Tips for Using and Answering Questions

• Asking them:
  – Plan them; know what you are going to ask and when in your presentation you are going to do so.
  – Know the purpose of each question. Are you eliciting information or an opinion?
  – Go from general questions to more specific ones.
  – Confine the questions to one topic area at a time.
  – Ask short, clear questions that are easy to understand.
  – Ask the group first, individuals second.
  – Do not interrupt a person who is responding to a question.

• Answering them:
  – Listen for both intent (what is meant) and content (what is being asked).
  – Acknowledge each question; repeat or paraphrase each to show that you understand or get clarification.
  – Try to answer completely and accurately. Address answer to the whole audience; do not focus on only the questioner, but verify the questioner’s satisfaction.
  – Avoid these behaviors when answering questions:
    • Being unresponsive; do not ignore anybody.
    • Showing that you think the question is inappropriate or stupid.
    • Diverting the question. If at all possible, answer the questions as they come up.
    • Going off on a tangent. Do not say, “This reminds of a time…” and tell a 10-minute war story. By the time you finish, nobody will remember the question.
    • Treating two questions as one. Even if two people ask similar questions, answer each separately.