

## Meetings that Rock

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If you've ever sat around at a meeting (even worse, at a meeting that you were facilitating) and asked yourself, "What are we doing? Why am I here?" then you've witnessed poor meeting planning. An important factor in motivating your members is making them feel that meeting is time well-spent.

### The Four Roles of a Facilitator

1. Insures that a group follows its own **process**.
  - Make sure each agenda item has a sponsor at the meeting.
  - Clarify status and desired outcome for each agenda item.
  - Clarify motions before they are voted/consensuses upon. Have the minutes taker read a motion before the group takes action on it.
2. Keeps group conscious of **time**-factors.
  - Periodically summarize the discussion.
  - Take responsibility for keeping a discussion relevant.
  - Take responsibility for making process suggestions for the group to reject or accept.
3. Assists the group in analysis; lends **direction** where possible.
  - Always seek to maintain a positive atmosphere at the meeting.
  - Show appreciation to group and to individuals for progress or accomplishments.
  - Keep group from focusing entirely on details.
4. **Empowers** the group as a whole; works to circumvent any attempts to overpower the group.
  - Draw reticent people into the meeting.
  - Check in with the group often; be sensitive to group dynamics.
  - Make sure that the group sticks to its own meeting ground-rules.
  - Learn to recognize hidden comments as proposals.

#### Miscellaneous...

- Prepare for a meeting in advance.
- Review Agenda at the beginning of the meeting.
- Know the personalities of the group.

## **Techniques for Dealing with Conflict in A Meeting**

### **Don't Panic.**

*Conflict is a natural part of living together and dealing with problems together. Conflict frequently promotes better decision-making and allows for groups to resolve underlying problems.*

### **Listen for agreement, before focusing on conflict.**

*Try to gauge where two people/groups share ideas. If you can't find any, look at shared values. Build agreement on those values and ideas. Circle in on conflict, but don't avoid it.*

### **Authentic listening**

*Make sure both groups/people are really listening to one another. Rephrase arguments in terms each will understand. Make sure both groups/people recognize their concerns are understood. Ask each group to try to articulate the other's position.*

### **Seek alternative solutions.**

*If the group appears to be at an impasse, take a moment to brainstorm other possibilities.*

### **Recognize when emotions are running out of check.**

*Take a moment of silence to let people cool off. Appoint a "vibes watcher" to keep the group in check for issues that are particularly divisive.*

### **Resolve conflict within the meeting.**

*Do not let conflict fester outside the meeting. If no satisfactory resolution can be found at the meeting, be sure a process for resolution has been set up.*

### **Recognize the difference between group conflict and individual conflict.**

*Avoid spending lots of group time to solve problems between two individuals unless some sort of group action is necessary. Set up a conflict-resolving process outside of the group's meeting.*

### **Use outside or alternative mediators and facilitators.**

*Step down from the chair when you think you cannot act to resolve a conflict.*



## Meeting Problem-Solving Techniques

### Traditional Problem-solving Process:

#### Procedure:

1. A problem is presented to the group.
2. Time is set aside for clarifying questions.
3. The nature of the problem is explored through discussion and alternative solutions are explored.
4. One of the alternative solutions is accepted by the group and is delegated to a group or individual for implementation.
5. The group is periodically appraised on the status of implementation and, once implemented, the solution is evaluated in the context of the problem it was designed to solve.

### Brainstorming:

Purpose: To generate ideas in as creative a meeting environment as possible and allow participants to tap into the creative energy of the group as a whole.

#### Procedure:

1. A presentation of a problem or issue is made to the group.
2. After a time for questions and clarification, each member of the group presents an idea or two. Ideas should be spontaneous, so avoid using stacks (speakers' lists) unless you have to.
3. A recorder list all the ideas together.
4. Initially, every idea is accepted, no evaluation of any kind is allowed.
5. Typically, the group will go through a spurt of ideas, a lag, and then another spurt before exhausting its creative power. After going through this process, review the list and eliminate those ideas which are clearly unworkable. The remaining list should represent a fairly complete options available to the group.



### **Feedback:**

**Purpose:** To provide groups or individuals with personal reactions in a non-threatening manner.

**Procedure:**

1. A presentation is made to the group.
2. After a time for questions and clarification, each member of the group presents his/her reactions to the presentation. Every effort is made to make the reactions as honest and as tactful as possible, using the following guidelines:
  - Be specific, rather than general.
  - Be tentative, rather than absolute (You seem to assume...)
  - Be informing, rather than commanding.
  - Be suggesting, rather than directing.

The above criteria should allow those receiving feedback as much latitude as possible and prevents them from feeling attacked or cornered by the group.

### **Statement Polls/Round Robins:**

**Purpose:** To allow every group member to speak and to give the group an idea of where it stands collectively.

**Procedure:** After a presentation and a brief discussion, each group member is asked to state his/her views on a topic.

## The Responsibilities of the Group

### *Self-facilitation*

A good facilitator does not guarantee a good meeting. Self-facilitation is based on the idea that everyone in the group should take responsibility for the meeting by keeping their own behavior in check, and helping to move the discussion along whenever possible. If you continually talk until the facilitator has to interrupt you, or if you bring up tangents or irrelevant issues during a discussion, you are not self-facilitating.

### *Ground-rules*

Your group should establish basic ground-rules for its meetings. Taking a few minutes to go over ground-rules gives everyone a good sense of how they should behave in meetings, and emphasizes the importance of approaching a discussion with an open mind and treating each other with respect. Creating ground-rules helps set the overall tone for your group, and can save you a lot of work in the long run. Ground-rules also give you something to refer back to when something starts going wrong in a meeting, such as people not listening to each other or verbally attacking someone else in your group.

### *Work between meetings*

Committees exist to do work – and most of that work can **not** be done in a meeting. Too often, people see the meetings as goals in themselves. Simply going to a meeting does not make you a responsible committee member – much of your committee's work will be done in between meetings, and you should do your fair share.

### **Ground-rules for good meetings.**

1. LISTEN.
2. No question is ever stupid (unless it shows that you've violated rule #1).
3. Avoid droning on and on and on and on and on and on...
4. Less is more . Don't repeat what someone else has said, or continue pounding away at a dead horse.
5. Don't feel compelled to talk just because you're on the queue. If your point has already been made by the time it gets around to you, pass.
6. Separate people from arguments. A difference of opinion does not necessarily signify mental inferiority or personal defect.
7. NEVER personally attack anyone in a meeting.



8. Come to the meeting prepared. If there's something to read for the meeting, read it. Don't take up time by asking other people to explain what you easily could have found out for yourself.
9. Respect process. Don't jump stack.
10. And, of course, LISTEN.



## **Tips on planning for the meeting:**

### ***1. Make clear goals for the meeting***

Having a meeting is not a goal in and of itself. Think about what you specifically want to accomplish. "Educating people" doesn't count as a goal, either. What do you want people to know when they walk out of the door? How will you be able to tell if they understand what you're talking about?

### ***2. Give people a clear idea of what to expect.***

A lot of this can be accomplished through an agenda. Let people know what kind of meeting it's going to be, so that they can come mentally prepared. A reflection meeting is very different from a policy meeting. When people have an idea of what to expect, it gives them a better sense of control and ownership of the meeting, and ultimately, the organization.

### ***3. Involve other people in planning the meetings.***

Let other people tell you what they think should be accomplished or discussed at the next meeting. Some people may have ideas or issues they feel are important for the group to address, but fail to communicate that. An easy way to do this is to pick topics to go on the next meeting's agenda at the end of your meeting.

### ***4. Pick a meeting location that is friendly, low-key and accessible.***

### ***5. Send out background materials before the meeting.***

If an important decision is being made, and there are things people need to know or read before the meeting, write it up and send it out. This gives people a chance to mull things over, and also saves meeting time.



## **Good things to do during the meeting:**

### **1. *Review the Agenda***

Go over what's going to happen. Ask for any changes or additions.

### **2. *Go over meeting rules***

If someone's new and you use a process that people aren't familiar with (stack, direct responses, etc.) , it's a good idea to briefly summarize the rules for everyone.

### **3. *Encourage participation***

Just because you're thinking it, doesn't mean you're the only one who's going to say it. As much as possible, hang back and let other people do the talking. Nothing sucks more than a meeting that involves sitting around and watching one person do it all.

### **4. *Stick to the Agenda***

This is what keeps your meeting focused. Sure, it's good to be flexible, but make sure that you're not so flexible that nothing gets accomplished.

### **5. *Seek commitments***

If everyone agrees that something needs to be done, make a list and ask for volunteers during the meeting. Going up to the board and asking for volunteers is generally more effective than sending around a sheet.

### **6. *Bring Closure to the meeting***

Summarize the meeting results, and anything that people need to do for the next meeting. If it was a reflection meeting, an after the meeting "check-in" usually works well.





## Meeting Structure:

### 1. Agenda:

Your agenda gives people an idea of what to expect. Your agenda should be set **before** the meeting, although last minute revisions can be made at the meeting. When possible, include time limits or approximations for each item. When possible or necessary, make copies of the agenda for everyone. And even better - send it out beforehand. Allow for flexibility in the agenda, and give people the opportunity to make any necessary changes.

### 2. Presentation and Clarification:

It is vital that people understand what they are talking about before discussion starts. Otherwise, you'll end up with a meeting that goes around in circles, or a huge discussion on the wrong issue (or both). Don't assume that people understand what is being discussed – offer a clear and concise description, then allow time for people to ask questions to clarify the proposal. Also, let people know what **action** is required of the committee, and what they will be voting on.

### 3. Discussion

### 4. Voting (if necessary)

### 5. Tasking:

Any work that was generated during the meeting (the committee decided to put posters up in all the co-ops) should be tasked out to committee members. Don't forget to set deadlines. Summarize what action everyone will take before the next meeting.

### 6. Adjournment.



## Agendas – Groundwork

- A. Function
  - a. Provide framework for the meeting, expediting business by preventing undirected discussion.
  - b. Allow for advanced preparation, and careful consideration of all items
  - c. Remind all members of their responsibilities for the meeting
  - d. Keep things moving on schedule
  
- B. Responsibility for preparing the agenda
  - a. Facilitator/chairperson has primary responsibility
  - b. Any committee or member in charge of research or development of a particular agenda topic is responsible for submitting relevant reports, data and other supporting documents
  
- C. Format and Strategies
  - a. Should include all items to be discussed in the order in which they will be taken
  - b. Order should be throughout on the basis of energy levels and productivity (generally, a meeting starts off slowly, peaks just a bit before the middle, and tapers off to the end.)
  - c. New business should be taken at the end of the meeting
  - d. Consent calendar may be included with the agenda, listing all items which should require no discussion or debate. If any member wishes to discuss any of the items s/he simply asks to have them removed from the calendar. Everything remaining on the calendar can then be passed or accepted with one motion.
  
- D. Timing – the agenda should be sent out along with supporting documents one week prior to the meeting in order to allow the board members to prepare for the meeting by carefully thinking through various reports and proposals.