

*problem  
solving  
for  
better  
health<sup>®</sup>  
(psbh<sup>®</sup>)*

*participant's  
handbook*

*Dreyfus  
Health  
Foundation*



**introduction, mission,  
understanding the process**

- **step one:**  
**define the problem** (nature, size, cause, contributing factors)
- **step two:**  
**prioritize the problem** (take a realistic piece of the problem)
- **step three:**  
**define a solution** (ask a good question)
- **step four:**  
**create a good action plan** (4 main components: why, what, how, evaluation)
- **step five:**  
**take action**

**conclusions**

# *introduction*

Welcome to the Problem Solving for Better Health® (PSBH®) process. You are now joining the ever-growing family of health problem solvers around the world. To date, PSBH® has been implemented in the following countries: Belarus, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cameroon, China, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Ghana, Guyana, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Lithuania, Mexico, Nigeria, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine, the United States of America, and Zambia.

# *mission*

The mission of the PSBH® program is to assist you in developing small-scale, problem-solving projects that will directly benefit many people. PSBH® participants are encouraged to generate new ideas and methods to more effectively utilize the resources that are currently available to them to help solve specific health problems in their areas.

The PSBH® philosophy is that, despite worldwide shortages of financial resources for health, front-line health workers and other interested individuals can better utilize the already available resources to create a far greater impact on local health issues than is generally achieved. The PSBH® process trains you to strengthen your skills at finding and developing new and innovative ways through which you can improve health individually. During the workshops, you will be encouraged to work with other participants and facilitators to learn from them, as well as to share your ideas and experiences. The goals of the program are to stimulate a series of better-health projects based on individual responsibility and action and to create a collaborative network of small, self-sustaining, and lasting health projects. We are convinced that through such efforts, better health can be brought to more people throughout the world. Importantly, it is already happening. You can make this much more possible!

# *understanding the process*

The PSBH® process is a simple, step-by-step problem-solving procedure. During the workshop (and throughout this handbook) you will be taken through these steps. Once you have mastered the process, you can apply it to solving problems in all areas of personal and professional activity, not just health.

***The first objective is to define and state the problem clearly.*** This may not be as simple as it sounds. It is very important to clarify both to yourself and others the problem you wish to address. All too often, people are badly misled and vital resources are wasted in seeking wrong and unhelpful solutions to incorrect problems because these problems were not clearly defined at the outset.

***You need to be clear as to the exact nature, size, and cause of the problem, as well as to any contributing factors and whether in fact you believe it can be solved.*** If you do not know these things, you cannot start to solve a problem and will not know when it is solved.

You may have more than one problem that needs a solution. Do not let this worry you. During the workshop, you will be assisted by your facilitators and other participants in your small group to narrow down your list to just one solvable problem. Then you will begin the process of defining your problem in very specific and clear terms.

***Here is an example from a recent workshop:***

A participant's major concern was the large number of pregnant women who were found to be positive for syphilis upon routine testing during antenatal consultations that she conducted in her clinic. She concluded that the disease was a major health problem in her city. She first stated her problem as follows: "There are too many cases of syphilis among pregnant women in X city." Let's critique her problem statement. This problem statement only provides a vague idea of the problem she wishes to solve and what the solution might be, i.e. reducing the number of cases of women with syphilis in that city. "Too many" is a vague term. It doesn't tell us anything specific. We don't know how big the problem really is. Are 100 women affected? 1,000? 15,000? More? If the city has a large population, say 500,000, and there are 150,000 women of child-bearing age, and a 10% prevalence, there could be as many as 15,000 such women. One health worker simply couldn't find or treat all such women. It's a huge task.

Bearing in mind the first cardinal principle of PSBH<sup>®</sup> - that of utilizing already available local resources to solve health problems - she would indeed be a very fortunate and very busy health worker if she had available to her enough resources to tackle this huge problem by herself. It is a large problem requiring a large amount of resources.

# *step 1*

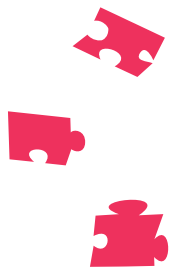
## *define the problem*

- *nature*
- *size*
- *cause*
- *contributing factors*

## step 2

### prioritize the problem

take a  
realistic  
piece  
of the  
problem



Rather than give up because she could not tackle such a large problem with the resources immediately available to her, the participant was taught to look again at the problem and redefine it from the point of view of what it is that she, as an individual, could begin to do to solve it. **Here, the second cardinal principle of PSBH<sup>®</sup> becomes applicable - tackling the problem piece by piece - taking small, realistic, and manageable pieces, solving each piece before taking another.**

In this example, the participant now began to look at the problem of syphilis among the pregnant women attending the antenatal clinic where she worked. She was thus narrowing her problem to focus on an area in which she could have an influence herself, using resources that she had available to her. She was taking a small, manageable piece of a large problem.

Taking this approach, she was able to restate her problem more precisely as follows:

There is a high prevalence (15%) of syphilis among women attending clinic B in X city.

She might add:

Last year we saw 2,000 pregnant women in our clinic and 300 cases of syphilis. Fifteen babies with congenital syphilis were born.

Now we know the nature and size of the problem. We also know the cause - put most simply, it is the microbe that causes syphilis. But the microbe is only one small part of the syphilis story. Critical contributing factors are the women's lack of knowledge about the discovery and its transmission, as well as the importance of detecting it prior to pregnancy.

Having stated her problem clearly, the participant now was able to assess its priority. Because of the health consequence of the problem to both mother and child, this was clearly a high priority in her clinic. There were other problems in the clinic, but this was an important one - **and one she could do something about!**

By tackling this piece of the problem in women attending her clinic, she would be laying the basis for a city-wide solution later on.

**Having defined your problem well and determined whether it can be solved, the next step is to begin to define a solution.** There are several types of solutions you may want to consider.

- education
- biomedical
- psychological
- economic
- microenterprise
- legislative
- job training
- environmental

**Now that you have identified your problem and type of solution (or combinations thereof), put that solution into the form of a good question.** Your question should include all the elements of the following format:

will doing *what*, with *whom*,  
*where*, and for *how long*  
achieve the *desired objective*?

In the example given, the participant worked hard to state her problem and her solution according to this guideline. Here is her good question:

"Will a program of health education about the dangers of syphilis in pregnancy, as well as the need for early detection and treatment, for 20 pregnant first trimester women per month, attending reproductive and maternal health clinic X for antenatal check-ups, reduce the number of babies born with congenital syphilis by 50% in two years?"

This is a good question. It is relevant, well-defined, and is answerable. It fits into our format: Will doing **what** (a program of health education on syphilis, as well as on the need for early detection and treatment in pregnancy), with **whom** (20 pregnant first trimester women per month, attending clinic X for antenatal check-ups), **where** (local clinic), and for **how long** (monthly groups of 20, for two years) achieve the **desired objective** (to reduce the incidence of syphilis in newborns by 50%)?

*step 3*

*define  
a  
solution*

*ask a  
good  
question*



# step 3

## define a solution

### ask a good question



The following are some examples of good questions developed at PSBH® workshops around the world:

- ? Will a program about the dangers of smoking involving the joint activities of the fire and police departments, as well as all the school children in district X of Warsaw, Poland, reduce the number of people who smoke in that community by 20% over the next year?
- ? Would a public health education campaign carried out by eighth grade students at school X in Bartica, Guyana, reduce the number of cases of diarrhea among children less than five years old by 40% over the next year?
- ? Would a two-year program of job training (hairdressers, carpenters, ice-cream sellers, apprentice seamstresses, and shoeshine boys) organized by the Business Advisory Council in Cape Coast, Ghana, for 100 young people (male and female) between the ages of 12 and 16, reduce the incidence of teenage pregnancy by 30%?
- ? Would a series of regular neighborhood clean-up days in neighborhood X in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, involving at least 50 adults and school children every month for the next year, decrease the amount of dangerous waste in the community and reduce the number of injuries to children by 50% over the next year?

As you formulate your question and begin to give the details of your solution, **there are certain priorities that you should always keep in mind. You have to decide what is most important for you to do to solve the problem. Try to stay focused on what will do the most people the most good - bearing in mind the optimization of the use of available resources.**

Quite often, problems that we face have already been encountered by others before us. So before setting about defining your solutions, find out as much as you can about what is already known regarding your chosen problem. Has someone else solved the problem before you in your area, your country, or in another country? Find out what did and did not work well for others. To avoid reinventing the wheel, do not be ashamed to learn from their experiences. This can prevent you from making the same mistakes they made and enable you to make real progress in solving your problem.

At this stage, you now need to make some specific plans for tackling the problem you have identified, defined, and stated in the form of a question. You need to organize your thoughts, provide the details of your solution, chart the actions you will take, and list the resources that you will need to implement the type of solution you have chosen. You will also need to communicate your ideas and plan of action to all interested parties to inform them and/or to enlist their assistance. **You need, therefore, to prepare and write a project plan - a blueprint of your problem-solving project.**

**Your plan should not be theoretical. It should be a practical, organizational tool to help you clarify your thinking and planning.** It also should be a communication tool that will help let others know what you are thinking and planning to do, with whom, and for how long, to achieve the desired objective! It should state how you will implement your plan. In sum, it should provide the details of your solution. It also should provide a means of listing the resources that you have available and those that you might require in addition - needs which you can communicate to those who can assist you.

**Finally, and most important, your plan should state how you will evaluate the impact of your work.** It should include how you will tell if your project has succeeded and what impact it has had on people. In many ways, this plan is the most important product of the workshop and the PSBH® process.

**You will be expected to have written the outline of such a plan by the time the workshop ends so that you may begin to act immediately when you return to your work.**

**why** **A statement of the solvable problem.**  
**Background to the problem.** This should include a simple statement of what the problem is (preferably in one sentence). Also, state briefly the origin or history of the problem, how it has come about, and how it affects the health of the subjects of your study/project. If you have access to statistics or previous work/studies/ research done on the same problem, you should refer to them to strengthen your point. State why you wish to solve the problem and how your solution will improve the health of your subjects.

## step 4

### create a good action plan

### 4 main components

- why
- what
- how
- evaluation

# step 4

## create a good action plan

### 4 main components

why ●

what ●

how ●

evaluation ●

**what** A restatement of the solvable problem posed as a **GOOD QUESTION**. The **OBJECTIVES** of your work or what it is you wish to achieve. It is important to try to be as specific and creative as possible. It isn't enough to say you will give a series of ten lectures. You also have to say how you will make this series effective: when and where will you hold the lectures; who will be your target audience; what you hope to convey, etc. Finally, state what you have to achieve. As already described, frame your work around your question using the following format:

Will doing **what**, with **whom**, **where**, and for **how long** achieve the **desired objective**?

**how** The **METHODOLOGY** (how, what will be done, content, frequency, duration, where) that is to be used to tackle the problem. In this section, you should describe details of your solution. You will need to provide more information about the people with whom you are working and what you will be doing. For example, how will you pick the people with whom you will work? If you do a survey of 1,000 people, how will you choose whom you survey - every tenth house? If you use volunteers, how will you select and train them? If you are doing an educational program, how many sessions will you have and what kind of teaching materials will you use? If you are planning to reduce the amount of garbage in your community and will be using volunteers to accomplish this, what jobs will the volunteers actually be doing? How will you get community members to volunteer? How often will they do it? If you are trying to increase community participation in health projects, how will you convince the community members to join in? Will you use social events? Will you use flyers? How will you distribute the flyers? The more details you provide about each step of your project, the better.

**evaluation** How will you measure or **EVALUATE** the impact or effectiveness of your project? What is the most important thing to measure? This is a very important part of what you need to do. If you cannot measure the effect of what you have done, you will never know if you have solved the problem or not. You will need to be honest and self-critical in your evaluation. Do not be afraid to say if you have failed to achieve your objective. Use this as a learning process so that you and others will not make the same mistakes in the future.

**Another very important part of the methodology or your plan of action is a listing of all the facilities and resources you will need to complete your project.** You know at this point that you need to think about what local resources there are for you to use. This includes human resources as well as physical supplies and natural resources. Try to include everything you will need in this part of your plan.

*\*An “endpoint” is just a term for your specific objective. Some examples: # of babies born with congenital syphilis; # of teenage pregnancies; # of smokers*

The chart below is an example of a way you might organize what resources you have available and those which you may require.

resources required

	<i>have</i>	<i>need</i>
<i>1. personnel</i>		
<i>2. equipment</i>		
<i>3. printing</i>		
<i>4. space</i>		
<i>5. ....</i>		

*"cost"*

You might find that some of the resources you will need are currently unavailable. You should list the resources you don't have and discuss them with your facilitators and the other participants in the workshop. It might be possible for one or more of these people to come up with the needed resources. Your job is to think creatively about how you can procure what you need, and whom you can contact in this regard.

It is also important for you to put together a schedule of when the various steps in your project should take place. You should try to be realistic when estimating how long each step should take - but also think positively! Keep in mind the following questions when writing your schedule or timeline

- When will the various steps in the planned process take place?**
- Who is responsible for what, and when are they responsible for it?**
- When will the project be completed?:**

The more specific you are now, the better. The following is one example of a timeline in the format of a flowchart. There are other formats that you can use that are equally good.

## step 4

What is the measure of success or failure of your solution to the problem?

*what is the endpoint?\**

- *primary endpoint,*
- *secondary endpoint?*

# step 4

## create a good action plan

### 4 main components

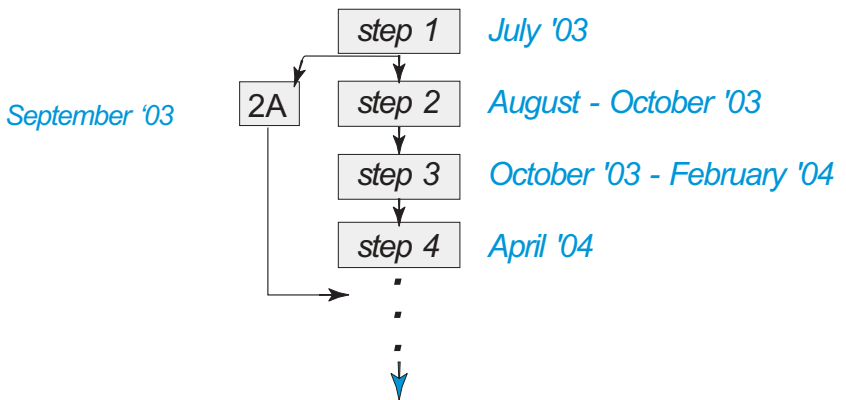
why ●

what ●

how ●

evaluation ●

### flow chart



✓ Remember to put a title and your name and address on the start of your action plan. After evaluation, you should also add a list of the facilities and resources you have and will need for your project, and a schedule or timeline of the steps you will take to implement your project.

✓ Remember to include in your plan a means through which you and others can measure the effectiveness of your project in the weeks and months to come. Ask yourself how you will be best able to measure the results of your project so you will have an accurate record of its overall effectiveness.

Remember that the PSBH® workshop is run with the firm, unshakable belief that **individuals can, and do, make a difference.**



nyone who thinks that he or she is too small to make a difference has never been alone in a room with a mosquito.

Your job now is to return to your community and put your project into action. Making it happen will require all your skills and energy.

## *think small*

We often get discouraged that we can't solve all our problems at once - perhaps with one grand, single stroke. **However, we will achieve better health for all if we begin with the small problems or pieces of problems. Once they are solved, the bigger problems will be easier to solve ... and may now be smaller than they were before!**

## *the important thing is to take action!*

Remember that your local PSBH<sup>®</sup> facilitators are only a phone call, fax, letter, or email away and they want to hear from you. If you run into problems, contact your facilitator or a fellow workshop member. Your facilitator will make a point of following up on your project and helping you if possible. Do not be a stranger. No participant of a PSBH<sup>®</sup> workshop ever needs to feel alone against a mountain of difficulties.

**I**f you start with a small problem, big problems become easier to solve.

**G**enius is perseverance in disguise.

# *step 5*

## *take action!*



# *conclusions*

## psbh<sup>®</sup> key concepts

- innovation
- simplicity
- clarity
- process
- excellence
- people first!
- action
- no excuses are acceptable!



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