



ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

The guideline used in the Network of mother centres in the Czech Republic

Many small people make a plenty tiny steps on many little places;
these tiny steps can change the world.

African proverb

**This guideline was written for GROOTS International and Huairou Commission by
Rut Kolínská on behalf of personal experiences
in cooperation with Petra Štěpová from the Mother centre Dobříšek in Dobříš.
Translation Regina Kejdová**

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Introduction

Majority of Mother Centres (MC) founders cannot avoid negotiations with a local town hall and these are not always easy. A mother in our society is often seen as a person who only looks after her child. This position demotes her to a child grade. Therefore, she should not understand town or governmental management administrations. A desire for better life condition in MC continuously pushes mothers to bring their wants down to a town hall. As a consequence of this we tried to change the stereotype vision, searching for a way to present that mothers are equal to officially voted representatives. We wanted to prove that mothers can find suchlike solution or solve problems efficiently hence cooperation becomes a beneficial step for both parties.

During a process of project implementation (Local to Local Dialog) we searched for a tool to introduce a formal concept of an equal negotiation position for both parties. A round table doesn't have last or first places, which means that no one takes the first or last position there. This was the whole idea of balanced discussion with representatives of towns, regions and government officials on an equal level.

We have learnt to follow a "Leadership Support Process Method", which helped us to realise how important is common business management implementation such as protocol procedure, time table arrangements, jobs separation and others.

Our effort was finalised this year while celebrating 15th anniversary of the Network of MC establishment, while we were preparing "All together around round a table campaign". During a month campaign other MCs joined us. They also start to organise round table discussions, which allow them to attempt solving difficult problems in their community. Regional coordinators hold discussions with their local public representatives.

I have prepared guidelines for the "All together around round a table campaign", which are beneficial for both, local MCs organisers and also regional coordinators preparing round table discussion within the region.

Presented guideline illustrates our activities, also can be hold as a recommendation of proven experiences working in our country. I believe that it can be also transformed to another countries with a slightly distinguish culture tradition.



Mothers from mother centers by round table – regional government Jihlava

Step by step

1. Assessment formulation

Important is to give a reason to organise round table discussions, not only to assure ourselves but also addressed parties. One of the major targets is an attempt for cooperation with local, regional and governmental representatives. This key topic will never end to a final conclusion. Topics are chosen regarding the present situation trying to find solutions or themes for general discussions.

Major topics of the “All together around round a table campaign” in the Czech Republic are difficulties related to family life with small children.

Services for families

According to gradual creation of new conditions for MCs I understand that topics related to services for families are parental issues, which deserves to be carried out to community activities.

Possibilities of financing

Sensitive part of an event organisation is its financing, however; it should bring down an open discussion. Communities should use a balanced financing for both genders, men and women called „gender budgeting“ according to equal opportunities process This is an impulse for discussion, which can help to influence a traditional financing practice, which is used investing the most of the budgeted mainly to support just sport activities.

Family friendly society

This topic of the Network MCs campaign belongs between primary scopes (možnosti) opening further discussions with communities. Not only it searches for appraisals (ocenění) but it also looks up for easier family living conditions.

Environmental politics with respect for families with small children

Apparently (zdánlivě) a generous topic can again uncover a potential discussion. This should be searching for beneficial solutions, which will be leading to shape community plans with your own demands.

Useful questions to correctly shape topics for discussion

- What is the situation?
- Why we are not satisfied with the present situation?
- What are our suggestions?

It is important that you can independently review the problem and can offer a solution yourself.

2. Preceding preparation before addressing an appropriate bureau

Firstly, before you address a bureau you must perform following search (in case you have not done it before).

Discover:

- Find out what is a common practise of your local bureau. Discover what has been done in regarding the matter in the past, what are further plans. Pre election promises of community representatives are wise to know.
- Discover who is a person responsible for your matter. Monitor personal responsibilities in a bureau.

After all this you can create a letter, which will mention your topics and concerns to organise a round table discussion. Even though you manage to obtain a verbal confirmation, a written confirmation of the meeting is convenient to have for both sites. It can be your a leading guide later or help to prove, in case you are asked for it. Your letter should be brief and clear. Do not forget to enclose information about your organisation activities.



Discussion around a table in Prague

3. Addressing bureau and settling discussion

Where to start

Address a person with the highest position in the bureau in case you have not been in contact before.

Advanced steps

After you manage to organise your meeting prepare also alternative solutions.

Date

Try to find the most convenient date for the key people (not only suitable date but also time). Calculate that discussion should not take more than two hours.

Participants

Introduce your own participants; delegate professionals who can support your issues. Do not forget to arrange an invitation procedure. Determine who is going to invite who.

Place

It is not necessary; however, an ideal place for round table is your local bureau office. Nevertheless, an invitation to your place can also bring you many contributions!



Official environment is depressing - Round table in Olomouc

Conditions

Arrange who organises following:
Drinks and refreshment
Materials for a meeting (table, papers, pens, etc.)
Other necessary equipment

Babysitting

You should organise babysitting when parents of small children participate the meeting. Officials should realise that babysitting is a necessary sequence of larger events.

Moderation

All participants have an equal voice while attending a round table discussion, nevertheless someone has to lead the discussion. There are two options: you can moderate yourself or find someone who is capable to do so. A responsible practice is to find another person who could help you to search for beneficial arguments on behalf your advantage. Do not be afraid of moderation!
There is a risk that you might lose your position if you let bureau lead the event. In any case it is essential to have an advanced scenario comprehending questions beforehand.

Promotion in the media

Promotion in the media is a basic part of moderation – arrange following: who will write a press release and when, who invites media, when will be media release ready, whether after or during the even and etc. Remember a media form close.

Documentation

Documentation is a necessary prove that the round table took a place. Arrange than who will be recording the meeting (audio or video recording) or whether someone will create a protocol, who will provide photographs, who will put presentation list together, etc.

Specification of personal responsibility

Immediate personal duty instructions for each step are necessary to be established during the process. Specify responsible for each step of guidelines.

Everything should be created in written form. Both sites should receive a copy.

4. Prearrangement of round table discussion

Personal responsibility and task specifications depend on an agreement. Following description came out from a situation when we are the ones who organises the whole meeting ourselves.

Advanced group

Cooperation within a group is convenient. Try to involve additional people. It is important to divide tasks and to name coordinators for individual operations.

Time schedule

To achieve a time schedule, which would be describing individual operations, responsibilities and deadlines is recommended. I would advise to calculate an extra time for unexpected matters. Do not underestimate this, an accident can happen. Time table leads you to confirm whether you follow a real timing set - from the beginning till the end.

Public relations

PR preparation includes participant and media invitations, press realise and also a preparation for eventual media questions. Attach further **written documents** about your organisation as well, examples of case studies and good practice from elsewhere, brochures, business cards, year-end report.

Prearrange participants' present lists, guests and media members' checklist (these can be namely signed). If you book a babysitting during the event create unique present list for babysitters. Prepare "a bowl" for collecting business cards!

Recording the event and photo documentations is a necessary part of the meeting completion. (Recording can be done through a written document and through an audio or video record, depending on facilities).

Place

Place arrangement depends on conditions and adjustment possibilities. It is wise to explore the place in advance before the event will be taking place! I would certainly recommend following completions:

- Make the place "homelike", bring flowers or others decorations
- Arrange a round (oval) table setting so all participants can easily see each other
- Recommend sitting in a circle without a table in the middle during the session, especially when an even is organised in mothers centres.
- Create available space for bystanders and press
- Homely atmosphere should present your organisation activities
- Ensure that children will have a program set which will entertain them



Questioning is important – round table Prague

Settings

Book refreshment, snacks, decorations and other utilities.

Inform all participants about your drought plan of the discussion. It is obvious that the discussion can lead to new subject matters and questions but it helps when you have themes to hold on to. A too large space for improvisation can lead to an uncomfortable misunderstanding. A moderator can complete detail information to each point, which will assure you, lead you and will help in case you lose continuity of topics.

Try to estimate and to note a length of each section. This can assist you - and also others to follow a time table.

Program should have at least a **basic outline** as follows:

- Welcome session – involving participants (LSP steps – see bellow)
- Introduction – when there are more participants attending (approx. more than ten) than an introduction can be presented by moderator. However, it is appreciated to personally name everyone as well as organisations, which participants represent. Introduce what they supposed to discuss – what is their task (for instance, why they attend the event).
- Topics specification
- Questions related to situation appraisal – interpret a correct way and identify the problem
- Conclusion – a possible response to raised questions during the discussion
- Questions searching for solutions and suggestions
- Answers to possible doubts
- Space for further publics (if participates)
- Answers to potential questions

- Final summary
- Final focus around the table
- Greeting and farewell

Last monitoring

Monitor whole process the day before the even takes place. Summarise **attendants' participation, equipment, materials and settings. Assure that everyone is aware of its duty.**

Knowledge that everything is ready will make you feel comfortable. This will also allow you to fully focus on event content and its whole progress. It is wise to arrive on the time, at least an hour before discussion starts. Arrange the arrival time if you do not organise the event (half an hour beforehand is recommended).

Discussion

LSP method base

Basic elements of the Leadership Support Process Support bring an informal atmosphere, which allows all participants to express themselves. It also helps to avoid indiscipline spokesmen distraction. It is essential to notice following rules in advance:

- **Time** – set a time table assistant who will watch the time before each round as well as mention a time available for each question (a half minute for an answer is usually enough).
- **Understanding** –a main purpose of discussion is not to duel but to find mutual solutions together. This should be mentioned at the beginning
- **Appeal each participant to express his opinion**, one after the other. Invite the ones refused to answer at the end of the discussion. Introduce a brainstorming session in advance (observe speakers who slip out of the themes)
- **Express your own opinion**
- **Listen to others** – do not repeat already mentioned solution but bring new ideas
- **Do not comment others** – do not bring additional secondary topics

Follow the program

I recommend avoiding an improvisation. Not only watch the program but also a time schedule.

Documentation

Providing records and photographs should not disturb the event progress. It is advised to introduce a presence of recording to all participants beforehand and assure that they agree with it.

Outputs

If you manage to find mutual outputs, press release and the like than it is recommended to directly define a final résumé and procedure it.

Acknowledgement

I suggest presenting a personal acknowledgment to the ones who assisted with meeting preparations and also to every participant after the round table finishes. A small favour is welcome – for instance own artefact or children painting.

Appraisal

Each event influence our further activities so do not forget to find a mutual evaluation of the event.

- Successful benefits
- Unexpected (positive or negative) contributions

- Failures
- Lessons learnt

Within a scope of the Local to Local project also belongs a process and accomplishment evaluation of a project **mission**. I highly recommend you to form a similar message of your event. A traditional folk saying or classics citation can bring a significant help.



Cold atmosphere of the government hall - Olomouc

A wish for a farewell

Lobbying in non profit sphere belongs between unsure activities, which always demand a relatively substantial preparation process and a great patience. It often happens that we cannot see an immediate fruitage of our effort. This should not discourage you from lobbying. Generally we gain many beneficial experiences. Achieved bits and pieces could be the right tiny stone which can let slip an avalanche. And it is worth to be there!

Rut Kolínská