

Participant Handouts

*Channels of
Divine Guidance:*
**Consultation Part 1:
Developing the
Requisites of
Consultation**

An Assembly Development Module Workshop

Developing the Requisites of Consultation

OVERVIEW FOR PARTICIPANTS

Purpose

- ★ To examine what consultation is, how it differs from other forms of group decision-making, and what its prerequisites are

This workshop focuses on examining consultation – what it is, how it differs from other forms of group decision-making, and what its prerequisites are. It includes an opportunity for participants to assess their level of mastery of 16 consultative skills and to develop a personal action plan for enhancing their ability to consult, thereby improving their Assembly’s consultative climate.

What you will find inside your handouts:

- ★ Quotations and worksheets for the various segments of the workshop
- ★ An evaluation form to be filled out by you
- ★ An evaluation form to be filled out by the Assembly within two months after the workshop

If you would like to have information on additional workshops or other Assembly development resources, ask your Assembly Development representative or contact the Office of Assembly Development at (847) 733-3490, by mail at 1233 Central Street, Evanston, IL 60201, or by e-mail at OAD@usbnc.org.

Note: If time is short for any exercise, focus on the quotations in bold

The Call to a New State of Mind

“The evolution of local and national Bahá’í Assemblies at this time calls for a new state of mind on the part of their members as well as on the part of those who elect them. . . .”

“The evolution of local and national Bahá’í Assemblies at this time calls for a new state of mind on the part of their members as well as on the part of those who elect them, for the Bahá’í community is engaged in an immense historical process that is entering a critical stage. Bahá’u’lláh has given to the world institutions to operate in an Order designed to canalize* the forces of a new civilization.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1996.

“. . . Spiritual Assemblies must rise to a new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities as channels of divine guidance, planners of the teaching work, developers of human resources, builders of communities, and loving shepherds of the multitudes. They can realize these prospects through increasing the ability of their members to take counsel together in accordance with the principles of the Faith and to consult with the friends under their jurisdiction, through fostering the spirit of service, through spontaneously collaborating with the Continental Counselors and their auxiliaries, and through cultivating their external relations. Particularly must the progress in the evolution of the institutions be manifest in the multiplication of localities in which the function of the Spiritual Assembly enhances the individual believer’s capacity to serve the Cause and fosters unified action. In sum, the maturity of the Spiritual Assembly must be measured not only by the regularity of its meetings and the efficiency of its functioning, but also by the continuity of the growth of Bahá’í membership, the effectiveness of the interaction between the Assembly and the members of its community, the quality of the spiritual and social life of the community, and the overall sense of vitality of a community in the process of dynamic, ever-advancing development.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1996.

“An expansion of thought and action in certain aspects of our work would enhance our possibilities for success in meeting our . . . commitments.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1990.

“The burgeoning influence of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation seemed . . . to have assumed the character of an onrushing wind blowing through the archaic structure of the old order, felling mighty pillars and clearing the ground for new

The Call to a New State of Mind, continued

conceptions of social organization. . . . Even the Community of the Most Great Name itself is experiencing the rigorous effects of this quickening wind as it ventilates the modes of thought of us all, renewing, clarifying, and amplifying our perspectives as to the purpose of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh in the wake of humanity's suffering and turmoil."

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1992.

"But, O my brother, when a true seeker determines to take the step of search in the path leading to the knowledge of the Ancient of Days, he must, before all else, cleanse and purify his heart, which is the seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God, from the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge. . . ."

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitab-i-Iqán*, p. 192.

"Present-day conceptions of what is natural and appropriate in relationships – among human beings themselves, between human beings and nature, between the individual and society, and between the members of society and its institutions – reflect levels of understanding arrived at by the human race during earlier and less mature stages in its development. If humanity is indeed coming of age, if all the inhabitants of the planet constitute a single people, if justice is to be the ruling principle of social organization – then existing conceptions that were born out of ignorance of these emerging realities have to be recast.

"Movement in this direction has barely begun."

Bahá'i International Community's Office of Public Information, dated January 23, 1995, in *Prosperity of Humankind*, section III.

". . . change, ever more rapid change, is a constant characteristic of life at this time. . . ."

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1990.

"Change is an evolutionary process requiring patience with one's self and others, loving education and the passage of time as the believers deepen their knowledge of the principles of the Faith, gradually discard long-held traditional attitudes and progressively conform their lives to the unifying teachings of the Cause."

The Universal House of Justice, letter dated July 25, 1984, in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice*, p. 634.

***Canalize:** to channel into a particular direction; provide an outlet for

Perceiving the Importance of Consultation

“No welfare and no well being can be attained except through consultation.”

“Bahá’u’lláh insistently drew attention to the virtues and indispensability of consultation for ordering human affairs.”

The Universal House of Justice, *“The Promise of World Peace,”* Section III.

“Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding.”

Bahá’u’lláh, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 3, #1.

“No welfare and no well being can be attained except through consultation.”

Bahá’u’lláh, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 3, #2.

“The question of consultation is of the utmost importance, and is one of the most potent instruments conducive to the tranquility and felicity of the people. . . . Consultation, therefore, is one of the explicit ordinances of the Lord of mankind.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 7, #14.

“Through taking part in conferences and summer schools as well as Nineteen Day Feasts, and in service on committees, they can develop the wonderful skill of Bahá’í consultation, thus tracing new paths of human corporate action.”

The Universal House of Justice, *Wellsprings of Guidance*, p. 96.

“In its own meetings it [the Assembly] must endeavor to develop skill in the difficult but highly rewarding art of Bahá’í consultation . . .”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 30, 1972, in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice*, p. 224.

“Consultation is no easy skill to learn, requiring as it does the subjugation of all egotism and unruly passions, the cultivation of frankness and freedom of thought as well as courtesy, openness of mind, and wholehearted acquiescence in a majority decision.”

The Universal House of Justice, *Wellsprings of Guidance*, p. 96.

Experiencing the Collective Wisdom of the Group

“ . . . the views of several individuals are assuredly preferable to one man. . . . ”

“The purpose of consultation is to show that the views of several individuals are assuredly preferable to one man, even as the power of a number of men is of course greater than the power of one man.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 8, #17.

“Individual initiative, personal ability and resourcefulness, though indispensable, are, unless supported and enriched by the collective experiences and wisdom of the group, utterly incapable of achieving such a tremendous task [safeguarding and fostering the interests of the Cause].”

Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 15, #31.

Instructions for “Lost on the moon” Activity

Scenario

Due to mechanical difficulties, your spaceship has just crash-landed on the lighted side of the moon. You had been scheduled to rendezvous with a mother ship 300 kilometers away in the daylight, but the rough landing has ruined your own ship and destroyed all of the equipment on board except for fifteen items.

Your crew’s survival depends on reaching the mother ship, so you must choose the most critical items available to you for the 300-kilometer trip. The emergency manual prepared by the Space Agency, which explains how to make these decisions, was also destroyed in the crash, and all communications with earth have been cut off. You are on your own.

You have survived the crash. Your next concern is to try to survive the moon.

Instruction

Your task as an individual: Rank the fifteen items which were not destroyed in the crash (on the following sheet). Place the number “1” by the item you believe to be the most important to your survival and the number “2” by the second most important. Rank order the entire list, so that the number “15” represents the item that you believe is the least important to your survival. After you complete the individual ranking sheet you will be asked to complete the “Collective Decision” sheet in a small group.

“Lost on the Moon”

Individual Decision Making

Scoring Sheet

Items

<u>Items</u>	<u>My rank</u>	<u>NASA's rank*</u>	<u>My points**</u>
1. Box of matches	_____	_____	_____
2. Parachute silk	_____	_____	_____
3. Two .45 caliber pistols	_____	_____	_____
4. Stellar map of the moon's constellations	_____	_____	_____
5. Two fifty-kilogram tanks of oxygen	_____	_____	_____
6. Solar-powered portable heating unit	_____	_____	_____
7. Twenty meters of nylon rope	_____	_____	_____
8. First-aid kit containing injection needles	_____	_____	_____
9. Signal flares	_____	_____	_____
10. Twenty liters of water	_____	_____	_____
11. Solar-powered FM receiver-transmitter	_____	_____	_____
12. One case of dehydrated milk	_____	_____	_____
13. Magnetic compass	_____	_____	_____
14. Food concentrate	_____	_____	_____
15. Self-inflating life raft	_____	_____	_____

Score

My individual score _____

*Will be supplied after you rank items. **Do not calculate until told to do so

Scoring

Scoring the rankings: Wait until your facilitator directs you to score your rankings. At that time, enter NASA's ranking numbers, which will be provided by the facilitator, in the appropriate column on your individual scoring sheet.

Subtract the smaller number of the two rankings from the larger number. For example, if you ranked “signal flares” as “1” and NASA ranked it “10,” you earn 9 error points. Total the error points for all fifteen items to get a final score. The lower the total score, the better the solution.

After you have finished scoring your individual rankings, copy NASA's rankings on your group decision-making sheet and score your group's rankings.

“Lost on the Moon”

Collective Decision Making

Scoring Sheet

Items

<u>Items</u>	<u>Group rank</u>	<u>NASA’s rank*</u>	<u>Our points**</u>
1. Box of matches	_____	_____	_____
2. Parachute silk	_____	_____	_____
3. Two .45 caliber pistols	_____	_____	_____
4. Stellar map of the moon’s constellations	_____	_____	_____
5. Two fifty-kilogram tanks of oxygen	_____	_____	_____
6. Solar-powered portable heating unit	_____	_____	_____
7. Twenty meters of nylon rope	_____	_____	_____
8. First-aid kit containing injection needles	_____	_____	_____
9. Signal flares	_____	_____	_____
10. Twenty liters of water	_____	_____	_____
11. Solar-powered FM receiver-transmitter	_____	_____	_____
12. One case of dehydrated milk	_____	_____	_____
13. Magnetic compass	_____	_____	_____
14. Food concentrate	_____	_____	_____
15. Self-inflating life raft	_____	_____	_____

Score

Our group score _____

*Will be supplied after you rank items. **Do not calculate until told to do so

Scoring

Scoring the rankings: Wait until your facilitator directs you to score your rankings. At that time, enter NASA’s ranking numbers, which will be provided by the facilitator, in the appropriate column on your individual scoring sheet.

Subtract the smaller number of the two rankings from the larger number. For example, if you ranked “signal flares” as “1” and NASA ranked it “10,” you earn 9 error points.

Total the error points for all fifteen items to get a final score. The lower the total score, the better the solution.

True Consultation

***“Consultation
... is the
bedrock of this
unique order.”***

“Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding.”

Bahá'u'lláh, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 3, #1.

“Consultation bestoweth greater awareness and transmuteth conjecture into certitude. It is a shining light which, in a dark world, leadeth the way and guideth. For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation.”

Bahá'u'lláh, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 3, #3.

“In all things it is necessary to consult. This matter should be forcibly stressed by thee, so that consultation may be observed by all. . . inasmuch as it is and will always be a cause of awareness and of awakening and a source of good and well-being.”

Bahá'u'lláh, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 3, #5.

“In this Cause, consultation is of vital importance, but spiritual conference and not the mere voicing of personal views is intended.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 10, #22.

“. . . true consultation is spiritual conference in the attitude and atmosphere of love. Members must love each other in the spirit of fellowship in order that good results may be forthcoming. Love and fellowship are the foundation.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 10, #22.

“Settle all things, both great and small, by consultation. Without prior consultation, take no important step in your own personal affairs.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 9, #20.

“. . . consultation must have for its objective the investigation of truth.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 10, #22.

***Unfettered:
unrestrained**

Defining True Consultation

Consultation*

- ★ to ask the advice or opinion of
- ★ to deliberate together

Our definition

The dictionary definition of consultation is incomplete.

Read the quotations on the previous page silently and highlight key phrases. Working as a group, develop a one- or two-sentence definition of consultation that embraces the concepts found in these quotations and goes beyond the dictionary definition.

Outcomes

List the results/outcomes of true consultation as found in the quotations on the previous page:

*Dictionary definition

Differences between Bahá'í Consultation and other Decision-Making Processes

“... the spirit of Bahá'í consultation is very different. . . .”

“Consultation, frank and unfettered, is the bedrock of this unique order.”

Shoghi Effendi, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 15, #32.

“It is important to realize that the spirit of Bahá'í consultation is very different from that current in the decision-making processes of non-Bahá'í bodies.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated March 6, 1970, to a National Spiritual Assembly.

“The laws, commandments, injunctions and exhortations we have all agreed to obey and follow as Bahá'ís include a clearly defined approach to decision-making and to the implementation of decisions.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 2, 1996, to a National Spiritual Assembly.

“Not only is the Bahá'í perspective unique, so too are the methods used by the believers to achieve their objectives. Unity and cooperation are important values which should be the watchwords for activities in which the believers engage. As a consequence, Bahá'ís eschew* the adversarial approach of dispute and confrontation, and seek rather the methods of consultation, with its commitment to informed discussion and mutual respect, and with its goal the achievement of consensus in the pursuit of truth.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated October 24, 1990, to a National Spiritual Assembly.

“Speech is a powerful phenomenon. Its freedom is both to be extolled and feared. It calls for an acute exercise of judgment, since both the limitation of speech and the excess of it can lead to dire consequences. Thus there exist in the system of Bahá'u'lláh checks and balances necessary to the beneficial uses of this freedom in the onward development of society. A careful examination of the principles of Bahá'í consultation and the formal and informal arrangements for employing them offer new insights into the dynamics of freedom of expression.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated December 29, 1988, in *Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, paragraph 27.

***Eschew:**
to take care to avoid;
shun

“There cannot be in our Faith any room for the political maneuverings so common to the outside world. Frankness, full unprejudiced consultation, must govern all Assembly and committee work, and anything less than this is not only unworthy

Differences between Bahá'í Consultation and other Decision-Making Processes, continued

“In order to find truth we must give up our prejudices. . . .”

of a Bahá'í, but a direct disobedience to the Master's instructions and a sign of lack of faith.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated November 29, 1948, in *Lights of Guidance, Fourth Revised Edition*, 1996, p. 180, #592.

“The operating principles of the new Order to which we have been called are only partially understood, since the transition from the old one is far from complete. And even though they may in some instances resemble those in common practice, they are on the whole different because they are of a different standard from that generally followed today. The temptation when we falter in applying them and become disappointed or frustrated may well be to lapse into the methods of the society around us. Disappointment and frustration give rise to criticism. This is natural. The expression of criticism is essential to the progress of the Bahá'í community. But to be effective, it must adhere to the discipline of Bahá'í consultation; otherwise the consequence will be to increase rather than decrease the difficulties of the community and to impede its progress. The critical attitude now prevalent abroad, with all the cynicism and contentiousness it evokes, is for the most part unacceptable to Bahá'í practice.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated February 28, 1997, to a National Spiritual Assembly.

“In order to find truth we must give up our prejudices, our own small trivial notions; an open receptive mind is essential. If our chalice is full of self, there is no room in it for the water of life. The fact that we imagine ourselves to be right and everybody else wrong is the greatest of all obstacles in the path towards unity, and unity is necessary if we would reach truth, for truth is *one*.”

'Abdu 'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 136.

The Art of Bahá'í Consultation

“ . . . endeavor to develop skill in the difficult but highly rewarding art of Bahá'í consultation. . . .”

“In its own meetings it [the Spiritual Assembly] must endeavor to develop skill in the difficult but highly rewarding art of Bahá'í consultation, a process which will require great self-discipline on the part of all members and complete reliance on the power of Bahá'u'lláh.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, July 30, 1972, in Messages from the Universal House of Justice, p. 224.

“The prime requisites for them that take counsel together are purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment from all else save God, attraction to His Divine Fragrances, humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones, patience and long-suffering in difficulties and servitude to His exalted Threshold. Should they be graciously aided to acquire these attributes, victory from the unseen Kingdom of Bahá shall be vouchsafed to them.”

‘Abdu'l-Bahá, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 5, # 9.

“Man should weigh his opinions with the utmost serenity, calmness and composure. Before expressing his own views he should carefully consider the views already advanced by others. If he finds that a previously expressed opinion is more true and worthy, he should accept it immediately and not willfully hold to an opinion of his own. By this excellent method he endeavors to arrive at unity and truth.”

‘Abdu'l-Bahá, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 10, #22.

“In order to find truth we must give up our prejudices, our own small trivial notions; an open receptive mind is essential. If our chalice is full of self, there is no room in it for the water of life. The fact that we imagine ourselves to be right and everybody else wrong is the greatest of all obstacles in the path towards unity, and unity is necessary if we would reach truth, for truth is *one*.”

‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 136.

“They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views. They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden. The honored members must with all freedom express their own thoughts, and it is in no wise permissible for one to belittle the thought of another, nay, he must with moderation set forth the truth. . . .”

‘Abdu'l-Bahá, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 6, # 10.

The Art of Bahá'í Consultation, continued

“... a contribution to the consensus of opinion. . . .”

“Patience and restraint, however, should at all times characterize the discussions and deliberations of the elected representatives of the local community, and no fruitless and hair-splitting discussions indulged in, under any circumstances.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated April 18, 1939, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, pp. 16-17, #34.

“The members thereof must take counsel together in such wise that no occasion for ill-feeling or discord may arise. This can be attained when every member expresseth with absolute freedom his own opinion and setteth forth his argument. Should any one oppose, he must on no account feel hurt for not until matters are fully discussed can the right way be revealed. The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 5, #9.

“The members of an Assembly must learn to express their views frankly*, calmly, without passion or rancour*. They must also learn to listen to the opinions of their fellow members without taking offence or belittling the views of another. Bahá’í consultation is not an easy process. It requires love, kindness, moral courage and humility. Thus no member should ever allow himself to be prevented from expressing frankly his view because it may offend a fellow member; and, realizing this, no member should take offence at another member’s statements.”

Letter from The Universal House of Justice, dated August 26, 1965, in *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 179-180, #590.

“He who expresses an opinion should not voice it as correct and right but set it forth as a contribution to the consensus of opinion; for the light of reality becomes apparent when two opinions coincide.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 10, #22.

“Through the clash of personal opinions, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has stated, the spark of truth is often ignited, and Divine guidance revealed. The friends should therefore not feel discouraged at the differences of opinion that may prevail among the members of an Assembly, for these, as experience has shown, and as the Master’s words attest, fulfill a valuable function in all Assembly deliberations.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated April 18, 1939, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 17, #34.

“And, when they are called upon to arrive at a certain decision, they should, after dispassionate*, anxious* and cordial* consultation, turn to God in prayer, and with earnestness and conviction and courage record their vote. . . .”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated February 23, 1924, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 14, #25.

- * **Frank:** open, candid, sincere; willing to tell what one feels or thinks
- * **Rancour (Rancor):** bitter resentment or ill will; hatred; malice
- * **Dispassionate:** fair, impartial; not influenced by strong feeling; not affected by personal or emotional involvement
- * **Anxious:** eager; ardent or earnest wishing
- * **Cordial:** courteous and gracious; stimulating

The Example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

“... ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seemed to listen with my ears. . . .”

“Another characteristic always apparent was His silence. In the world of social and intellectual intercourse to which I was accustomed, silence was almost unforgivable. From the collegiate with his, or her, ‘line,’ to the lawyer, doctor, minister, statesman – a ready answer, a witty *bon mot*, a wise remark, a knowing smile was stock-in-trade. They all had their ‘line,’ and it was upon their readiness or unreadiness to meet every occasion verbally that their reputation largely rested.

“How differently ‘Abdu’l-Bahá met the questioner, the conversationalist, the occasion: To the questioner He responded first with silence – an outward silence. His encouragement always was that the other should speak and He listen. There was never that eager tenseness, that restlessness so often met showing most plainly that the listener has the pat answer ready the moment he should have a chance to utter it.

“I have heard certain people described as ‘good listeners,’ but never had I imagined such a ‘listener’ as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. It was more than a sympathetic absorption of what the ear received. It was as though the two individualities became one; as if He so closely identified Himself with the one speaking that a merging of spirits occurred which made a verbal response almost unnecessary, superfluous. As I write, the words of Bahá’u’lláh recur to me: ‘When the sincere servant calls to Me in prayer I become the very ear with which He heareth My reply.’

“That was just it! ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seemed to listen with my ears. . . .

“And when, under His encouraging sympathy, the interviewer became emptied of his words, there followed a brief interval of silence. There was no instant and complete outpouring of explanation and advice. He sometimes closed His eyes a moment as if He sought guidance from above Himself; sometimes sat and searched the questioner’s soul with a loving, comprehending smile that melted the heart.”

Howard Colby Ives, *Portals to Freedom*, pp. 194-96.

Consultation as Spiritual Conference

Focus questions

- ★ What dynamics occurred between the members of the group?
- ★ Which of the prime requisites of consultation were present in this meeting?

“The most memorable instance of spiritual consultation was the meeting of the disciples of Jesus Christ upon the mount after His ascension. They said, ‘His Holiness Jesus Christ has been crucified . . . we must be loyal and faithful to Him, we must be grateful and appreciate Him, for He has raised us from the dead, He made us wise, He has given us eternal life. What shall we do to be faithful to Him?’ And so they held council. One of them said ‘We must detach ourselves from the chains and fetters of the world; otherwise we cannot be faithful.’ The others replied ‘That is so.’ Another said ‘Either we must be married and faithful to our wives and children or serve our Lord free from these ties. We cannot be occupied with the care and provision for families and at the same time herald the kingdom in the wilderness. Therefore let those who are unmarried remain so, and those who have married provide the means of sustenance and comfort for their families and then go forth to spread the message of glad-tidings.’ There were no dissenting voices; all agreed, saying ‘That is right.’ A third disciple said ‘To perform worthy deeds in the kingdom we must be further self-sacrificing. From now on we should forgo ease and bodily comfort, accept every difficulty, forget self and teach the Cause of God.’ This found acceptance and approval by all the others. Finally a fourth disciple said ‘There is still another aspect to our faith and unity. For Jesus’ sake we shall be beaten, imprisoned and exiled. They may kill us. Let us receive this lesson now. Let us realize and resolve that though we are beaten, banished, cursed, spat upon and led forth to be killed we shall accept all this joyfully, loving those who hate and wound us.’ All the disciples replied ‘Surely we will – it is agreed; this is right.’ Then they descended from the summit of the mountain and each went forth in a different direction upon his divine mission.

“This was true consultation. This was spiritual consultation and not the mere voicing of personal views in parliamentary opposition and debate.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 11, #22.

Developing the Skills of Consultation

Score yourself on your level of mastery of these consultative skills on a 1-5 scale

1 = does not usually occur

**3 = sometimes occurs/
inconsistent**

5 = occurs most of the time

Please circle the number after each phrase which best indicates your skill level

Search out truth	1	2	3	4	5
Listen with patience and restraint	1	2	3	4	5
Carefully consider views already expressed before speaking	1	2	3	4	5
Express thoughts and opinions with absolute freedom	1	2	3	4	5
Express opinion as contribution to consensus, not “truth”	1	2	3	4	5
Express views and feelings with devotion	1	2	3	4	5
Express views and feelings with courtesy	1	2	3	4	5
Express views and feelings with dignity	1	2	3	4	5
Express views and feelings with care	1	2	3	4	5
Express views and feelings with moderation	1	2	3	4	5
Consult in such a way that discord/ill-feeling do not arise	1	2	3	4	5
Avoid insisting upon own opinion/persistence in views	1	2	3	4	5
Avoid belittling another person’s thoughts	1	2	3	4	5
Avoid feeling hurt if others disagree	1	2	3	4	5
Avoid criticizing/objecting to previous decisions	1	2	3	4	5
Avoid fruitless and hair-splitting discussions	1	2	3	4	5

Moving Towards Maturity: Improving the Assembly's Skill in Consultation

Focus questions

- ★ Why is it imperative that Assemblies improve their performance?
- ★ On whose efforts does the proper functioning of Assemblies largely depend?
- ★ What are the effects of our efforts to develop skill in consultation?

“With increasing public attention being focused on the Cause of God, it becomes imperative for Bahá’í institutions to improve their performance, through a closer identification with the fundamental verities of the Faith, through greater conformity to the spirit and form of Bahá’í administration and through a keener reliance on the beneficial effects of proper consultation, so that the communities they guide will reflect a pattern of life that will offer hope to the disillusioned members of society.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1990.

“. . . Spiritual Assemblies must rise to a new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities.

. . . They can realize these prospects through increasing the ability of their members to take counsel together in accordance with the principles of the Faith . . .”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1996.

“Only as individual members of Local Spiritual Assemblies deepen themselves in the fundamental verities of the Faith and in the proper application of the principles governing the operation of the Assembly will this Institution grow and develop toward its full potential.”

The Universal House of Justice, in *The Local Spiritual Assembly*, p. 5.

“The proper functioning of these institutions depends largely on the efforts of their members to familiarize themselves with their duties and to adhere scrupulously to principle in their personal behavior and in the conduct of their official responsibilities.”

Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1993.

“In its own meetings it must endeavor to develop skill in the difficult but highly rewarding art of Bahá’í consultation, a process which will require great self-discipline on the part of all members and complete reliance on the power of Bahá’u’lláh.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 30, 1972, in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice*, p. 224.

Personal Action Plan

Focus questions

- ★ What attitudes and behaviors will require great self-discipline on my part?
- ★ What do I need to subjugate to improve my skills of consultation?
- ★ What do I need to cultivate to improve my skills of consultation?
- ★ How will I increase my reliance on the power of Bahá'u'lláh to make these changes?

“Consultation is no easy skill to learn, requiring as it does the subjugation* of all egotism and unruly passions, the cultivation of frankness and freedom of thought as well as courtesy, openness of mind, and wholehearted acquiescence* in a majority decision.”

The Universal House of Justice, Wellsprings of Guidance, p. 96.

Using your self-score sheet “Developing the Skills of Consultation” (see page 18) and these focus questions, pick 1-2 personal goals and develop your plan of action for achieving these. They can be noted in the spaces provided below.

My goals:

My plan for achieving my goals:

How I will evaluate my progress:

* **Subjugate**: to bring under dominion; conquer; subdue.

* **Acquiescence**: passive assent or agreement without protest.

“Kam Kam. Ruz bih ruz – little by little; day by day”.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Vignettes from the Life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 27, #37.

Developing Plans of Action

**Suggestions
about
developing
plans of action
to achieve goals**

- ★ Write down what you will do very specifically. For instance, “listen with patience and restraint,” might be spelled out as: “I will be more patient by listening to everything a person has to say and not making a snap judgment. I will honestly try to see his or her point of view.”
- ★ Study your chosen qualities: meditate on their inner meaning and on how they manifest themselves in behaviors, discuss your understanding with someone else, observe these qualities in someone you know who is strong in that area, read stories about how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá manifested this quality, such as in the book *Vignettes from the Life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*.
- ★ Identify one or two people with whom you interact and consult on a regular – ideally, daily – basis. Plan how you can practice new behaviors in these relationships.
- ★ Build in some ways to create opportunities to practice these new attitudes and behaviors as well as to seize opportunities that arise.
- ★ Include “inner work” in your plan: prayer, meditation, reading from the Writings, especially in your selected goal areas.
- ★ Choose some way to track your progress. Possible methods include writing in a journal each day, asking a trusted person for frank feedback, or pairing up with a partner and coaching and encouraging each other.

Summary of Key Points on Consultation

Consultation is . . .

- ★ spiritual conference in the attitude and atmosphere of love and not the mere voicing of personal views
- ★ the investigation of truth
- ★ very different from the decision-making processes of non-Bahá'í bodies

To participate in consultation I must . . .

- ★ acquire purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment from all else save God, attraction to His Divine Fragrances, humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones, patience and long-suffering in difficulties and servitude to His exalted Threshold
- ★ develop greater measures of love, kindness, moral courage and humility
- ★ cultivate frankness and freedom of thought as well as courtesy, openness of mind, and wholehearted acquiescence in a majority decision
- ★ search out the truth in every matter
- ★ carefully consider the views already advanced before expressing my own views
- ★ weigh my opinions with the utmost serenity, calmness and composure
- ★ express with absolute freedom my own thoughts and opinions
- ★ express my opinions not as correct and right but as a contribution to consensus
- ★ express my views with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation
- ★ express my views frankly, calmly, without passion or rancour
- ★ not feel hurt if anyone disagrees with my opinion
- ★ not insist upon or willfully hold to my own opinion
- ★ learn to listen to the opinions of others without taking offence or belittling their views
- ★ practice patience and restraint
- ★ acquire great self-discipline and complete reliance on the

Additional Quotations from the Facilitator’s Guide

From “Defining True Consultation”

“. . . earnest consideration must be given to the reality of man, namely, his thought. To understand the relevance of this potent reality is also to appreciate the social necessity of actualizing its unique value through candid, dispassionate and cordial consultation, and of acting upon the results of this process.”

The Universal House of Justice, Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986, p. 692.

“In this field Bahá’í youth may demonstrate the efficiency, the vigor, the access of unity which arise from true consultation and, by contrast, demonstrate the futility of partisanship, lobbying, debate, secret diplomacy and unilateral action which characterize modern affairs.”

The Universal House of Justice, Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986, p. 94.

From “The Art of Bahá’í Consultation”

“Few people . . . have had much training in listening. Living in a competitive culture, most of us are most of the time chiefly concerned with getting our own views across, and we tend to find other people’s speeches a tedious interruption of the flow of our own ideas. Hence it is necessary to emphasize that listening does not mean simply maintaining a polite silence while you are rehearsing in your mind the speech you are going to make the next time you can grab a conversation opening. Nor does listening mean waiting alertly for the flaws in the other person’s argument so that later you can mow him or her down. Listening means trying to see the problem the way the speaker sees it. . . . Listening requires entering actively and imaginatively into the other person’s situation and trying to understand a frame of reference different than your own.”

S. I. Hayakawa, essay entitled “How to Attend a Conference.”

“Their efforts at such discipline will give birth to an etiquette of expression worthy of the approaching maturity of the human race.”

The Universal House of Justice, December 29, 1988, in Rights and Responsibilities: The Complementary Roles of the Individual and Institutions, pp. 17-18.

From “Developing the Skills of Consultation”

“The experience of the Bahá’í community may be seen as an example of this enlarging unity. . . . It is a single social organism, representative of the diversity of the human family, conducting its affairs through a system of commonly accepted consultative principles. . . . If the Bahá’í experience can contribute in whatever measure to reinforcing hope in the unity of the human race, we are happy to offer it as a model for study.”

The Universal House of Justice, Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986, p. 695.