

How to run great meetings

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Enjoyable and efficient meetings make people happy to return and create confidence that the group's work is on track and productive.

Here are some tips for great meetings.

- Be purposeful.** Meet for a good reason and aim to get a clear result.
- Give plenty of notice.** Circulate the agenda and drafts of documents 1-2 weeks before a meeting so people have time to read them, digest them, and have an informed discussion.
- Be welcoming.** Personally welcome each person and introduce them to others. Make sure everyone has a name tag.

A simple, all-purpose icebreaker

An "icebreaker" is an interaction that puts both the speaker and the audience at ease at the start of a meeting. You've probably heard of people using jokes as icebreakers. Don't believe it. The best icebreakers involve the participants expressing themselves *physically* in response to the speaker. The easiest icebreaker is simply to ask some questions that the audience will want to say "yes" to. For instance "How many of you don't have enough time for yourselves any more?" They'll all raise their hands. A couple more questions like that, especially if they are light hearted, will put the audience, and yourself, completely at ease. Alternatives are to ask the audience to stand up or move into groups in response to questions. With small groups, a couple of "yes" questions can easily turn into a focused conversation, allowing the group to seamlessly get down to business.

- Have a great agenda.** Aim for an agenda that is dynamic, varied and well timed, but also has flexibility to respond to the group's needs. And don't pack out the agenda: be realistic about what can be achieved (or people may feel steamrollered).
- Give clear navigation directions.** Occasionally remind people

what stage they are up to in the session, so they know what's next.

Make it interesting. If all you do is plough through business items, people will eventually lose interest and membership will flag. Include a high point in every meeting: an inspiring speaker, a prize or celebration, a debate or role play.

Shift boring bits off-agenda. Consider having an executive team meet separately to deal with the boring agenda items before the main meeting. But make sure the whole group agrees on what is dealt with this way.

Make it enjoyable. Have food and drink. Choose a comfortable, attractive venue. Pay attention to the lighting and acoustics. Do you need a sound system so all can hear?

Make it accessible. Think about convenient times and locations, child care, wheelchair access, and public transport.

Make it friendly. Welcome each participant. Use name tags. Set the chairs in a semi-circle to encourage interaction.

Make it interactive. Don't let people just sit there. Some are just dying to speak. Others are shy but have great ideas. Create plenty of opportunities for discussion during the meeting. Put decisions to the group. Let the group amend the agenda at the start. Think about brainstorming in pairs, trios or small facilitated groups where people will be more at ease. Above all, help people talk to each other. That's the part they'll enjoy most.

End well. Summarise clearly at the end. Thank all. Say what will happen next and give crisp commitments to follow-up.

End on time. Be realistic about what you can fit into an agenda. People hate meetings that drone on forever.

Follow up. Following up a great meeting is just as important as the meeting itself. Call those who were expected but didn't show and give them the highlights. Make sure that commitments made at the meeting are carried out.

Evaluate. Make sure you gather feedback from participants:

Was it satisfying? Were their questions answered? Would they come back? What can you improve?

Useful resources

More on great meetings

There are plenty of good meeting guides on the internet. Just Google "great meetings".

This section was partly based on:

How to Run a Good Meeting by Craig White, Center for Participatory Change at: www.cpcwnc.org/Toolbox/tbxmeeting.html