

Guidelines for Meeting Effectiveness

Is a meeting really necessary? (pre-critique)

Does the meeting have a goal?

Is an agenda being created ahead of the meeting?

Who are the appropriate participants?

Could the information be covered by e-mail, memo or a personal conversation?

Meeting Preparation

Meeting Planner (prepares agenda, books room, advises participants)

- Determine the meeting's desired outcomes and identify participants whose input is needed to accomplish the outcomes
- Determine if the meeting requires a facilitator to keep control of the process and monitor how people are working together (not the Chair)
- Determine best order for agenda items and assign a lead for each
- Prepare the agenda, complete with timelines for each item and send to participants along with any relevant supporting material, giving participants enough time to read and prepare for the meeting
- Assign a notetaker to record discussion and action items (who does what by when)
- Plan logistics such as location, equipment, refreshments, parking
- Communicate in advance if food is being provided. Scheduling meetings during the lunch hour period 12:00 - 2:00 (depending on participants lunch hour) should be avoided and only used for urgent situations after all other times have been considered.

Agenda Guidelines

A meeting is only as good as its agenda. A well-drafted agenda can help the meeting to run smoothly and quickly, and maximize what you actually achieve as a committee

Agendas should clearly identify a start time and an expected finishing time. An agenda is tentative (or draft) until such time as the group formally approves it at the meeting

Items should be specific. Items should be grouped for Decision, Discussion, or Information (presentations). Items should be designed so that they result in an outcome

Items should have the name or initials of the person introducing/speaking to the topic

Set a time for each item – this will assist the Chair in controlling the time of the meeting and ensuring it finishes on time

Conducting the Meeting

Meeting Chair (presides over meeting to ensure agenda/timelines are followed – the chair duties can be rotated)

- Empower members by guiding, mediating, probing and stimulating and allowing others to thrash out ideas
- Use a process to manage discussion and guide decision-making
- Keep discussions on track by continually restating the issue under consideration or goal being sought
- Keep watch on non-verbal communication and provide an opportunity to articulate any sources of discomfort or displeasure
- Encourage dialogue, value everyone's opinion and encourage silent members to participate
- Keep group focused on the central question and move towards a decision. ***Unanimity of thought is not required – consensus is.*** The compromise necessary to elicit unanimous vote can diminish the value of a good idea
- Deal with disruptive members. In fairness to other members don't squander time and energy contributions but handle confrontation privately, during a break
- Close the meeting by summarizing achievements and progress made so that members leave with a sense of accomplishment and motivation to continue

Meeting Participants

- Be prepared to participate
- Read the agenda and materials prior to the meeting and seek clarification of anything that is unclear
- Stick to the agenda and bring up new business at the appropriate time
- Speak clearly and in a voice everyone can hear.
- If remarks are lengthy, sum them up at the end
- Provide documents in advance, whenever possible, allowing time for others to read and digest the information

Meeting Etiquette

- Give reasons to support your position rather than denigrating the opinions of others
- Arrive on time and return promptly after breaks
- Be courteous and respectful; do not talk while others are speaking. If you would like to speak, ask the chair
- Formally send regrets if unable to attend a meeting
- Use of electronic media (cell phones, laptops and Blackberrys) should be relevant to the current meeting (presentations, checking availability for future meetings etc.)
- Be mentally as well as physically present
- Do not carry on side conversations – you can only attend one meeting at a time.
- Focus disagreements on ideas, not on individuals

Record of Meeting Guidelines – Minutes, Notes, Action Summary

Regardless of style, formality or name, a written record of the meeting demonstrates that a committee/group has carried out its work properly (accountability). It serves as a reminder of the action that people have agreed to take or as a means of following-up to see whether the action has been taken.

This record mirrors the agenda so that people can see that the committee/group is getting through its intended business. It is a source of information for those who were not at the meeting – absent members should be able to understand exactly what happened by reading the document.

The meeting record is exact, self-explanatory, and succinct – an impersonal, objective document about what actually happened. It is NOT:

- a newsletter
- a verbatim report of what was said
- a means for the recorder to make assumptions and generalizations, to impose his/her own opinion(s) or an opportunity to record personal views and opinion
- a substitute for a proper information system or for good personal communication.

The meeting record should include:

- the name of the organization/committee/group
- the date, time and location of the meeting
- the names of those in attendance
- decisions/agreements/requests made (whether by consensus or motion) and any items deferred/referred
- a statement of what a report was about, who presented it, if it was verbal or written.

The meeting record does NOT include:

- conversation, comments, or discussions which are off topic
- detailed chronicle of lengthy discussion that reach no conclusion
- direct speech or direct quotes except as formal motions
- emotional language
- each participant's contribution towards the discussion.

For more informal meetings chairs might want to combine the agenda piece with minutes that record action only. What has been provided are suggested templates that can be modified to suit the type of meeting conducted.