

Facilitation Guide

Developing a Strong, Vibrant Community

An Assembly Development Module Workshop



“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.

“. . . 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*



Developing a Strong, Vibrant Community

OVERVIEW FOR FACILITATORS

Purpose

- ★ To explore the role of the Assembly in the process of community building
- ★ To deepen appreciation of what Bahá'í community life is intended to be
- ★ To introduce elements of a systematic planning process of community development

This module explores the role of the Assembly in the process of community building. It deepens appreciation of what Bahá'í community life is intended to be and introduces elements of a systematic planning process of community development. The module contains activities to help identify reasons why believers may withdraw from active involvement in the community and to discover ways to lovingly intervene and draw them closer. It also includes activities which an Assembly can use with its community to assess the needs of community members and to identify skills and resources which members would like to contribute to the process of community building. "Take home" assignments help the Assembly examine current activities and processes of community life, envision their preferred future, and select strategies to systematically turn their vision into reality.

The Office of Assembly Development would like to thank the many individuals who so generously shared thoughts and insights on this topic, particularly Ms. Lin Deahl-Coy and Mr. John Suggs, Jr.

What you will find inside your Facilitation Guide:

- ★ **Frontispiece with key quotations.** A one-page sheet containing quotations from letters of the Universal House of Justice which provide the foundation of the modules. (p. 2)
- ★ **Overview for Facilitators.** The guide you are reading. (p. 3)
- ★ **The Assembly Development Process.** A one-page description of the process of Assembly development, the role of these modules within that process, and how to request an Assembly Development representative to facilitate the modules. (p. 5)
- ★ **Guidance for Facilitators.** A four-page collection of suggestions for preparation before the session, tips for facilitating during the session, ideas for closing the session, and guidance on what to do with the workshop report form and evaluation forms after the session. (pp. 6-9)
- ★ **Highlights of this module.** A two-page listing of the module objectives, an agenda outline with times of each segment of the module, and a listing of materials needed. (pp. 10-12)

Note: You will also want to obtain a copy of the Participant Handouts.

OVERVIEW FOR FACILITATORS, continued

- ★ **Facilitator’s instructions for segments of this module.** A series of pages that provide the purpose and instructions for each section of the module. (pp. 13-41)
- ★ **Description of the Office of Assembly Development.** A two-page overview of the vision and mission of this office and the services it can provide. (unnumbered pages near the end of the Facilitation Guide)
- ★ **Evaluation Forms.** A two-page evaluation form for the facilitator to complete and return to the Office of Assembly Development and a two-page evaluation form for the Assembly to complete two months after the workshop. (unnumbered pages at the end of the Facilitation Guide)

The Assembly Development Process

“...enabling Assemblies to rise to a ‘new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities’...””

The National Spiritual Assembly focuses its Assembly Development initiatives towards facilitating the development of “a new state of mind” on the part of Assembly members and the community, thereby enabling Assemblies to rise to the “new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities” envisioned by the Universal House of Justice.

The development process is designed to be furthered by presentation of a variety of module workshops, each module covering a distinct topic or function. Use of these workshops will help Assemblies to understand more clearly the spiritual nature of their institution, to improve their performance, and to attain an ever advancing level of maturity as the primary institutions of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh. When used with the general community, the workshops will heighten appreciation for the station and responsibilities of local Assemblies and deepen the desire to support and assist these institutions in their growth process.

The National Spiritual Assembly highly recommends that each workshop be studied with a Bahá’í facilitator who resides outside the particular Bahá’í community, although these materials may be used by Assemblies on their own. A list of Bahá’ís who serve as facilitators, called Assembly Development Representatives, is available from the Office of Assembly Development of the Bahá’í National Center at (847) 733-3490 or by e-mail to OAD@usbnc.org.

Assemblies may choose to study these workshops as an institution, may invite other Assemblies in their area to study together, or may invite their community to join them in exploring the modules. Workshops may also be used at Bahá’í schools or Institutes. If they are used with both Assembly members and other community members, Assemblies are encouraged to set aside follow-up time at one of their future meetings to consider the impact and implications of what was learned on their collective functioning.

Workshops in this program range from two to five hours in length with the majority averaging about four hours. They are, however, adaptable to different timing needs. Workshops are divided into separate segments which can be selectively deleted if timing needs require this. Optional supplemental materials are also included for use if more time is available.

Guidance for Facilitators

Before the Session

Personal preparation

- ★ Take time to prepare yourself spiritually and materially to facilitate this workshop. Meditate on your role in facilitating the friends' thoughtful study and consultation.
- ★ Read through the workshop and its handouts in advance of the session and ponder the themes in them.
- ★ Pray for assistance. Feel confident that the Blessed Beauty will guide and confirm you as you endeavor to serve the Faith.

Preparation of the course and its materials

- ★ Become familiar with the workshop and its options and extensions. Feel free to duplicate the handouts on colored paper and interleaf them in the Facilitation Guide if this would make facilitation easier for you.
- ★ The amount of time suggested for each segment of the workshop is a minimum only. If the number of participants in a workshop is large and many small groups will be reporting back, you will need to allow more time than the minimum to complete some segments.
- ★ If some of the participants are not proficient in English, consider ways to meet their needs. For instance, those who understand spoken English but do not read it easily could be paired with those who can read quotations aloud. These adjustments may affect the amount of time necessary to complete an activity or exercise.
- ★ Material which appears in italics is provided to supplement and extend the session if more time is available. Determine in advance how many expansions to the module, if any, are appropriate. Some factors to consider are available time, general level of experience and deepening of the participants, and local interest in a particular topic.
- ★ Have materials (such as a few extra handouts, art supplies, extra pens and pencils, small gift item) ready for each participant. It is wise to have slightly more of everything than you anticipate needing in case a larger than expected group of friends attend.
- ★ If the workshop segments you will be using require cards for games or exercises, prepare these beforehand. If workshop

Guidance for Facilitators, continued

segments have demonstrations, practice these once or twice beforehand.

- ★ Select devotional readings, prayers, and music you will want to use and make sure you have the equipment to play any music you might have.

Preparation of the meeting room

- ★ If possible, ask to see the meeting room in advance. Arrive early to set up. Adapt the room set-up to meet your needs, if possible.
- ★ Create an inviting atmosphere of beauty, dignity, and warmth to welcome participants. Possibilities include photographs of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, holy places or great teachers, heroines and heroes; framed quotations, decorating the walls with objects of beauty, tablecloths, arrangements of fresh or dried flowers, lighting, candles, music from diverse cultural backgrounds, bowls of potpourri or drops of rose oil, seating arrangements, and refreshments.

During the Session

Creating and maintaining a spiritual environment

- ★ Warmly greet the participants. Be sure that the spirit of the Faith permeates the room. While conveying the content of the workshop is important, it is equally important that the style of interaction does not feel harsh, nervous, or rushed. Be a bringer of light to the hearts of the group.

Facilitating discussion

- ★ These workshops ask facilitators to raise several questions to the group for possible consultation. If one question fails to elicit much response, move on to another one.
- ★ Express appreciation for each participant’s contribution.
- ★ Be mindful of who has spoken and try to give everyone an opportunity to offer a first comment before giving time for individuals to offer second or third comments. Depending on the size of your group, you may want to go around the room, inviting each person to comment briefly in turn.
- ★ As groups are consulting on quotations and focus questions, go from group to group and listen in, without interrupting the

consultative process. You may want to note comments or questions that arise and bring them up when the groups reassemble.

Using time

- ★ When small groups are asked to consult or work on an art project in a certain amount of time, give each group a “5-minute warning” when their time is nearly finished. This could be done either by going from group to group as a reminder or by ringing a small bell.
- ★ Be flexible and sensitive to the needs and understanding of the participants. If a particular question or point engages the group in lengthy but topic-related discussion, it may be preferable to allow participants to continue to pursue an area that intrigues them rather than to cut off discussion and move on to another point or exercise. Participants often experience exploring less material but in greater depth as more satisfying than a hurried look at many aspects of a topic.
- ★ You may choose to make the decision yourself about whether to let a group spend more time on one area and skip later exercises or activities. You may also choose to involve the group as a whole in the decision: “Since this topic is generating a lot of interest, do we want to 1) spend more time here and not explore a later topic, 2) extend the time of our session and not skip any segments, or 3) move on from this topic, go through all the following segments, and end at our original agreed-upon time?”

Dividing participants into small groups

- ★ Put stickers on participants name cards or leave cards with stickers at their place and have them group themselves according to sticker design.
- ★ Divide into groups by the month/season in which one’s birthday falls.
- ★ In theater/auditorium seating, form groups around where participants are sitting.
- ★ Create funny groupings and ask people to choose the group that best describes them (Example: people who love apples are

Guidance for Facilitators, continued

group A; if your favorite color is blue, join group B; if Casablanca is your favorite movie, join group C.)

- If you have Assembly members from several communities attending a session, you may wish to have them work together as an Assembly or work in groups composed of different Assemblies, depending on the exercise.
- If you have a combination of Assembly and community members attending, you may wish to mix the groups together for some exercises and separate Assembly members from community members for other exercises.

Closing the Session

- ★ Provide verbal instructions on how to turn the evaluation forms in.
- ★ You may want to give a gift to each participant of a card with a beautifully lettered quotation that pertains to the workshop.
- ★ Encourage Assemblies that went through this workshop in a group larger than their own membership to have a follow-up period at an up-coming meeting to consult on what was learned and how it can be applied to their own functioning.
- ★ Suggest choosing a date and picking a topic for the next Assembly development workshop.

Please note: Have the participant evaluation forms turned in to you and return them with your evaluation form. Be sure to use the machine readable forms. Give participants their Bahá'í Locality Code and explain how to fill in the forms.

After the Session

- ★ Complete the workshop report form and mail it with the participant evaluations to:

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States,
Office of Assembly Development
1233 Central St., Evanston, IL 60201
OAD@USBNC.ORG, fax. (847) 733-3486, phone (847) 733-3490

- ★ Send a follow up letter to the Assembly(ies) to thank them for participation and include a copy of their evaluation form to fill out two months after the workshop.

Thank you for serving the Cause by facilitating this Assembly development workshop!

Highlights of Developing a Strong, Vibrant Community

Objectives:

Participants will:

- ★ Explore aspects of “a new state of mind”
- ★ Acquire a deeper appreciation of what Baha’i community life is intended to be
- ★ Identify the Assembly’s role in the community building process
- ★ Discover ways to create more loving, cohesive communities
- ★ Become familiar with elements of a systematic planning process of community development

Agenda outline: (total time: 3 hours, 15 minutes)

- ★ **Introduction** (15 minutes), p. 11
An opportunity to introduce the Assembly Development Program, familiarize participants with the objectives of this module, and present an agenda outline of topics and activities.
- ★ **The call to “a new state of mind”** (10 minutes), pp. 12-13
A guided discussion to help participants grasp some of the implications of moving toward “a new state of mind.”
- ★ **Bahá’í community life** (40 minutes), pp. 14-15
Activities to identify elements that define and characterize the Bahá’í community and to help participants perceive the effects of such a community on those who belong to it and on those outside it.
- ★ **What we need and want from our communities** (20 minutes), pp. 16-17
An opportunity for participants to express individually what they need and want from their Bahá’í community.
- ★ **The Assembly and the individual: partners in the process of community building** (5 minutes), p. 18
An activity to identify the complementary roles and responsibilities of individuals and Assemblies in building strong, cohesive Bahá’í communities.
- ★ **The process of community building** (50 minutes), pp. 19-20
A partnership activity to identify the principles which guide the process of community building, followed by group exploration of activities which foster the spiritual, intellectual, and community life of believers, ending with an artwork activity to express what has been learned.
- ★ **Our contribution to the process of community building** (15 minutes), p. 21
Opportunities for participants to reflect on what they can contribute to their community and to offer specific talents, capacities, or resources.
- ★ **Knitting hearts together** (25 minutes), pp. 22-24
Activities to help identify reasons why believers may withdraw from active involvement in the community and to discover ways to lovingly intervene and draw them closer.

Highlights, continued

- ★ **A systematic process of community development** (10 minutes), p. 28

An introduction to elements of a systematic planning process for community development.

- ★ **Closing** (5 minutes), p. 31

Inspirational quotations to provide assurance of divine confirmations for all efforts to build the vibrant, close-knit, loving communities intended by Bahá'u'lláh.

- ★ ***Further consideration of “a new state of mind”*** (variable time), pp. 12-13

A guided discussion examining existing assumptions and conceptions and the feelings evoked by the process of change.

- ★ ***Memorization of the Writings*** (5 minutes,) p. 15

Recitation in unison of a verse included in the Participant Handouts.

- ★ ***Examining patterns of community life*** (variable time), p. 25

An examination of various aspects of the community's current patterns of functioning and an opportunity to brainstorm additions or refinements to current practices.

- ★ ***Case studies for consultation*** (30 minutes), pp. 26-27

Practice in consulting about how to draw believers into closer contact with the community though better meeting their needs.

- ★ ***Planning our preferred future*** (50 minutes), pp. 29-30

A visioning and planning activity for participants to express their hopes, dreams, and aspirations for what their community will become and to begin identifying steps that will bring their vision to reality in a systematic manner.

Times given above are minimums. Module material which appears in italics is provided to supplement and extend the session if more time is available. If less time is available, you can skip whatever section seems to be less relevant to the needs of the group. You may also choose to direct participants to focus only on quotations in their handouts that are bolded, as these are the most vital. Focusing on bolded quotations may also aid participants who are slower readers.

***Extension
sessions for use
if more time is
available***

Highlights, continued

Materials needed

- ★ Whiteboard, blackboard or flip chart and markers
- ★ Index cards – three per participant
- ★ Pens or markers, tape, gluestick
- ★ Newsprint or posterboard
- ★ Crayons, colored pencils, or markers for making posters
- ★ One tree and several fruit and nuts shapes cut from construction paper; each participant will need 5 fruits and 2 nuts. (prepare in advance)
- ★ *Optional: Two different colored highlighters for each participant; colors should make a third color when used on top of each other, such as yellow and blue or yellow and pink*
- ★ *Optional: A picture or an actual sample of a beautiful tapestry*
- ★ *Optional: A beautiful card or calligraphy rendition of a passage from the Universal House of Justice to give as a gift to each participant (p.32)*

Note: You will need to inform the sponsoring Assembly that Participant Handouts for each participant should be ordered directly from the Bahá'í Distribution Service prior to the workshop.

Introduction (15 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To introduce the Assembly development process
- ★ To familiarize participants with the objectives of this module
- ★ To present an agenda outline of topics and activities

Activities:

1. Brief devotions

- ★ Open with brief devotions that you have selected or ask for a volunteer.

2. Introduction (1-2 minutes)

- ★ Give a brief introduction to the resources of the Office of Assembly Development and the Assembly Development Modules (see the description of the Office of Assembly Development which is attached toward the end of the module). Highlight that the purpose of the modules in the Assembly development process is to facilitate the development of “a new state of mind” on the part of Assembly members and the community, thereby enabling Assemblies to rise to the “new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities” envisioned by the Universal House of Justice.

- ★ This particular module focuses on the Assembly’s role in building strong, loving communities which nourish the lives of the friends and attract those outside the Faith. This module will take Assemblies through a systematic planning process of community development.

3. Overview of objectives (1 minute)

- ★ Read aloud the objectives of this module and have them posted.

See page 9 of the Facilitation Guide for a list of objectives. Make adjustments for any sections that are removed for timing considerations or optional extension sessions that are added.

4. Review agenda (3 minutes)

- ★ Go through the agenda for the session, writing an outline of topics to be covered on a whiteboard or previously prepared flip chart.

See pages 9-10 for an agenda. Make adjustments for any sections that are removed for timing considerations or optional extension sessions that are added. You may also need to make timing adjustments depending on the audience composition: a

Introduction, continued

full Assembly vs. mixed groups of participants, experienced vs. newly-formed Assemblies, etc.

5. Sharing questions (3-5 minutes)

- ★ Invite participants to share questions they have about this topic.
- ★ Make a list of these and post them. At the end of class, check to make sure that all have been answered or that the questioner has been referred to information elsewhere.

The Call to “a New State of Mind” (10 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To grasp some of the implications of moving toward “a new state of mind”

Activities:

1. Discussion of quotations (5-10 minutes)

- ★ Have a participant read aloud the first quotation on the handout “The Call to a New State of Mind” (Participant Handouts, p. 3).
- ★ Invite participants to share thoughts and feelings about “a new state of mind” and the process of moving toward it.
- ★ Offer the thought that one implication is the need for all of us to listen to “old” quotations with “new” ears in order to find new insights in familiar quotations.
- ★ *You may also choose to share two other thoughts:*
 - *First, a new state of mind is not a one-time paradigm shift – a condition of once we “get it,” we will necessarily “have it” forever – as much as a continuing process of reorienting our minds from what is to the vision of what the possibilities are, as described in the Writings and Ridván messages.*
 - *Second, it is normal to slide back into “old” states of mind – especially under stress – for quite a while. States of mind are habits, or default settings, which take conscious, deliberate effort and time to change.*

Optional extension: Further discussion of quotations

- ★ *Have participants read aloud the remaining quotations on “The Call to a New State of Mind.” (Participant Handouts, pp. 3-4) The following questions can be asked in any order, and you have the option to ask them after the paragraph in question or after all quotations are read.*

Ask the group as a whole:

- *How might “an expansion of thought” be stimulated? (par. 3)*
- *What might fall into the category of “the obscuring dust of acquired knowledge”? (par. 5)*
- *What are some of the assumptions and conceptions we have in general about institutions, their authority, and*

The Call to “a New State of Mind,” continued

*“what is natural and appropriate in relationships”?
(par. 6)*

- *What assumptions and conceptions do we bring to our service as members of Assemblies? (par. 6)*
 - *Where do these assumptions and conceptions come from? (par. 6)*
 - *How do we remove “obscuring dust” and “clear the ground for new conceptions of social organization”? (par. 5)*
 - *How comfortable is the process of “ever more rapid change”? (par. 8)*
 - *Is resisting or hiding from this “onrushing” and “quickenning wind” an option for us? for humanity as a whole? (par. 4)*
- ★ *Ask for thoughts on the process of “experiencing the rigorous effects” of an “onrushing” and “quickenning wind” ventilating “the modes of thought of us all, renewing, clarifying, and amplifying our perspectives.” (par. 4)*
- ★ *Ask for one word descriptions of the feelings that being part of such a process evokes. Acknowledge as a normal part of the change process all the feelings, whether they express excitement or reservations.*

2. Read passage, underline, and share (3-5 minutes)

- ★ Ask participants to read the second quotation, a passage from the Ridván 153/1996 message from the Universal House of Justice (Participant Handouts, p. 3), silently and underline or highlight what they feel are key words or phrases that have particular implications for the topic of this module.
- ★ Invite participants to share what they have underlined.

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

Bahá'í Community Life (40 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To identify elements that define and characterize the Bahá'í community
- ★ To perceive the effects of such a community on those who belong to it and on those outside it

Setting up the activities:

- ★ Comment that Bahá'u'lláh calls us to be “anxiously concerned with the needs of the age” in which we live and to center our deliberations “on its exigencies and requirements.” (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 213) Our focus at this time in history must always be on ministering to the needs of a suffering humanity by bringing them the message of Bahá'u'lláh, but we are also called to give equal attention to consolidation and to building new models of life. New believers must be lovingly embraced and woven into the fabric of community life. A loving, unified community, in turn, acts as a magnet, drawing humanity to the Faith.

Activities:

1. Group discussion (10 minutes)

- ★ Ask the group as a whole to describe an ideal community (this does not necessarily have to be a Bahá'í community):
 - What are the behavioral manifestations of a loving, unified, joyful community?
 - How would its members treat each other?
 - What kinds of relationships would exist?
- ★ List participant' responses on a flip chart. Sample responses might include: intimacy, safety, a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose, dynamic, opportunities to serve, a lack of prejudice, etc.
- ★ Ask the group as a whole:
 - How would you know you belonged to such a community?
 - What would it feel like to be part of this?
 - What would it mean to your life to be part of such a community?

2. Reading quotations (5 minutes)

- ★ Have participants “count off” into four groups and assign each group one of the four focus questions below. Before breaking into small groups, read aloud, as a whole group, the quotations in “Bahá'í Community Life” (Participant Handouts, pp. 5-6),

Bahá'í Community Life, continued

asking each group to listen for passages which speak to its focus question. Group members should underline or highlight these passages.

3. Small group discussion of quotations (15 minutes)

- ★ Each group will answer one of the following focus questions, using the quotations just read:
 1. What is the definition of a Bahá'í community?
 2. What characteristics does it have?
 3. What effect does it have on those within it?
 4. What effect does it have on people in the larger community?

4. Groups report back (10 minutes)

- ★ Have each group report back its question and the results of its consultation.
- ★ Call attention to the similarity between the list of what we expressed as qualities and characteristics of an ideal community and the descriptions of Bahá'í communities as conceived by Bahá'u'lláh.
- ★ Share the thought that we have been given the opportunity to construct and live in exactly the type of social arrangement we deeply want.

Optional extension (5 minutes)

- ★ *Comment that the root word of “community” is “common.”*
- ★ *Ask the group as a whole to brainstorm what members of a Bahá'í community have in common. Write these on a board or flip chart.*
- ★ *A sample list might include such items as:*
 - *a common vision*
 - *love for Bahá'u'lláh*
 - *norms, methods, or ways of doing things, such as consultation*
 - *standards*
 - *aspirations*
 - *character flaws or challenges, such as racial attitudes*
 - *commitment to obey the laws and institutions*

Bahá'í Community Life, continued

- *a plan for achieving goals*
- *sense of identity as being part of the family of Bahá*
- *knowledge of God's purpose for us in this day*

Optional extension: Memorization of the Writings (5-10 minutes)

- ★ *Write the following verse (handouts p. 6) on a whiteboard or blackboard:*

The Bahá'í community life provides you with an indispensable laboratory where you can translate into living and constructive action, the principles which you imbibe from the teachings.

- ★ *Have participants recite in unison. Remove 2-3 key words after each recitation. Symbols may be placed above the words to aid in memorization.*

What We Need and Want from Our Communities (20 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To express what we need and want from our Bahá'í community

Setting up the activity (2 minutes)

- ★ Share a passage from the Bahá'í International Community's statement The Prosperity of Humankind, section VI: "The institutions of society . . . [must] assess in an objective manner both the real needs and the aspirations of the communities they serve. . . ."
- ★ Comment that human beings have a variety of needs: physical, personal, social, and spiritual. We meet these needs through a variety of means: through our own efforts, through our relationship with God, and through our relationships with friends, family, and community members. The next activity will focus on needs that we seek to have met through being part of a Bahá'í community.
- ★ Explain that participants will be given three cards. Ask them to take 2-3 minutes to anonymously write down a word or a phrase on each card that expresses something they are looking for in or from their community, an experience or need they would like to have met. These can be physical, social, personal, or spiritual needs. Share examples of specific needs, such as: transportation to Feast, child care so I can come to deepenings, friendship, fellowship, someone to teach with me, spiritual/intellectual stimulation, multicultural experiences, to be listened to with love and respect, or to be informed about events.

Activities:

1. Individual reflection (2-3 minutes)

- ★ Give each participant three index cards. (Note: Facilitators may want to have index cards waiting at each persons' place at the beginning of the session.)

2. Sharing needs and wants (10 minutes)

- ★ Collect index cards, shuffle them for anonymity, read them aloud, and tape them to a wall or large surface.

Note: If you feel the participants know each other well and would feel a deeper sense of closeness by doing this activity openly instead of anonymously, please feel free to adapt it. Change the directions to ask each person to read aloud his or her cards.

What We Need and Want from Our Communities, continued

3. Reflecting on the meaning of these needs (5 minutes)

- ★ Point out that these are a representative sampling of the needs of these friends in this community on this particular day.
- ★ Ask whether these needs are unique to our being Bahá'ís or if they are broader, human needs. (Most will probably be broader.)
- ★ Mention that church growth research conducted in Christian denominations in the United States highlighted such needs as a sense of belonging and community, a sense of meaning and purpose, and moral education for children.
- ★ Comment that the need to belong is a powerful need in us and, by implication, to the larger, non-Bahá'í population, of which we are a sample.
- ★ Comment that recent letters of the Universal House of Justice speak of a hunger for meaning and for unity on the part of humanity as a whole. Share the thought that as we build communities which meet the human needs of the Bahá'ís, we will also be building communities that are very attractive to those outside the Faith who yearn for something to which they can belong.

Optional break: A short break could be taken at this point. If a break is not taken, it may be desirable to have participants stand and stretch in place.

The Assembly and the Individual: Partners in the Process of Community Building (5 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To identify the complementary roles and responsibilities of individuals and Assemblies in building strong, cohesive Bahá'í communities

Setting up the activity

- ★ Comment that the Universal House of Justice refers to “. . . the three inseparable participants in the evolution of the new World Order – the individual, the institutions, and the community. . . .” (The Universal House of Justice, Dec. 31, 1995, to the Bahá'ís of the World, sec. 2.12)
- ★ Hold up a picture or a sample of a beautiful tapestry or simply ask the friends to imagine a Persian carpet of rich colors and exquisite patterns. Suggest this as a metaphor for the process of community building: working together on the loom of love and unity, the interaction of the design work of the Assembly and the handiwork of the believers, individually and collectively, produces a pattern of community life.
- ★ Duplicate copies of three quotations from Participants Handouts pp. 7-9 and hand a slip of paper with one of these quotations to three selected readers. Quotations to be duplicated are the second quotation on p. 7 (Baha'i administration as a facilitator of the emergence and maintenance of community life), the quotation that begins on the bottom of p. 7 and continues on to the next page (“On the one hand is the initiative...”), and the final quotation on p. 9 (Local Assemblies as rallying centres).

Activities:

1. Reading of quotations (3 minutes)

- ★ Distribute quotations to selected readers. Have these read aloud as illustrations of the complementary, interactive nature of the roles of the Assembly and the individual.

Optional Extension (30 minutes)

- ★ *Give each participant two different colored highlighters. Have them silently read through the quotations in “The Assembly and the Individual: Partners in the Process of Community Building” (Participant Handouts, pp. 7-9).*
- ★ *Ask half the group to underline, with one highlighter, the roles and responsibilities of the Assembly. Ask the other half of the group to underline, with one highlighter, the roles and responsibilities of the individual, alone and collectively.*
- ★ *Ask volunteers from the first group to share what they underlined. As they do so, ask members of the second group to*

Partners in the Process of Community Building, continued

use their second highlighter to mark these passages on their handout.

- ★ *Repeat this process as volunteers from the second group share their passages and members of the first group highlight these on their handouts.*
- ★ *Comment on the complementary, interactive nature of these roles, as demonstrated by participants' now multi-colored handouts.*

2. Take home assignment

- ★ Encourage participants to read the remainder of the quotations on pages 7-9 of the Participant Handouts as a take home assignment to further enhance their appreciation for these complementary roles.

The Process of Community Building

(50 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To identify principles which guide the process of community building
- ♣ To become familiar with activities which foster the spiritual, intellectual, and community life of believers

Setting up the activity

- ★ Comment that when a collection of Bahá'ís who love Bahá'u'lláh but are strangers to each other come together, they may not immediately feel a sense of community. Indeed, as they get to know each other better and learn each other's preferences and concerns, they may, for a time, feel like they have more differences than similarities. This should not be surprising, since Bahá'u'lláh is bring together people who may never have realized they had anything in common previously. Through a variety of initiatives – cultivating the spiritual qualities and practices of consultation, focusing on our shared love of Bahá'u'lláh, individually working to pattern our lives after the Master, and unilaterally trying to be a source of unity and encouragement to each other – we slowly build communities in which we all feel truly known, loved, and supported by each other.
- ★ Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice have also given specific guidance about furthering the process of community building, which we will now explore.

Activities:

1. Reading quotations (10 minutes)

- ★ Working with a partner, read through the quotations in “The Process of Community Building” (Participant Handouts, p. 10). Highlight the key principles mentioned.

2. Sharing principles (5 minutes)

- ★ Ask volunteers to share the principles they identified. List these on a flip chart. A sample list might include:
 - we are just at the beginning of this process
 - balance between outward thrusts (expansion) and deeper thrusts which sustain the community (consolidation)
 - make a beginning with one activity and expand from there
 - be ready to adapt
 - accommodate a wide range of actions without losing concentration on teaching objectives
 - be systematic

The Process of Community Building, continued

- review successes & difficulties, adjust & improve methods, learn, and move forward

3. Emphasize two points

- ★ We are all beginners, learning together: “Bahá’ís everywhere are at the very beginning of the process of community building.”
- ★ We are asked to be systematic in our efforts: the Universal House of Justice asked Bahá’ís to “review their successes and difficulties, adjust and improve their methods accordingly, and learn, and move forward unhesitatingly.”

4. Small group artwork (20 minutes)

- ★ Divide into small groups. Have participants read “Elements of Community Life” (Participant Handouts, p. 11). Ask groups to prepare a poster of the elements mentioned.

5. Sharing artwork (10 minutes)

- ★ Have groups share and explain their posters.
- ★ *Optional: Refer participants to the handout “Activities of a Bahá’í Community” (Participant Handouts, pp. 12-13) as a summary of this segment.*

6. Reflection on the value of small groups within the larger community (5 minutes)

- ★ Comment that while we all want our communities to grow, we also want a sense of closeness and intimate fellowship that can be harder to maintain as the community expands.
- ★ Draw a graphic on the board of a large circle filled with many dots, representing the members of the community. Draw several “lassos” encircling different collections of dots, using a different color for each lasso. Dots may be enclosed in more than one lasso. Explain that each lasso represents a small group within the community.
- ★ Comment that these small groups within the larger community can create smaller, more intimate circles which keep the community from feeling large and impersonal as it grows. They help foster deeper friendships based on common interests, such as parenting, teaching, prayer groups, youth workshops, a Bahá’í choir, service projects, etc.

The Process of Community Building, continued

Optional extension (10 minutes)

- ★ *Ask the group to brainstorm what can be done, formally and informally, to increase personal contact between the friends and bring together people of similar interests and concerns.*

Our Contribution to the Process of Community Building (15 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To reflect on what we can contribute to our community
- ★ To express willingness to share specific talents, capacities, or resources with the community

Prepare materials in advance

- ★ Prepare, for each participant, 3 fruit shapes (apples, oranges, peaches, pears, etc.) and 1 nut shape cut from construction paper. Have extras on hand. Samples attached on page 33. For a group so large that cutting shapes is not practical, give participants different colored index cards.
- ★ Also prepare in advance a large construction paper tree or a stylized drawing of a tree on newsprint. The size of the tree should be large enough for all the “fruits” and “nuts” (if used) to fit on the tree.

Activities:

1. Reading quotations (1 minute)

- ★ Have participants read aloud the quotations on the handout “What Can I Offer to the Process of Community Building?” (Participant Handouts, p. 14).

2. Individual reflection (3-5 minutes)

- ★ Give participants 3 “fruits” and 1 “nut.”
- ★ Ask participants to write on the “fruits” what they have to contribute to the process of community-building – attributes, skills, resources, time, facilities, professional expertise. These should be things they really like to do, not just what they would be willing to do.
- ★ Ask participants to write on the “nuts” what skills they would be willing to learn if someone would teach them or help them get started. Participants may fill in as many “fruits” and “nuts” as they choose.

3. Sharing of fruits and nuts (10 minutes)

- ★ Ask each participant to come up to the tree, read his or her “fruits” and “nuts” aloud, and glue or tape them on the tree.
- ★ After all participants have added their contributions, comment on the diversity of skills and resources available to the community.
- ★ Ask if there are any surprises at some of the talents or the degree of willingness to do various things that exist in the

Our Contribution to the Process of Community Building, continued

group, i.e., “I never knew you liked to X or could Y. I would have called on you for help years ago!”

- ★ Mention the usefulness of Assemblies having some type of inventory of the skills and resources of their community. Inventories can range from very simple to quite sophisticated, depending on the size and complexity of the community.
- ★ Comment that new believers should, in a systematic way, be invited to share their skills and talents with their new community.

Knitting Hearts Together (25 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To identify reasons why believers withdraw from active involvement in the life of their Bahá'í community
- ★ To discover ways to lovingly intervene and draw believers back closer to the community

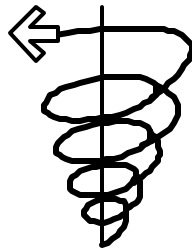
Setting up the activities:

- ★ Comment that we have looked at several activities and patterns of behavior that must be enhanced for community life to flourish at the local level. The Writings also contain guidance on practical approaches to creating a stronger sense of community and knitting closer the hearts of the friends.

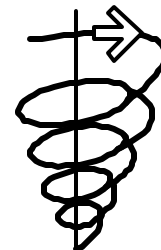
Activities:

1. Reflecting on two natural forces (5 minutes)

- ★ Mention two forces of nature: centrifugal force and centripetal force. Explain that centrifugal means “moving outward away from a center or axis” while centripetal means “moving inward toward a center or axis.” Draw on the board examples of spiraling away from the core and spiraling closer to the core.



Centrifugal



Centripetal

- ★ Comment that even in warm, close-knit communities believers sometimes seem to fall away, or be pulled away, from the core of active community life.
- ★ Ask the group as a whole to give a few examples of events or forces that pull believers away from involvement in community life. Examples might include the following:
 - Physical reasons – illness, disability, lack of transportation
 - Financial difficulties – feeling unable to participate in events or reciprocate hospitality
 - Struggles with Bahá'í law – alcohol & drug use, chastity issues
 - Needing time out to deal with life crises – bereavement, moving, family illness, job loss, marital difficulties
 - Loss of faith, struggle with belief
 - Demands of professional life or academic studies

Knitting Hearts Together, continued

- Personal interests, recreation, etc. becoming more important or satisfying than involvement in Bahá'í community life
- Backbiting, disunity, personal hurts from within the community
- Burnout from activities and services in the community

2. Reading quotations from the Writings (3 minutes)

- ★ Have one or more participants read aloud the quotations on the handout “Strengthening the Bonds of Unity” (Participant Handouts, p. 15).
- ★ Ask participants to underline, as they listen, key words or phrases that mention steps we can take, individually and as a group, to help each “cell” of our organic Bahá'í “body” feel connected to the whole.

3. Reflecting on centripetal and centrifugal forces (2 minutes)

- ★ Refer back to the examples of centripetal force and centrifugal force drawn previously.
- ★ Comment that when we face life's tests and difficulties, we dip into our “coping reserves.” If several demands are made upon these reserves in a short period of time, our reserves can become exhausted. We have no more energy to give to the community and, in fact, often look to the community to notice our need, help us through our difficulties, and help us fill up our reserves again.
- ★ Comment that when the community responds, we feel buoyed up, more able to cope with the immediate situation, and, later, much closer to the community for having received tangible evidence of its love and assistance (point to the centripetal drawing).
- ★ Mention that if the community does not notice our need for support or doesn't seem to respond to it, we still have to cope with the challenges of the moment, but we also may have the additional test of feeling let down by the people we thought cared about us. Our community can feel like a disappointment to us – it was not there for us when we needed it. We feel a greater distance from the community because of this experience (point to the centrifugal drawing).

Knitting Hearts Together, continued

- ★ Suggest that often when people are going through stressful times, there are several cries for help, for those who have ears to hear. A series of signs may point to difficulties: a missed meeting, an absence from Feast, rushing out the door of an event early, declining social invitations.

Optional:

- ★ *Ask for other examples of cries for help.*
- ★ *Comment that this pattern of decreasing activity offers a window of opportunity for loving intervention.*

4. Small group work (10 minutes)

- ★ Divide participants into groups of 4-5. Ask groups to brainstorm, using their underlined handouts (Participant Handouts, p. 15), quick, easy, and loving ways for individuals and the community to intervene when believers see friends moving away from active participation in the life of the community. Offer a few examples as “starters”:
 - A five-minute phone call
 - A cheery “I’ve missed you” note in the mail or e-mail
 - An invitation to get together for tea
 - A request to serve using a skill the individual especially enjoys sharing

5. Groups report back their ideas (5 minutes)

- ★ Allow time for each group to share its strategies for loving interventions.
- ★ Mention that a group once suggested the practice of never letting two absences go unnoticed. This practice raises several questions about systematic planning and action: How can this strategy be implemented, especially as the community grows? Who will notice who is missing? Who will contact whom?
- ★ Comment that these types of questions help Assemblies form processes for turning loving intentions into systematic actions.

Knitting Hearts Together, continued

Optional extension

- ★ *Allow time for groups to consider these three questions to practice taking an idea and turning it into systematic plan of action:*
 - *How can the practice of never letting two absences go unnoticed be implemented, especially as the community grows?*
 - *Who will notice who is missing?*
 - *Who will contact whom?*

Optional Extension Session One: Examining Patterns of Community Life (variable amount of time)

Purpose

- ★ To identify the community's current patterns and processes
- ★ To brainstorm additions or refinements to these practices

Activities:

1. Small group discussion of focus questions:

Divide into groups. Ask each group to choose one or more focus questions (Participant Handouts, p. 16) to examine various aspects of the community's current patterns of functioning and to brainstorm additions or refinements to current practices.

Variations:

- Consult on questions as a whole Assembly.
- Divide into groups of 4-5, with all groups focusing on the same question and sharing the results of their consultation.
- Divide into groups of 4-5, with each group focusing on a different question and sharing their question and the results of their consultation.
- Invite each Assembly present to share successful practices of their community in one or more of the areas covered in the focus questions.
- Encourage Assemblies to share focus questions with their committees and ask for recommendations.
- Encourage Assemblies to share one or more focus questions with their community at Feasts and ask for suggestions.

Focus questions:

- ★ When new believers enroll, what is the process, formal or informal, that integrates them into the community and helps them put down roots? What specific steps could be developed as habits in the community?
- ★ When believers move into the community from elsewhere, what is the process, formal or informal, of welcoming them and integrating them into the community? What specific steps could be developed as habits in the community?
- ★ How are birthdays and anniversaries observed?
- ★ Is there a process to recognize and celebrate a Bahá'í child's attainment of the age of maturity?

Note: This segment should be used either as an optional extension during the session or as a "take home" assignment for consultation at future Assembly meetings

Examining Patterns of Community Life, *continued*

- ★ When believers pioneer or return from pioneering, is there a process to celebrate their sacrifice, assess their needs, or offer help?
- ★ What does the community do regularly to create joy? How do its members have fun together? (Shared joy is the social glue that binds community together!)
- ★ When someone is sick or in need, what is the process to help?
- ★ What happens when a believer, or a relative of a believer, dies? What happens a week later? What happens a month later?
- ★ What is the process of sharing good news?
- ★ What is the process of celebrating births and marriages?

Optional Extension Session Two: Case Studies for Consultation (30 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To practice consulting about how to draw believers into closer contact with the community through better meeting their needs

Setting up the activity

- ★ Comment that one measure of success is the number of new believers enrolled, but an equally important measure may be the number of believers retained in consecrated service over a long period of time.

Activities:

1. Small group work (15 minutes)

- ★ Divide participants into groups. Ask each group to spend the next 15 minutes consulting about one of the following situations. Each group should be prepared to share its responses to the case study question.

2. Groups report back (15 minutes)

- ★ After each small group explains its case and their suggestions, ask the whole group for any other ideas that might also be helpful.

Case studies (Participant Handouts p. 17):

1. Cesar is the only elderly Bahá'í in a community of young, active adults. He is in good health, but no longer feels comfortable driving at night. Unfortunately, when community events take place, he is the last to be informed about them and has even been forgotten on several occasions. Frustrated, he tells himself that he is just not an important member of the local community and stops participating in its activities.

Question: How might the Assembly and the community regain Cesar's participation?

2. Keneesha has been an active member of the Bahá'í community for many years. Her mother, who lives nearby, was recently diagnosed with an aggressive cancer. Her husband's job requires frequent travel. Worried about how she can manage to care for both her mother and the couple's school-age children, Keneesha consulted with the Assembly about her situation. The Assembly offered to say prayers on behalf of Keneesha and her family. She felt that the Assembly's response was not very helpful and vowed never to bring a problem to the Assembly again.

Case Studies for Consultation, continued

Question: What might be more helpful responses for the Assembly to make to Keneesha's situation?

3. Beth, a 16-year-old, eagerly enrolled in the Bahá'í community six months ago. The school friends who introduced her to the Faith now seldom visit her or invite her to join them on social occasions. In fact, Beth has been participating less and less in Bahá'í activities and more and more in the events of a local church youth group.

Question: How might Beth's participation in the Bahá'í community be rekindled?

A Systematic Process of Community Development (10 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To introduce elements of a systematic planning process for community development

Setting up the activity:

- ★ Comment that the question we have been addressing throughout the module is “How do we intentionally cultivate vibrant, flourishing communities which systematically identify the needs of their members, meet these needs, successfully and permanently expand their numbers, and lovingly help new believers make their contributions to Bahá’u’lláh’s new world order?”
- ★ Refer back to the quotation from the Universal House of Justice about setting in motion “a systematic process of community development. This process should be one in which the friends review their successes and difficulties, adjust and improve their methods accordingly, and learn, and move forward unhesitatingly.” (Participant Handouts, p. 10)
- ★ Offer the thought that this is a never-ending, cyclical process. Each stage of growth brings new challenges, yields new fruits, and lays the foundation for the next stage of a community’s growth. The process of community development is never finished.

Activities:

1. Review handout (5 minutes)

- ★ Refer participants to the handout “A Systematic Process of Community Development” (Participant Handouts, p. 18). Read through the components and the questions that are part of each.

2. Suggestions for taking the next steps (3 minutes)

- ★ Mention that participants have already begun assessing needs and resources in the earlier activities with the index cards, fruits and nuts. Suggest that these activities be repeated with as large and representative a gathering of the community as possible to gather further information.
- ★ The next step is creating a vision of what they would like their community to become and identifying short, medium, and long-term strategies to achieve this vision. A short brainstorming session, done at a Feast, an Assembly meeting, or a special gathering of friends in neighboring areas can yield ideas and possible strategies that can be refined to create a systematic plan of community development.

Note to the facilitator

A Systematic Process of Community Development, continued

Note to the facilitator

If the group you are working with is one Assembly or a combination of Assembly and community members from one or adjoining communities, you may want to do Optional Extension Three: “Planning our Preferred Future” (Participant Handouts, p. 19) at this time. It can also be given as a “take home” assignment for use by the Assembly at a later time.

If your group is composed of participants from communities so distant that they could not implement a joint inter-community plan, or if time does not permit an actual visioning session, simply refer participants to the handout on page 19, talk through the focus questions, and encourage Assemblies and communities to go through this process in the near future.

Optional Extension Session Three: *Planning Our Preferred Future* (50 Minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To express our hopes, dreams, and aspirations of what our community will become
- ★ To begin identifying steps that will bring our vision to reality in a systematic manner

Activities:

1. Group visioning (30 minutes)

- ★ Divide into groups that are all from the same or neighboring communities. If groups are larger than 8-9, split into several smaller groups.
- ★ Ask groups to brainstorm the following focus questions, considering what is now known about the community's needs and resources, and what has been learned about ways to knit hearts closer. A group recorder should write down each element of the vision of what we want our community to become and each step toward our preferred future as it is suggested.
 - What do we want our community to be like in 1 year? in 3 years? in 5 years?
 - What can we do to create a community that is warm and loving?
 - What steps can we take to move our community progressively closer towards this vision?

Optional:

- ★ *Participants may want to refer back to their poster of "Elements of Community Life" or the graphic "Activities of a Bahá'í Community" (Participant Handouts, pp. 11-13).*
- ★ *They may also choose to assess which elements are currently present in the community and consider the following focus questions (listed on Participant Handouts, p. 19):*
 - *How might existing elements be refined to make them even more enriching?*
 - *Is it timely to add missing elements to the pattern of community life?*
 - *If so, what might be added?*

2. Group planning (10 minutes)

- ★ Have groups go through their list of possible steps and flag them as short term (1-3 months), medium term (3-6 months), or long term (6-12 months), based on how long it would take to get them started.

Planning Our Preferred Future, continued

3. Groups share visions and lists of possible steps (10 minutes)

- ★ Ask each group to share its list of vision elements and its short, medium, and long-term approaches to building its preferred future.

4. Final comments (1 minute)

- ★ Point out that these vision elements and lists of possible steps are a rough draft of a plan for systematic community development.
- ★ Encourage participants to take these back to their Assemblies and full communities for further consultation and refinement.
- ★ Encourage Assemblies to initiate a “success cascade” by immediately doing the most do-able short-term goals and using the resulting successes to bring energy to other strategies.
- ★ Repeat the point that in meeting our own Bahá’í community’s needs, we will also be increasing our ability to attract non-Bahá’ís, whose needs for belonging, meaning, and service are the same as ours.

Closing (5 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To provide assurance of divine confirmation for all our efforts to build the vibrant, close-knit, loving communities intended by Bahá'u'lláh

Activities:

1. Review of initial questions (3-5 minutes)

- ★ Check to see that all questions raised at the beginning have been answered or that the questioner has been referred elsewhere.

2. Share the following quotations to close the session (1 minute)

“A Bahá'í community which is consistent in its fundamental life-giving, life-sustaining activities will at its heart be serene and confident; it will resonate with spiritual dynamism, will exert irresistible influence, will set a new course in social evolution, enabling it to win the respect and eventually the allegiance of admirers and critics alike.” (The Universal House of Justice, Ridván message to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1984, in A Wider Horizon, p. 27.)

“As a community clearly in the vanguard of the constructive forces at work on the planet, and as one which has access to proven knowledge, let us be about our Father's business. He will, from His glorious retreats on high, release liberal effusions of His grace upon our humble efforts, astonishing us with the incalculable victories of His conquering power. It is for the unceasing blessings of such a Father that we shall continue to supplicate on behalf of each and every one of you at the Sacred Threshold.” (The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1990.)

Optional:

- ★ *Give each participant a beautiful card or calligraphy version of an appropriate quote as a gift (example suitable for photocopying onto attractive paper is attached)*

“Wherever a Bahá’í community exists, whether large or small, let it be distinguished for its abiding sense of security and faith, its high standard of rectitude, its complete freedom from all forms of prejudice, the spirit of love among its members and for the closely knit fabric of its social life.”

The Universal House of Justice

In the print version this
would be followed by fruit
and nut templates, an
Office of Assembly
Development description
and evaluation forms.