

Method of Evaluation by Group Facilitation (MEGF)



Between 3
and 4 hours



Between
5 and 15 people



Low

RESOURCES REQUIRED

MATERIALS:

Electronic version (with a projector):

- Pieces of paper to vote (3 per participant);
- Computer;
- Projector;
- Spreadsheets (on computer).

Paper version (without projector):

- Pieces of paper to vote (3 per participant);
- Post-it notes or pieces of paper to write statements on and stick on the wall;
- Pens and/or pencils;
- A marker;
- Tape.

HUMAN RESOURCES:

- A facilitator;
- A timekeeper for each step of the MEGF.

SUMMARY

The Method of Evaluation by Group Facilitation (MEGF) is a tool that allows for the definition and appropriation of priority issues or to develop a common vision within a group. It is designed to direct efforts towards dialogue on a specific territory. This method was developed in 1986 at the Université Laval to evaluate teaching through students' perceptions. Recently, the Coastal Communities Challenges Community-University Research Alliance (CCC-CURA) adapted and used this tool in some communities and organizations as a participative approach for resolving coastal, riparian and territorial development issues. The method consists in discussing and classifying different areas of work or intervention in order of importance. The participants secretly vote for which areas of work should be given priority, and that is how the classification is decided on.

Strengths

- The activity is relatively short;
- This method allows for every participant to speak so that everyone can express himself or herself;
- The secret vote avoids participants mutually influencing each other and changing the outcome of the exercise, priority issues or the elements of a common vision;
- When it comes to deciding the priority issues, each participant has the same weight.

Weaknesses

- This method requires a well-prepared and experienced facilitator.

OBJECTIVES

The EGF's purpose is to define priority issues and a common vision, and for the group as a whole to adopt statements that were originally submitted by individuals.

Information

Consultation

INVOLVEMENT

COLLABORATION

Empowerment

WHEN TO USE

The MEGF can be used when a community or a group of stakeholders are looking to define a vision of the future and prioritize the issues that can affect it. It can guide stakeholders' actions and help develop a strategy to attain the objectives previously fixed. The MEGF encourages the participation of different stakeholders concerned with the same issues.

The use of the MEGF is most favourable when participants are involved in a participative planning process, where learning and sharing of experiences are expected, multiple issues are at play, and funding is not sufficient to address all the issues at once. The MEGF can be used for groups of approximately 15 individuals, but can also be adapted for larger groups (see the example of the "Rendez-vous des OBV").

BEFORE THE ACTIVITY

Estimated preparation time: 5 hours

1. Identification of a topic and selection of participants

The organizers should first think a potential question to start the discussion. This question could be sent to participants a few days before the activity. Here are some examples of questions:

Imagine your community 15 years in the future. Your hopes, wishes, and desires have come true. What do you see? Which are the most important issues (coastal, development, etc.) in your community (municipality, coastal zone, watershed, etc.)? What are the needs of the local stakeholders in terms of...?

The organizers are also responsible for selecting potential participants and inviting them to the activity. They will also need to provide a venue to accommodate the expected number of participants.

2. Preparation of the venue and the material

Le matériel nécessaire au déroulement de l'activité devra être préparé selon la formule choisie, soit la version électronique (avec projecteur et ordinateur) ou la version papier (avec cartons et « post-it » sur la table). Une formule combinée des versions électroniques et papiers peut être réalisée (voir exemple ci-dessous). Les participants devront être placés en cercle, de façon à faciliter les contacts visuels entre tous.

3. Schedule

It is recommended to prepare in advance a detailed schedule with an estimation of the duration of each of the steps of the MEGF.

ACTIVITY

1. Explanation of the MEGF steps

The facilitator welcomes the participants and explains the objective of the activity as well as how the meeting will work. He or she will then present the initial question. (15 minutes)

2. Statements

The facilitator asks participants to think of statements that answer the initial question. Each participant should think of at least 3 statements, although there is no formal limit at this stage. It is important to respect and communicate with the participants the allotted time for this step. This step is conducted individually. (5-10 minutes)

ACTIVITY

3. Roundtable

Each participant will then present themselves and their statement to the rest of the group. A maximum of 3 rounds is done to identify statements in order of importance. The facilitators take note of the statements in a spreadsheet or on pieces of paper that can be fixed to the wall. A statement can't be repeated, so if a participant notices that someone has already said the same thing as them, or something similar, they can skip their turn or come up with something else. After the 3 roundtables, the facilitator asks if anyone still has any ideas of statements that haven't been mentioned. Participants can also ask for more information about a statement, without necessarily discussing it or taking position at this time. (45 minutes)

4. Grouping

The facilitator makes sure that all participants have understood each of the statements. They can be read out loud so that everyone validates understanding each one. The statements that are similar can then be grouped to avoid redundancy, making sure not to lose the essence of each statement. At the end of this step, there should be no more than 10 to 15 statements. The table below shows how the statement can be presented in a table.

STATEMENTS	
1. Erosion	10. Coastal risks
2. Flooding	11. Consultation and participation
3. Rain	12. Local committees
4. Citizens awareness	13. Dialogue
5. Financial support	14. Sharing of experiences
6. Prevention	15. Shoreline protection
7. Future generations	16. Learning
8. Vision of the future	17. Local projects
9. Submersion	

After grouping, the facilitator can identify each of the new categories with a name or a number. (15 minutes)

5. Deciding Priority Issues

At this step, each participant has to associate a relative importance to each statement. The facilitator hands out the pieces of paper for voting and asks each participant to rank each issue with a number between 1 and 5, 5 corresponding to the most important, 4 to the second in order in importance, 3 to the third, 2 to the fourth, and 1 to the fifth. This step must be done individually and secretly.

6. Break and Score Counting

During this break, the facilitator tallies the score for each of the statements and enters the results in a table. (15 minutes)

7. Collective appropriation of the results

The facilitator presents the results to the participants and points out the issue with the highest score. (5 minutes)

N. B.: The MEGF can also be used with a larger group. In such a case, the larger group would have to be separated into smaller groups of 5 to 15 individuals each, and the steps 5 to 8 would have to be repeated with the larger group (see the example presented below).

AFTER THE ACTIVITY

The MEGF prioritizes a number of statements or actions that have to be taken, from which point stakeholders can plan future actions that they would do. They can also formulate a common vision based of the priority statements.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

- Do not use the MEGF as a tool to negotiate;
- Do not grant too much speaking time to one participant;
- Participants should not comment or oppose to other people's statements. Participants should feel comfortable to present their statements. If others are against it, they can simply not vote for it later on;
- Participants sometimes propose statements that are too vague. It is the role of the facilitator to help define each statement as much as possible.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLE

CONSULTATION DURING THE 14TH CONVENTION FOR WATERSHED ORGANIZATIONS



The EGM has been recently used by the Regroupement des Organismes de Bassins Versants du Québec (ROBVQ) to consult its members, during the 14th conference bringing together these organizations (14e Rendez-vous des Organismes de Bassins Versants). The objective of the activity was to determine the needs of local stakeholders in terms of support and guidance for actions regarding the fight against green-blue algae and eutrophication.

For this exercise, the participants were split into small groups because of the large number of participants (approximately 50). This example demonstrates that it is possible to adapt this tool to larger groups. Thus a facilitator was necessary for each of the small groups. Because of the time constraint (the activity could not last more than 3.5 hours), someone was assigned the role of timekeeper.

In this case, the MEGF took place in two steps. To begin with, two facilitators presented the objectives and explained the different stages to the whole group.

The facilitators asked the participants to go sit randomly at one of the six tables in the room, so to form six smaller groups. Participants were asked to try and create groups with individuals of diverse backgrounds. There were six facilitators, one for each table. Each participant had to think of three statements, each represented by 3 or 4 keywords, in response to the original question. Each participant introduces themselves and presents a first statement to the group. As statements were coming out, the facilitator noted them down and stuck them to the wall. Once the last participant spoke, the cycle started again from the beginning so that each participant could propose a second statement and even a third if the time allowed for it. The facilitator then read aloud each statement to make sure that it was understood by all the participants. The members of the small group then combined similar statements into categories. Similar statements were aligned vertically on the wall with the name of the category on top. Each participant then voted for which categories they considered to be a priority by assigning a value, between 1 and 3, to the three most important in their opinion. The scores were tallied by the facilitator during a short break and the results presented to the small group when its participants returned. A volunteer from each of the small groups finally presented to the entire group the three statements with the highest scores at their table.

The second part consisted in merging the statements from each of the small groups and deciding which issues were priorities for the entire group. This step required a facilitator for the entire group and someone to take notes using the computer application Xmind (mind mapping software), notes which were projected on a screen. A representative of each of the small groups was called up to present the three categories chosen as priorities within their group, and explain what each one meant or represented. With the participation of everyone, the similar categories were grouped together. A second vote took place at this time, but this time with each participant being able to vote for 5 categories, associating with each one a value between 1 and 5, 5 representing the most important issue in their opinion. Finally, the scores were tallied by two facilitators while participants took another break. They then presented the five categories with the highest scores to everyone. Before closing the activity, the follow-up and monitoring process was explained to the group.

The results of this exercise were used to elaborate an inventory of tools to create awareness on issues such as green-blue algae and eutrophication, and to create a structure for financial support.

The most important outcome of this experience was the fact that a large group was able to quickly decide what the priority issues they could all agree on were. The use of the MEGF with such a large group required experienced facilitators able to keep discussions in small groups within the planned time-frame; this showed to be the most difficult task.



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

CCC-CURA, <http://www.defisdescommunautescotieres.org/>

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The Coastal Communities Challenges—Community-University Research Alliance (CCC-CURA) comprises a group of partners and researchers concerned with issues pertaining to resilience and governance for coastal and riverside communities in the context of climate change.

The Regroupement des organismes de bassins versants du Québec (ROBVQ) comprises some 40 watershed organizations operating in Quebec. It is a key partner of the Quebec government in the development of watershed management measures.



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