

Effective Group Work

The lists below describe behavior needed for a group to achieve its short or long term goals (task functions) and for building and maintaining the group as a working unit (maintenance functions).

Group members may assign different functions to different members. Since all the functions are necessary for effective group work, members should assume unfilled roles as needed.

TASK FUNCTIONS

Initiating, coordinating, developing method	Propose tasks and goals, define problems, and suggest procedures, solutions, and ways that different issues may be handled. Give direction and purpose, adjusting or harmonizing issues that may cause conflict. Suggest an agenda or order of business, where to go next.
Seeking information/opinion	Make group aware of need for information by requesting relevant facts or asking for clarification. Ask for feelings or opinions to seek group opinion and test for consensus.
Giving information or opinion	Offer relevant facts, avoiding reliance on opinion when facts are needed. State feelings or beliefs, evaluating a suggestion as a basis for group decision.
Clarifying, elaborating	Eliminate confusion and reduce ambiguity by defining terms, interpreting ideas, giving examples, developing meanings, and explaining.
Summarizing, testing for agreement	Pull together ideas and related issues, showing contradictions, defining common ground, noting progress, stating areas of agreement and asking if agreement is possible.
Acting as "philosopher-critic"	Draw general statements from specific ones, critically examining underlying assumptions and ideas.
Evaluating	Measure accomplishments against goals, noting progress and blocks and providing a sense of progress in line with goals.

MAINTENANCE FUNCTIONS

Harmonizing, mediating	Conciliate differences, offering compromise to reduce tension.
Encouraging	Accept others' contributions and opinions, being friendly, warm and responsive to others. Give others recognition.
Expressing feelings	Call group attention to reactions to ideas and suggestions by expressing own feelings and re-stating others' feelings.
Checking environment	Ensure physical surroundings are assisting group. Check refreshments and furniture arrangements. Check heat and light levels.
Relieving tension	Make relaxing comments, joke, clown around, call for breaks.
Compromising	Maintain group cohesion by offering or accepting compromise, yielding status, or admitting error.
Assisting communication	Provide stimulating, interested audience for others, accepting ideas and going along with the group. Draw out silent members, and suggest procedures for discussion. Listen to, explain, and interpret what others have said.
Setting standards	Help group be aware of direction and progress. Express the group concern, suggesting tasks and stating standards for the group to achieve.

Source: Quaker Peace Action Caravan. *Speaking Our Peace: Exploring Nonviolence and Conflict Resolution*. London: Quaker Peace & Service, 1987. 55.