

Participant Handouts

*Channels of Divine
Guidance:*
**Becoming a More
Efficient and Effective
Assembly**

An Assembly Development Module Workshop

Becoming a More Efficient and Effective Assembly

OVERVIEW FOR PARTICIPANTS

Purpose

- ★ To discover practical ways to express the spiritual qualities of efficiency and effectiveness
- ★ To gain a more thorough understanding of the duties of Assembly Secretaries and Chairs
- ★ To develop an appreciation of the need for a diversity of process skills within the Assembly

This workshop is designed to help Assemblies perceive the relationship of efficiency and effectiveness to the demands implicit in entry by troops, gain a more thorough understanding of the duties of Assembly Secretaries and Chairs, and develop an appreciation of the need for a diversity of process skills within the Assembly. The focus is on finding practical ways to express the spiritual qualities of efficiency and effectiveness in the Assembly's functioning through development of specific skills, such as time management, agenda planning, and delegation.

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.”

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.”

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.”

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

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

The Call to a New State of Mind, continued

“ . . . this quickening wind . . . ventilates the modes of thought of us all, renewing, clarifying, and amplifying our perspectives.”

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.”

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 Kitáb-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’í International Community’s Office of Public Information, January 23, 1995, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, section III.

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

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

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

Efficiency and Effectiveness as Spiritual Qualities

“These are the days for rendering the divine Cause victorious and effective aid!”

“In a period of history dominated by the surging energy, the rebellious spirit and frenetic activity of adolescence, it is difficult to grasp the distinguishing elements of the mature society to which Bahá’u’lláh beckons all humanity. The models of the old world order blur vision of that which must be perceived; for these models were, in many instances, conceived in rebellion and retain the characteristics of the revolutions peculiar to an adolescent . . . period in the evolution of human society.”

The Universal House of Justice, December 29, 1988, in *Rights and Responsibilities: The Complementary Roles of the Individual and Institutions*, p. 11.

“These are the days for rendering the divine Cause victorious and effective aid!”

Shoghi Effendi, December 8, 1923, in *Trustworthiness*, p. 19.

“The great thing is to ‘live the life’ – to have our lives so saturated with the Divine teachings and the Bahá’í Spirit that people cannot fail to see a joy, a power, a love, a purity, a radiance, an efficiency in our character and work that will distinguish us from worldly-minded people and make people wonder what is the secret of this new life in us.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, February 14, 1925, in *Living the Life*, p. 3.

“Systematization . . . implies an orderliness of approach in all that pertains to Bahá’í service, whether in teaching or administration, in individual or collective endeavor. . . . it suggests the need to be clear-headed, methodical, efficient, constant, balanced and harmonious. Systematization is a necessary mode of functioning animated by the urgency to act.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1998.

“It is my earnest prayer that they will utilize their highly responsible position . . . for the wise and efficient conduct of the affairs of the Cause. . . .”

Shoghi Effendi, in *Bahá’í Administration*, p. 80.

“I . . . felt a thrill of delight at the welcome news of the harmonious and efficient functioning of your Spiritual Assembly.”

Shoghi Effendi, in *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 11.

“I always eagerly await detailed and frequent reports from the National Assembly and desire strongly its members to meet as often as possible and actively, efficiently and constantly direct,

***Efficient:** performing or functioning in the best possible and least wasteful manner; competent; capable

***Effective:** adequate to accomplish a purpose; producing the intended or expected result

Efficiency and Effectiveness as Spiritual Qualities, continued

“Administrative efficiency and order should always be accompanied by an equal degree of love, of devotion and of spiritual development.”

co-ordinate and reinforce the activities of the individuals and Local Assemblies. . . .”

Shoghi Effendi, in *Dawn of a New Day*, p. 7.

“I am much impressed and feel deeply gratified to learn of your devoted and unremitting labors, individually and collectively in the field of service to the Cause; of your constant vigilance and watchful care in upholding its fundamental principles and guarding its essential interests; of the efficiency, faithfulness and vigor with which you are conducting the administration of its affairs throughout that land.”

Shoghi Effendi, in *Bahá’í Administration*, p. 45.

“It gives him, indeed, much pleasure and encouragement to realize that your Assembly meetings are conducted with such a good deal of order and efficiency, and above all, in such a perfect spirit of unity and fellowship – the few other obstacles and difficulties left, he feels confident, will in due time disappear.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, September 26, 1935, in *Letters to Australia and New Zealand*, p. 10.

“He wishes me . . . to assure each and all of you of his abiding appreciation and gratitude for the remarkable unity, efficiency and zeal with which you are fostering and safeguarding the manifold and vital interests of our beloved Faith. . . .”

Letter written on behalf Shoghi Effendi, May 7, 1935, in *Light of Divine Guidance*, Vol. 1, p. 72.

“What can be learned from our Oriental brethren is reverence, self-sacrifice, unquestioning obedience and complete devotion to the Cause. These are wonderful traits, and ones which the West must emulate. In exchange we can offer them our sense of principle and efficiency and capacity for action.”

Letter written on behalf Shoghi Effendi, May 31, 1951, in *Light of Divine Guidance*, Vol. 2, p. 101.

“I rejoice to learn of the marvelous effect which your resourcefulness, efficiency and unrelenting efforts are producing upon your admiring brethren of the East.”

Shoghi Effendi, in *Bahá’í Administration*, p. 99.

“Administrative efficiency and order should always be accompanied by an equal degree of love, of devotion and of spiritual development. Both of them are essential and to attempt to dissociate one from the other is to deaden the body of the Cause.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, December 10, 1933, in *Lights of Guidance*, p. 35, #124.

Consequences of Becoming Efficient and Effective

Focus questions

- ★ What does becoming more efficient and effective allow?
- ★ What does failure to become more efficient and effective hinder?

“Such a firmly founded, busy and happy community life as is envisioned when Local Spiritual Assemblies are truly effective, will provide a firm home foundation from which the friends may derive courage and strength and loving support in bearing the Divine Message to their fellowmen and conforming their lives to its benevolent rule.”

The Universal House of Justice, Naw-Rúz message to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1974, in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986*, p. 265.

“Though the Local Assemblies should give the N.S.A. all the moral and financial support the latter needs, it is the duty of the N.S.A. to inspire the necessary confidence in keeping the management of its work as efficiently as possible.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in *Dawn of a New Day*, p. 15.

“The National Assembly should deal efficiently with such matters and thus encourage the friends to follow the correct procedure. The whole object in Bahá'í administration is not only to manage the affairs of the Cause, but to stimulate the believers to work for it and to teach it to the masses. When the N.S.A. provides competent and quick service, in its own work and that of its Committees, it will see a far greater manifestation of enthusiasm and enterprise on the part of the believers.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in *Dawn of a New Day*, pp. 194-195.

“The most vital matter on which the Guardian wishes you to fully concentrate is that of consolidating the foundations of the Administration. Not until your group learns to work efficiently through obedience to the local assembly and under its guidance can there be any hope for future expansion. The friends must all realize the necessity of internal discipline and order which only a properly elected and efficiently functioning body such as the local assembly can effectively maintain.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in *Light of Divine Guidance*, Vol. 1, p. 80.

“It [the Administrative Order] will, as its component parts, its organic institutions, begin to function with efficiency and vigor, assert its claim and demonstrate its capacity to be regarded not only as the nucleus but the very pattern of the New World Order destined to embrace in the fullness of time the whole of mankind.”

Shoghi Effendi, in *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 144.

Consequences of Becoming Efficient and Effective, continued

“The divergence between the ways of the world and of the Cause of God becomes ever wider. And yet the two must come together. . . . Such a process will require a great development in the maturity and effectiveness of Local Spiritual Assemblies.”

“It is at this local level of Bahá’í community life, the very foundation of the administrative structure of the Faith, that we so often find lack of adequate strength and efficiency.”

The Universal House of Justice, November 17, 1971, to all Continental Boards of Counselors, in *Lights of Guidance*, p. 41, #146.

“We urge you ever to bear in mind that the purpose of Bahá’í administration is primarily to lend strength and directive to the teaching work and to promote the establishment of the Faith. It should never be regarded as an end in itself but purely as a means to canalize and make effective a spiritual vitality generated by the Word of God in the hearts of the believers.”

The Universal House of Justice, November 12, 1973, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, p. 2.

“Every Local Spiritual Assembly which unitedly strives to grow in maturity and efficiency and encourages its community to fulfill its destiny as a foundation stone of Bahá’u’lláh’s World Order can add to a growing groundswell of interest in and eventual recognition of the Cause of God as the sole hope for mankind.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1985, in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-1986*, p. 667.

“The twin processes so clearly described by the beloved Guardian [the steady progress and consolidation of the Cause of God and the progressive disintegration of the old world order] . . . will undoubtedly impose upon us new tasks, the obligation of devising new approaches to teaching, of demonstrating more clearly to a disillusioned world the Bahá’í way of life and making more effective the administrative institutions of the Faith. The authority and influence of National and Local Spiritual Assemblies will have to be strengthened in order to deal with larger Bahá’í communities. . . .”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1971.

“The divergence between the ways of the world and of the Cause of God becomes ever wider. And yet the two must come together. . . . Such a process will require a great development in the maturity and effectiveness of Local Spiritual Assemblies.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1972

Using Differences to Enhance Assembly Functioning

“ . . . each person cannot do everything and all persons cannot do the same thing.”

“An expansion of thought and action in certain aspects of our work would enhance our possibilities for success. . . . A unity in diversity of actions is called for . . . because each person cannot do everything and all persons cannot do the same thing. This understanding is important to the maturity which, by the many demands being made upon it, the community is being forced to attain.”

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

“The differences of language and of social and intellectual background do, undoubtedly, render the work somewhat difficult to carry out and may temporarily check the efficient and smooth working of the national administrative machinery of the Faith. They, nevertheless, impart to the deliberations of the National Assembly a universality which they would be otherwise lacking, and give to its members a breadth of view which is their duty to cultivate and foster. It is not uniformity which we should seek in the formation of any national or local assembly. For the bedrock of the Bahá'í administrative order is the principle of unity in diversity, which has been so strongly and so repeatedly emphasized in the writings of the Cause.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in *Dawn of a New Day*, pp. 47-48.

“Full harmony . . . is of the utmost importance, for upon it depends the unity of the Cause of God, the solidarity of the friends, the full, speedy and efficient working of the spiritual activities of His loved ones.”

Shoghi Effendi, in *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 24.

“ . . . among any group of people there are those who are outstanding because they show a capacity for understanding, for work, for efficient action, for leadership, for drawing other people together, for self-sacrificing and devoted service – for any number of qualities which enable them to respond actively to the needs of their environment and make a difference to it. In some cases this capacity has already been amply demonstrated; in others it is still latent but can be developed.”

The Universal House of Justice, November 6, 1994, to a National Spiritual Assembly.

Task and Maintenance Functions in Decision-Making Groups

Questions for Assembly consultation

- ★ Are there functions that are not being performed by any member of the Assembly?
- ★ If so, how can the function(s) be deliberately cultivated and incorporated into the Assembly's functioning?
- ★ How can the Assembly, in its role as "developer of human resources," ensure that all functions are performed, even if some of them are not a natural gift of its members?

The process by which decision-making groups accomplish their work includes many roles or functions. Some of these relate to helping the group perform its tasks. Others relate to maintaining relationships among its members. All of these functions must be performed for the group to work with optimal efficiency and effectiveness.

Please refer to the table on the reverse for a listing of functions which are needed by Local Spiritual Assemblies. The table includes space for indicating who on your current Assembly fulfills that function.

Thoughts of John Kolstoe on doing what is needed

"The fact is that although a great number of people are ill-suited for the duties they must perform, nonetheless, the jobs need to be done. If there are no qualified people to do these things, someone else must often do the best he can. For the individual it means doing what *must* be done instead of doing that for which he is best suited, or would prefer. It is an easy but inappropriate thing to say, 'Oh, I can't do that', and let it go. The beloved Guardian made this revealing distinction early in his ministry when he said: 'The time has come for the friends . . . to think not as to how they should serve the Cause, but how the Cause should be served.' (*Priceless Pearl*, p. 74) Surprising new talents and sources of strength have often been discovered when someone simply did what was needed.

"We are promised '. . . that if we arise to play nobly our part every deficiency in our lives will be more than compensated by the all-conquering Spirit of His grace and power.' (*Bahá'í Administration*, p. 88) . . . God makes surprising use of the material available. All we have to do is 'play nobly our part' and be astonished by the compensation."

John Kolstoe, *Consultation: A Universal Lamp of Guidance*, p. 151, ©1985, George Ronald, Publisher, Oxford, England. Used with permission.

Task and Maintenance Functions in Decision-Making Groups, continued

Function	Who does this?
<p>1. Information and opinion giver I offer facts, give my opinions, ideas, feelings, and information.</p>	
<p>2. Encourager of participation I help the other members take part in the discussion. I am open to their ideas. I let them know I value their contribution.</p>	
<p>3. Information and opinion seeker I ask for facts, information, opinions, ideas, and feelings from other group members.</p>	
<p>4. Tension reliever I tell jokes and suggest fun ways of doing the work in order to reduce tension and increase the fun we have working together.</p>	
<p>5. Direction giver I give direction to the group by planning how to go on with the group work and by calling attention to the tasks to be done.</p>	
<p>6. Communication helper I help communication by using good communication skills. I make sure that all group members understand what each other says.</p>	
<p>7. Summarizer I pull together related ideas or suggestions made by members and restate and summarize the major points discussed by the group.</p>	
<p>8. Evaluator of emotional climate I ask members how they are feeling about the way the group is working. I share my own feelings about the group's work and the way members are interacting.</p>	
<p>9. Coordinator I pull together group work by putting different ideas and suggestions in the proper order. I also make sure the actions of different members are coordinated.</p>	
<p>10. Process observer I observe the way the group is working. I use my observations to help discuss how the group can work together better.</p>	
<p>11. Energizer I give the group energy. I encourage group members to work hard to achieve our goals.</p>	
<p>12. Listener I listen carefully to other group members. I restate their ideas to make sure I understand them.</p>	

Functioning of the Chair

“... special attention should be paid to ... the functions and duties of the Assembly’s officers ... upon the proper discharge of whose responsibilities the efficient functioning of the Assembly largely depends. . . .”

The Universal House of Justice has written that the efficient, effective functioning of a Local Spiritual Assembly depends largely on its officers properly carrying out their responsibilities:

“In the courses for Local Assembly members special attention should be paid to . . . the functions and duties of the Assembly’s officers . . . upon the proper discharge of whose responsibilities the efficient functioning of the Assembly largely depends. . . .”

The Universal House of Justice, April 17, 1981, to all National Spiritual Assemblies, in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-1986*, p. 485.

Duties of the Chair

A familiar passage by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on requisites of Assembly functioning, corrected in 1997 at the request of the Universal House of Justice, contains illuminating guidance on the role of Chair. Newly inserted passages are underlined.

“The first condition is absolute love and harmony amongst the members of the assembly. They must be wholly free from estrangement and must manifest in themselves the Unity of God, for they are the waves of one sea, the drops of one river, the stars of one heaven, the rays of one sun, the trees of one orchard, the flowers of one garden. Should harmony of thought and absolute unity be nonexistent, that gathering shall be dispersed and that assembly be brought to naught. The second condition is that the members of the assembly should unitedly elect a chairman and lay down guide-lines and by-laws for their meetings and discussions. The chairman should have charge of such rules and regulations and protect and enforce them; the other members should be submissive, and refrain from conversing on superfluous and extraneous matters. They must, when coming together, turn their faces to the Kingdom on high and ask aid from the Realm of Glory. They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 1997 ed., pp. 93-94.

“In regards to the Assembly meeting, the Chair has the responsibility to:

- ★ Ensure that there is free and open discussion during the meetings, that it is kept to the point, and that all members are given the opportunity to contribute to the consultation

Functioning of the Chair, continued

- ★ Clarify decisions or motions so that they are fully understood
- ★ Call for a vote when appropriate
- ★ Consult with Secretary about agenda
- ★ Call the meeting to order

“Such systems as ‘Robert’s Rules of Order’ have no authority in Bahá’í consultation. Each Assembly should agree on the details necessary for maintaining an orderly flow of consultation and should revise them as required.”

Summary from Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities, 3.6-3.7.

“Concerning the duties of the Chairman of the Local Spiritual Assembly or the National Spiritual Assembly; he is supposed to share, freely and fully, in the discussions of all subjects under the consideration of these bodies, and to register his vote regarding each one of them. The duty of a Bahá’í Chairman is not only to guide the course of the discussion, but also to express his own viewpoint without any reservation whatever. He is entitled to exercise both of these functions.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, October 10, 1936, in *Lights of Guidance*, p. 28; also in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 3.6.

Thoughts on the Job of Chair, from John Kolstoe

“The chairman’s attitude must be one of service.”

“The chairman, together with the secretary, is like a host and should make certain the others feel comfortable and that things run smoothly. This includes making sure that each one’s contribution can flow freely with a minimum of distraction. To accomplish this the chairman should see that the physical arrangements are appropriate. Special consideration should be given to any member (such as someone in a wheelchair) who requires special attention. The chairman’s attitude must be one of service. It is his responsibility to make sure meetings start and end on time. Pacing is important so that all matters receive the necessary time and attention.

“At the most basic level, the chairman directs the flow of discussion, synthesizes the various contributions made, describes the gem of consensus as it emerges, identifies a trial conclusion, determines when consensus has been reached and states the decision.

“During consultation the chairman has duties beyond making sure discussion is carried on in an orderly and efficient manner. He, more than anyone else, sets the tone of proper decorum and courtesy. He must make sure everyone has a chance to speak. Care must be exercised so that no one, including himself, monopolizes the discussion or intimidates others. The phrase to ‘invite the reticent* and quell* the loquacious*’ has been used in this connection.

“Unlike the presiding officer of most other organizations, the chairman has a duty to share his opinion. He also has the same right and responsibility to vote as any other member.

“The chairman determines when consultation has been adequate. He must neither cut it short nor allow discussion to go on and on. He, or someone else appointed, should summarize the matter before a vote is taken. This statement should be clear and to the point so that everyone is sure what is being decided. If all members are clearly in agreement, voting is not necessary. However, the chairman must be sure that unanimity truly has been reached.

* **Reticent:** quiet; reserved
* **Quell:** to quiet
* **Loquacious:** talkative

“In general the chairman needs to have a comprehensive view of what the Spiritual Assembly is doing so that he can properly

Thoughts on the Job of Chair, continued

reflect its concerns. He should see priorities clearly and understand the plans, hopes and objectives of the institution. He is often the one who must analyze, synthesize, summarize and communicate the assembly's concerns both for his fellow members and to the community at large. It is his task to relate the specific actions and decisions to the major purpose.

“Often the chairman is the official spokesman for the Spiritual Assembly and it is his duty to marshal the understanding and support of the entire community.”

John Kolstoe, *Consultation: A Universal Lamp of Guidance*, pp. 53-54, ©1985, George Ronald, Publisher, Oxford, England. Used with permission.

Helping the Assembly Move Through its Agenda

Tips for Chairs

- ★ **Work from a well-planned agenda.**

Effective agenda preparation enables the Chair to plan how the necessary work can be covered in the time available and to conduct the meeting accordingly. Without a good agenda the Chair cannot help the Assembly make the best use of its time. While the proposed agenda is produced jointly by the Secretary and the Chair prior to the meeting, other members are free to suggest changes to the agenda at the beginning of the meeting.

- ★ **Keep the focus on the topic at hand.**

When consultation strays from one subject to another, gently move the focus back. Helpful comments might include: “We’ll be discussing that item later on the agenda, but first we need to finish with this topic.” “We’re moving into an interesting area. Perhaps the Assembly will want to put this on our agenda for future consideration.”

- ★ **Close one topic before opening another, even if it is related.**

Ask: “Before moving on, what have we decided about the topic under consideration?” Make sure the Secretary has captured the decision for the minutes.

- ★ **Don’t allow items not requiring the entire Assembly to consume Assembly time.**

Consider whether the entire Assembly is required for all items. If the topic is along the lines of serving potato salad vs. coleslaw at the community picnic, ask “Can this item be delegated to an individual or committee to take care of outside the Assembly meeting?”

Encouraging the Participation of All Members

Tips for Chairs

- ★ **Solicit comments from quieter members of the Assembly.**
Make an opening for less assertive members to share their thoughts without putting them on the spot. Be aware of cultural differences about assertiveness.

- ★ **Note the order of requests to speak from members.**
This helps avoid any apparent discourtesy or injustice. You may want to let those who have not previously spoken share their thoughts before acknowledging those who have already expressed themselves.

- ★ **Intervene to stop interruptions.**
Make sure that each member is allowed to share his or her comments in an open, listening environment. If an interruption occurs, immediately break in to invite the original speaker to continue his or her thought. Be aware that women and minorities are disproportionately interrupted.

- ★ **Prevent domination of the Assembly by one or more members.**
The Assembly has elected you to protect and preserve a consultative atmosphere. Feel the authority given to you for this purpose and exercise it lovingly but firmly. While the Chair has a special responsibility to facilitate the flow of consultation, it is the duty of every Assembly member to see that the consultative process is upheld. Each member should support you in the exercise of your authority, and each should feel free to comment, “I would like to hear from those who have not yet spoken.”

Helping the Assembly Find Closure

Tips for Chairs

- ★ Remember that reaching consensus is different from everyone having their first preference selected.
- ★ Check for possible consensus by stating the idea under discussion and asking “Does anyone disagree?” or “Is this a decision that everyone can live with?”
- ★ If there is lack of consensus, avoid asking questions that are too open-ended, such as “Does anyone have something more to share?” Instead, consider asking such questions as:
 - Are there any suggestions that have not been put on the table?
 - What further information would you need in order to be in favor of this recommendation?
 - What have we overlooked in our consultation?
 - How can this recommendation be changed so that we can all enthusiastically support it?
- ★ Call for a vote, if necessary.

Dealing with Anger, Conflict, and Hurt Feelings

Tips for Chairs

Moments of conflict are critical times in the life of any group. How they are handled affirms or undermines the values and stated beliefs of the group. They present the Assembly and its members with a challenge: “We know what the Writings say about consultation, but here’s how we’re actually going to operate.”

The Chair can help the Assembly meet this challenge in several ways:

★ **Set an example.**

One of the Chair’s most important contributions in these situations is modeling appropriate consultative attitudes and behaviors. Set an example by being courteous and by not losing your temper or becoming defensive.

★ **Create openings.**

Make sure that each member has an opportunity to share his or her point of view and receive a respectful hearing. Feeling truly heard helps diffuse anger and frustration.

★ **Take a time out from the topic at hand, if needed.**

When strong feelings emerge, it is often better to shift the focus from content – the topic being discussed – to process – how members are relating to each other.

★ **Surface feelings.**

As you hear subtle or blatant signs of hurt or anger, share your observations: “You seem upset. We need to hear what you are feeling right now.”

★ **Acknowledge the speaker’s comments.**

Let members know they have been heard: “You feel some members are allowed to get away with making hostile, critical comments, and you are tired of being a target.”

Acknowledgement does not necessarily imply agreement, but it lets the speaker know his or her comments have not gone out into a great empty space.

★ **Express confidence that the Assembly can grow through these difficult situations.**

Shared struggles form bonds. Express your confidence that the Assembly’s maturity, effectiveness, and unity will all be enhanced through its efforts to find the balance of consulting with frankness and love.

Facilitating Consultation

Finely developed consultation skills are necessary for effective Assembly meetings. Clearly, an Assembly will be most efficient when all of its members learn and practice these skills, but at a minimum the Chair should facilitate consultation by using and modeling them.

At appropriate times during a meeting the Chair and other Assembly members should:

★ **Ask for clarification.**

If you are unclear about the topic being discussed or the logic of a particular point of view, ask questions. Ask members to restate the point or repeat ideas in different ways. Ask for examples, pictures, diagrams, graphs, etc.

★ **Monitor involvement.**

Encourage roughly equal participation among Assembly members. Politely direct attention away from someone who is talking too much. Make openings for less aggressive members either by making a general request for input or by directly asking their opinions.

★ **Listen with detachment.**

Actively explore each other's ideas rather than debating or defending each idea that comes up.

★ **Summarize.**

From time to time summarize and restate to the Assembly what you have heard being said. Check for agreement.

★ **Keep the discussion focused.**

Don't permit digressions, irrelevant discussion, or overly long examples.

★ **Keep an eye on the time.**

If discussion of some of the agenda items takes longer than expected, remind the Assembly of deadlines and time allotments so that work can be either accelerated or postponed or time can be rebudgeted.

★ **Test for consensus.**

Summarize what the Assembly's position on an issue seems to be, check whether the members agree with the summary, and ask if everyone can live with this. Remember that consensus is not unanimous agreement but a proposal acceptable enough that all members are willing to give it a try.

★ **Evaluate the meeting process.**

Constantly assess the quality of the consultation. If the Assembly seems stuck or frustrated, ask "Are we getting what we need and want from this discussion? If not, what can we do differently in the remaining time?"

Functioning of the Secretary

“... special attention should be paid to ... the functions and duties of the Assembly’s officers, especially those of the secretary. . . .”

The Universal House of Justice has written that the efficient, effective functioning of a Local Spiritual Assembly depends largely on its officers properly carrying out their responsibilities:

“In the courses for Local Assembly members special attention should be paid to . . . the functions and duties of the Assembly’s officers, especially those of the secretary, upon the proper discharge of whose responsibilities the efficient functioning of the Assembly largely depends. . . .”

The Universal House of Justice, April 17, 1981, to all National Spiritual Assemblies, in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-1986*, p. 485.

Duties of the Secretary

“Generally, the functions of the Secretary include the following, although the Assembly is free to assign some of the responsibilities to secretarial assistants or other members. Some larger communities have found it is helpful to divide the workload of their Secretariats. For example, they may have a General Secretary, an External Affairs Secretary, a Recording Secretary and a Personal Status Secretary:

- ★ Prepares agenda for the Assembly meetings, usually in consultation with the Chair
- ★ Records all minutes of the Assembly meetings and of the annual meeting
- ★ Receives mail for the Assembly and presents communications of all kinds to the Local Spiritual Assembly at the next meeting
- ★ Answers correspondence, under the direction of the Local Assembly
- ★ Maintains a filing system for all correspondence, bulletins, etc.
- ★ Prepares agenda and materials to be shared with or distributed to the community at Nineteen Day Feasts
- ★ Makes notes of recommendations made at the Nineteen Day Feast and presents them to the Assembly at the next meeting. The community should be advised of any action taken or consideration given to such recommendations.
- ★ Maintains an up-to-date list of names, addresses, and telephone numbers of all members of the community
- ★ Advises the National Center of all enrollments, transfers, changes of address, and changes in personal status (marriage, divorce)
- ★ Sends out written notices of the Annual Meeting so that they are received at least fifteen days before the annual meeting on April 20th
- ★ Follows up Assembly action
- ★ Is watchful for the periodic submission of reports from committees as well as expected responses to the Assembly’s communications
- ★ Brings to the meeting files, correspondence, and references from the Writings which relate to the meeting’s agenda”

Summary from Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities, 3.7-3.9.

Thoughts on the Job of Secretary,

from John Kolstoe

“Secretarial duties are many and varied.”

“Little is said in the Bahá’í Writings about the functions of the officers of Local Spiritual Assemblies. The by-laws for incorporated Assemblies state: ‘The officers of the Spiritual Assembly shall consist of a Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer, and such other officers as may be found necessary for the proper conduct of its affairs . . .’ Very little else is said about the functions of the officers.

“Three observations come to mind about why so little is mentioned:

1. Any understandings we have about the functions of officers apply to this period of history only; they may or may not apply to the future.
2. While there is certain work which must be done, who does what is not important.
3. There is no inherent station in any of the offices. Other than performing certain specific services, an assembly officer is no different from any other Bahá’í.

“The administrative duties of officers are described in many manuals put out by various National Spiritual Assemblies. The following comments do not deal with a list of duties; rather they are thoughts on how officers can facilitate consultation. . . .

“Secretarial duties are many and varied. In most situations the responsibility to record and carry out the directions of the assembly falls upon the secretary. Sometimes the duties are divided between a recording or minutes secretary, corresponding secretary or assistant secretary or secretaries. Some specific functions may be assigned to some other person. The general duties are spelled out in the many administrative manuals available.

“The secretary, like all other members, takes part in the discussion and votes. He is often the most familiar with the matter at hand; therefore, other members of the Spiritual Assembly are frequently dependent upon him for background information. It is important that this information be shared early in the consultation, so it is often best to have the discussion start with a background statement by the secretary.

“Another important secretarial duty is maintaining the records of the Spiritual Assembly. Records are important, but the manner in which a Spiritual Assembly keeps its records and the extent of

Thoughts on the Job of Secretary,

continued

“... the secretary does all those things which need to be done to help the community function smoothly while maintaining unity.”

those records is a secondary issue. There are widely differing standards. A balance must be found so that adequate records are maintained for the needs of the community while guarding against too heavy a burden falling on one person or maintaining a more complex system than the needs of the community warrant. Most of all, care must be exercised that perspective is not lost. The systems of administration and record-keeping should never overshadow the purposes of teaching and building unity.

“Day in and day out the secretary does all those things which need to be done to help the community function smoothly while maintaining unity. He must have patience and vision, and should project the assembly’s love for the community’s members, thereby ensuring that their experiences with the assembly will be as pleasant and favorable as possible. The secretary is normally the assembly’s official channel of communication and should reflect the spirit and noble station of the assembly itself.

“Like the chairman, the secretary must also have a firm understanding of both the general picture and the interrelationship of all Spiritual Assembly concerns.”

John Kolstoe, *Consultation: A Universal Lamp of Guidance*, pp. 52, 54-55, ©1985, George Ronald, Publisher, Oxford, England. Used with permission.

Splitting up Secretarial Functions

The Assembly can divide up the secretarial functions among as many of its members as it feels is necessary.

The job of the Secretary is an enormous one, but the Assembly can divide up the secretarial functions among as many of its members as it feels is necessary, depending on the size of the community and the amount of work involved.

Imagine that you are serving on an Assembly of a large community. Working with a partner, divide the following secretarial functions among the five Secretaries listed below:

1. represents the Faith to outside organizations
2. drafts mandates for committees and writes letters of appointment
3. maintains membership statistics
4. handles or coordinates public information functions
5. receives in-coming correspondence
6. creates the agenda, with the Chair
7. keeps in touch with various committees – their needs, plans, progress
8. coordinates liaisons or task forces on personal matters and years of patience
9. keeps the Assembly files
10. serves as spokesperson for the Assembly
11. records the minutes
12. makes/updates the Assembly's implementation list

General Secretary

Recording Secretary

External Affairs Secretary

Personal Affairs Secretary

Committees Secretary

Tips for Secretaries

Using technology can save a tremendous amount of secretarial time.

E-mail

- ★ Agendas can be sent in advance to members with computers.
- ★ The correspondence list from the agenda can be sent to the Recording Secretary, who can write the minutes using a template and inserting the correspondence list.
- ★ Reports from the Treasurer and from committees can also be easily incorporated into the minutes.
- ★ Excerpts from the year's minutes can serve as a basis for the annual report.
- ★ Committees can send an annual report to the Secretary, who can incorporate these into the Assembly's annual report or include them as attachments to the report.
- ★ **Caution:** Be sensitive to the feelings and perceptions of members who do not have e-mail. In order to avoid feelings of resentment or being "out of the loop," Assemblies should have a clear understanding of what materials will be sent electronically and make provision for these to be delivered in other forms, in a timely manner, to those without e-mail.

Agenda and minutes templates

- ★ Using a template for the agenda saves time and acts as a memory prompt.
- ★ Using a template for minutes provides a standard format. A simple form of minutes is to list the subject, important points, and the decision. Writing up the decision in some way that sets it apart from the rest of the text – bolding, underlining, or indenting – will ensure easy reference later.

Template letters

- ★ Devise templates for frequently sent letters, such as
 - a letter welcoming new believers (declarants or move-ins) and acquainting them with the community's goals, events, and activities
 - a letter congratulating children reaching the age of maturity
 - a letter preparing an individual who has requested to meet with the Assembly for a personal consultation
 - the annual election call

For more information:

- ★ Refer to "Assembly Communications" (section 3.22-3.28) of *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities* for more information on the following:
 - **Record-keeping:** 3.22
 - **Minutes:** 3.23 - 3.24 (includes suggestions from the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assemblies)
 - **Incoming and outgoing correspondence**, including tone: 3.24 - 3.26
 - **Archives:** 3.28 - 3.31

Managing the Assembly's Time

Prior to the meeting

- ★ **Schedule regular meeting times, as much as possible.**

“He sincerely hopes that your Assembly will meet as regularly and as frequently as possible in order to maintain the efficiency of its functioning and to raise the standard and to widen the scope of its activities.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in *Dawn of a New Day*, p. 47.

“The Spiritual Assembly must decide how often it should meet in order to properly handle the affairs of the Cause under its jurisdiction. Twice a week or twice a month is not the point, the point is that it should be alert and carry on the work adequately.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 7; also in *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 3.1.

- ★ **Establish, and keep, concrete starting and ending times.**

- ★ **Build in social time for Assembly members separate from the meeting time.**

- ★ **Create an agenda prior to each Assembly meeting to share with all members in advance.**

- ★ **Help members prepare in advance for the meeting.**

- Include with the agenda any necessary “homework” reading or a list of references to be studied.
- Include the minutes with the agenda.
- Schedule pre-meeting preparation time.

Practices such as these help members fulfill their responsibility to engage in “the methods of consultation, with its commitment to informed discussion. . . .” (Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, October 24, 1990, in *The American Bahá'í*, November 4, 1993.)

- ★ **Use issue summaries.**

- ★ **Bring one agenda item to closure before starting consideration of another one.**

“One cannot obtain the full force of the sunlight when it is cast on a flat mirror, but once the sun shineth upon a concave mirror, or on a lens that is convex, all its heat will be concentrated on a single point, and that one point will burn the hottest. Thus is it

During the meeting

Managing the Assembly's Time, continued

necessary to focus one's thinking on a single point so that it will become an effective force.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 111.

- ★ **Determine if and when the Assembly wishes to address a subject brought to its attention.**
- ★ **Use an implementation list.**
- ★ **Take breaks.**
- ★ **Set aside time for process checks.**

Implementation List

★ **An implementation list shows at a glance:**

- date of the Assembly meeting
- essence of the Assembly decision
- to whom implementation of the decision was assigned
- target date for completion

**A sample list
might look this:**

Date	Decision	Assigned to	Target date
4-15	Present statement to City Council	Jim & Layli	Get on Council's agenda by April 30; presentation by mid-May
4-15	Annual audit	Pat & Maria	May 30
4-15	Participate as a marching unit in the 4th of July parade	Kathy, Linda, & Jamal (convener)	Report plans, materials needed, and cost to LSA by May 15
4-15	Research DDBC on consulting with non-Assembly members	all Assembly members	next meeting

★ **The Assembly can use an implementation list to:**

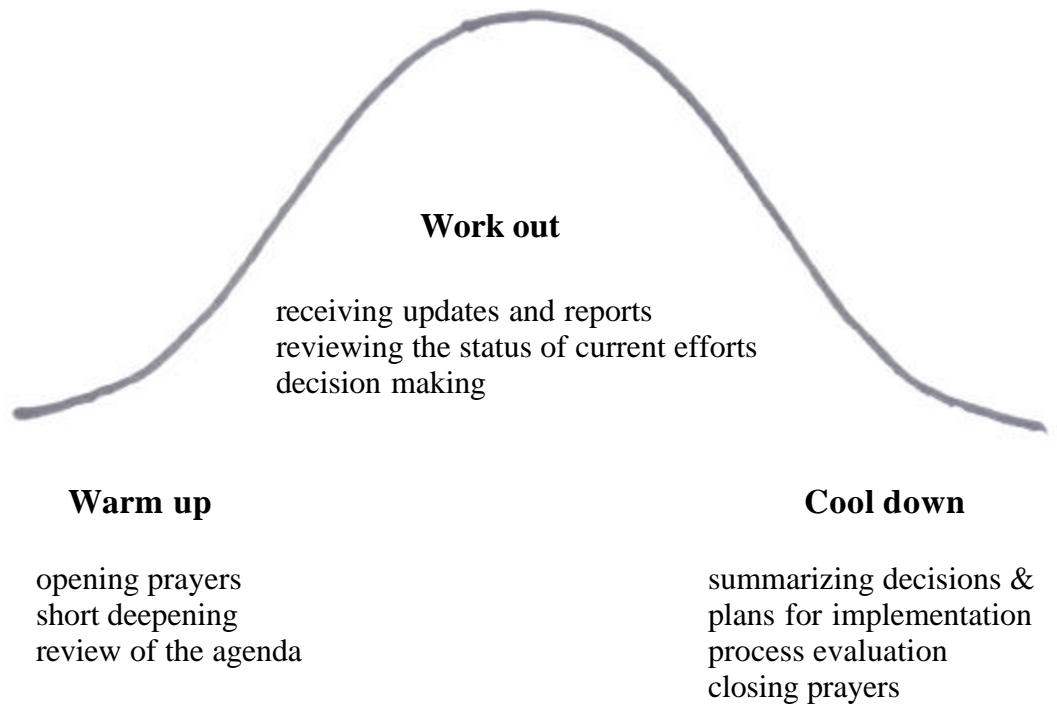
- get a status update on each item
- quickly ascertain if decisions are being carried out in a timely fashion
- see if difficulties have arisen which will require putting a situation on an Assembly agenda for consultation

Sample Assembly Process Assessment

This is only a sample assessment. An Assembly could include as many or as few items as it finds helpful. An assessment can be done verbally and informally. It can also be done by having each member fill out an assessment sheet. Items receiving the most checks for “can improve” could then be adopted by the Assembly as goals for improvement and assessed frequently for signs of progress.

	<u>Doing okay</u>	<u>Can improve</u>
1. Does the Assembly convene and adjourn on time?	_____	_____
2. Does the Assembly keep to its agenda?	_____	_____
3. Are secretarial duties handled satisfactorily?	_____	_____
4. Are the duties of the Chair handled satisfactorily?	_____	_____
5. Is participation in consultation relatively balanced?	_____	_____
6. Do members listen carefully to one another?	_____	_____
7. Do members show self-restraint?	_____	_____
8. Is accurate information available for consultation?	_____	_____
9. Are spiritual principles identified and surfaced?	_____	_____
10. Does the Assembly stay focused on the topic?	_____	_____
11. Do members help clarify each other's points?	_____	_____
12. Are decisions summarized for clarity?	_____	_____
13. Does the Assembly assign responsibility for implementation?	_____	_____
14. Does the Assembly delegate appropriately?	_____	_____
15. Does the Assembly follow up on assigned tasks?	_____	_____
16. Does the Assembly evaluate its process periodically?	_____	_____

Assembly Meeting Dynamics



When the Assembly's work is aligned to correspond to this three stage rhythm, the Assembly will

- be more productive
- function at a greater level of effectiveness
- experience increased feelings of satisfaction at the end of meetings

Creating Effective Agendas

Effective agendas help the Assembly manage its time wisely by letting the Assembly know what to expect: what topics will be addressed, how urgent each one is, and approximately how much time each topic will require.

The Universal House of Justice has made suggestions about the preparation of an agenda for National Secretaries which may also be applicable to Local Assemblies:

“The Agenda is usually prepared by the Secretary, sometimes in consultation with the Chairman or other member or members of the National Spiritual Assembly. Immediately after a Spiritual Assembly meeting, all items not cleared should be transferred to a new draft Agenda in preparation for the next meeting. Then, as each new matter arises, it should be entered under the appropriate heading. In this way the Agenda can be built up gradually. A few days before the Assembly meeting, the completed draft could be duplicated for the members. At the beginning of each meeting, any additional urgent items which have developed or items which individual members wish to raise can be added.”

The Universal House of Justice, in “A Suggested Guide for National Secretaries” enclosed with a letter date May 4, 1972; in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 3.22-3.23.

Tips for creating effective agendas

- ★ Use a correspondence log
- ★ Indicate clearly the purpose – announcement or action – of agenda items
- ★ Prioritize items by timeliness
- ★ Prioritize items by importance

“. . . teaching the Cause of God must be accorded precedence, inasmuch as it is a matter of paramount importance. . . .”

Bahá’u’lláh, in *The Local Spiritual Assembly*, p. 11.

- ★ Indicate estimated times for agenda items
- ★ Keep track of items which will need follow up at a later date
- ★ Set aside time for process checks

How Can this Agenda be Improved?

Review the sample agenda at right to see how this agenda might be improved.

Agenda for the Spiritual Assembly of Heavenly Vista June 21, 2002

- ★ **Reading of minutes of the meeting of June 14**
- ★ **Secretary's report**
- ★ **Treasurer's report**
- ★ **Teaching**
 1. Bahá'í float in the parade
 2. Bahá'í booth at the mall
- ★ **Consolidation**
 1. Training institute programs
 2. Deepening new believers
- ★ **Administrative**
 1. Contribution to scholarship fund
 2. Bahá'í phone line
- ★ **Personal matters**
 1. Request for a year of waiting
 2. Possible violation of law against drinking
 3. Plans for upcoming wedding
- ★ **Closing prayer**

Now You're Cooking! — Sample Agenda

Review the sample agenda at right to see an example of a creative way to structure a good agenda.

Agenda for the Spiritual Assembly of Heavenly Vista September 21, 2002

- ★ **Prayers**
- ★ **Approval of minutes of the meeting of September 14**
- ★ **Correspondence log**
 - Outgoing
 - Incoming
 - ⇒ Action needed
 - ⇒ Announcements
- ★ **Treasurer's report**
- ★ **What's Cooking?** [Brief reports from committees/task forces; review of implementation list]
- ★ **Burning Items** [must be acted on or noted at this meeting]
 - Final arrangements for visit of Youth Workshop this weekend
- ★ **The Main Course** [top priority item to be discussed this meeting]
 - Review/revise mandate of the Bahá'í Education Committee
- ★ **Crockpot Items** [will require more than 5 minutes consultation]
 1. Setting standards and expectations for behavior of children at Feast
 2. Increasing universal participation in teaching activities
- ★ **Microwave Items** [will require less than 5 minutes consultation]
 - Date set for next year's Interfaith Food Festival
- ★ **Menu planning** [select main course for the next Assembly meeting and the next Feast]
- ★ **Dessert** [choose time of next meeting, if necessary]
- ★ **Taste Test** [group process assessment end of meeting]
- ★ **Back-Burner Items** [items that will be coming up later]
 1. John and Mary's year of waiting – ends January 15, 2003
 2. Presentation of Bahá'í books to local colleges – after Jim reports on what titles are currently in each college's collection
- ★ **Preserves** [items on hold until the Assembly wants to review them]
 - Contact with believers we rarely see [last contact was Naw-Rúz greeting letter]
 - Progress on refinement of the Feast
- ★ **Closing prayer**

Delegation within the Assembly and Beyond

Delegation makes the best use of the talents and capacities of the Assembly and the community.

Everyone has a role to play in carrying forward the work of the Faith. Delegation makes the best use of the talents and capacities of the Assembly and the community, one of the signs of a “best” Assembly:

“The best Assembly is the one that capitalizes the talents of all the members of the group and keeps them busy in some form of active participation in serving the Cause and spreading the Message.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, August 1932, in *Bahá'í News*, No. 68, November 1932, p. 3; in *Lights of Guidance*, p. 37, #131.

“The first quality for leadership, both among individuals and Assemblies, is the capacity to use the energy and competence that exists in the rank and file of its followers.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, August, 30, 1930, to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, in *The Local Spiritual Assembly*, pp. 22-23.

“In the human body, every cell, every organ, every nerve has its part to play. When all do so the body is healthy, vigorous, radiant, ready for every call made upon it Therefore, in this organic, divinely guided, blessed, and illumined body the participation of every believer is of the utmost importance, and is a source of power and vitality as yet unknown to us.”

The Universal House of Justice, September 1964, in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-1986*, p. 43.

Learning When to Delegate

“As a Bahá’í community grows, the number and variety of its responsibilities often demand the assistance and expertise of community members not serving on the Assembly.”

“As a Bahá’í community grows, the number and variety of its responsibilities often demand the assistance and expertise of community members not serving on the Assembly. In such cases, the Assembly should delegate specific tasks to committees and individuals who possess the required talents and abilities.

“Delegating responsibility also increases the level of participation and helps those involved develop a sense of loyalty and commitment to the Faith and to the Bahá’í community. Delegation means assigning responsibilities to committees and individuals, and authorizing them to take the actions required to carry out their responsibilities.

“To establish the authority of the committee or individual who has been assigned responsibilities, the Assembly must make certain:

- that the committee (individual) understands the extent of its own responsibility and authority
- everyone with whom the committee (individual) is authorized to communicate and collaborate and from whom it may request services also knows that the committee (individual) has such responsibilities and authority.

“The committee’s authority may be limited in various ways (e.g., by a mandate), but it should always know what constitutes approved and disapproved lines of communication.

“There is a common misconception that Assemblies cannot delegate authority because doing so means giving it up. The delegation of authority to a committee (individual) in no way diminishes the Assembly’s authority or responsibility. The committee (individual) serves at the wish of the Assembly and can be dissolved at any time if necessary.”

*Commentary written on behalf of the National Spiritual Assembly, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 3.18*

“Many Assemblies find that some of their activities such as teaching, observance of Feasts and Anniversaries, solution of personal problems, and other duties are best dealt with by committees appointed by the Assembly and responsible to it.”

*The Universal House of Justice, July 30, 1972, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 3.18 and 4.12.*

“Although Local Spiritual Assemblies are primarily

Learning When to Delegate, continued

responsible for counseling believers regarding personal problems, there may be times, when in the judgment of the National or Local Assembly, it would be preferable to assign counseling or advisory duties to individuals or committees. This is within the discretion of the Assembly.”

The Universal House of Justice, March 27, 1966, in *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 21, #45; also in *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 4.12.

Questions that Assemblies may want to pose to themselves whenever considering how to assign tasks:

1. Is there a compelling reason why the Assembly should make this decision and carry it out instead of asking a task force to handle the matter?
2. Is there a compelling reason why the whole Assembly needs to be present or needs to handle this matter?
3. Is there a compelling reason why a particular Assembly member or officer needs to handle this matter?

Suggestions on How to Delegate

Focus question

- ★ What consequences might result from neglecting to heed these suggestions?

The following suggestions on how to delegate are adapted from Morris Taylor's book *Helping Joe Strong*. This book is an excellent resource of practical suggestions for helping Assemblies become more efficient and effective.

When you delegate a task to an individual or committee, remember the following:

★ **Project champion**

When appointing a committee or team, include at least one "project champion" in the group. A "champion" is an individual who is:

- committed to seeing the assigned task through to completion
- reliable in carrying out responsibilities
- capable of getting a job done in spite of the inevitable problems that arise
- capable of working with little or no supervision

★ **Adequate authority**

Give authority commensurate with responsibility. There are decisions to be made in carrying out any assignment; the people to whom you delegate responsibility must be given the power and freedom to make those decisions.

★ **Time and resources**

Give the time and resources necessary to do the job properly.

★ **Deadlines**

Set a deadline for every task that you delegate. If it's a large task to be accomplished over time, set sub-deadlines at regular intervals as well.

★ **Review what, how, and when**

Take time to review what you want done with the individuals to whom you delegate. Whenever possible, delegate responsibilities in writing; but even then, take time to meet with the individuals and ensure that they know exactly what is to be done, how it will be measured, and the deadline for completion.

Morris Taylor, *Helping Joe Strong*, pp. 64-66, ©1997, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, IL. Used with permission.

Avoiding Officer Burnout

“At present we must complete the objectives of the Seven Year Plan, paying great attention to those inner spiritual developments which will be manifested in greater unity among the friends and in National and Local Spiritual Assemblies functioning ‘harmoniously, vigorously and efficiently’ as the Guardian desired.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1983.

Case study

The Assembly has just elected as its Secretary a mother with small children who lives in the only home available for Bahá'í meetings.

- ★ Consult as a group about how the Assembly can give her the support and practical help she may need to properly discharge her responsibilities and keep her sanity.
- ★ Have a spokesperson record and report back your ideas.

Establishing a Bahá'í Style of Administration in the Midst of a Non-Bahá'í Culture

Focus questions

- ★ What characteristics does the Universal House of Justice describe as tendencies and “entrenched habits of American life?”
- ★ What effects do these have on the functioning of Assemblies?
- ★ What steps can the Assembly take as an institution to arrest their influence?
- ★ What dynamics can be changed or set in motion in the community by these efforts?

“You live in a society caught in the tightening grip of moral decadence on a vast scale. But this should come as no surprise to you. It is the unavoidable consequence of a pervasive godlessness; its symptoms and repercussions were described in painful detail by Shoghi Effendi in several of his letters to the Western friends. Inevitably, the American Bahá'í community is affected by this condition to some extent. The corrosive influence of an overbearing and rampant secularization is infecting the style of administration of the Faith in your community and threatening to undermine its efficacy*.

“The aggressiveness and competitiveness which animate a dominantly capitalist culture; the partisanship inherent in a fervidly* democratic system; the suspicion of public-policy institutions and the skepticism towards established authority ingrained in the political attitude of the people and which trace their origins to the genesis of American society; the cynical disregard of the moderating principles and rules of civilized human relationships resulting from an excessive liberalism and its immoral consequences – such unsavoury characteristics inform entrenched habits of American life, which imperceptibly at first but more obviously in the long run have come to exert too great a sway over the manner of management of the Bahá'í community and over the behaviour of portions of its rank and file in relation to the Cause. This unwholesome influence must be arrested by immediate, deliberate effort – an effort which must surely begin within your Assembly itself. Further accommodation of it will severely impede the progress of your community, despite the abundant possibilities of an imminent breakthrough.”

The Universal House of Justice, May 19, 1994, in *Rights and Responsibilities: The Complementary Roles of the Individual and Institutions*, pp. 36-7.

***Efficacy**: capacity for producing a desired result or effect; effectiveness
***Fervid**: heated or vehement in spirit; fervent

Closing Quotations

“The time is indeed ripe for the manifold activities . . . to be harmonized and conducted with unity, cooperation and efficiency. . . .”

“The time is indeed ripe for the manifold activities, wherein the servants and handmaids of Bahá’u’lláh are so devoutly and earnestly engaged, to be harmonized and conducted with unity, cooperation and efficiency, that the effect of such a combined and systematized effort, through which an All-powerful Spirit is steadily pouring, may transcend every other achievement of the past, however glorious it has been”

Shoghi Effendi, in *Bahá’í Administration*, pp. 24-25.

“It is his most fervent hope and the object of his continued supplications at the threshold of Bahá’u’lláh that your community which is already functioning with such a remarkable vigour, unity and efficiency may rapidly gain in numbers and in strength, and become a beacon of light, the radiance of which shall gradually penetrate and envelop all the neighbouring centers and regions.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in *Light of Divine Guidance*, Vol. 1, p. 86.

“The challenge offered by these opportunities the American believers, I feel confident, will . . . unhesitatingly take up, and will, with their traditional fearlessness, tenacity, and efficiency, so respond to it as to confirm, before all the world, their title and rank as the champion-builders of the mightiest institutions of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh.”

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 15.