

Effective Meetings



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Disclaimer

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As an executive member or as an individual board member,
you should be able to answer the question:

“What are we going to accomplish?”
before any and all meetings.

There have to be reasons for meeting or “Why Meet?”

Reasons for Ineffective Meetings

Many meetings waste a lot of time. Even the best meetings are not as productive as they could be. Some common reasons why meetings fail to accomplish their objectives are described below:

Poor Leadership

- A meeting often is dominated by a few members and others are excluded. The chairperson must manage such situations, allowing for input from all.

Lack of Preparation

- A meeting with no specific objectives, no background information on items where decisions need to be made or a lack of direction frustrates those in attendance, leaving them without a feeling of accomplishment.

Timing

- Poor timing can result in low attendance, and insufficient information available for the meeting. Ample time prior to each meeting allows members to plan and prepare for the meeting.

Uninterested Members

- Members who are unaware of the long-term goals of the association or have not been oriented often become uninterested. Responsibility within the group helps to involve these people and gives them a feeling of importance.

Disruptive Members

- People who are not involved in responsibilities of the organization often seek attention by developing disruptive behaviour. The chairperson should manage these behaviours and attempt to direct this energy productively.

Environment

- The physical environment has an impact on the productivity of any meeting. Some seating arrangements and table shapes encourage free and open participation, while others inhibit it. Find the most suitable environment for your association through experimentation.

Tradition

- Ritual and tradition keep many meetings as they presently are. Meetings are held at a customary time and place, whether or not there is a need for a meeting.

This handbook will suggest ways to solve these problems so your meetings will become more effective.

Checklist

Complete this checklist to determine which areas need work.

Our meetings:

- ☐ are planned beforehand by the chairperson and executive members
- ☐ have clear written agendas, distributed in advance
- ☐ start and end on time
- ☐ usually accomplish the original purpose
- ☐ allow equal involvement from all members

Need more help?

Contact your Community Development Coordinator.

Types of Meetings

In productive organizations, meetings are of distinctive types. All meetings should have specific purposes for being held and specific tasks to be performed by the members. However, one meeting may include several different types within its structure. The different types of meetings are as follows:

Informational: The purpose here is to share information such as facts, data, decisions, or policies.

Planning: The purpose of the planning meeting is to discuss a long range plan (one to ten years) for the organization.

Problem Solving: Similar to a planning meeting but problem solving considers one day to six months. The focus is on day to day business.

Evaluation: The purpose of this meeting is to assess progress according to the planning and/or problem solving meetings.

Training: A training meeting is held to educate the members; to expand knowledge, improve skill, or change attitudes of participants.

Celebrational: This time is spent enjoying being together and having a good time.

Meeting Tempo

Another item worth noting is the tempo of successful meetings

Meeting Type	Pace
Informational	Quick, Crisp
Planning	Slow, Deliberate
Problem Solving	Meandering
Evaluation	Slow, Contemplative
Training	Smooth, Flowing
Celebrational	Rambling

Parliamentary Procedure

Although the majority of voluntary organizations strive to keep their meetings as informal as possible, there is a place and a time for the implementation of Parliamentary Procedure. These rules of order are a basic tool for maintaining order and control in group discussions.

Parliamentary Procedure appears, at first, to be a complex and confusing system to follow. You will find a few simple procedures will improve the efficiency of your meetings.

Use of Parliamentary Procedure will:

- ✓ *allow only one item to be discussed at a time*
- ✓ *facilitate action*
- ✓ *allow fairness to every member*
- ✓ *be effective in managing large groups*
- ✓ *allow for many quick decisions to be made*
- ✓ *assist in accurate record keeping*
- ✓ *maintain order*

For detailed information on the rules of order, please see attached....

Tips for an Effective Meeting

1. Have a clear purpose

2. Plan ahead before the meeting

- Subject matter identified
- Important preliminary information distributed
- Each participant knows what is expected

3. Agenda

- List specific measurable objectives rather than topics

4. Involve the right people

- Attendance should be limited to those whose presence is essential for achieving the purpose

5. Timing

- Choose the right time and the right place for participants
- Limit the time of the meeting
- Start on time – end on time

6. Summarize what the meeting has accomplished

- Record all formal decisions made at the meeting for future reference
- List actions to be taken, when and by whom

In summary, people want the following from your meetings:

They want trust.

They want background information.

They want a clear background for participation..

They want to speak and be heard.

They want their ideas recognized.

They want the discussion “buttoned up” at the end.

They want to know what steps of action will follow.

Pre-Planning a Meeting

You will need to look at the expectations, hopes and needs of those who attend a meeting. An awareness of these factors will help you do a better job when you prepare meetings.

Trust

- Operate in an atmosphere of trust
- A conviction that ideas are wanted
- A sense of plan and purpose in attitude

Background

- Information on the causes of a problem or situation which requires a meeting
- A flight plan, a road map
- An understanding of why there is concern

Target

- A constructive purpose all can identify
- A clear focus on the subject area
- A specific question to pin- point ideas

Participation

- An appreciation of the difficulties some have in speaking up at a meeting
- A willingness to do pre-planning
- Confidence in the leader's methods
- Fairness to both ideas and people

Ground Rules

- Thoughtful control for the sake of the individual and the group
- A clear statement of the ground rules
- Proper techniques to allow people to be heard

Recording

- A system of keeping records of the meeting
- Evidence that ideas are heard and will be recorded

Summary

- A plan for ending the meeting as a complete experience
- A realistic summary

Follow Up

- What will happen next?
- What is expected of members?

Plan Your Meeting Checklist

Some time must be spent in preparation of a meeting in order to make it successful. It is very important that people leave the meeting with a feeling of accomplishment rather than frustration. A well-planned meeting helps to achieve this. The following checklist can be used by your organization to make it easier to plan each meeting. All meetings vary, so you may have to adjust it to meet your particular needs.

Publicity

- Notices to members including date, time, location, purpose

Agenda and resource material to include copies of

- Agenda
- Past meeting minutes
- Materials to be discussed
- Committee reports

Before the Meeting

- Assignments
- Contacts
- Reports
- Test equipment (LCD project, conference phone etc)

Location

- Size of room
- Electrical outlets
- Acoustics
- Temperature
- Washrooms
- Stairs/elevators
- Ventilation
- Parking
- Traffic Directions
- Lighting
- Telephone access
- Wall Space for Flipcharts

Equipment

- Tables (numbers, size, shape)
- Chairs (numbers, comfort)
- Screen
- White board/markers
- Laptop
- Extension cords
- Flip chart/extra paper
- Coffee, tea, water or other refreshments
- LCD projector

Materials

- Name tags
- Felt markers
- Paper
- Masking tape
- Pens

The Agenda

An agenda is simply a brief outline of what you intend to discuss and in what order. Its purpose is to assist the chairperson in seeing what order. Its purpose is to assist the chairperson in seeing that business is conducted fairly and quickly, as well as to provide direction, order and advance information to those attending.

Essentially there are three kinds of items that are a part of most meetings:

Items for Information

- simply inform the board of action taken affecting the members
- announcements, copies of correspondence
- serve as progress reports from committees

Items for Discussion, Referral or Tabling

- require further input by members prior to a recommendation for decision or action
- lack sufficient information and need to be referred to a committee or the executive
- may be poorly-timed or those that you do not wish to take immediate action on

Items for Decision and Action

- require action of an immediate and visible nature by board members
- result in specific recommendations
- in order for your meetings to be fruitful some decisions and actions must be evident

The format of the any agenda should be accepted by the members of your organization and it should be followed at each meeting. However, if it is deviated from, the group should be made aware of the changes and the reasons for doing so.

Environment

The formation of the meeting room will influence the outcome of your meeting and set the atmosphere for discussions.

Consider the following

Members seated across a table facilitates opposition and disagreement

Sitting side by side makes disagreements more difficult

The position of the chairperson indicates the role that he/she intends to play. Sitting at the end of a long, narrow table reveals power and complete control, whereas a chair who sits among the members becomes more of a facilitator. It is more difficult to manage discussion from this last position.

Sample Agenda Format

District Recreation Commission Meeting

7:00 pm, September 12, 2011

Multi-purpose Room, High School

(Times are listed are for guideline purposes)

Agenda

Call to order

- Make introductions if necessary (*5 minutes*)

Approval of agenda (*2 minutes*)

Approval of minutes from last meeting (*3 minutes*)

Business arising since last meeting (*12 minutes*)

- Item 2 in previous minutes refers to the adhoc Fundraising Committee Report. Please be prepared to discuss recommendations 1 through 4 regarding next year's fundraising priorities.

Strategic Priorities (*30 minutes*)

- Program/Service priorities – discuss and determine key priority over next 6 months

Committee Reports (*18 minutes*)

- Executive Committee
- Program Committee
- Fundraising Committee

Other Business (*7 minutes*)

- Board education – update on Directors Liability Insurance
- Items from the floor
- Items introduced by the Chair

Evaluation of meeting, next meeting date/agenda items (*7 minutes*)

Writing Clear Agendas

In order to make an agenda more useful, it should consist of specific measurable objectives, rather than topics. Writing clear and complete objectives for a meeting requires practice. One simple guide to follow is to start each statement with to and follow it with a verb.

Examples:

- To set date, time, location for our next tournament
- To discuss method and develop critical path to increase participation levels by 10%
- To identify evaluation methods for officials in our area

Objectives stated in the terms of used above may require further refinements during the meeting. They will help when deciding who should attend, as well as allow participants to prepare for the meeting. With a well-prepared agenda, composed of objectives, (not topics), your meeting will be simplified and shorter.

Agenda Worksheet

- 1. Purpose of the Meeting**
- 2. List of all committees to present reports**
- 3. List of all of the items to be covered at the meeting**
 - a) Items from last meeting
 - b) New items
- 4. Prioritize items according to the required length of time needed to accomplish each**
- 5. Develop these items into specific, measurable objectives – *not topics***
- 6. Type out the order of the agenda**
- 7. Additional information attached to the agenda**
- 8. Inform members of the agenda by email or fax or mail.**

Minutes Checklist

Good minutes are essential because they are the only record of business for your organization. They will be required for constant referral.

Your minutes should include the following:

- ☐ **Heading**
- ☐ **Date**
- ☐ **Time**
- ☐ **Location**
- ☐ **Name of chair**
- ☐ **Names of members present**
- ☐ **Names of members absent**
- ☐ **Starting time**
- ☐ **Adoption of minutes from last meeting**
- ☐ **Summary of ideas and topics discussed**
- ☐ **Suggestions proposed, action by whom, by when**
- ☐ **All motions made**
- ☐ **Name of members who made motions**
- ☐ **Name of members who seconded motions**
- ☐ **Outcome of motions (carried or defeated)**
- ☐ **Time of adjournment**
- ☐ **Date, time, location of next meeting**

Committees

A committee is two or more persons who have been chosen by the organization to carry out a specific task.

Benefits:

- Saves time and prevents boredom at meetings. The committee can work out the project details and report back at the next meeting.
- People can choose the committee that their abilities/interests suit best.
- Involves everyone; thus one person is not loaded with all of the responsibilities
- Trains new members; involving the inexperienced with experienced members.

A committee may do any particular job the organization wishes. The size of the committee depends on the size of the project. It should include both new and experienced members.

Methods of Appointing a Committee

1. Election by members
2. Volunteers
3. According to a resolution

Types of Committees

Standing Committees are those which are active throughout the year.

Special Committees are those which are appointed to serve a single event or purpose. These are also called Ad Hoc Committees and are often dissolved at the conclusion of the event or project.

Organization

A committee is organized similar to the larger board. The chairperson calls the committee together and presides at the meetings. It is important definite duty assignments are made within the committee. Since committee are appointed as representatives of a whole organization, reports must be made by the chairperson to the board members at meetings.

Committee Reports

1. Reports should be written and a copy given to the secretary.
2. All members of the committee should agree on the contents of a report before it is presented.
3. Include the following:
 - Name of the committee and the date
 - List of the committee members' names
 - Specific purpose of the committee
4. Procedure
 - What has been done
 - Information that has been gathered
 - Proposed action plan
 - Names of those assigned to carry out specific tasks
5. Recommendations
 - Should be made at the larger committee or board meeting in the form of motions and acted upon

Note: For more information about the duties of the committees, president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer and members, read pages 4-10 in the booklet entitled *Parliamentary Procedures*.

The Role of the Chairperson

The position of the Chairperson is the single most important role in your association. It is obvious that the chairperson is in the prime position of being able to affect the direction of any meeting. Your Chairperson essentially has 4 major roles to play at any meeting:

1. **The Chairperson must be fully informed on each item and thus be able to determine what the objective is.** In order for the chairperson to be effective he/she:
 - Should set aside the time to review each agenda item with the person responsible for bringing it forward
 - Must know why the board is dealing with an item and what action is required
 - Must be generally aware of all the alternatives
 - Must be able to guide his fellow members towards their objective
2. **The Chairperson must be able to encourage the involvement of each board member in discussions to ensure that all relevant points are heard.**
 - The Chairperson should not be the main spokesperson on the agenda items. His/her role should be to elicit comments from colleagues and if possible arrive on a generally agreed upon course of action.
 - Encouraging discussion also entails a fairly high degree of management by the chairperson. Individuals should not be allowed to dominate the discussion. The Chairperson should not allow the discussion to drift.
3. **The Chairperson must be able to determine various alternatives.**
 - The chairperson must be able to take a wider view of problems and to point out the various options available to the association.
4. **The Chairperson must be capable of summarizing the main points and bringing the item to a decision.**
 - The chairperson should be serving in a directing capacity – to draw out the main points, summarize then and have a motion made on the item.

Meeting Personalities

Several of the personalities mentioned are disruptive behaviours which seem to be attempts to take over or challenge the chairperson. It is important for leaders to develop responses to such situations in order to maintain control and to accomplish the objectives of the meeting. The leader can confront this behaviour by following these guidelines:

1. Confrontation is most effective, allowing the individual to examine his/her behaviour and its consequences. It expresses care and concern, not punishment. It should be done privately.
2. Focus on the behaviour and avoid labelling the person. Classifying the person only increases his/her defensiveness.
3. Point out the effects this behaviour has on the group. Often, the disruptive individual is unaware of the negative impact of his/her behaviour.
4. Suggest alternative behaviours that will be more productive, satisfying participation for the disruption member.

The Initiator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always starts something • Generally the chairperson • Clarifies, defines, identifies and states ideas to others
The Orientor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assists the group in getting proper focus on the topic • Keeps discussion on the right track • Chairperson's task but hopefully others will play this role too
The Facilitator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeps the discussion going by asking for explanations or asking questions concerning the topic
The Encourager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows approval (smiles, nods head) and verbally gives approval
The Harmonizer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key role of the chairperson • Attempts to have all sides of the question considered
The Recorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeps written records of decisions and actions of the group
The Summarizer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brings ideas together which have been contributed by other members • Not necessarily the role of the chairperson
The Expeditor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interested in the comfort of the members, the physical setting and the materials • Opens windows, distributes pens and paper, etc.
The Fact-Seeker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs more information on a topic before making a decision • Add stability to any meeting
The Compromiser	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives ground or admits that there are two sides to the question in order that progress be made
The Monopolizer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaks up at every opportunity (interrupting others to do so) • Uses 10 words when 1 would do
The Recognition Seeker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The know-it-all • Draws attention to his/her self
The Whisperer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whispers throughout the meeting • Rarely, if ever, contributes to the group as a whole
Mr./Mrs. Zipper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not talk

Summary

Your organization must evaluate the effectiveness of your meetings and then practice better and new techniques. If you follow the suggestions in this booklet, you will find your meetings will become more constructive, shorter and more enjoyable.

Remember to:

- Have a purpose for a meeting
- Pre-Plan each meeting
- Inform all members
- Keep accurate records