



Operational Issues for Marriage Education Programs

How to Guide with Simple Operation Forms

Operational Issues for Marriage Education Programs

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This *How to Guide* is designed for anyone in the process of selecting a facility in which to offer a healthy marriage program. It is also for facilitators preparing to deliver a Healthy Marriage (HM) workshop. The goal of this guide is to provide concrete tips and tools that will help you prepare to deliver it. This guide was designed by an experienced team of workshop designers and facilitators and includes suggestions by healthy marriage practitioners.

To further clarify some of the operational issues, there are sample checklists which address technical needs, workshop supplies and selecting a location. There are also ideas for deciding the best layout for your room included at the end of this guide. The samples include direction on areas that many new programs overlook when planning. You can use this guide to direct and improve your program operations. Keep in mind that our suggestions are purposely generic to give a range of options. You will need to consider the factors that are unique to your program like location, budget and other factors.

It is widely known that many practitioners put great effort into preparing to deliver healthy marriage content and recruitment activities. However, for those who are new to delivering HM workshops, setting-up and managing the logistics can be equally demanding in terms of time, resources and preparation. A potential participant's first impression of your program can be the deciding factor in their ongoing involvement and willingness to recommend the program to others. Regardless of how helpful and well taught your program may be, neglecting basic factors like comfort, convenience and environment can negatively impact perceptions of and participation in your program. Remember that participants in your program have numerous demands on their time. Any effort to make your program more efficient increases

the likelihood of maintaining participants' interest.

Below are some operational issues that you may want to consider:

Scheduling

People are generally busy! They may work long hours, care for children all day or have other important commitments. As a result, you should be conscious of the time commitment you are expecting and set the schedule accordingly to maximize participation.

- Schedule program activities at times that are convenient. Those times are often going to be evenings or weekends.
- Ask potential participants, at time of sign up, intake or enrollment to indicate their specific schedule preferences including desired day and time. Although you can not please all of the people all the time, try to create a schedule that reflects the needs of the majority.
- Be aware of potential scheduling conflicts like holidays, religious celebrations and children's summer and winter vacations. Also take advantage of scheduling opportunities such as the start of other service programs like Early Head Start programs that could dove-tail nicely with your HM Workshop. Be flexible and willing to reschedule workshops as needed or schedule workshops in between, or concurrent with, major calendar events to maximize participation.
- Make sure that participants have enough time to arrive to your program. Keep in mind that they may be coming from work or other prior commitments. For example starting a weekday evening workshop at 6 or 6:30pm may be

better than 5 or 5:30pm. In order to allow some flexibility, you can hold food time or social ice-breaking sessions in the beginning to allow participants to get there without missing any of the important content. Additionally, the food and social times can serve as an added benefit and motivate participants to get to the workshop early and on time. This is a good strategy to maintain group cohesion without appearing too strict.

Selecting a Location

When selecting a location, consider whether the space is welcoming, easy to navigate and easy to get to. Also consider if the space is value neutral and/or appropriate for the target audience you are attempting to reach. Imagine what it would be like to walk through a large building complex where it is difficult to find the workshop space. For many it would signal them to turn around and go back home. If any aspect of the space feels intimidating or inconvenient, it may deter participants from proceeding.

With all the options for where a program can be offered, it can be difficult to narrow your list. Here are 5 potentially good ideas for locations to conduct a workshop.

1. Community Center
2. Public or private school space
3. Library
4. Book Store
5. Non profit Community Space

Use the Selecting a Location Checklist located at the end of this document when visiting a potential workshop location.

- Operating a secular marriage education program in a house of worship might also discourage participation from individuals or couples that are

not of that faith.

- Holding your program activities in a facility that houses substance abuse or mental health or government assistance programs might also carry negative connotations and deter some participants.
- Think about whether the space you are using provides sufficient privacy for participants who may be uneasy about attending a marriage education program to begin with.
- Try to locate a space that is accessible to people with disabilities.

Transportation

Some of your participants will have vehicles and others will rely on other means of transportation like public transit. Make sure that participants have clear directions to your location. Make sure those without vehicles are clear about other convenient modes of transportation.

- For drivers: Make sure there is sufficient parking available nearby. Ideally this parking should be free.
- For public transportation users: Make sure they have detailed information on bus and train stops/routes.
- Be sure that whoever answers your phone can provide good directions and information for those who are driving or using public transportation. Also be sure people know how to get from public transportation stops to the program site. You can keep public transportation schedules on hand for attendees. It may be a good idea to include a map insert with directions to the workshop site in

mailings or marketing materials.

- For low-income participants: Consider subsidizing transportation expenses by providing bus tickets, train tickets or gas vouchers for each session. Remember this when planning your budget.

Childcare

Providing childcare on-site may be the most helpful and convenient incentive for participants. This can however raise budgetary and liability issues. If you decide to pursue this option, think about some of the following points:

- Consider partnering with agencies in your community that already offer children's programs. A few options are the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, faith-based groups and non-profit childcare providers. These partners may allow you to use their facility to host your workshop or if they are nearby can offer drop-off childcare services.
- Think about what ages you will include and make sure that your programming is appropriate for that group. For example, programs for older children and teens require very different staffing needs and resources than those serving infants.
- You can also provide childcare vouchers or reimbursement so that participants can secure their own childcare. This is particularly important if you are working with disadvantaged couples or individuals.
- When planning your program operations, identify childcare providers in your community that offer high-quality services, extended hours or reduced rates. Provide that information to participants

during registration as well highlighting it in marketing materials.

Also, consider whether the proposed space will be consistently available at the times you want to offer your program. Abruptly moving your program to a different location partway through a workshop series may confuse and inconvenience participants.

- Find out whether any other groups may be able to reserve the space you are considering or whether any other programs' space needs might take precedence over yours.
- Make sure that you will be able to access the space during evenings or weekends. Be sure to also find out if there are strict policies on when participants can arrive or must vacate the space. This may impact participants who need to come early or stay late or want to hang out after a workshop to socialize.
- You may want to consider paying at least a nominal fee to the managers of your space and/or consider signing a formal contract or agreement guaranteeing your rights to the space at certain times.

Décor and Comfort

Consider whether your space is equally welcoming to men, women and couples. You should make sure that any literature, posters and other decorations in your space appeal to both genders. It's also best if they depict both two parent families and single parents. You may need to bring decorations with you to achieve this kind of balance.

Given that participants may be spending extended periods of time in your space, make sure it is comfortable. Sufficient and comfortable seating, a

mild temperature and minimal background noise will go a long way in promoting comfort. If you are working with pregnant women, take extra measures to ensure comfortable seating. Use extra pillows, blankets, plush love seats or other cozy amenities to maximize comfort and relaxation. The way you configure your room is also important. A traditional classroom setup with desks or chairs in rows may appear too academic and not very inviting. A circular setup will allow for a panoramic view. With large furniture, this setup may not be possible. Select your setup based on what is reasonable for the room and furniture size and type. Review the samples near the end of this tip sheet for ideas on layout.

Signage

Make sure that your participants can find your program space and that they know when they are in the right place.

- Decide beforehand who will create and post signage before participants arrive.
- Place signs in parking lots and on the appropriate building entrance. Give further directions inside the building directing people to the correct room. You can never have too many signs!
- In addition, signage should clearly point out where your program is located while still being discreet and protecting the privacy of your participants.
- Make sure the information on your signs matches the information included in your other materials. For example, if your marketing pieces advertised “Couples Workshop” but your signs say “PAIRS” because that is the curriculum you are using participants may be confused.

Program Materials and Equipment

It can be very frustrating to participate in a program or activity where the facilitator is not prepared—remember participants are giving you their time out of their busy schedules and are making the workshop a priority. Participants should not have to wait for their facilitator to get ready. See the Technical Needs checklist at the end of this document for suggestions on things to consider when preparing for a workshop.

- Set up equipment about an hour before participants arrive and be sure to understand how to operate it in advance.
- Test equipment. If you are using anything that plugs in to an electrical outlet (speakers, laptops, LCD Projectors, overhead projectors, DVD players, etc.) test it before participants arrive.
- Have extra light bulbs, batteries, extension cords, power strips, ink pens, paper, workshop materials and other supplies on hand. Having a portable supply closet or bin on hand will be very handy if anything unexpected happens.
- Pre-determine who will be responsible for copying any handout materials. Also delegate who will pick up and transport equipment and materials.

Breaks and Refreshments

Breaks and refreshments are two simple ways to create a welcoming environment. The budgetary requirements of providing food are minimal but the benefits are countless.

- Be sure to include breaks if the program is longer than one hour. Studies on adult learning show that it is difficult for most people to focus on content for longer than this. Remaining stationary

may become physically uncomfortable for some participants.

- Providing refreshments will certainly add to the comfort of the participants in your program. Many will be coming directly from work and will appreciate a meal.
- Be conscious of people's dietary needs. Remember that some people are vegetarians, diabetic, have food restrictions or have common food allergies to foods like gluten and peanuts.
- If you don't have a refreshment budget, contact local businesses that may be willing to donate refreshments. Local businesses are often eager to be associated with positive community efforts. For example some bakeries give food away to non profit organizations at the end of the day. Identifying these types of programs will be helpful.
- In order to stretch your resources, think about purchasing food in bulk from discount "big box stores." Purchase non-perishable items such as chips, crackers or snack packs so that you can use them for a future workshop and not waste them. Don't forget to have napkins, cups, plates and utensils on hand as well.
- Designate someone to purchase, deliver and set out refreshments at the program location. This can be a single staff person's responsibility or can rotate between staff and will allow you to focus on welcoming your participants and setting up program materials.
- Cleanliness is important to remember when serving food to your participants. Here is a simple

rule to start with, keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot. Food borne microorganisms grow at temps between 41°F and 135°F which is known as the temperature danger zone. If food is held in the "danger zone" for more than four hours it must be thrown out. Also, be sure to wash hands with soap and water before handling food. When preparing food, clean and sanitize all work surfaces, equipment and utensils after each task.

- Make sure to have easily accessible trash cans and waste receptacles on hand especially when refreshments are housed in the same place as the workshop. You do not want to disrupt the environment that you worked so hard on making comfortable with trash or strong food aromas or odors.

For more information, please check out the following checklists for issues discussed in the document:

1. Technical Needs Checklist
2. Workshop Supplies Checklist
3. Selecting a Location
4. Sample Room Layout (Small room)
5. Sample Room Layout (Medium sized room)

Program Facilitator Technical Needs Checklist

Tips

- *DVD Players:* If you use DVD video clips during your workshops, it may be easier to have a player that is separate from your computer. This will allow a smoother transition between the PowerPoint slides and the video clips.
- *Projector Positioning:* Make sure your projector screen is positioned where everyone will be able to see the slides and images clearly regardless of where they sit.
- *On site Video Specialist:* Large gatherings involving twenty or more couples may require an audio-visual technician to be on site to assist with the technical aspects of the workshop for the duration of the workshop. Having this type of resource on hand can give newer facilitator(s) greater peace of mind.
- *On site Audio Specialist:* If the facility where the workshop is being conducted has its own PA system, it is advisable to meet with the person responsible for its operation. Do this well in advance in order to coordinate the technical details for your workshop and, perhaps, even do a test run, if possible.
- *Speakers:* The volume level of most laptop speakers is usually not adequate for workshops. There are amplified speakers available that can reinforce the audio portion for the video clips. Use the headphone jack from the laptop to boost the sound and make sure your volume is boosted on the laptop.
- *Power Outlets:* Notice where power outlets are located in relationship to where the projector, laptop and speakers are going to be positioned. Allow plenty of room for the projected image to fit properly onto the screen.
- *Cables and Cords:* Make sure you have duct tape and/or a rug to place over the extension cords so as to not create a hazard.
- *Facilitator Space:* Allow plenty of room for the facilitator to move around.
- *Plan B:* Whenever working with electronic equipment bring a backup or have a Plan B in the event of a malfunction. For example, if you rely on video clips, be prepared to do a skit or role play of a scene in the event that the video does not work. Having flip charts or another low tech backup plan is always worthwhile. Also it incorporates different ways of learning and reinforcing the message.

Here is a checklist of technical equipment that is generally needed to complete a marriage workshop.

LIST of EQUIPMENT if using PowerPoint slides	
	Projector
	Screen
	Laptop computer
	Cable to connect laptop to projector (make sure proper cable is available based on the type of computer you will use for example a Macintosh (Mac) vs. a Personal Computer (PC) which runs Microsoft Windows.
	Speakers
	Speaker cables
	Extension cords
	Duct tape or rug to cover cables

Additional equipment may be needed depending on the following three factors:

1. the size and acoustics of your space
2. the ability of the facilitator(s) to vocally project
3. the number of couples in attendance at the workshops

LIST of EQUIPMENT if using DVDs/VHS tapes	
	TV/Monitor or Projector/Screen
	DVD player
	Cable to connect DVD player to the projector
	Remote control for projector
	Microphone (wireless is recommended)
	Mixer/amplifier
	Sound engineer
	Extra batteries for remote control and microphone as needed

Disclaimer

Technical equipment varies and is constantly being updated. Be sure to familiarize yourself with this equipment in advance.

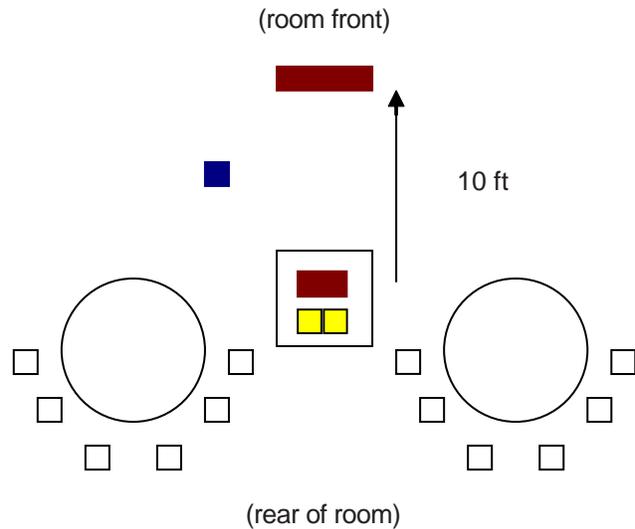
Workshop Supplies Checklist

	<p>Flip Chart or white board For displaying, summarizing, underscoring ideas generated during brainstorming</p>
	<p>Dry erase pens, markers or chalk To record ideas. Use different colors to help differentiate points.</p>
	<p>Masking tape To hang individual flip chart pages.</p>
	<p>Pens/Pencils For participants to write down notes, questions and ideas</p>
	<p>Scratch paper For participants to write down notes, questions and ideas</p>
	<p>Phone list For participants so that they can reach your office and its staff with questions and concerns</p>
	<p>Community resource list For participants to obtain community information on a variety of program regarding various issues like Domestic Violence (DV), substance abuse, food banks, etc. It is advisable to give the resource list to all participants so that no one is singled out, feels stigmatized or endangered, in the case of DV, for wanting additional contact information.</p>
	<p>Curriculum materials Manuals/workbooks, slides and other curriculum related resources</p>
	<p>Technical equipment To play clips and project slides. Including but not limited to overhead projector, laptop computer, LCD projector, power strip, etc.</p>
	<p>Technical equipment supports</p>
	<p>Tables and chairs Can also include pillows, throws, cushions, table cloths to make the space more inviting and comfortable.</p>
	<p>Emergency supplies</p>

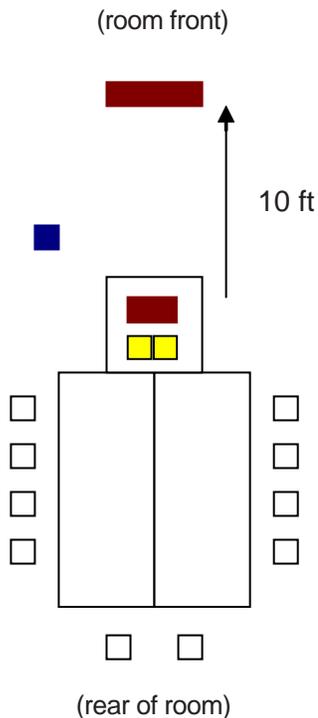
Sample Room Layout/Diagram

Small Group (6-18 people)

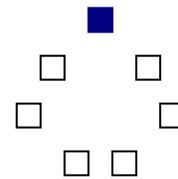
- Three variations using two 6' rounds, two or one 4x8 rectangular tables.
- Small table to hold projector, laptop and speakers to reinforce audio portion for DVD clips. Power bar and extension cord will be required.
- Screen in front of the room at least 10 feet from projector.
- Single facilitator can be on either side of screen
- Snacks and exit to either side of room or in the back of room.



Preferred Set-up (12 people/6 couples)



Variation 1 (10 people/5 couples)



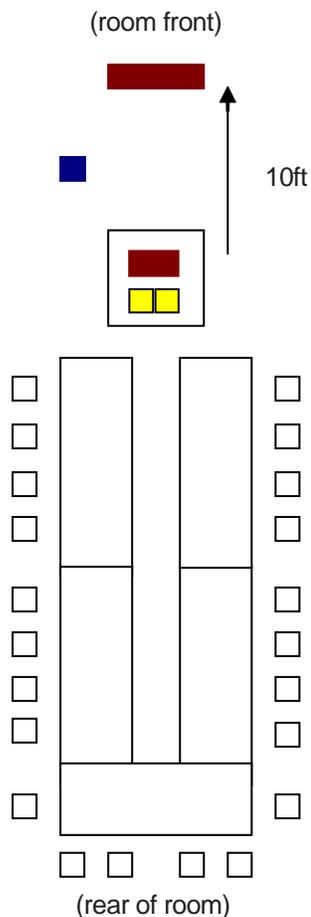
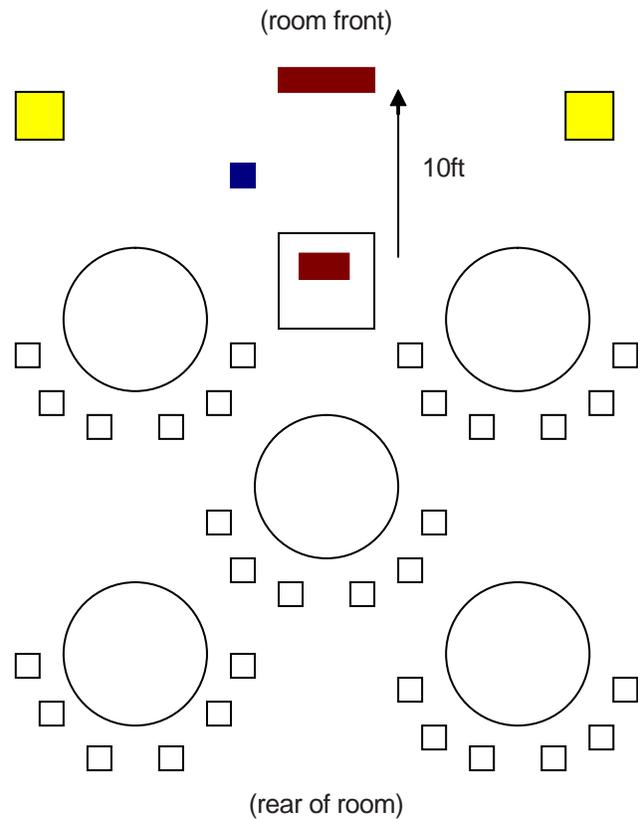
Variation 2 (6 people/3 couples)

- Use of curriculum that does not require projection.
- No tables available. Chairs only using clip boards.

Sample Room Layout/Diagram

Medium Size Group (18-30 people)

- Three variations using 6' rounds or a series of 4x8 rectangular tables depending on the size of the group.
- Small table to hold projector and laptop. Power bar and extension cord will be required.
- Will need amplified speakers on tripod stands to reinforce audio portion for DVD clips.
- Screen at least 10 feet from projector in front of the room
- Single facilitator can be on either side of screen. A microphone may be necessary depending on how well the facilitator projects and the acoustics of the room itself.

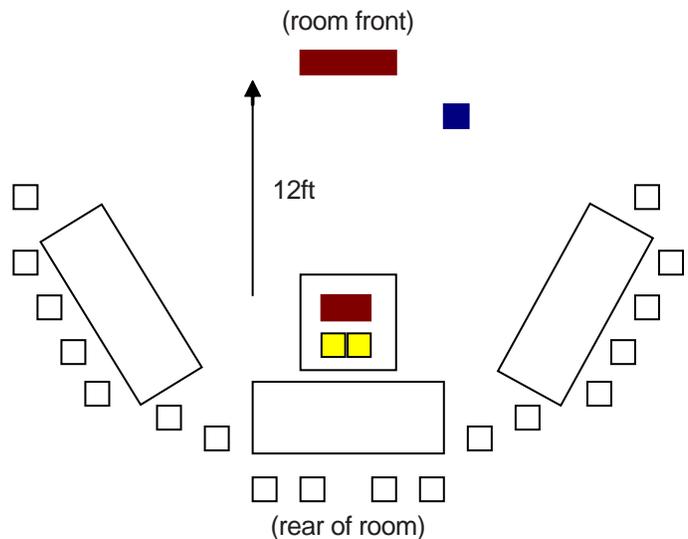


Variation 1 (22 people/11 couples)

For rooms that are long and narrow

Preferred Set-up (30 people/15 couples)

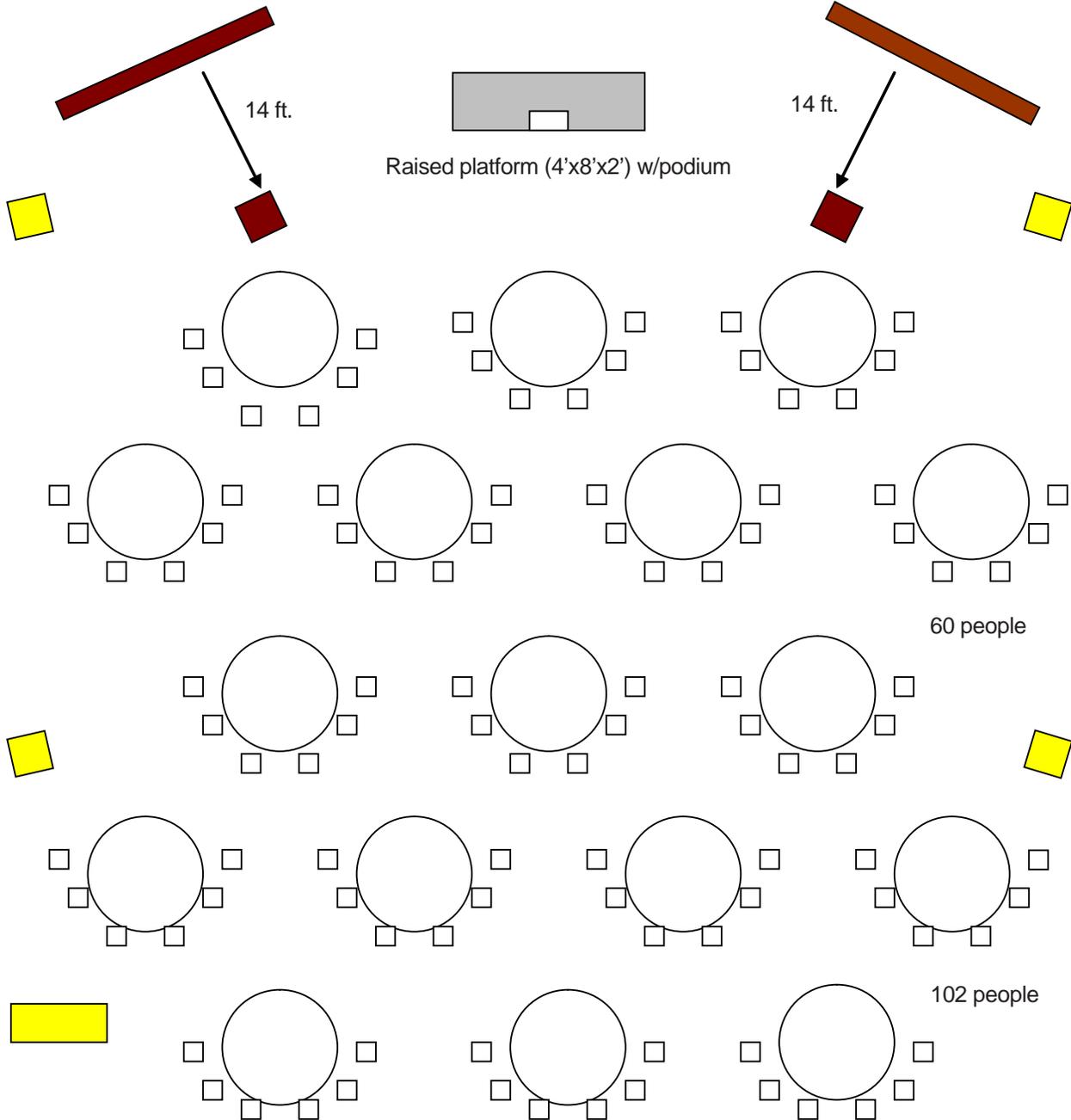
Note: Additional rounds are recommended for gatherings of 30+ participants.



Variation 2 (18 people/9 couples)

For rooms that are more square in shape and rounds are not available.

Sample Room Layout/Diagram



Large Groups (60 - 100 people)

- Use of 8 ft rounds with six chairs set in a semi-circle
- Two facilitators using microphones (one male and one female)
- One table for projector with large screen (8 ft) on one side positioned diagonally
- Two amplified (perhaps four) speakers on tripod stands depending on room acoustics
- Snacks and exit to either side of room or in the back of room.

Huge Groups (100+ people)

- Recommend an on site A/V person for gatherings of 100+. Other suggestions:
- Two facilitators with on 4'x8' raised platform
 - Four speakers on tripod stands
 - Two projectors positioned diagonally
 - Snacks and exit to either side of room or in the back of room.

Workshop Location Assessment List

Determining the location of your marriage education workshop is important. The following checklist can be used to assess specific areas of a potential workshop site and record your comments.

Location: What is the distance from the majority of your target audience? Is the location easy to find?
Notes:
Parking: How much parking is available? Is it convenient and free?
Notes:
Lighting: Is the parking area well lit enough to be safe during evening workshops?
Notes:
Public Transportation: Is the location near a bus, subway or light rail train station? Can your participants afford it? Would offering subsidies help to maximize participation?
Notes:
Quality: Is the neighborhood and the building clean, safe, inviting and familiar to your audience?
Notes:

Childcare:

Does your target audience need it? How will you find out? What is the age range of children to be cared for? Are there any skills-based or character curricula for the children to do while their parents are participating in the workshop? Is there space available for it near where the workshop will be held? How is the room equipped?

Notes:

Cost:

Can you afford the location? Do they charge a flat fee, hourly rate or take donations? What forms of payment do they accept?

Notes:

Workshop Space:

Will the room accommodate the number of participants expected as well as refreshments and registration areas? Does the space offer any privacy if couples or individuals are filling out inventories or surveys? Are there enough tables and chairs available? Will the space need amplified sound (microphone and speakers)?

Notes:

Electricity:

Are there ample outlets in the workshop space? Will you need power boxes and extension cords?

Notes:

Accessibility:

Can the workshop space be accessed in advance of set up? Is it accessible to handicapped participants? Is the area secure?

Notes:

Cleanup:

Who is responsible for cleaning up after a workshop? If it's workshop staff that is responsible, are cleaning supplies available for your use?

Notes:

Food and Refreshments:

Are there kitchen facilities onsite? Are there appliances like refrigerator, stove, coffeemaker, toaster, microwave and an ice machine available if needed?

Notes:

Restroom facilities:

Are there men's and women's restrooms near the workshop room? Are they cleaned and stocked with soap, paper towels, toilet tissue and other supplies?

Notes:

Advance promotion:

Will directions and a map be needed for inclusion in advanced promotion of the workshops? Will other details about the location need to be included in advertising?

Notes: