responsible for identifying factors that will affect their success or failure. Evaluation is the process of determining whether or not the factors we chose were actually important to the success of the program and will lead to future changes or follow-up programs that build on the success of the program. If organizers do not know what factors contributed to success or failure, they will have a difficult time determining what to build on for future programs and what to avoid.

Four primary elements of a peer exchange should be considered when developing an evaluation plan for a peer exchange- the content, process, outcomes, and the logistics. The content focuses on the sessions themselves. Evaluation questions may focus on things such as: Were the sessions effective? Did the facilitators, workshop instructors, presenters and guides conduct good sessions? Were the specific learning objectives met? Evaluation of the process considers how well people worked together and the flow of the program. Did we get where we wanted to go in a manner that respects what is important to us as individuals and as a group? Process questions explore things such as: Did the participants adopt and use the ground rules? Were the differing values of the participants respected? Were there opportunities for reflection? Outcomes are the changes in the community that the organizers wanted to see as a result of the peer exchange. These are often societal changes such as reducing the incidence of HIV/AIDS or increasing access to affordable housing. These goals are often what drive the work of the participating organizations, so linking the work of a peer exchange to the purposes of the groups who participate in the exchange is critical. Outcome questions help organizers determine to what extent the learning is transferable to the work in communities. Finally, logistics questions focus on the support elements of a peer exchange. How well did the housing, transportation and meals serve the needs of the peer exchange? The purpose is to find out how well the housing or meals complimented the program. Housing can facilitate interaction, help people get to know the community, connect participants more directly with their

hosts, among other things. Meals and transportation may also contribute to goals of the program. It is important to be sure that people are comfortable, but these attributes should be looked at within the context of the exchange. If a goal of the exchange is to build stronger relationships between members of the host organization and the visiting organization, home stays may contribute to that goal, whereas keeping people in a hotel may not, even though it could be more comfortable. Effective questions look at the extent to which these important ingredients of a peer exchange facilitate the work of the exchange.

Content—The content of a peer exchange includes the sessions, workshops, tours, dialogues and other elements of the peer exchange that make up the program for the exchange. The success of the program often begins with looking at how well the sessions were received by the participants, the degree to which learning objectives were met in each session, and the contribution the session made to the overall goals of the program. There are several effective approaches to session evaluation.

1. Session questionnaire. This is what is typically done at conferences. The organizers put together a series of questions about each session for participants to answer at the end of each session. It is not very interactive but can provide some information.

2. Session goals and review. It may make sense to get an understanding of why the participants are in a session, what they want to learn or explore. To create a session goal and review start by asking each participant what they would like to learn or discuss during the session; make a list of those items; and review the list as a group at the end of the session. This tool is strong on group interaction and participant satisfaction, but it may not contribute much to an understanding of how well the session achieves the goals of the program.

3. Guided discussion. At the end of the day have each participant complete a short questionnaire about the day. Questions should focus on the quality of the session and the goals of the program. This can be supplemented with a "go round" that explores aspects of the questionnaire that relate to overall program goals. This is helpful for understanding how well the day's agenda and the individual sessions are contributing to the overall goals of the peer exchange. If done on a daily basis, this discussion can lead to program adjustments if necessary.

Process—The principles of the exchange should serve as a guide for understanding how well the process contributes to the learning and goals of a peer exchange. Remember, principles exist on two levels. The first are the broad sets of principles that were established early in the organizing (see section, "values and principles reflected in a peer exchange) to set guidelines for the planning, organizing and implementation of the peer exchange. They typically reflect the values that exchange participants share in common and want to respect as they put the program together. The second type of principles are those reflected in the basic agreements (see section, "basic agreements'). In both cases the goal of assessment is to determine how the group met the expectations set by the group for themselves. There are many times a group cannot guarantee their work will lead to the outcomes they desire, but they can control for how well their values are respected, their ideas are valued and heard, and their interactions are healthy. When assessing process consider:

1. The relationship between the program and the principles. Does the program build on the principles we established for the peer exchange such as collective learning or the inclusion of participatory methods? Sometimes these can be assessed by a simple review of the program and the principles together. One effective tool is to have a session among the organizers of the peer exchange when the planning of the program is nearly complete and ask, "Does the program reflect the following principle…? If so, in what way does it respect that principle? If not, how can we adjust the program to better reflect this principle? At the end of the peer exchange a similar debriefing session can be held in which the similar questions are used: " Did the program reflect the principle of …? If so, in what way did it respect that principle? If not, how can we be sure that the situation does not happen again in future programs?" When putting a program together it is not uncommon to make mistakes in terms of implementation. When effectively evaluated, a mistake can be a valuable learning tool. It is acceptable to make mistakes that violate the principles as long as they were unintentional and as long as a lesson was learned that can be used to avoid similar situations in the future. It is not acceptable to keep making the same mistakes over and over again because the process was never evaluated.

2. The use of a process observer. A process observer is someone who participates in the program and pays specific attention to how the process is working. She looks at how well people are relating to one another, the program, and the exchange itself. She is the informal keeper of the rules. She helps session leaders by periodically reminding them what the basic agreements are and they monitor the program to be sure the basic agreements are being respected. If the basic agreements are repeatedly being violated, she may remind the group what they agreed to when they adopted the basic agreements.

3. Periodic support group sessions. Support group sessions are very useful tools for evaluating the process. Hosting a "check-in" dialogue session each morning before the program starts can help uncover potential flaws in the process. A "check-in" asks the questions, "What is going well? What is challenging?" and "What support will make a difference?" These questions may raise concerns about facilities or the program itself but often it is a good barometer for gauging how people are doing in the exchange. Is their energy low? Have they been working too hard and need a break? These kinds of process concerns will come up during a check-in.

Outcomes—Outcomes can be difficult to assess for a peer exchange. This is particularly true when an outcome is a change in practice or behavior that requires longer term monitoring or assessment. An outcome is a particular result that the organizers would like to see because of participation in a peer exchange. It may not be possible to know the extent to which participation in a peer exchange contributes to an outcome unless some type of follow-up contact is initiated that looks at how a new practice is being implemented. Shorter-term outcomes such as an improved understanding can be assessed during the exchange as part of the session evaluation. This section is more focused on the changes that the peer exchange participants would like to see result from their time together. The changes do not need to be sophisticated but should reflect the value that participants expect to get from a peer exchange. For example, a program may include a best practice session on how a local group is using peer counseling to educate the community about sexually transmitted diseases. It would be unreasonable to expect that a group will go

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home and use that practice in their communities. The context is likely to be different, the needs of the community may be different, and the relationships that are necessary to run that program may not be present. However, what is reasonable is to expect the participants to look at how peer counseling may be used in their community as an educational tool. It is hard to have people speculate on what will happen. Effective questions can be used during reflection sessions at the end of the day or the end of the exchange that help organizers get a sense of how the participants have changed as a result of their participation and how they might use what they have learned. Good reflection questions can include:

1. What is one thing (practice, idea or concept) you learned during the exchange that you will use when you get home?

2. What is something you already do that has been enhanced by your participation in the peer exchange? In what way was it enhanced?

3. What did you learn that will enhance your ability to work with others?

4. How will the relationships you developed during the peer exchange support you in your future work?

Some of these questions lead to questions about following up the peer exchange. This is natural because when people have had a good learning experience they are often interested in continuing the relationship in some way. Evaluation tools can help understand what it was about the program that was special and help people to begin to think about next steps in their own development.

Logistics—the process of assessing whether or not the logistical support enhanced or detracted from the learning is often incorporated into the other assessment tools such as the session evaluation. There are two reasons to assess the logistics. One is a monitoring function. It can be helpful to know whether people are satisfied with the housing, able to eat the food and travel to the venues and other activities on time. Monitoring can identify problems so that changes can be made during the exchange. The monitoring function can be addressed through daily feedback collected formally and informally that helps organizers identify issues with the logistical support.

Box _:Goal: Reduction of HIV/AIDS in communities through grassroots community interventions

Objective 1: Introduction of three, proven "best practices" that grassroots organizations are currently engaged in to reduce HIV/AIDS that can be replicated (in part) in other communities

Measures
1. Number of "best practices" actually shared during the peer exchange.
2. riteria used for selecting the practices
3. Extent to which others were able to use the practice in their communities.

Objective 2…

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Daily feedback is a simple method for gathering input about how a program is going for the individual participants. It provides a monitoring function that does not directly contribute much to evaluating the program. Logistical support, when it is effective, is not likely to be noticed or recognized for contributing to the success of a program. However, when there are problems with logistical support, it can have a very negative affect on the quality of a persons experience and their ability to effectively participate in a program.

1. Daily check-in – When a peer exchange incorporates a daily "check-in" session held every morning, logistical issues may emerge in that process. Most of the time check-ins deal with program process or content. However, if there are serious logistical issues, eventually they will be raised during a check-in. The problem with a check-in is people may be reluctant to share issues with housing or food in a support group environment until they are really upset. It is much more difficult to resolve once that happens.

2. Daily feedback sheet – One method that has proven highly effective is a daily feedback questionnaire. At the end of each day have the participants complete a 2 or 3 question survey that asks them "What did you like about the day (what did you learn)?" What was not effective or inhibited your participation? "What change would make the peer exchange better for them?" At the end of the day ask 2 or 3 people to meet with some of the organizers to read through the feedback forms and make recommendations for changes. If there is concern that there will be too much complaining, it is a good idea to ask when people have a concern that they also provide a suggestion for improvement.

3. Temperature-takers – Participants may feel more comfortable sharing complaints with their peers informally than in a formal evaluation or check-in session. While they may not wish to offend the organizers, logistical issues can be severely detrimental to a Peer Exchange. If participants are unhappy with the lodging situation or food, they will be unable to concentrate fully on the learning objectives, no matter how good their intentions. Organizers should use temperature-takers, trusted people selected from both the host and visiting groups, to check-in with each day on the general attitude of the group and receive suggestions for improving logistics.

Documenting the Peer Exchange

Documenting a peer exchange is a way of sharing the learning that takes place in an exchange with others who have similar values and interests but were not able to participate. It also informs the assessment that organizers will want to do when they determine whether or not the peer exchange was a success. The documentation plan is the key to understanding what happened at the peer exchange that was valuable and sharing that valuable learning with others who were not present. Documentation can be viewed as preserving the history of the event. Effective documentation reflect the goals and expectations of the exchange, provides a record of the participants at each of the events, records the outcomes of the program and generates a report that can be used for donors, to make recommendations for policymakers and to develop follow-up.

Goals and objectives. The goals and objectives provide the framework for documenting the important elements of the peer exchange. Goals include both the long-term and short-term outcomes that organizers would like to see result from the event. The goals are also what attract the participants. Grassroots women interested in exploring the best practices of other grassroots women's organizations engaged in combating HIV/AIDS in their communities are going to be attracted to a program that has as its goal, "the reduction of HIV/AIDS in communities through grassroots community interventions". A well-formulated goal is future oriented, will identify the issue(s), set the stage for the agenda, resonate with people who have a natural interest in the topic and provide a focus for the documentation of the program. Objectives are specific to the goal, can be measured in some way and begin to move the program towards achieving the goal. An objective for the goal "reduction of HIV/AIDS in communities through grassroots community interventions" may include the introduction of three proven best practices that grassroots organizations are currently engaged in to reduce HIV/AIDS that can be replicated or adapted for use in other communities. This objective is incorporated in the goal through the sharing of grassroots practices. It can be measured by looking at:

1. Number of best practices actually shared during the peer exchange.
2. Criteria used for selecting the practices
3. Extent to which others were able to use the practice in their communities.

A single goal may have several objectives. When considered collectively, the objectives will outline a plan for how the objectives for the peer exchange will contribute to the goal. It is very unlikely that a peer exchange that focuses on HIV/AIDS will identify all the grassroots methods that are effective in reducing the incidence of HIV/AIDS. However,

Box _: Sample Participant Learning Questionnaire

1. To what extent do you feel your understanding of this topic increased because of this session?

1	2	3	4	5
Very little		Moderately		Very much

2. Do you believe the information you received in this session will help you in your practice?

1	2	3	4	5
Very little		Moderately		Very much

3. Do you think the instructor was effective in presenting the materials

1	2	3	4	5
Very little		Moderately		Very much

Additional Comments

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the objectives will clarify how the program will contribute to the goal and the measures begin to identify some of the important things that should be documented. A peer exchange may have two or three goals with four or five objectives for each goal. For planning purposes the following matrix might be helpful.

Once goals and objectives are established the process of documentation focuses on how to tell the story in a way that reflects what is important. What is important should be reflected in the goals and objectives.

Counting the participants—Counting participants seems like something so simple that it should not even be discussed but it is very important. The record of participants should be inclusive. That means there should be a total list of all the people involved in the program. Each session should have a roster and each event should have a roster. In addition the organizations that are in some way affiliated with the program as sponsor, participating organization or partner should be listed. Ideally there should be a record of the key networks and institutions that the individuals and participating organizations belong to that may have an interest in what was learned in the exchange. Some of this information is valuable to supporters who like to count bodies at events, but the primary goals for developing rosters is to get a picture of who participated and when they participated, get a sense of who else was involved in the exchange and identify people and organizations with an interest in what was learned at the peer exchange. Most of the people and organizations on these rosters will have a stake in what was learned as a result of the peer exchange and are likely to want to see copies of reports and follow-up actions that resulted from the program. The challenge is to know who to count and why:

1. Participants—Rosters for the participants should be tabulated for the overall program and for each event including: program sessions, tours, special events, and group meals. The objective is not to inflate the numbers but to portray an actual count of the people who participate in the exchange and benefit from the work of the organizers who plan each event. Many of the sessions or events may be as small as 10 to 15 people, but others can be very large; it may not be unusual to have as many as 200 or 300 people participating in certain functions during a Peer Exchange (such as a community-wide dinner or presentation). This can be important documentation when asked by supporters to document the local impact of the program.

2. Count the volunteers—Volunteers should be counted and the time they commit to the organizing and hosting of a peer exchange should be documented. These hours can be translated into a prevailing wage rate that can be used to demonstrate the financial commitment and non-financial contributions of the hosting groups. The number of volunteers and volunteer hours accumulated by the visiting organizations should also be included. Organizing to attend and participate in a peer exchange can often require lots of local support. Volunteers are often passive participants in the peer exchange, another good reason to count them. They may not get to participate in many of the sessions, but they have the opportunity to learn as much as the program participants through the work they do and the relationships they develop hosting the participants. They may have more one-on-one time with participants than others involved in the program. This can have additional benefits to the volunteers and the organizations they represent.

3. Organizations—Track the different people and organizations and the contributions they made to the success of the peer exchange regardless of the scope of the contribution they made. It can be surprising how many people were involved. This information not

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only demonstrates the scope of the work that was involved in organizing the exchange, but it also identifies potential beneficiaries of the program regardless of whether or not they participated in the any of the formal events. They should all receive copies of the documentation and evaluations produced for the exchange and their contributions should be acknowledged.

4. Networks—This may be the most difficult to track. Many of the people and organizations that participate in the peer exchange are also part of networks. Many of these networks may share similar values as those that motivated the peer exchange. The network may also be the reason that the participating groups met each other. These networks can be very effective in analyzing and disseminating the results of the peer exchange to a broader audience that may have an interest in the products of the exchange.

Program Outcomes—everyone wants to know what was accomplished and whether or not the peer exchange made a difference. Program outcomes are those things that happened as a result of the peer exchange. There are learning outcomes—those things that are learned as a result of the sessions, programs, and networking that takes place during the exchange. These types of outcomes can be determined in a variety of ways but generally require the participants to self-report what they learned. There are a number of opportunities during an exchange for that kind of information to be collected. The second type of program outcome is an increased capacity to implement or adapt a new practice. This is more difficult to monitor but can be done through self-reporting at the end of the peer exchange and through follow-up contact six months later. The third type of outcome is the anticipated change in the community expected as a result of the new or modified practice. This can be very difficult to measure because often the change can take years to develop and may be difficult to directly attribute to the peer exchange. However, these long-term changes in the community are often what participants are striving to create, so evaluation efforts should look at creative ways to gather that type of information. In this section the focus will be on the first two types of outcomes. The third will be discussed more completely in the section on "following up a peer exchange".

1. Learning outcomes—there are many opportunities for learning outcomes at a peer exchange. The sessions, networking, site visits, meals, events, and even the free time can reinforce learning at a peer exchange. Organizers typically want to track two types of outcomes. The first is the learning that took place during sessions. Did participation in the sessions improve the participants understanding of a topic or concept? Often the presenters or organizers have very specific ideas about what they would like the participants to learn as a result of having participated in the session. If there is a need to generate a report that illustrates the level to which learning occurred in a session and there are more than 10 people participating, a short questionnaire can be administered. Use a maximum of 5 questions that can be measured on a simple scale and provide space for comments. In the sample there are three questions. The five-point scale means that if the participant completing the form felt like she learned the topic "very" well, she would circle the "5" and if she learned "very little" she would select a "1". The scores can be averaged and provide a sense of the relative quality of learning. It is only recommended to collect this kind of information if there is a specific use for it such as when a donor requires this type of data or when the program may be repeated or modeled for others. The questionnaire can be given to participants when they arrive at the session and then collected at the end. If there are just a few participants or it is a small exchange, it may be more effective to do a series of "go rounds" with participants using variations on the following: What was most valuable about this session? What additional information or resources would I like? What would make the training more valuable to me? A group of six can do all three questions in less than 10 minutes when using strict time limits. Have someone record the responses. If there is time, discuss the responses. The "go rounds" can be facilitated by someone other than the session leader (when possible) and the ground rules need to be strictly enforced.

The learning that takes place during the peer exchange that happens outside the formal sessions can be captured during a reflective dialogue. This is a dialogue session held at the end of the peer exchange. It is an evaluative session where the participants reflect on a series of questions. One set of questions should focus on the learning. The primary question could be a variation on the following: What is one thing I learned from the sessions, site visits and relationships that I developed that will help me in my practice?

2. Change in Practice Outcomes—One of the goals of a peer exchange is to share practices with each other. One organization may have come up with a unique strategy for developing resources, another group may have a unique way of organizing or teaching. These practices are often incorporated into the identity of the organization. A peer exchange is an opportunity to share these practices with other peer organizations that may be able to adapt some aspect of the practice into their own work. One type of outcome from a peer exchange that many are interested in tracking is the extent to which a practice learned at a peer exchange is adopted and used at home. In grassroots development many practices are highly contextual. This means that the place, culture, norms, and resource base of a community heavily influence how a grassroots organization does its work. Grassroots organizations are part of the community and thus reflect the values, norms, and cultural characteristics of the community; therefore, a practice in one place may not have direct application someplace else. However, in a peer exchange, through the use of dialogue and other participatory meeting methods, a practice can be shared and explored in a way that the core concepts underlying the practice are discussed. These concepts can often be adapted to the local customs, norms, and culture of another community.

The process of documenting the extent to which the organizations at a peer exchange are able to adopt a best practice shared by a peer organization is a change in practice outcome. Documentation occurs at two levels. Participations are asked the questions, "What is one practice that you will take home with you from this exchange?" The responses to these questions will give organizers some indication of the intentions of the program participants. Intentions are not outcomes. The second level of documentation is to find out 3 to 6 months after the exchange the extent to which the participants have adapted the practice they said they were going to adopt. This follow-up serves a twofold purpose. One is to find out how they are doing with the practice. Were there issues they did not anticipate? Was the practice having an impact in their community? The second purpose of following up is to trouble shoot issues that may emerge when trying to implement or use a new practice. This can be a form of social support. The follow-up can be in the form of a phone call, e-mail, questionnaire or some combination. Often people may respond better to one method than another. At the peer exchange itself methods for follow-up and evaluation should be discussed.

Generating Reports—A myriad of reports can be generated from a peer exchange. However, most grassroots organizations are often not interested or may not have the capacity or time to generate a number of reports and others are generally not interested in reading many reports. One approach to report writing is to develop a single summary report that documents the entire peer exchange. Other summaries and reports can be developed as needed from the summary report. The simpler the process a group uses. the more useful the final summary report is to the organizers. A summary report documents the entire peer exchange from its inception to the follow-up plan. It is a collection of the documents that are produced in the course of putting together the exchange. The level of detail is up to the organizers. It may include many details such as correspondence or the minutes of planning meetings. At a minimum it should include the goals for the exchange, the plan for reaching the goals of the exchange, the agenda, the budget, rosters, notes and evaluations from the sessions, the program outcomes and the follow-up strategies. Most of the elements in a summary report are developed as part of the preparation for the peer exchange. Producing the summary report is often simply a matter of assembling the pieces together into one place. Once the summary is put together, other papers and reports can be generated from this single report.

Methods of Gathering Information

The process of collecting information can range widely depending on the talents and interests of the people involved in the peer exchange, how the information will be used and the resources available for documentation. The following list of methods for gathering information are not an exhaustive list but should provide some ideas for program organizers as they think about how to collect the information they need to effectively tell their stories. The list includes common methods such as interviews and questionnaires and some that are not as common such as support groups and employing documenters. These methods can be used in combination depending on the reporting needs of the exchange.

Personal Testimony—Gathering personal testimony is a method commonly used to gather the experiences of individual participants. Their stories are reported as a means of understanding the issues that the women confront. The stories can be used to frame an issue. For example, if the theme for the peer exchange is housing, the women can give testimony about their experiences with housing. Some may talk about the struggles they faced finding and keeping housing. Others involved in policy may talk about their struggles advocating for housing. There can be many perspectives. In many peer exchanges there is a diversity of experience. Gathering stories can be an important way to document the experiences of the participants and begin the process of exploring appropriate remedies. When using personal testimony, consider the following questions:

1. How will the information be used? Often the stories can be gathered in ways that support the work of the group. For example, if one purpose is to inform policymakers about the experiences of the women in the peer exchange with accessing affordable housing, a guiding question can be developed around general themes that will make it possible to look at themes or commonalities among the stories.

2. How will we protect the identity of the women? Many times the women give testimony about things that are sensitive and maybe even dangerous to share. It is important that the identities of the women are closely guarded. If there is a chance their identities may be revealed, be sure that they understand the risks and give permission to collect their stories. If they will be asked to share their testimony publicly, make sure they have the support they need to get through the process safely.

3. How will we record their stories? Recording their stories can be done many ways. The most effective is video because the stories shared on video are often the most compelling. When using video, start with simple questions or stories that are easy for the storyteller to share until they get used to talking on camera. It does not take long for most people to get comfortable, so one or two simple questions should be enough to get them warmed up. Voice recording is a good alternative to video. If the stories will be analyzed, think about how they will be transcribed or translated. Transcription and translation can be time consuming and costly. However, it is very difficult to do much effective analysis of stories without some sort of transcription of the stories.

4. What are the policy implications of the stories themselves? The process of collecting stories is often fun. The people collecting the stories will find it difficult not to analyze the stories while they are conducting the interviews. It's a natural reaction. One suggestion is to ask the interviewers (if there are more than one) to take simple notes during the interviews around a single question (provided the interview itself is being recorded). Facilitators and documenters should be reminded to think about the policy implications of the stories they are hearing while they are hearing them.

Questionnaires—Questionnaires can be useful when there are concerns about protecting confidentiality, when the group is very large and when there is a need for documentation that can be quantified. There are several challenges to using questionnaires with a peer exchange. First of all questionnaires are not very interactive and can be very impersonal. Peer exchanges are highly interactive and relational so the use of a questionnaire may not be comfortable for participants, particularly for participants with low levels of literacy. It may be easier to have facilitators or documenters administer the questionnaires orally if time permits. Second, it can be difficult to develop good questions. The best questions tend to be those that relate directly to program objectives and are easy to understand. Questions that can be answered yes/no or using a simple rating 1 to 3 or 1 to 5 are the quickest to complete. Open-ended questions that require a written response should be carefully designed to elicit a specific response. They also take a long time to answer, so ask very few open-ended questions. Finally, questionnaires often have too many questions. A questionnaire used to evaluate a session or event should take just a couple minutes to complete and include no more than one open-ended questions. For a questionnaire conducted at the end of the day or at the end of the program, participants can be given more time—up to 15 minutes and these may include more open-ended questions. When using a questionnaire consider these questions:

1. What is the purpose of using a questionnaire? Sometimes questionnaires are overused. In a peer exchange they can be very helpful in two ways. The first is for providing daily feedback when the purpose is to gather information about how the program is going. Personal information regarding housing or food needs may surface sooner in a questionnaire. The second is at the end of the program prior to the evaluation dialogue. Questions that can be used to evaluate the program can be helpful in stimulating the process of reflecting on the experience and can help to quantify the peer exchange experience.

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2. How do we want to measure the responses? A daily feedback questionnaire may be used to get feedback to open-ended questions such as "What did you like about the day? What is something you will use in your program? What suggestions would you make to improve the peer exchange for tomorrow?" A daily feedback does not need to be quantified but can offer good feedback to organizers. A closing questionnaire may include a series of questions that rate elements of the program combined with open-ended questions.

3. **How will we use the results?** This question informs the organizers how the questionnaire should be developed. If the primary role is to inform organizers about general information such as satisfaction levels, then there is no need to develop a series of questions that can be used as measurements. If the purpose is to collect information that can be used in a more formal evaluation or for planning purposes, then careful consideration should be given to the types of measurements used in the questionnaire.

4. How will you test your questionnaire? Make sure that the questionnaire is tested on people who can provide feedback regarding its effectiveness at soliciting the kind of information that is desired. If the questionnaire is used at the event first, the problems with how questions are written or interpreted will not surface until it is too late.

Support groups—Support Groups are a common method of evaluation used in a peer exchange. The support group process will incorporate many of the participatory meeting methods mentioned earlier in this publication. When used as a means of collecting information, support groups need to stay grounded in the basic agreements. Support groups are used in peer exchanges as a means of managing the dialogue among the peer exchange participants. The basic agreements set expectations for participants. Some of the participatory meeting methods can be incorporated in the support group process as a means of gathering information. A "check-in" which gauges how people are doing at the beginning or the end of a day, can be incorporated into a support group as a tool for assessing how people are doing in the program or to identify participant expectations. A support group can be used as a tool for developing an understanding of where people are in terms of their understanding of an issue. For instance, a "go round" can be used to answer a single question that will be used to frame a larger dialogue or evaluate how a group will use a new practice. When using support groups as tools for gathering information, consider how the data will be recorded. Often the basic agreements that govern interaction in support groups and other participatory meeting methods require confidentiality. If information that is recorded will be shared, the whole group should be asked to approve the recording of the responses, even if identities will be protected,. The recording of the sessions themselves can be done using video or audio if a transcription is needed. Most often responses to questions are recorded on a flip chart easel pad. This is important to do because it allows the person who provides the response to see how their responses are being reported. Even though the sessions are being recorded or someone is taking notes, it is a good idea to have someone recording on a flip chart easel pad so that the group can follow the flow of the conversation and have a visible record of the proceedings.

Participant Documenters—It is nice to have the story of the peer exchange told by someone who was there participating in the sessions, attending the events, and sharing in the meals. The participant documenter is someone who is actually a participant in the exchange. She may not share as much during dialogue sessions or other events because she is also an observer of the process. She observes how people are participating, evaluates whether or not goals are being reached and monitors relationships. Sometimes the participant documenter is the person who is responsible for developing a report for the program; other times she is there to provide feedback to participants. For example, at the end of the day, it may be useful to provide a short report to the entire group sharing their perspectives on what was observed for the day. This can give organizers important feedback that can be used to adjust the program for the next day and it will also provide feedback to the participants, letting them know how they did in regards to respecting the basic agreements, what they accomplished that day, and provide encouragement to them that will give them energy going into the next day. This is also a chance for participants to validate the information that the documenter has collected. The primary recording tool for the documenter is a notepad and pencil. Often documenters are seen taking notes about what they witness. They note how passionate the dialogue was during one session or how low energy seemed during the afternoon. This information provides important context information that helps people interpret some of the other information that may be gathered that focuses more on program content. If the hosting organization employs support staff, this may be the best option for documentation. A staff person often knows the context and origins of the exchange, understands the values of the organizations, and may be responsible for writing the final report. A student from a partner university may also be a good choice.

When selecting a documenter consider the following:

1. Are the participant documenters trusted by the group? Often the tendency is to use someone with a lot of experience in evaluation to serve as the documenter such as an academic or program evaluator. It is important that documenters are trusted by the participants. If they are outsiders, participant documenters can be disruptive to the process if the participants do not trust them. The best documenters are true participant documenters, people who are part of the group or trusted by the group. Their input is sought out by the group and often people will approach them if they have something they would like to share.

2. What kind of stories should they tell? Typically a documenter has a set of objectives on which to focus provided by the organizers. Organizers may ask the documenters to focus on group dynamics, the flow of the program, the types of decisions made, communication, and other factors that contribute to the success of the program. These factors serve as the focus of their observations and the basis for their stories.

3. How do you want the stories communicated? The stories can be told many ways. They can be written as prose, with the documenter serving as a narrator interpreting the events as they see them. Documenters can serve as storytellers focusing on the anecdotes that emerge throughout the course of the exchange. The stories can also be written formally in the form of a report that will be broadly shared. This is important because the participant documenter should have skills that match how the stories will be told.

Worksheet 7 :: Reviewing and Evaluating the Peer Exchange

1. Of the practices, activities, and methods you experienced in the community, what did you like the most? What impressed you about this experience?

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2. What lessons, stories or new skills will you take back to share with the other women in your organization?

____

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3. Was the process effective in including the basic agreements? Did you feel the participants followed the process and used the basic agreements effectively as a tool for managing their interaction?

____

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4. What was challenging or difficult for you as you participated in this exchange?

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____

____

a. How would you change the peer exchange to make it less difficult and more beneficial to you?

____

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____

10. What ideas did you receive for new activities or ways of working that you may use in your organization? Community? National Organizations or Networks?

____

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____

11. What do you need to apply these new ideas at home?

____

____

____

a. What kind of support or additional contact would you need from the other organization(s) involved in your peer exchange? ____________________

____

____

b. What resources would you need? ____________________

c. In what ways is the community you visited different from your community? __________

____

____

d. Will these differences hamper the application of your learning to your community?

____

____

How Do I Follow-up My Peer Exchange?

The follow-up for the exchange should begin when a peer exchange is being conceived. All planning for the exchange should be done with follow-up in mind, as sharing and implementing new practices is often the ultimate objective of the exchange. The peer exchange is a learning process designed to enhance the work of grassroots women's organizations by strengthening their networks and enhancing their learning. Learning takes place at a peer exchange in a variety of ways. It occurs in the sessions, through the individual relationships and by witnessing the work of their peers in their own environments. The goal for many participants is to learn something that they can use to improve their practice at home. For many the learning starts with the peer exchange and continues once the participants get home; thus, the real value of a peer exchange is cumulative and may not be readily apparent at the end of the exchange itself. So whether follow-up is planned or not, the work started in the peer exchange often continues long after the program is over—sometimes in ways that cannot be predicted.

If the choice is made to do follow-up, a budget and the methods for conducting the follow-up should be developed before the exchange ever takes place. A half or full day for planning follow up and implementation can even be incorporated into the Peer Exchange program agenda. When there is an expectation that those who attend the peer exchange will participate in follow-up activities, this expectation should be an expectation potential participants understand before agreeing to attend and participate in the peer exchange. It may be difficult for people to make a longer-term commitment once the exchange begins, so that commitment should be sought before the program ever starts. When organizers wait until the program begins to request commitment for follow-up activities, participants may tell them they will participate in follow-up activities when they know they cannot. They do not want to disappoint the organizers, so they tell them what they want to hear.

Several factors go into deciding whether and how to follow-up on a peer exchange. The first is to decide what the expectations are going into the peer exchange. Is the peer exchange one part of an ongoing development strategy for the organizations and the networks they belong too? If so, follow-up would be seen as a natural progression. If a peer exchange is a stand-alone program conceived to bring two or more groups together to explore a potential relationship, follow-up may not be necessary. Another factor relates to the goals of the exchange. If some of the goals are long-term and require the application of the experiences from the peer exchange to the participants' practice at home, follow-up activities will need to be planned to monitor the progress of their work. A third factor is networking. Often a peer exchange plays a role in networking. People working on similar issues that share a common value for development—especially gender-based development can form a network. A peer exchange can serve as a catalyst for building new relationships and strengthening existing relationships. Follow-up activities often entail exploring how those relationships will be maintained. A fourth factor is to think about how the learning at the peer exchange can be shared with others who may not have been able to participate. Finally, was something learned at the peer exchange that can be helpful to others planning to use this method in the future? A follow-up strategy may look at how the experience of participating in a peer exchange can be enhanced and replicated in the future.

Reviewing the Goals of the Exchange—The goals for the peer exchange should help organizers decide how to follow-up the peer exchange. Remember the goals provide guidance to program planning. If the goals are fairly modest and focus primarily on learning outcomes, there may not be a need to follow-up the exchange in any meaningful way. However, if the goals are action-oriented and dependent on the participants doing things once they return home or after the exchange then follow-up will be necessary if those goals are to be realized. It is likely that some of the goals of a peer exchange will require some type of action when participants return home. Most grassroots groups are pragmatic in the choices they make about their development and are unlikely to invest substantially in an effort that will not enhance their efforts. The challenge for organizers then becomes to define reasonable expectations for participants and program organizers and plan the level of support necessary to implement the follow-up plan.

1. Expectations for participants should be negotiated with the participants before the exchange. If a goal of the exchange is to exchange "best practices", it is reasonable to expect that the participants will explore ways they can use elements of those "best practices" in their own work. Since the participants may not know much about the best practices and how they work prior to the exchange, part of their work at the exchange should be to identify those practices they are interested in trying at home. This may require time during the program to learn about the practices, collaborate with their peers to consider different options for how the practices can be applied in their community, and develop a short-term implementation plan. The plan should include the things they will do in the first 90 days in terms of their plan. Clear expectations greatly enhance the potential success of follow-up activities.

2. Expectations for organizers need to be realistic in terms of the type of support they are able to provide. Conducting the peer exchange is likely to take a great deal of energy. If follow-up activities will require their active participation such as convening people, maintaining linkages between groups, sending out questionnaires, and other tasks, the organizers will need to be sure they are able to play those roles. It may be helpful to have someone responsible for coordinating the follow-up efforts that was active in the peer exchange and played a role in the planning, but was not a key leader and organizer during the event. This will ensure that the person responsible for follow-up has energy to lead the process after the Exchange ends.

3. Effectiveness of systems of support can make or break the follow-up efforts. In order for people to be effective in implementing their new practices, they will need a system of support. Sometimes support can be built into the peer exchange program. If there is an expectation that there will be follow-up activities, teams of people from each participating organization should be encouraged to participate. Time can be built into the program for reflection on what they are learning. They can develop a plan to try the new practices at home. When a team participates, they can be their own support system. When follow-up is likely to be necessary, a means for supporting those activities will need to be developed that includes support for the people responsible for implementation, access to a network of people they can share ideas with and trouble shoot problems, and a means of monitoring their progress.

Strengthening Networks—A peer exchange connects people who may be building networks of grassroots women and increasing their capacity for development work. New networks can emerge and old networks can be strengthened through this process. Networks are resources for accessing ideas and seeking support. Sometimes the networks seem to take on a life of their own, but they are still maintained through programs like peer exchanges and other events that bring grassroots women together. Follow-up to the peer exchange should consider the potential impacts on the networks. Follow-up activities that can further strengthen the networks include:

1. Working groups—One of the results of a peer exchange can be the emergence of new groups of people that want to continue their work together. Often this can be done with minimal support. Contemporary communication technology makes it possible to set up e-mail groups, host conference calls, and video networking. This technology, where available, can facilitate the further sharing of ideas and strengthening of relationships.

2. Building on other events—Target other conferences and events that focus on some of the same issues addressed in the peer exchange. It may be possible to plan future exchanges and meetings around these events. Sponsors may not be interested in supporting another peer exchange a year later, but they may support attendance at a professional development program where follow-up meetings that build on the peer exchange experience can take place.

3. Reciprocal exchanges—One of the outcomes of a peer exchange is often an interest in continuing the relationship by having the groups who hosted the peer exchange visit the places where the people come from that participated in their exchange. Essentially the hosts become the visitors and visitors become the hosts. This can strengthen the depth of the relationship between the collaborating groups and facilitate the development of a community-to-community relationship, which can make the network more sustainable over time. Some grassroots groups

Peer Exchanges :: Sharing the Experiences of Grassroots Women's Organizations

have had a series of reciprocal exchanges that grow and change as their memberships change.

Sharing the Resources of an Exchange—An important follow-up activity is sharing what is learned through the peer exchange with others who might benefit from what was shared. Many good ideas, practices and policy recommendations can emerge from an exchange. Sharing these experiences effectively makes it possible for others to benefit and learn from these experiences rather than reinventing them the next time an exchange happens. The peer exchange itself has built into the organizing process several different potential audiences including the participants, the volunteers, sponsors, partners, their organizations and the networks to which they belong. These should be the primary audience because they are likely to have the most vested in the outcomes of the exchange. Newsletters, an event summary, press release, website and video clips are all tools that can be used to spread the results of the exchange. Analysis and reports of a successful exchange process can enhance the ability of organizing groups and others to host exchanges in the future. Success can be contagious. When something good happens, such as the work completed at a peer exchange, it not only educates people with similar interests, but also it can motivate them to try new things, share their ideas and possibly develop a peer exchange of their own.

Improving the Peer Exchange Process—Finally, follow-up activities can be internally focused, looking objectively at the peer exchange itself and seeing how improvements can be made to program development, logistical support and planning. This can make future efforts more effective and help others avoid similar problems when they plan their own exchanges. Being well organized, knowing what to do and what not to do can make the actual exchange a powerful learning opportunity. It is important for everyone to leave the exchange full of energy and excitement about the possibilities, including the organizers of the event. Fatigue is a natural part of the process. However, if the organizers are exhausted to the point of being burnt out, it is unlikely they will want to be involved in another event anytime soon. Part of the reflection process needs to include a look at those things that drain the energy of the organizers. The organizers also tend to play leadership positions in their grassroots organizations. The process should enhance that leadership, not detract from it. The review process should involve looking at the program planning, the program itself, and the logistical support. Within 30 days of the event a debriefing session should take place. The following questions can serve as a guide to initiate the debriefing process.

Planning for the Event

1. How did the program come together?
2. Did we have enough volunteers?
3. Were the volunteers adequately trained?
4. Were the hosts effective in coordinating the plan?
5. Were the visiting groups involved?
6. How can we improve the process?

The Peer Exchange Program

1. Did the agenda adequately represent the goals of the exchange?
2. Did the participants find the events useful?
3. What kind of projects emerged?
4. Did the program facilitators have enough support?
5. Did the program support staff/volunteers have enough training?
6. What should we do differently in the future?

Local Arrangements

1. Were the participants well taken care of (housing, food, transportation)?
   a. What were the problem areas?
2. Did we have adequate resources to host the event?
   a. What additional resources would have made it easier?
3. Were there enough volunteers?
4. Did the visitors get to know the community and its people?
5. What should we do differently in the future?

The debriefing should include recommendations for improvement to the peer exchange process so that future organizers can benefit from the experiences, avoid similar mistakes and replicate the activities that worked very well. A summary of the debriefing should be included with the program summary of the overall peer exchange and should be shared with others as part of the evaluation of the program.

Conclusion

It is apparent that there are many benefits for groups that organize and participate in peer exchanges. The process facilitates the sharing of effective practices that grassroots women's organizations have developed around the world with their peers regardless of where they live. The networks that emerge or are strengthened as a result of the peer exchange contribute to build solidarity amongst grassroots organizations and help them voice their concerns to policymakers around the world. When a group in India visits with a group from Brazil and a group from Kenya about how they are addressing issues such as health care, housing, employment, and education they find many things they share in common. They know they share concern about the issues, and they often find that these issues have similar effects on their families and communities. The shared understanding that comes from their discussion of the issues and the sharing of their strategies breeds hope and stimulates the development of larger efforts to affect national and international policy as it relates to the issues affecting their communities.

Grassroots organizations are finding innovative solutions to the most difficult issues. A peer exchange is a type of best practice that strengthens networks of grassroots groups and their ability to support each other. It helps them explore complicated issues, develop and share best practices, provide support to one another, develop their voice and leadership capacity and impact policy locally, nationally and internationally. Hopefully the information in this handbook will make it possible for others to explore the possibility of attending or hosting a peer exchange at some point in the future.

Worksheet 8 :: Follow-up Actions from the Peer Exchange

1. Did an action agenda emerge from the peer exchange? Yes/No.
   a. If yes, what action steps will be required?

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2. Which of the goals established for the peer exchange will require follow-up?

____
____
____

a. What follow-up actions will be required? ______________________________
____
____

b. Who will need to be involved?______________________________
____
____

c. What resources will be needed? ______________________________
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____

d. What kind of support will be necessary? ______________________________
____
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3. How will the peer exchange strengthen our networks? ______________________________
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a. What actions can we take to ensure that our exchange contributes to our networks?
____
____

b. What can we do to support our collaborators in their networking?
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____

4. How will we share what we have learned in this exchange with our other peers not able to participate in the peer exchange?

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____

5.What have we learned that can help us and others plan future exchanges?

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A History of Leadership Support Process

Neighborhood Women (NW) Leadership Support Process (LSP) elements and methods evolved from our work with grassroots women leaders. They can be used in various settings and situations and reach their maximum use in Leadership Support Groups, an essential tool in NW organizing. These processes are used to ensure that grassroots women leaders and their professional partners involved have raised their consciousness as women and can support and empower each other as they work in local communities. A short history of the evolution of the Leadership Support Process gives insight as to how NW works.

Very early in the development of the Williamsburg/Greenpoint effort, leaders from NW encouraged women to take control of their own leadership. By doing this we were contradicting the pattern of women "helping" to develop a project and then not making major economic and political decisions when funding came. Another focus was on dealing with diversity in a sensitive and constructive way. Issues of class, race, and ethnicity were at the forefront of our attention. Unlike the leaders of many organizations, no one at NW pretended such differences did not exist. The challenge was to find commonalities, dispel myths and fears, and work together to create neighborhoods in which everyone could live decently.

In addition to its local efforts, in 1979 NW proposed a national leadership development and support program of four weekends over a two-year period for selected Williamsburg leaders and ten other grassroots women leaders from around the country, to develop a process for working together across racial, income, gender and ethnic lines. It took place between 1980-82, and was funded by the Carter administration. Those attending included Phyllis Kinnerk from Chicago, a Polish-American mother of seven whose mothers' group at the local Y developed into Southwest Women Working Together; Helen Powell from West Virginia, who organized thousands of mining families against black lung disease in her mountain community; Bertha Gilkey of St. Louis, whose fourteen years of organizing in her public housing development resulted in a tenant-managed community with remodeled houses and the virtual elimination of drugs, crime and vandalism; Karen Means from South Dakota, a leader of Women fo All Red Nations; Cathy O'Brien, active in welfare rights in Washington, D.C.; Maria Garcia and Ester Cota from Guadalupe, Arizona, whose group separated their Chicano community from the town of Tempe and formed the town of Guadalupe where they created institutions and schools to reflect their self-determination and values.

Each time we met, we sat around for the whole weekend and talked. We talked about everything and anything. And we listened. We listened to everything and anything. We asked each other questions:

- What do you do as women that is unique to community work?
- What is great about women's contributions?
- What problems do you as a woman face?
- What sustains you in your work? Why do you do it?
- When you feel like quitting, what keeps you going?
- What's it been like out there all these years?
- What's been good? What's been really hard?
- What kind of support has made a difference?
- What kind of support really hasn't made a difference?
- What lessons have you learned from successes? From failures?
- What do you wish we knew about you?
- What's distinctive about your community (your people and people like you)?
- What do you wish we knew about your people's issues?
- How could we be more thoughtful, better allies for you and for your people?
- What are our common strengths? Needs?
- What might we take on together?

Our work together eventually involved into a National Steering Committee, chaired by Bertha Gilkey and Karen Means, and the Leadership Support Process. We knew we had discovered something important and we all brought back to our communities new ways of being together. We had discovered a complex of ideas and practices that combined leadership support with community organizing action projects. These techniques had evolved from our peer counseling training our in our college program, personal experiences with consciousness-raising and methods used by self-help and Re-Evaluation Counseling groups, as well as reports of breakthrough development work worldwide. They were a new amalgam because we knew if we took either a traditional feminist or a traditional neighborhood movement approach we could lose our real and deep commonality. The neighbor-

[7]Williamsburg and Greenpoint are adjacent neighborhoods in Brooklyn, New York, where the National Congress of Neighborhood Women was founded

hood ways can cubmerge women's issues; the traditional feminist focus can emphasize women-as-individuals to the exclusion of shared community social issues.

Our methods involved the use of small groups in which women could think together and also express some of the exhaustion, fear, confusion, hurt, pride, and hope they felt as leaders in the community. The group also provided a safe environment, structures, and helpful settings for deepening women's self-awareness. They began to appreciate themselves in terms of gender, class, ethnicity, race, and as people with opinions. We had learned early in our work that many neighborhood women of all backgrounds, if asked in standard discussion setting how they felt about being a woman, or poor, or African American, or Italian American, would respond, "I never thought about it," or, "Fine". Similarly, if asked in such settings what they thought about issues such as what kind of housing would meet their needs, they often fell silent or echoed the stereotypes pictured in women's magazines or on television.

To get beyond these responses, our support group leaders used what we came to call "vision questions" that bring out what people feel, know, and want, but do not usually articulate. Working up to the present through evoking past experiences is one approach we used. If we asked women, for instance, to talk about what they liked or did not like about the housing they grew up in, we began to tap the stream of feelings and ideas about housing that lies beneath the surface. Our "dream session" which focused on what women would like if money were no object, were particularly effective in getting to new visions. Some of the most imaginative ideas we have heard anywhere about housing design and community development came up in these sessions.

We introduced the Leadership Support Process to our network members in workshops around the country, and we trained them in forming and leading "Leadership Support Groups." The immediate effects were so energizing to the participants and so conducive to communication breakthroughs among women initially quite wary of each other, that we introduced them into our large conferences. In combination with issue and skill-building work, these groups proved unifying and liberating. They led over and over again to something we had not expected: they inspired women to express deeply held feelings about their spiritual life and religious faith, their hope for a loving community, and their joy in finding others who shared their feelings. This has been very moving for all of us.

Since that time we have continually experimented with applications of the Leadership Support Process. While it is not a solution to all our interpersonal, intergroup and public policy problems, we feel (and participants regularly confirm) that it helps to bring diverse people together. We feel it is indispensable to finding out what women have really experienced and what they really want. It is essential to our strategies for making communities work for women.

Key Elements of LSP

At the heart of the way NW works is a belief that the way to improve life in neighborhoods is to enhance and expand participation by women in local development. TO do that we need to overcome hostilities, mistrust, fear of ourselves and each other, and the mistaken belief that we are incapable of solving big problems. LSP helps us do that. It also creates a culture and values-based oasis in our society, to counteract the tendency to reduce almost everything to the economic values of the marketplace. It is an oasis from the prevalent employer/employee dynamic that produces such typical attitudes as "What's in it for me?" "I'm only out for myself," "I'm in charge because I'm the boss," "I only work here," "You can't fight City Hall," "It's someone else's responsibility."

The Leadership Support Process functions as a holding environment, or what the Hopi people called the "cup of our culture," against the larger society's prevailing winds. It holds up the values and visions selected by NW as important and works against eh particular attitudes and behaviors we think of as undermining genuine participation. In neighborhoods everywhere people have to struggle to hold on to their values, their deepest hopes for their families, and their communities against odds that seem overwhelming. Our insights come from many of these efforts. Leadership Support Process is not a set of rigid formulas but rather a set of guidliens for strengthening and sustaining grassroots women leaders in their work to improve their lives and their communities.

Key Leadership Support Process elements

1. Starting with values and vision. In every situation, values and vision are reference points, the ground from which NW encourages groups to decide their priorities and structures. We use structured "vision questions" that elicit every participant's own experiences, thereby enabling her to own her own authority:

- What is a positive experience of leadership that you have had?
- What would it look like for you to exert your full leadership potential on behalf of your deepest values?
- What would that be like?
- What has held you back?
- What support would make a difference?

2. Setting group standards together. We make and keep basic agreements in order to set standards for working together. We use our own agreements to carry our values and visions into many different settings.

3. Supporting each other as leaders. We are committed to the support and development of women as leaders in a context of mutual support. In order for every woman to claim her leadership, we examine the myths of leadership that we have accepted. We redefine women's leadership, mutual support, and self-care so that we recognize and overcome prior social conditioning and oppression. Meetings function best when we recognize the importance of delegating oversight to a leader who takes responsibility for using meeting methods consistent with our principles.

4. Becoming allies and principled partners by honoring diversity. Our "social identities based on race, class, religion, and ethnicity, provide valuable traditions, cultural values, and social perspectives that must be incorporated into comprehensive community development. We use "allies panels" to learn how to deal with conflict and take everyone's social identitiy issues seriously. We celebrate and honor diversity by learning how to be effective allies to each other on oppression issues. We reach out and teach about non-hierarchical working partnerships, based on NW principles, between grassroots women and professionals, academics, politicians, donors and other community groups.

5. Using appreciation and participatory meeting methods in various settings. Deliberate appreciation of ourselves and each other can be a source of renewal. So can celebrations, songs and other creative expressions of our diversity and our common visions and values. The elements of the Leadership Support Process can be used in various settings such as meetings, workshops, conferences, family groups, to build conditions for community into our lives. We recommend on-going Leadership Support Groups to empower grassroots women leaders, as they have proved successful in helping nurture, sustain, and regenerate their energy.

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