PARLIAMENTARY HEARING EXERCISE (NA6E)

**Module**
Negotiations & Accountability

**Format**
Whole group exercise

**Purpose**
This activity contributes to the module learning objectives by allowing participants to practice using the negotiations and advocacy skills that they have learned throughout the session.

**Time Required**
- 75-90 minutes (15-20 minutes preparation, 35-40 minutes hearing, 10-20 minutes debrief and discussion)

**Activity Description**
This exercise provides an opportunity for participants to practice using the negotiations and advocacy skills that they have learned throughout the session in an interactive and lively mock parliamentary hearing. Each participant is assigned to play the role of a key stakeholder in the debate of a new piece of legislation being considered by the health committee of parliament. Participants work in teams with others playing the same role to develop a strategy, and then the entire group simulates the full scenario.

The exercise has four phases: Preparation by teams, statements by advocates, debate by parliamentarians, and a vote. Participants should be encouraged to be dramatic and somewhat exaggerated in their role-playing, and creative in developing their advocacy strategy, while also adhering to the structure of the exercise in order to maximize participation by all. This exercise is most successful with a group of participants who feel comfortable with each other and have developed some interpersonal rapport. In order for the exercise to function smoothly, the total group should be 14-40 participants.

**FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS**

**Step One: Assign participants into role-playing groups**

The participant instructions should be printed, separated into individual sheets, and distributed randomly among the group. The assignments should not be shared with the participants in advance, nor should participants have access to any assignments other than their own.
The five assignment categories are listed below, as well as the proportion of total participants who should be assigned into each group. Each group should have at least two people.

1) Advocates in favor: 25% of participants
2) Radical advocates: 5% of participants
3) Opposed advocates: 30% of participants
4) Leaning-supportive parliamentarians: 20% of participants
5) Leaning-opposed parliamentarians: 20% of participants

Additional Preparation

The facilitator should select one participant from either of the parliamentarian groups to be named chair of the health committee, and distribute the separate instructions for this person from the participant instructions. The chair will be responsible for facilitating the hearing itself. The facilitator should assign this role to an individual participant who is likely to enjoy the exercise and who will ensure that the hearing runs more or less according to time and structure, but who will not dominate the speaking time.

Participants who are assigned to be members of parliament should wear name badges that identify themselves as leaning-supportive or leaning-opposed. In a true advocacy scenario, many policymakers' overall opinions are known by advocates, and this knowledge helps them tailor their arguments and tactics.

Step Two: Allow teams to prepare their strategies

Each of the three groups of advocates is assigned a different color to identify themselves during the preparation. To ensure spontaneity and liveliness in the exercise, it is important that the groups do not know what roles other groups will play, or their strategies, before the mock hearing begins.

Using each group’s color name only, ask the groups to gather in separate rooms or corners of a large room. DO NOT publicly identify the groups by their position (for example, Opposed advocates, etc). The teams should be given 15-20 minutes to develop a strategy for their participation in the hearing. During this time, the participants who have the role of parliamentarians should write their affiliation on nametags, but are otherwise free to occupy the time as they wish. Check in with each group as they prepare for the hearing to ensure they understand the expectations and are preparing accordingly.

Step Three: Facilitate the hearing
Announce the beginning of the hearing. The facilitator should primarily observe the hearing, assuming that the participant named as chair of the health committee fulfills his or her responsibilities, but should monitor time and guide the chair as needed.

**Sample hearing agenda**

Call to order: 1 minute  
Testimony from advocates in favor: 5 minutes  
Testimony from advocates opposed: 5 minutes  
Parliamentary debate: 20-25 minutes  
Parliamentary vote: 5 minutes

The facilitator also has the option to introduce a “surprise” event at any time during the hearing exercise if he or she feels it is needed or would improve the exercise.

Possible surprise events to change the trajectory of the exercise:

- (If radical advocates are too disruptive): Radical advocates are sent to jail.  
- (If opposition is too strong): A foreign donor announces it will reimburse all import taxes paid on contraceptives, so no government resources are required.  
- (If support is too strong): A new budgetary analysis has been released showing that if this legislation is approved, funding for a child health program will have to be cut.  
- (If parliamentarians are being disruptive): Announce a cabinet reshuffle. Two parliamentarians have received reassignments to be the minister of sports and the minister of transport and must leave to begin their new duties immediately.  
- (Additional complicating factor): New information is released about a member of parliament whose spouse is an executive at the National Revenue Authority, which administers import taxes.

**Step Four: Debrief and discussion**

After the parliamentary vote has concluded, the exercise is complete. Ask the participants to share their experiences and discuss the value of the exercise.

Sample discussion questions

- Did you think this exercise captured the real-life experience of budget advocacy?  
- What surprised you about the events of the exercise?  
- Which group had the most challenging role to play, and why?  
- Did any participants use a tactic that you would like to incorporate into your real-life advocacy?

**Key Learning Concept(s)**
Responding to unpredictable and complex advocacy and negotiation situations; relative effectiveness of different advocacy strategies and messages.

Materials Needed

- Chairs and tables to arrange into a mock hearing room; nametags and pens for participants playing the role of parliamentarians

Associated Sessions

- What Next? Why Negotiation Matters in the Policy Process (NA1L)
- How Can Research Influence Negotiation? (NA2L)
- Negotiation Case Study (NA3E)

Required Preparation

- None.