

Community Action Tool

Organizing A Muslim Youth Conference

Organizing a Youth Conference

Description

A community conference, open to all Muslim youth, or open to Muslim youth, parents and community service providers, provides an opportunity to hold much more in-depth discussions than are possible in focus groups. Approximately 100 participants attended the conference held as part of our project, and this provided a good mix for the workshops. In order to enable youth in school and working parents to attend, the conference is best held on a weekend.

One possibility is a two-stage process, in which you hold focus groups to identify the issues, and then organize a conference to identify possible solutions and actions.

Establishing a Conference Organizing Committee

Establishing a conference organizing committee is essential. Some key factors to consider are to get people who:

- represent the participants you are trying to attract as they will know how they think and what will engage them;
- have time to attend meeting and can do the work they volunteer to do;
- are flexible and reliable;
- have contacts in the community that you are trying to reach out to; and
- have a range of skills that can be utilized.

The most effective way to develop an organizing team is to seek volunteers from the sponsoring organizations. Word of mouth is effective because people are often recommending people that they have worked with before and already have a working relationship.

Designing the Agenda

In designing the conference it is important to have youth involved in the organizing committee, to ensure the topics and activities are likely to be of interest.

The sessions need to be interactive and engaging, and be relevant to the youth.

The conference for our project used the following approach:

- Presentation of the issues:
 - Keynote speaker
 - Video of comments from youth in the community, prepared in advance for the conference
 - Powerpoint presentation on results of youth focus groups held prior to the conference
- Workshops for youth to develop skits, videos, poems, or other presentations to give voice to their concerns, and present these to the assembled conference
- Discussion sessions for youth, parents and community service providers to develop recommendations and solutions to the issues raised by youth in their presentations.
- Closing speeches that provided specific ways that youth could get involved in their community.

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Provided on the CD is the agenda and the power point presentation. (Appendices D-8, D-9 and E)

Promotion and Outreach

Promoting the conference in the community is important in order to encourage a diverse range of participants. Asking participants to give up a day on a weekend means that additional efforts will likely be needed. The CD provides an example of a poster or flyer to advertise the conference, and an agenda that can be sent out to promote the conference. (Appendix D-4 and D-8)

Methods for advertising and promoting the conference include:

- Poster
- Announcements at Friday prayers at all mosques in the community
- Notices to community organizations, including Muslim specific organizations
- Notices to schools and parent organizations
- Notices to social service organizations, police and other service providers in the community.

In particular, recruiting youth on a weekend may be challenging. In the conference organized as part of this project, it was very useful to work through community centres which had existing Muslim youth groups, and encourage the members to attend as a group.

Resource People

The conference will need a range of resource people, including:

- one or two Masters of Ceremonies (MC);
- one or two keynote speakers, preferably someone who is known to youth or is from an organization or a background that will appeal to youth;
- workshop leaders familiar with the issue or topic for each workshop;
- facilitators for discussion sessions.

The Steering Committee can brainstorm ideas for resource people, and local community organizations (both mainstream service providers and organizations in the Muslim community) can be approached for suggestions, and particularly to recruit facilitators. As with the focus groups, it is ideal to have facilitators who are Muslim and close in age to the youth at the conference.

For every speaker, it is important to provide them with a clear idea of who they audience is and what is expected from their speech. For every resource person it is important to clearly explain his or her role and provide supporting material. Each MC and facilitator were provided with a guide. (Appendices D-11 and D-12)

Logistics

There are many logistical considerations in organizing a conference, and the conference task list provided on the CD covers this in more detail (see Appendices D-2 and D-3).

Some key elements include:

- Location: criteria for selecting the setting for the conference might include - well-known location, central, easily accessible by public transit, with ample parking, accessible to the disabled, with the type of spaces needed by the conference.
- Refreshments: will lunch be provided? coffee/tea/juice for breaks

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- Equipment: What audio-visual equipment is needed? What supplies are needed in the workshops?
- Registration: pre-registration might be desirable if you expect large attendance, and also encourages people to commit to attending. A simple registration form can be completed on site for those who do not register in advance. A sample registration form is provided on the CD. (Appendix D-6)

Challenges

Four key challenges were part of the conference:

- a) Recruiting youth to attend the conference in sufficient numbers for a good discussion can be a challenge. Parents and community service providers seem more willing to give up a day on a weekend. The suggestions given above may help, but overall, it is a factor that deserves extra attention in organizing the conference. Our approach was to work through community organizations that had existing youth programs. In the one case, the organization brought 40 youth. In the other case, the organization cancelled on the Friday afternoon because their youth was doing a youth program the day before.
- b) Starting the conference at 9:00 on a Sunday was not the right time for youth. We ended up starting at 9:45 and shortened the time in the workshops. With youth, it is better to start the conference at 10:00.
- c) Make the promotional material as clear as possible. The original design for the conference was to have the youth work in the morning and then have the parents and community members come for the afternoon. Because the promotional material was not clear, we had about 30 parents and community members in the morning that we had to put into an impromptu workshop.
- d) Working with youth to assume key roles and responsibilities: Youth are very enthusiastic and extremely hard working. What is less of a strength is the ability to discern what is an essential and what is a discretionary task. It is important to have someone to oversee the volunteers and to ensure that the essential tasks are completed.

Sample Budget

Costs that need to be factored into the budget are:

Expense	Explanation
Location	Consider: parking (preferably free), easy access by bus, can serve appropriate food or will allow outside caterers, has a speaker system, will set up the space for you as needed and is a place that people will feel comfortable going to. The location has to have enough rooms to accommodate your space needs. For the conference we needed a large plenary room (which doubled as workshop space), two additional workshop rooms and a childcare room.
Food/Catering	Food is an expensive cost but essential to a successful conference. It is important to clearly tell the caterers any specific food requirements that are needed.
Publicity	Publicity costs can include a flyer, newspaper advertising and advertising spots on TV and radio. Publicity can be done really inexpensively through websites, setting up a social page and through a mass e-mail and word of mouth.

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Facilitators	Facilitators for each workshop should be compensated.
Recorder	Recorders sit in each workshop and write down what is said. They should be compensated.
Speakers	Speakers should be compensated. If they are prepared to do it pro bono, it is important to provide them with a small gift when thanking them. Each speaker was provided with a \$25.00 Chapters gift card.
Organizer	A well-spent cost is to hire an organizer who can deal with many of the logistic details and can follow-up with all the volunteers. Three part-time organizers were hired for the conference and one MLO from the settlement organization worked on the conference.
Childcare	Childcare workers (who have qualifications) need to be compensated. It is also important to buy or borrow toys and supplies for a different range of children.
Transportation	To encourage youth to attend, bus tickets should be offered.
Audio-Visual	The conference used digital cameras in the workshops, laptops to show the interviews and the power points and an LCD projector.
Program/Printed Materials	The primary printed material is the program, however specific workshops required additional printed material.
Workshop Supplies	Each workshop had there own specific needs. The drama workshop required props and clothes to dress up in. We were able to borrow them from the local theatre group. The written word workshop needed paper, pens and art supplies. The video workshop needed digital cameras and film.

Tools on the CD:

- Conference task list (Appendices D-2 and D-3)
- Sample agenda (Appendix D-9)
- Conference poster (Appendices D-4 and D-8)
- Registration form (Appendix D-6)
- Introduction exercises (Appendix __, Handout __)
- MC guide (Appendix D-11)
- Facilitators guide (Appendix D-12)
- Powerpoint presentation of results of focus groups (Appendix E)

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Organizing Focus Groups for Parents

Organizing Focus Groups for Parents

Description

Parents are central to the development of youth and how easily they integrate into Canadian culture while also retaining their own sense of self. Many parents are often overwhelmed by their parenting task as they go through the day-to-day challenges of living and working, and in some cases, integration as an immigrant themselves.

The focus groups for parents are planned for 1 ½ hours but they can go much longer as parents have a lot to share and many solutions to offer.

Recruiting Participants

The best way to recruit parents is through a forum already familiar to them. If there is a Muslim parents group associated with a school, this would be a logical venue. If there is a community organization through which Muslim parents access services or activities (such as family service centre or community centre), this is also a possibility. Mosques are also opportunities to contact parents and invite them to a focus group. However, it is important to take steps to ensure a cross-section of parents are involved, and not just certain cultural groups or certain perspectives on Islam.

During the project and based on the results from the youth and parent focus groups, it is clear that there are a diversity of views in the Muslim community. There appeared to be distinctions and sometimes divisions related to race and culture, and the different perspectives of recent immigrants compared to those Muslims who were born in Canada or have been here a long time. These distinctions were more pronounced among parents than among youth.

When working with the parents and based on the descriptions of the youth, there appeared to be three distinct audiences of parents in the Muslim community:

- a) Conservative: Q'uran informs what the youth can do and there is a very strict interpretation of the Q'uran. The parenting style is to provide clear direction without debate and discussion.
- b) Encourage a strong Islamic identity within a diverse society: In this parenting style it is important to pass on to their children the cultural and religious beliefs that the parents hold while recognizing that the youth have to navigate within a diverse society and a different cultural base than they did.
- c) Muslim identity is not central to their parenting: Parents do not consider it an advantage or essential to maintain their Muslim identity or do not want to impose their values on their children.

When recruiting parents for the focus group, it is important to consider all of the different elements of the community and ensure that all have an opportunity to participate in the focus groups.

Discussion Questions

The parents' focus group was the most challenging to organize and in the end, we did a session for parents outside of the schools.

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Draft Agenda	
6:30	Welcome Introductions Explain the Project - Facilitators Re-affirm them as parents, acknowledge complexity of issues they are facing as Moslem parents.
6:45	Question 1: What worries you most as parents of Moslem youth?
7:10	Question 2: What has helped or supported you as a parent? (the school, the community, others, etc.)
7:35	Question 3: What other resources or supports do you need?
8:00	Final Thoughts

Logistics

For parents, evenings or a weekend work best. If the focus groups are organized through the school, it is a good place to hold them, since the location is familiar to parents. As we ended up organizing the parent's focus group outside of the school, we held it at City Hall as it was central, accessible and a pleasant venue.

If the parents include recent immigrants, translation or cultural interpretation may be needed.

Some of the logistical considerations:

- One facilitator and one note-taker, or two co-facilitators, would be responsible for each session. It may make sense to have the same facilitators as for the youth groups, so that they can provide feedback and build on the parents comments and offer input from what the youth said in their focus groups.
- Provide refreshments, as a gesture of courtesy.

Challenges

The greatest challenge we had was in bringing parents together to talk about the issues facing youth. Specifically:

- a) Bringing together parents from different Muslim backgrounds. Parents who were immigrants tended to feel more comfortable with other parents from the same country of origin.
- b) Parents from some backgrounds had misgivings about participating in a session sponsored by CCMW. It may be helpful to be prepared in advance for these concerns and to share more information about CCMW in the early contacts with these other community organizations and parent groups.
- c) In some cases, you have to go to many preliminary meetings to establish credibility with the parents. They have to have a sense of you personally before they will share their stories.

Tools on the CD:

- Discussion questions for parents (in the Focus Group Facilitator's Guide) (Appendices B-11 and C-8)

Community Action Tool

Creating a Steering Committee

Creating a Community Steering Committee

Role

The Steering Committee acts on behalf of the sponsoring organization(s) and consequently does not have ultimate authority. Some critical issues may be referred back to the decision-making body of the sponsoring organization(s).

Within these parameters, the role of the Steering Committee is to decide on the methodology and approach (youth focus groups, youth/teacher/parent focus groups, youth conference, combination), and oversee the entire project. Most decisions would be made by the Steering Committee, but major issues could be referred to the sponsoring agency or agencies, and some specific details would be delegated to those people undertaking the work.

Members of the Steering Committee provide expert advice and contacts in the community to help move the project forward. They would also take on specific tasks according to their skills and capacities. The Committee may have funding to hire contractors to carry out elements of the work.

The Committee would meet as needed, probably monthly during the planning and implementation of the project.

The Steering Committee can also play a role in identifying next steps at the end of the project, based on suggested actions and recommendations arising from the focus groups and/or the conference.

Sample Mandate

(This is a sample mandate for a Steering Committee working with consultants.)

The Steering Committee will be a point of contact and advice to the consultants. It will act in an advisory capacity and does not make final decisions (see Decision-Making Process diagram further below). The role of the Committee is to:

- Provide suggestions on where and how to collect data.
- Provide suggestions on how to address methodological challenges.
- Review updates on the progress of the project and make suggestions when challenges arise.
- Review the data collection results and provide input into the development of the framework.

Members of the Steering Committee

The composition of the Steering Committee will depend to some extent on the project you are planning. For example, if you are working through the school system to organize the youth focus groups, it would be highly advantageous to have school representatives on the committee.

In general, the Steering Committee would include:

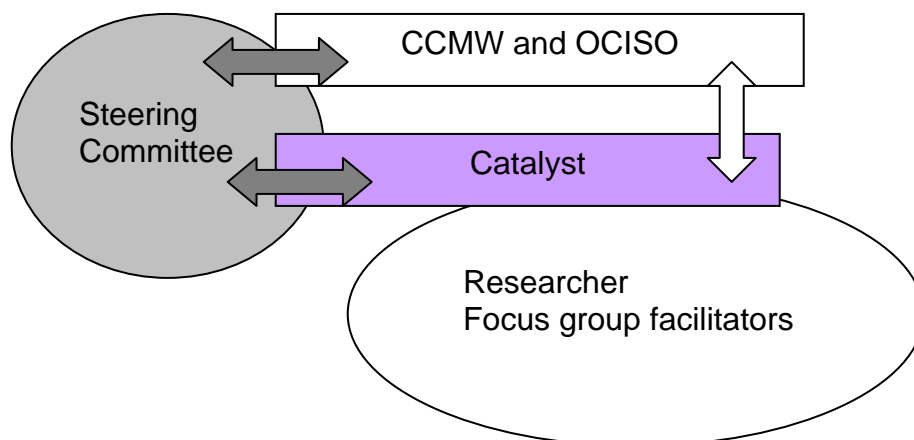
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- Sponsoring organizations; co-sponsoring the project with others can provide more visibility and help reach a wider range of the Muslim community.
- Youth, drawn from the participating schools, participating community youth organizations or groups, and/or from the community at large.
- School representatives, if you are working through the school system in your project. This might be a teacher or administrator from each of the participating schools. These individuals can help open doors in the school system, explain the approval procedures, recommend the most effective way to involve youth and teachers, etc.
- Community agencies can help provide facilitators and materials for the focus groups or conference, and if they have specific programs for Muslim youth or parents, can help recruit participants for the events.

Decision-making Process for the Project

When you have so many key stakeholders it is essential to clearly describe how decisions will be made and who has to be consulted. Ideally, you want to get input from the Steering Committee before making a decision as you will likely be collecting information to support an informed decision.

In the case of this project, decision making was divided between the consulting firm, Catalyst, and the two sponsoring organizations, CCMW and OCISO. Catalyst had decision-making authority for the contract staff and methodological implementation of the project. The two sponsoring organizations had overall decision-making authority around the overall methodology and budget for the project.



Tools on the CD:

- Mandate for the Steering Committee (Appendix F-1)
- Steering Committee sample agendas (Appendix F-2)

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Organizing Focus Groups for Teachers

Organizing Focus Groups for Teachers

Description

Teachers (or others who work with Muslim youth) have an important contribution to make in addressing issues that Muslim youth face. Focus groups with teachers are most effective in combination with youth focus groups, so that the results of each can be compared and can complement one another.

The session is structured as a series of exercises and discussion questions designed to draw out the views of the teachers. Two co-facilitators, or a facilitator and a note-taker, are responsible for leading the session and taking notes of the discussion. If you have more than 20 people you should consider having a second facilitator.

Recruiting Teachers to Participate

The best way to recruit teachers is through the Principal. Ideally you would want to get a discreet period of time to talk to the teachers of about an hour however you may only get 15-20 minutes at a staff meeting.

For one of the two schools in our project, we were required to submit a research application to the School Board's Quality Assurance Division. The process took about three months to complete because the relevant committee only met quarterly. **It is important, if you are going through the school system to get those permissions as early as possible.**

When it was thought that there might be a delay in the project, we approached a Muslim teacher from another school to potentially organize an event outside the school and that would be made up of teachers from various schools. This is another way to recruit teachers for a focus group.

In all the material to teachers, it is important to present the issues in as non-judgmental way as possible. There is a great diversity of teachers. In many ways, the teachers, like the schools themselves feel overwhelmed by the different issues that they have to deal with that goes beyond teaching but relates to family dynamics, integration of new Canadians and systemic issues of race and discrimination.

Discussion Questions for the Teachers' Focus Group

The discussion questions for teachers need to draw from their expertise, experience and observations. They work very closely with their students and often see many peer dynamics and social pressures facing Muslim youth. Because our time was limited with the teachers, we had both discussion questions and a questionnaire to be filled out afterwards. These are provided on the CD (See Appendices B-13, B-14, C-9).

If you have completed your youth focus groups, a summary of youth concerns and suggestions can be used to start off the parent or teacher focus group. A caution with using this process, is that they might become focused on one or two points and you will get more of a reaction than their original thinking.

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Logistics

Focus groups for teachers can be scheduled at the school. As with students, lunch hour is probably most convenient for them, although some schools have staggered lunches and you will never be able to get all the teachers together at one time.

Logistical considerations include:

- One facilitator and one note-taker, or two co-facilitators, would be responsible for each session. It may make sense to have the same facilitators as for the youth groups.
- Provide refreshments including lunch if the meeting is held at lunch.

Challenges

There were three main challenges in organizing the focus groups to consider:

1. The timing for the focus group is very brief with the teachers. You have to be very prepared and it is helpful to have a supplementary questionnaire for them to return. In our case, the questionnaire was lost as the person who was collecting them left the school.
2. The application process is detailed and can take a great deal of time. In hindsight it might have been more useful to have organized a session for teachers outside of the school that would have avoided the limited time for the focus group and the application process.
3. Teachers are at very different levels of openness to this issue and the material that is prepared to invite them needs to be non-judgmental and open. Even if it is some teachers are feeling very vulnerable and under attack and may see the project as a way to judge them.

Key Tips

- Involve the Principal as much as possible and get their full support.
- Involve as many teachers as possible in supporting the project.
- Go into the discussion with an open mind and be willing to look at the issues from the perspective of the teachers.
- Prepare supplementary tools like a questionnaire to get at their thinking.

Tools on the CD:

- Discussion questions for teachers (Appendix B-13)
- Questionnaire for teachers (Appendices B-14 and C-9)

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Organizing Muslim Youth Focus Groups

Organizing Muslim Youth Focus Groups

Description

A focus group size can range from 10 to 25 people. Generally, it lasts about 1 hour, although a longer time can certainly be used if it is available. It is best if the youth participating are from a cross-section of cultural backgrounds in the Muslim community.

The session is structured as a series of exercises and discussion questions designed to draw out the views of youth. Two co-facilitators, or a facilitator and a note-taker, are responsible for leading the session and taking notes of the discussion. If you have more than 20 people you should consider having a second facilitator.

Consent must be obtained for the youth to participate. Verbal consent can be given by youth who have reached adulthood (18 and over); for those under the age of majority, written permission is needed from their parent or guardian.

Recruiting Participants

Focus Groups at School

- Schools are an excellent arena to hold focus groups, because the students are already on-site and can easily attend the session. Also, schools tend to mix students from different cultural backgrounds (as compared to community organizations which may tend to attract Muslims from a specific national origin).
- If the youth focus groups are held at schools, lunch time is a good time to hold them. This makes it easy for most youth to participate, although the time available is usually somewhat short. After school is also possible, but participation tends to drop, as students head home or to after-school activities.
- Start planning well in advance, as permission is required from the principal and sometimes from the school board as well. The first step is to meet with the principal to get his or her support, and to decide on the best approach (where and when to hold the session, how to distribute and collect permission forms, etc.). A sample of an introductory letter to a principal is provided on the CD. (Appendices B-1 and C-1)
- Information and permission slips can be distributed to all Muslim students in the school. Many school boards have additional staff in the schools (although rarely full-time) to assist students from different cultural backgrounds and, where these staff exist, they can be of enormous assistance in encouraging students to sign up for the focus group. (Information sheets and consent forms are provided on the CD; see Appendices B-4, B-5, B-6 and B-7, and C-4 and C-5)

Focus Groups in the Community

- The project that this kit is based on chose the school system as the base for focus groups, however it is possible to organize youth focus groups in community settings. Different Muslim community organizations can be contacted to recruit youth, taking care to ensure a range of backgrounds are represented. The organizations can be asked to assist in distributing and collecting the information and permission forms. The introductory letter to principals, provided on the CD, can be adapted to use with community organizations.

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- Community organizations to publicize your focus group would include: the Mosques (and in particular any youth group through the Mosque); the Student Associations in both the high schools and universities, any private Muslim schools and any community organization that is specifically organized for Muslim Youth (in Ottawa, there is the Somali Basketball League).

Format

The focus group is held in a room where youth can speak freely without being overheard and without interruptions. The project this kit is based on held the youth focus groups in two stages: the first stage was separate sessions with boys and girls, and the second stage was a mixed session with everyone. The first session identified supports and concerns of youth, and the second session identified advice they would give other Muslim youth about how to handle different situations.

The first session has four main elements:

1. Introduction: facilitators introduce themselves, explain the project and how the information gathered in the focus groups will be used, and youth introduce themselves. An information sheet on the project (including contact information) can be handed out, if it has not been provided in advance.
2. Questionnaire: a short written exercise helps the youth engage in the topic; the completed questionnaires are confidential
3. Discussion: a series of open-ended questions are posed by the facilitator, and opportunity is provided for all the youth to speak
4. Closing: facilitators thank the participants and remind them of next steps.

The CD provides a sample agenda (Appendices B-9 and C-6), handout (Appendices B-3 and C-3), self-assessment questionnaire for the youth (Appendices B-10 and C-8) and the Facilitators Guide, which has the agenda, exercises, discussion questions and tips for organizing the session (Appendices B-11 and C-7).

Food

Providing food (e.g. pizza) is a good idea: it helps in recruiting participants, and helps the youth feel welcome. It was recommended that we get traditional food but when we asked the youth, they requested pizza.

Facilitators

Recruit facilitators to lead the focus group, preferably someone who is:

- Muslim
- A woman for the girls' focus group, and a man for the boys' focus group
- Somewhat close in age to the youth (e.g. in their 20's or 30's)
- Experienced in facilitating groups, and ideally experienced in facilitating youth groups, as the language and the dynamics of discussion is different among those in this age group than for adults.

Challenges

The three main challenges encountered in the project that this kit is based on were:

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1) Recruiting youth for the sessions: Youth have very active lives, full of school, friends, sports, music lessons, part-time jobs, family responsibilities, and many other activities. It is difficult to entice them to spend an hour or so at a “meeting”, and it will likely take considerable effort to recruit participants for one or several focus groups, particularly if you want to ensure a good cross-section of participants. Providing lunch, or other incentives, may help encourage youth to attend.

2) Getting youth to return their consent forms: If the youth are under 18 they will require a consent form signed by a parent and by themselves as the participant. There will need to be follow-up to gather the permission slips, as these are easily lost or forgotten.

3) Working with the school system: Because they are responsible for the well-being of the students in their care, school systems often have elaborate procedures and regulations which can slow down the process of organizing the focus groups. It is important to allocate sufficient time for these delays and processes. In the case of our project, it took several months to arrange some of the focus groups, although others were organized very quickly.

In addition, those working in the school system, the principals, teachers and resource personnel working with students, are all extremely busy and often over-worked. Constant follow-up is often needed to remind them of the focus group project and to determine progress in gathering permission slips, etc.

Tools on the CD:

- Letter to school principals (Appendices B-1 and C-1)
- Project information sheet and consent form (Appendices B-4, B-5, B-6, B-7, B-8 and C-2, C-4, C-5)
- Facilitator guide (Appendices B-11 and C-7)
- Self-assessment questionnaire (Appendices B-10 and C-8)
- Framework graphic (Appendices B-3 and C-3)