

# Implementation Tips for USAID Partners

Sharing Resources and Knowledge Among the Global CSO Community

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## Definitions

**Marginalized groups:** People who are typically denied full access to legal protection or social and economic participation and programs (such as police protection; political participation; access to healthcare, education, employment, etc.), whether in practice or in principle (or both) for historical, cultural, political, or other contextual reasons.

**Inclusive Development:** The concept that every person, regardless of identity, is instrumental in the transformation of their own societies and that their inclusion throughout the development process leads to better outcomes.

## Gender-Sensitive and Socially Inclusive Facilitation

**Q**

How can I ensure that representatives of women and marginalized groups can attend and participate meaningfully in project activities, public meetings, and civic engagement activities?

**A**

Proactive community engagement, careful planning, and targeted capacity building can facilitate more inclusive attendance and participation in project activities, public meetings, and community activities. Ensuring equal opportunity for all citizens to participate in a civic engagement project—or simply a public meeting held by a civil society organization (CSO) or government—is critical to achieving effective community decisions, efficient use of public resources, and positive outcomes for civic engagement projects. The importance of inclusive participation is reflected in various USAID policies and guidance documents on inclusive development, gender equality, youth development, disability, and others. See the *Implementation Tip* on [Introduction to Inclusion and Inclusive Development](#) for more information on USAID policies for inclusive development.

Even if a CSO invites a diverse group of citizens to a public meeting or other civic engagement activity, women and members of marginalized groups may not feel comfortable attending due to the social, political, and other barriers that commonly exclude them from civic and political life. Often, the norms that exclude these groups also make them feel that they do not have the right to demand that the community or the state meets their needs or furthers their interests. In many places, the longstanding dominance in leadership positions by men and members of majority ethnic or other social groups has prevented women and men in marginalized groups from thinking about their own distinct needs and interests, let alone voicing them in a community forum. Women and members of marginalized groups may also fear that traditional community leaders will not consider their input seriously, or worse, will demean or retaliate against them if they share perspectives that run counter to the interests of dominant groups. Marginalized groups may also feel that they lack the skills and agency to articulate their needs and interests in a formal community setting.

## What to include in the Invitation

### In addition to general information, invitations should include:

- The purpose of the meeting and why it's important for women and members of all social groups to participate.
- Instructions to CSOs and other community organization to bring women and members of marginalized groups.
- Information on provided accommodations and contact information for attendees to request additional accommodations.
- Co-sponsorship information.
- Meeting agenda and/or information on how the meeting will be conducted.

For public meetings and civic engagement activities to be more inclusive, recruitment and meeting facilitation must be conducted in a way that ensures that women and marginalized groups feel confident attending, believe they will be able to participate freely without fear of intimidation, and trust that their opinions will be heard respectfully and meaningfully considered. The following actions can help secure more inclusive attendance in public meetings and activities.

### Coordinating Invitations and Advertisements

- Ensure the meeting is scheduled at a time that is convenient and safe for all groups to attend. For example, take into account the different work schedules of both women and men and consider holding the meeting at a time when women have access to some form of child care.
- Identify women and key members of marginalized groups to serve as champions by having them recruit other members of their social group to attend and participate.
- Attempt to co-organize the meeting with a CSO representing marginalized groups and ask them to bring their members to the meeting. If co-organizing the event is not possible, coordinate with organizations representing marginalized groups to ensure there is no scheduling conflict.
- Plan to recruit at least a critical mass (33 percent) of women and representatives of marginalized groups for the meeting or activity. This will encourage more members of these groups to attend.
- Announce the meeting via information channels that are used by women and marginalized groups. For example, certain community radio stations may be popular and/or accessible to specific ethnic or socioeconomic groups.
- Consider using multiple means—such as posters, radio announcements, etc.—to alert people to the meeting. Ensure the invitation is appropriate for low-literate audiences by using oral invitations as appropriate.
- Coordinate with groups serving the needs of women (such as community mothers' groups) and marginalized groups to tell their members/clients about the meeting.
- Follow up on written invitations by phone, email, or in person to further encourage participation.

### Meeting Preparation and Setup

- Arrange for women to sit in the front of the room or as a group alongside men. People with a sight or hearing impairment should be seated in the front of the room.
- Use sign-in sheets that capture gender and other relevant demographic information for participants, such as age.
- Before the meeting, speak with traditional and community leaders who often lead such meetings to establish a common understanding that the meeting or activity must allow participation by all members of the community. If necessary, explain why it is valuable for people to speak freely without fear of being intimidated by other people or social groups.
- Arrange to have specific women and members of marginalized groups in the audience ask questions and/or speak up.
- If needed, provide information to women and marginalized groups about the subject matter of the meeting that will help prepare them to participate equally. For example, if it is a public meeting about delivery of public services, provide information on the service delivery decision-making process, opportunities to influence the process, and the government's service delivery obligations.
- Gather members of marginalized groups and help them identify their own needs and interests through guided facilitation. For example, women (who often are responsible for the cooking and cleaning) may want better access to clean water. Geographically marginalized groups may want better access to schools or primary health facilities. Persons with disabilities may want better access to technologies that would allow them to participate in community activities.

### Conducting the Meeting

- Set strict ground rules for the meeting and ensure that the facilitator enforces them equally. These might include:
  - Do not allow interruptions.
  - Respect time limits for speaking.
  - Establish zipper lists for speaking so every other person recognized is a woman or member of a marginalized group.
  - Pose specific questions to people who are not participating and do not move on until they have answered.
  - Prohibit efforts to intimidate other participants.

## Utilizing the data collected during the meeting

**To get a better understanding of meeting's impact, organizers should do the following after the meeting:**

- Analyze the sign-in sheet to determine how many men, women, and members of marginalized groups attended.
- Analyze the data collected by the meeting observer to determine:
  - What was the ratio of speaking time between men, women, and members of marginalized groups?
  - Were women and members of marginalized groups interrupted or did men from dominant groups speak more often and for longer periods?
  - Were the inputs from women and marginalized groups received respectfully?
  - If it was a priority setting meeting, were women's and marginalized groups' priorities voiced and recognized?
- If the meeting or activity is part of a USAID-funded project, include data on attendance and participation in project reports and monitoring evaluation databases.
- Evaluate the data gathered and discuss what changes might be made to improve stakeholder attendance and increase the number of inclusive outcomes.

- When opening the meeting, explain the value of equal participation by attendees.
- Provide rotating opportunities for women and members of marginalized groups to serve in different roles such as facilitating, note taking, and speaking on certain subjects.
- If note taking is done on a flip chart, make sure the suggestions and inputs of women and marginalized groups are all taken down.
- Identify someone to observe the meeting and record information about who spoke and for how long, whether or not they were interrupted, what issues were raised, and how different issues and messages were received by different participants.

### After the Meeting

- If meeting minutes or another type of report is developed after the meeting, ensure that issues raised by women and representatives of marginalized groups are included.
- Share the outcomes of the meeting among all participants and interested community stakeholders, including organizations representing women and marginalized groups.

### ***Additional considerations for supporting active, inclusive participation in civic activities***

**Provide training as needed before the meeting.** Due to social and gender norms, women and members of marginalized groups are not always comfortable stating their needs or speaking in public. Therefore, it may be important to provide these groups with training—on such topics as issue identification, using evidence for decision making, public speaking, rules and procedures for meetings—and conduct advocacy with them ahead of the meeting so they feel more comfortable and are able to participate fully. If there are videos of prior meetings, it may be helpful to share them so that participants have a better idea of what to expect.

Make efforts with community leaders to establish the value of inclusive participation. It may be useful to make the argument that the mandate of a publicly-elected official is to provide services that all community members want, need, and will use. Additionally, providing services and programs that are only demanded or used by majority groups is a waste of precious public resources. If leaders and dominant community groups work with women and marginalized groups to understand their unique needs and interests, they can use public resources more efficiently. See the *Implementation Tip* on [Introducing an Inclusive Civic Engagement Project to the Community](#) for more information.

## Resources

[How Facilitators Can Infuse Diversity and Inclusion into Everything We Do](#)

[Anti-Oppressive Facilitation for Democratic Process: Making Meetings Awesome for Everyone](#)

## For More Information

For this or other issues of Implementation Tips, please visit [NGOConnect.net](#). The website is a dynamic and interactive portal dedicated to connecting and strengthening CSOs, networks, and CSO support organizations worldwide.

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**Create space in the meeting agenda to discuss the “elephant in the room.”** Public meeting agendas often do not include time for open discussion of citizens' views and interests. This can discourage women and members of marginalized groups from voicing their priorities. For example, participants may not raise the need for separate bathrooms for boys and girls (to allow girls to practice menstrual hygiene management) due to lack of time in an agenda or discomfort raising the issue in public. The meeting organizers and facilitator must find a way to place such topics on the meeting agenda (or allow them to be introduced) and create an environment in which participants feel comfortable discussing them.

**Ensure the facilitator(s) are trained in gender-sensitive and socially inclusive facilitation.** Even in contexts where gender and social norms are not conducive to mixed-sex meetings with members of both dominant and marginalized social groups, it is important to hold meetings with diverse community members. It can be transformative for members of dominant groups to hear women and marginalized groups speak about their rights and interests. For such meetings to have a positive impact, however, the facilitator must ensure that community leaders and members of dominant groups do not speak over or drown out the voices of women and members of marginalized groups. Facilitators must be skilled in setting and enforcing ground rules for respectful and equal participation and to allow all participants to present their needs as community interests—rather than having the meeting be a zero-sum game that benefits one gender or social group. Additional resources on inclusive facilitation are included in the Resources section of this *Implementation Tip*.

