

# **Facilitation Guide**

## **The Equality of Women and Men, Part 2: The Assembly's Role in Fostering Partnership**

**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*



# OVERVIEW FOR FACILITATORS

## The Assembly's Role in Fostering Partnership

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### Purpose

- ★ To explore the role of the Assembly in the task of fostering a partnership between the genders and to describe resources available to help the Assembly

This module builds on the work done by participants in “The Equality of Women and Men, Part 1: A Shared Responsibility.” It explores the role of the Assembly in the task of fostering a partnership between the genders and describes resources available to help the Assembly. The module also contains opportunities for the Assembly to examine current patterns and practices in the community and to assess the extent to which women have been welcomed into partnership in various aspects of community life.

### What you will find inside your Facilitation Guide:

- ★ **Frontispiece with key quotations:** A one-page sheet containing a quotation from a letter of the Universal House of Justice which provide the foundation of the modules. (p. 2)
- ★ **Overview for Facilitators:** The page you are reading. (p. 3)
- ★ **The Assembly Development Process:** A description of the process of Assembly development, the role of these workshops within that process, and how to request an Assembly Development representative to facilitate the workshops. (p. 4)
- ★ **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. 5-8)
- ★ **Highlights of this workshop:** A listing of the workshop objectives, an agenda outline with times of each segment of the workshop, and a listing of materials needed. (p. 9-11)
- ★ **Facilitator's instructions for segments of this workshop:** A series of pages that provide the purpose and instructions for each section of the workshop. (pp. 12-31)
- ★ **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 form for Assemblies to complete two months after the workshop. (unnumbered pages at the end of the Facilitation Guide)

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

## The Assembly Development Process

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*“...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](mailto: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

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## 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 segments have demonstrations, practice these once or twice beforehand.

## Guidance for Facilitators, continued

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- ★ 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.

### 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.

**During the Session**

### 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 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

## Guidance for Facilitators, continued

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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 The Assembly's Role in Fostering Partnership\*

## **Objectives:**

### **Participants will:**

- ★ explore aspects of “a new state of mind” and the change process
- ★ explore the Assembly's role in establishing the equality of women and men
- ★ become aware of resources available to assist the Assembly
- ★ examine current patterns and practices in the community

- ★ This module is designed for participants who have already participated in the module “The Equality of Women and Men, Part 1: A Shared Responsibility.”

## **Agenda outline:** (total time: 3 hours, 20 minutes)

- ★ **Introduction** (15 minutes), pp. 12-13  
An opportunity to introduce the Assembly Development process, 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.14-15  
A guided discussion to help participants grasp some of the implications of moving toward “a new state of mind.”
- ★ **Envisioning the full partnership of women and men** (10 minutes), p. 16  
An activity to give voice to the hopes and dreams participants hold about the equality of women and men.
- ★ **Facilitating the process of change** (10 minutes), p. 17  
Individual reflection and group discussion of elements and implications of the change process.
- ★ **Working together** (15 minutes), p. 18  
A brief review of material covered in the module “The Equality of Women and Men, Part 1: A Shared Responsibility.”
- ★ **Special strengths of women** (15 minutes), p. 19  
A brief overview of qualities mentioned in the Writings as being particular strengths of women.
- ★ **The Assembly's role in establishing equality** (50 minutes), pp. 20-24  
Small group discussion and poster making to explore the Assembly's role in establishing equality, followed by the facilitator's description of resources available to the Assembly to assist in this process.
- ★ **Building communities of partnership** (70 minutes), pp. 25-28  
An opportunity for the Assembly to assess the extent to which the equality of women and men is incorporated into various aspects of community life and to consider what adjustments to current practices are needed to help the community become a model of partnership.
- ★ **Closing** (5 minutes), p. 31  
Inspirational quotations to recall to mind and heart the promises of divine assistance.

## Highlights, continued

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

- ★ ***Further consideration of the call to “a new state of mind”*** (variable amount of time), p. 14  
*A guided discussion examining existing assumptions and conceptions and the feelings evoked by the process of change.*
- ★ ***Checking for double standards*** (20 minutes), pp. 29-30  
*An opportunity to probe for differing sets of procedures and expectations based on gender which might be affecting the Assembly’s administration of justice.*

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.

**Materials needed**

- ★ Whiteboard, blackboard, or flip chart and markers
- ★ A variety of highlighters
- ★ A variety of pictures, cut from magazines or calendars, of men and women together or alone, nature pictures, and family groups
- ★ Newsprint
- ★ Crayons, markers, and/or other art materials for making posters
- ★ *Optional: Sample copies of items mentioned in the handout “Resources available to the Assembly”*
- ★ *Optional: A beautiful card or calligraphy rendition of a passage from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to give as a gift to each participant (see page 32)*

**Notes**

- ★ 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.
- ★ While this module does not bring up the fact that women cannot serve on the Universal House of Justice, this issue may arise. Facilitators may want to read a few references in advance to feel prepared to address it. Useful quotations on the topic are found

## Highlights, continued

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### Notes, continued

in the 1997 edition of Lights of Guidance (#2073, 2074, & 2076) and in the compilation Women (#27 & 28). Two of these quotations are printed on the following page.

If this issue is raised, you may want to read these passages to the group, point out that we have not yet arrived at the time when the wisdom of this teaching has been “revealed as manifest as the sun,” and discourage speculation about the nature of that wisdom.

“As regards your question concerning the membership of the Universal House of Justice, there is a Tablet from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in which He definitely states that the membership of the Universal House is confined to men and that the wisdom of it will be fully revealed in the future. In the local, as well as the National Houses of Justice, however, women have the full right of membership. It is therefore, only to the International House that they cannot be elected. The Bahá’ís should accept this statement of the Master in a spirit of deep faith, confident that there is a divine guidance and wisdom behind it, which will be gradually unfolded to the eyes of the world.”

From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly, December 14, 1940, in Women, A Compilation, #27; also in Dawn of a New Day, p. 86.

“As regards the membership of the International House of Justice, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states in a Tablet that it is confined to men, and that the wisdom of it will be revealed as manifest as the sun in the future. In any case the believers should know that, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself has explicitly stated that sexes are equal except in some cases, the exclusion of women from the International House of Justice should not be surprising. From the fact that there is no equality of functions between the sexes one should not, however, infer that either sex is inherently superior or inferior to the other, or that they are unequal in their rights.”

From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, July 28, 1936, in Women, A Compilation, #28; also in Directives of the Guardian, pp. 79-80.

## Introduction (15 minutes)

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### 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. Introduce the Assembly development process (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.
- ★ A primary focus of this particular module is the Assembly’s role in fostering the equality of women and men, both within and beyond the Bahá’í community.

#### 3. Overview objectives (1 minute)

- ★ Read aloud the objectives of this module and have them posted.
- ★ See page 9 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 (1 minute)

- ★ Go through the agenda for the session, writing an outline of topics to be covered on a whiteboard or flip chart.
- ★ See page 9 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 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.

## **Introduction**, continued

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- ★ Make a list of these and, 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 minutes)

- ★ Have a participant read aloud the first quotation on the handout “The Call to a New State of Mind.” (see Participant Handouts, pp. 3-4)
- ★ 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.

*Option: 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.” 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)*
- *How do we remove “obscuring dust” and “clear the ground for new conceptions of social organization”? (par. 5)*

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

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- *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 passage from the Ridván 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.

*A word in the Participant Handouts:*  
**\*Canalize: to channel into a particular direction; provide an outlet for**

# Envisioning the Full Partnership of Women and Men (10 minutes)

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## Purpose

- ★ To give voice to the hopes and dreams we hold about the equality of women and men

## Advance preparation:

- ★ Have available a table topped with a variety of pictures from magazines or calendars. These could include pictures of men and women together or alone, nature pictures, family groups, etc. Pictures should include cultural and racial diversity. Gather approximately 1 1/2 times the number of pictures as there are expected participants.

## Activities:

### 1. Individual selection of a picture (2-3 minutes)

- ★ Ask participants to go up to the table, silently view the pictures, and select one which completes the thought: “When I envision the partnership of women and men, an element that I find meaningful and exciting is . . .”

### 2. Group sharing (5 minutes)

- ★ Ask each person to hold up his or her picture and explain in 1-2 sentences the quality or attribute it expresses.
- ★ Comment on the importance of vision: seeing the end in the beginning energizes our efforts and enables us to do the hard work of translating our vision into reality.
- ★ Call to mind the example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who, as He set the cornerstone in the ground for the dedication of the future House of Worship in Wilmette, is reported to have said, “The Temple is already built.”
- ★ Share the comment of John Kolstoe, in his book Consultation: “Spiritual Assemblies must see their communities as they want them to be. . . and know that has been completed in the spiritual world. Then they must gear all activities to transferring that spiritual potential to the temporal world. When they work as if the completion of each task is a reality it probably will become so.” (Consultation: A Universal Lamp of Guidance, p. 184)

## Facilitating the Process of Change (10 minutes)

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### Purpose

- ★ To provide a brief overview of elements and implications of the change process
- ★ To acknowledge the enormity of effort required of all

### Activities:

#### 1. Individual reading (5 minutes)

- ★ Comment that in order to actively participate in the process of change as individuals and to help facilitate that process as Assemblies, we must be familiar with its elements and implications.
- ★ Ask individuals to read the quotations on their handout “Facilitating the Process of Change” (Participant Handouts, pp. 5-6), and underline or highlight key points about the process of change.

#### 2. Group discussion (5 minutes)

- ★ Invite volunteers to share their key points with the whole group. List these on a flip chart.
- ★ Ask participants: How comfortable is the process of “ever more rapid change”?
- ★ Underscore the role of patience with oneself and others during the process of change.

## Working Together (15 minutes)

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### Purpose

- ★ To briefly review materials covered in The Equality of Women and Men, Part One

### Setting up the activities:

- ★ As a brief review of material covered in “The Equality of Women and Men, Part 1: A Shared Responsibility,” have participants quickly do the following activities:

### Activities:

#### 1. Review of God’s design of equality and partnership (5-8 minutes)

- ★ Refer participants to the handout “Working Together” (Participant Handouts, pp. 7-8). Ask them to underline key points that answer the focus questions:
  - How are women and men intended to relate to each other?
  - What are the effects of not achieving this relationship?

There is no reporting back for this exercise, as it is only a tool to bring these points back to participants’ minds.

#### 2. Review of a shared responsibility (5-7 minutes)

- ★ Refer participants to the handout “A Shared Responsibility” (Participant Handouts, p. 9). This handout is a synthesis of quotations from the Writings previously studied.
- ★ Briefly talk through the gender-specific and shared responsibilities.

## Special Strengths of Women (15 minutes)

### Purpose

- ★ To become familiar with qualities mentioned in the Writings as being particular strengths of women

### Activities:

#### 1. Individual reading of quotations (5-8 minutes)

- ★ Ask participants to read through the handout “Special Strengths of Women” (Participant Handouts, pp. 10-11) and underline qualities mentioned as being particular strengths of women.

#### 2. Listing qualities (3-5 minutes)

- ★ Invite volunteers to share what they underlined as you write these on a board or flip chart.

#### 3. Facilitator comment (2 minutes)

- ★ Comment that many cultures have taught that men are natural leaders, better able to govern than women. It is significant that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá lists among the strengths of women “special gifts which enable her to govern in moments of danger and crisis.”
- ★ Share that the history of the Faith provides two examples of women governing during periods of danger and crisis.
  - The first example is Shoghi Effendi’s leaving the Holy Land for an extended period after his appointment as Guardian and his designation of Bahíyyih Khánum to supervise and manage the affairs of the Faith in his absence. He wrote to the American believers that “I have left for a time the affairs of the Cause both at home and abroad, under the supervision of the Holy Family and the headship of the Greatest Holy Leaf [Bahíyyih Khánum]. . . .” (Bahá’í Administration, p. 25)
  - A second example is the stewardship of the Hands of the Cause of God after the passing of Shoghi Effendi and prior to the election of the Universal House of Justice. Male and female Hands of the Cause worked together, as equal partners in service, to provide leadership during this period of danger and crisis.
- ★ Let participants know that a take-home assignment, to be given later, will focus consultation on how these special strengths can be developed and used in the local community.

**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's Role in Establishing Equality (60 minutes)

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## Purpose

- ★ To explore the Assembly's role in establishing the equality of women and men

## Activities:

### 1. Small group consultation and artwork (40 minutes)

- ★ Comment that having looked at the role of individual men and women in establishing equality and partnership, we will now focus on the role of the Assembly in this process.
- ★ Divide into groups of 4-5. Have each group read "The Assembly's Role in Establishing Equality" (Participant Handouts, pp. 12-13), consult on the following focus questions, and express their results in a piece of artwork, a chart, or a poster.

### Focus questions:

- What roles can the Local Spiritual Assembly play in establishing the equality of women and men?
- What specific courses of action are mentioned? What are practical expressions of these?

### 2. Groups share results (10 minutes)

- ★ Ask each group to explain its chart or poster to the whole group.
- ★ A sample listing of what Assemblies can do to transform attitudes, assumptions, and behaviors of men and women appears below. Mention any actions not included by the groups in their listings.
  - raise awareness of the issue of the equality of the sexes and keep it before the community
  - arrange for deepenings on this topic
  - encourage the community to examine traditional roles of women and men and explore Bahá'í concepts of full partnership
  - encourage men to develop a greater sense of ownership of the issue of equality
  - foster the development of leadership qualities in women
  - encourage the community to support the individual choices that women make in their personal, family, and professional lives
  - provide opportunities for discussion of issues associated with equality

# The Assembly's Role in Establishing Equality, continued

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- establish a safe consultative environment for such discussions, where both women's and men's thoughts and feelings can be shared openly and listened to with respect
  - monitor the process of how issues are addressed to ensure that it remains non-adversarial
  - see that the unity of the community is maintained throughout the process of discussion and change
  - examine local patterns
  - institute changes in local practices
  - be a role model itself
  - encourage a greater understanding of, and commitment to, the divine institution of marriage
  - develop in the community a greater appreciation for the sacred roles of motherhood and fatherhood
  - provide mothers with a well-planned program for the education of children
  - review activities for youth and children with the objective of raising up a new generation committed to gender equality
  - help Bahá'ís develop the skills necessary to eradicate violence against women
  - promote the identification, understanding, and resolution of the unique issues particular to women of different cultural backgrounds
- ★ Suggest that Assemblies may want to display their poster in their meeting room as a reminder during future consultations. They may also want to score themselves on each item on their poster and periodically evaluate their progress in rising to a new stage in the exercise of this particular responsibility.

### **3. Describing resources available to the Assembly (10 minutes)**

- ★ Comment that several resources exist to help Assemblies fulfill their responsibility to foster the equality of women and men. Refer participants to their handout "Resources Available to the Assembly" (Participant Handouts, pp. 14-15).
- ★ Describe each of these resources and, if possible, hold up sample copies:

# The Assembly's Role in Establishing Equality, continued

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## Resources available to the Assembly

### 1. Equality training

A program to help Bahá'ís and interested friends of the Faith develop and implement strategies for promoting equality in the home, in the Bahá'í community, and in the world at large. Using an interactive approach and a Writings-based curriculum, participants begin by exploring the meaning of equality and the necessity for cooperation and mutual support between women and men. They then develop and practice strategies for fostering equality in marriage and in Bahá'í community life, for raising children to live out the principle of equality, and for teaching this principle to others.

This four module, 32 hour Core Curriculum program is scheduled with local trainers through the National Teacher Training Center, Louhelen Bahá'í School (phone 810-653-5033; e-mail: louhelen@usbnc.org)

### 2. “Two Wings of a Bird: The Equality of Women and Men”

The National Spiritual Assembly's powerful statement on the Faith's vision of full partnership between the sexes is available from the Bahá'í Distribution Service (1-800-999-9019).

### 3. National Committee for the Equality of Women and Men

The mission of this committee of the National Spiritual Assembly is mobilize the American Bahá'í community to fulfill its spiritual destiny of becoming a shining example of full equality between women and men. Coordinated dissemination and study of the “Two Wings” statement serves as the reference point and guiding tool for the actions of the committee, which can be contacted c/o Bahá'ís of the United States, 1320 19th St. N.W., Suite 701, Washington, D.C. 20036 (phone 202-833-8990; e-mail ncewm@usbnc.org)

Some Regional Bahá'í Committees for the Equality of Women and Men exist as well. Check with the National Committee for information about your region.

### 4. The National Spiritual Assembly's Office of Women's Affairs

This office directly serves the Assistant Secretary, its director, in advising the National Assembly on equality issues and in

# The Assembly's Role in Establishing Equality, continued

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**Resources  
available to the  
Assembly,  
continued**

coordinating women's affairs throughout the Bahá'í community for the National Assembly. It works closely with the Bahá'í International Community's Office for the Advancement of Women, the National Assembly's Office of External Affairs, the National Committee for the Equality of Women and Men, Local Assemblies, Regional Bahá'í Councils, and agencies outside the Faith in promoting gender equality.

## **5. "Women" (a compilation)**

This compilation of extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice is grouped around the themes of the Bahá'í concept of equality, the role of education in the development of women, the application of the principle of equality to family life, women in the world at large, and fostering the development of women. It is available from the Bahá'í Distribution Service.

## **6. "Advancement of Women: A Bahá'í Perspective"**

This broad survey by Dr. Janet A. Khan and Dr. Peter J. Khan provides a comprehensive examination of many aspects of the equality of women and men. Assemblies may be particularly interested in chapters 5-7, which discuss implementation of the principle of equality. Chapter 5 highlights strategies and actions taken by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá during Their ministries, using stories and anecdotes as illustrations. Chapter 6 focuses on the role of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice in facilitating the understanding and practice of this principle. Chapter 7 examines the Bahá'í approach to implementation, including incorporating this principle into marriage and family relationships and into the functioning of the community. This book is available from the Bahá'í Distribution Service.

## **7. "The Greatness Which Might Be Theirs"**

This booklet, published by the Bahá'í International Community Office for the Advancement of Women, addresses themes and issues which form the "Platform for Action" of the 1995 United National World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China. The booklet is available from the Bahá'í Distribution Service and is also included on the Bahá'í International Community's web site: [www.bic-un.bahai.org](http://www.bic-un.bahai.org).

# The Assembly's Role in Establishing Equality, continued

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**Resources  
available to the  
Assembly,  
continued**

## **8. “Brilliant Star” magazine**

Many issues of this magazine, a publication of the National Spiritual Assembly, contain activities that promote the advancement of women and the equality of the sexes. The activities are designed primarily for children and youth but are useful for all ages. Copies of some, but not all, single back issues of the magazine are available from the Bahá'í Distribution Service and/or the National Teacher Training Center at Louhelen Bahá'í School. Subscription to the magazine is available by contacting Bahá'í Subscriber Service at the Bahá'í Distribution Service.

## **9. Study and discussion questions**

Call participants' attention to two pages in their handout (Participant Handouts, pp. 16-17) which contain study and discussion questions for use with the “Two Wings” statement and the compilation Women.

# Building Communities of Partnership

(70 minutes)

## Purpose:

- ★ To assess the extent to which the equality of women and men is incorporated into various aspects of community life
- ★ To explore how the Assembly can lead the community to develop into a model of partnership between women and men

## Activities:

### 1. Exploring the Writings (3 minutes)

- ★ Have participants read aloud the quotations on the handout “Building Communities of Partnership” (Participant Handouts, p. 18-19).

### 2. Reviewing local and national demographics (5 minutes)

- ★ Form groups by Assembly. If non-Assembly members are participating, form mixed groups of 5-7. If participants come from several communities have them form groups by community.
- ★ Refer participants to the handout “Demographics of our Community” (Participant Handouts, p. 21). Ask each group to identify roughly the percentage of women and men in the local Bahá’í community and enter these figures at the top of the handout.
- ★ While groups are working, write on the board or flip chart the following statistics for the American Bahá’í community from an article in The American Bahá’í February 1995:

	<u>% adults</u>	<u>% on LSA</u>	<u>% sec.</u>	<u>% chair</u>	<u>% as treas.</u>	<u>% as vice-chair</u>
Female	49.99	56	76	35	39	38
Male	50.02	41	21	61	56	58

- ★ Read aloud these statistics for groups to use as a point of reference in their upcoming consultations. [Note to facilitators: Numbers do not always add to 100% due to rounding]
- ★ Comment that the typical local Spiritual Assembly in this country is composed of 5 women and 4 men. These statistics, however, seem to indicate that Assemblies follow the patterns of society as a whole when choosing officers: women outnumber men 4-1 in the position of secretary; men outnumber women nearly 2-1 as chair and nearly 3-2 as treasurer or vice-chair. As a result, men are more likely to be officers of Assemblies than women.

**Examining  
patterns of  
activity in the  
community**

### 3. Examining the Assembly's internal functioning (10 minutes.)

- ★ Refer groups to the handout “Examining the Assembly’s Internal Functioning” (Participant Handouts, p. 20). Ask each group to answer the following questions and to list any of their comments or observations they would like to suggest that the Assembly consult about at a future Assembly meeting:
  - What is the make up of the Assembly by gender? Has the make up of the Assembly by gender been a consistent pattern over the past five years?
  - What gender is the current Assembly chair? Has this been a consistent pattern over the past five years?
  - What gender is the current Assembly secretary? Has this been a consistent pattern over the past five years?
  - What gender is the current Assembly treasurer? Has this been a consistent pattern over the past five years?
  - To what degree do our local statistics reflect our understanding that both women and men can perform each of these duties?

### 4. Examining patterns of activity (20 minutes)

- ★ Ask each group to now turn its attention outside of the Assembly’s functioning to the local Bahá’í community.
- ★ Have each group fill in the data requested about activities at the bottom of the handout “Demographics of our Community” (Participant Handouts, p. 21). The numbers can be very general, “ball-park” figures. Determine, roughly, the percentage of participation in the following community activities of each gender:
  - attending Feast
  - hosting/preparing Feast
  - attending Holy Day observances
  - planning/hosting Holy Day observances
  - contributing to the Fund
  - participation in teaching events
  - participation in deepenings
  - participation in children’s activities

- service on committees and task forces
  - selection as speaker for an event
- ★ Have groups explore implications of their data by completing two tasks:
1. Compare the participation figures of each gender to its percentage figures of the local Bahá'í population. Note any gaps which indicate one gender is not involved in some aspect of Bahá'í community life.
  2. Since implementation of the principle of the equality of women and men necessarily challenges traditional practices, identify what it challenges in this community.

*Optional: Invite each group to share with the group as a whole any patterns it uncovered.*

*NOTE: If you will be using the Optional Extension Session One “Checking for Double Standards,” which follows on p. 27, do so now.*

### Planning for change

#### 5. Planning for change (20 minutes)

- ★ Refer groups to the handout “Planning for Change” (Participant Handouts, pp. 22-23). Ask each group to consult on the first two focus questions. Emphasize that these consultations are just a beginning step in the on-going process of implementing change. Encourage Assemblies to consult further at future Assembly meetings on the second question and on the other remaining questions.

#### Focus questions:

- Have special efforts previously been made to encourage full participation by both sexes in the life of the community? What have been the results of these efforts?
- In light of the points surfaced during the activities and assessments just completed, what adjustments to current practices and expectations would help ensure a Bahá'í environment in which both women and men feel a sense of welcome, safety, belonging, and full partnership?

### Planning for change, continued

#### Focus questions for consultation at a later time:

- How can the Assembly draw out and develop those special strengths of women mentioned in the Writings in the local community?
- How can the Assembly provide opportunities for women in the local community to use these qualities?
- In what ways can the Assembly support the efforts of individual Bahá'ís to implement the principle of equality in their daily life?
- What activities will help individuals and the Bahá'í community as a whole take the next step in their personal and collective development relating to this principle?
- What activities can the Assembly arrange that both stress the importance of this principle and that also engage community members in actions that lead to a consolidation of behaviors that reflect equality?
- If assessments reveal a pattern of less participation of women in the affairs of the Cause, how can the Assembly design and implement activities in such a way that women are enabled to participate more fully?
- How can the Assembly make full use of the National Spiritual Assembly's statement "Two Wings of a Bird" within the Bahá'í community?
- How can the Assembly introduce the National Spiritual Assembly's statement "Two Wings of a Bird" to leaders of thought and people of prominence in the local community?
- In what ways can the Assembly collaborate with other groups or initiate activities to act as a catalyst for change in the area of gender equality?

#### 6. Groups report back (10 minutes)

- ★ Allow time for groups to share initial ideas from their consultations.

# Optional Extension Session One: *Checking for Double Standards* (20 minutes)

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## **Purpose**

- ★ To check for the possible existence of double standards

## **Setting up the activity:**

- ★ Comment that one aspect of inequality is the existence of double standards – differing sets of rules and expectations for each sex. Assemblies need to be mindful of the possible existence of double standards and adhere scrupulously to principle in the administration of justice.

## **Activities:**

### **1. Small group discussion** (10 minutes):

- ★ Divide participants into groups of 4-5. Ask each group to consider the following questions:
  - In your community, when it becomes known that an unmarried woman is soon to become a mother, 1) how is she viewed in the community? 2) how does your Assembly respond to this situation?
  - In your community, when it becomes known that an unmarried man is soon to become a father, 1) how is he viewed in the community? 2) how does your Assembly respond to this situation?

### **2. Large group discussion** (10 minutes):

- ★ Have groups reassemble as a whole and share with them the following guidance of the Universal House of Justice:

“ . . . when there is an isolated but serious offence, such as that of a Bahá’í woman who indulges in one act of immorality as a result of which she gives birth to a child out of wedlock, this is no grounds for the removal of administrative rights. But the Assembly, when it learns of the situation, should certainly arrange for the believer to be met and consulted with, to assist her in her difficulties, to ascertain her attitude to the situation. If she has no regret for the offence and indicates that she feels free to repeat it in future, she will need to be educated in the teachings, counselled and, if she does not change her attitude, to be warned that a continuation of such actions would cause forfeiture of her administrative rights. If, however, she is contrite and is determined to lead a moral life henceforth, there would be no question of sanctions. The same course would be followed with the man involved, if he were a Bahá’í.” (On

## *Checking for Double Standards, continued*

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behalf of the Universal House of Justice, letter dated December 9, 1991)

- ★ Invite comments on how closely the community and the Assembly practice the single standard set forth by the House of Justice and to what extent, if any, a double standard based on gender exists.
- ★ Comment that educating both sexes in the implications of the law of chastity and handling violations of this law are areas of life in which a double standard sometimes occurs.

*Optional: Invite comments about other areas of life in which a double standard on the part of the community or the Assembly might exist.*

## Closing (5 minutes)

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### Purpose

- ★ To feel strengthened and assured of success in fostering the equality of men and women

### Activities:

#### 1. Check to see if all questions have been addressed (3 minutes)

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

#### 2. Sharing of closing quotations (2 minutes)

- ★ Ask a male and female participant to read aloud the following assurances of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Universal House of Justice as we engage in the work of establishing full equality and partnership:

#### (Male reader)

“In the Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh, women are advancing side by side with men. There is no area or instance where they will lag behind: they have equal rights with men, and will enter, in the future, into all branches of the administration of society. Such will be their elevation that, in every area of endeavour, they will occupy the highest levels in the human world. Rest thou assured. Look not upon their present state. In future, the world of womankind will shine with lustrous brilliance, for such is the will and purpose of Bahá’u’lláh. . . . No soul can retard or prevent it.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 182.)

#### (Female reader)

“. . . the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh will aid them and the institutions of His World Order to see the realization of every principle ordained by His unerring Pen, including the equality of men and women, as expounded in the Writings of the Cause.” (letter dated May 31, 1988 to a National Spiritual Assembly, p. 4, quoted in Advancement of Women, p. 296.)

#### Optional:

*Give each participant a beautiful card or calligraphy version of the quotation of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on the following page as a gift (a version suitable for photocopying onto attractive paper is included).*

“The happiness of mankind will be realized when women and men coordinate and advance equally, for each is the complement and helpmeet of the other.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá