

Holding Effective Meetings

Description:

This tool provides guidelines for conducting effective meetings, a checklist to help keep the meeting focussed, and a sample meeting evaluation form for Boards and committees.

How it can be used:

Although meetings are often essential, they are sometimes held without proper preparation. Use the guidelines and checklist to ensure that meetings are effective by having materials prepared in advance, and that the objectives of the meeting are met through practicing a focused approach.

Meetings can either be an effective way to collectively share information or a real time-waster. Answer the following questions to make sure your meeting is necessary:

- Is the meeting *really* necessary to achieve the purpose and outcomes?
- Are there alternatives (email, teleconference, video-conference, etc.)?

A successful meeting begins with good preparation. If you have determined that a face-to-face meeting is necessary, follow these guidelines to conducting an effective meeting.

Prepare for the Meeting

- Decide on the purpose of the meeting.
 - What do you (the team) expect to accomplish?
 - What are the measurable outcomes?
- Determine who needs to attend the meeting.
 - Include those that are necessary.
 - If someone needs to be present for a brief period, try to position them right before a break, so they can participate/present and then break from the group.
 - If all participants are not required for most of the agenda items, plan multiple meetings to make more effective use of peoples' time. It is better to have a few people attend multiple meetings than to have a number of people sit through meetings that don't relate to them.
- Determine the length of the meeting.
 - Meetings don't have to be measured in hours; perhaps you need only 30 minutes.
- Find a location and set the time for the meeting.
 - It may be useful to set a regular time/place that satisfies everyone's schedule, then cancel the meeting if there is no need to get together.
 - When schedules are tight, sometimes working lunches are the easiest way to meet.
- Prepare and distribute an agenda.
 - Follow up from the previous agenda.
 - Request agenda items from participants, assign time limits, ensure action items will be reported upon by the responsible participant, collect accompanying and background documents, and distribute agenda well in advance so participants can arrive prepared.
 - Bring extra hard copies or an electronic version to meeting.

Group practices

- Agree on group 'norms' or practices.
 - Is there a penalty for consistently showing up late?
 - Is there a process to ensure that everyone gets 'air time'?
 - Agree that interruptions will not be tolerated. Does your community or health centre have a practice that will support this, such as the talking stick or speaking stone?
 - All comments are directed toward the project and not attacking the people.
- Ensure that the Chairperson/Co-chairs is/are prepared.

- Do they approve the agenda?
- Do they vote?
- Are they leading the discussion or is there a facilitator?
- Ensure the note-taker is present.
 - Who is responsible, what is the turnaround time, and how will they be disseminated (e.g., email, online communal space, posted in public space, etc.)?
- Determine how discussions not on topic will be addressed.
 - Park them and address them at end of a meeting if there is time, add them to the agenda of a future meeting or hold a separate meeting.
- The Chairperson or facilitator should arrive early to ensure that the room is set up, the technology is functioning, supplies are available, etc.

Hold the Meeting

- Begin the meeting with introductions.
 - This will 'take attendance' and ensure participants are familiar with each other.
- Review minutes of the previous meeting.
 - Participants should come to the meeting having read the previous meeting minutes.
 - Only discuss items that may not have been accurately recorded.
- Review the agenda.
 - Additional agenda items can be added if they are relevant and there is time available, or there is agreement they should take precedence over other agenda items.
- Review the purpose of the meeting.
 - The chairperson should review the purpose of the meeting, the expected outcomes, and a reminder of meeting policies, if necessary.
- Stick to the agenda regarding topic and time available.
- Ensure notes are being taken.
 - One person should be responsible for keeping meeting minutes.
 - The meeting summary should not detail entire conversations but should record decisions as well as any action items (i.e., What's to be done? By whom? When is it to be done?).
 - Individuals maintain their own records of the meeting, including actions assigned to them.
- Defer items that cannot be addressed.
 - If it is found during the course of a meeting that an item cannot be addressed because of lack of information or the right individuals are not present, do not waste time on that item. Instead, defer the agenda item to a meeting when it can be adequately addressed.
 - Make sure an action item is in place to prevent the same item from being deferred again.
- Set the agenda for the next meeting.
 - Include the purpose and objectives of the meeting as well as a time to meet.
 - Any unfinished business from the current meeting should be noted.
- Review the action items.
 - Ensure someone is responsible for each action item and note the timelines.
- Evaluate the meeting.
 - Briefly discuss whether the meeting addressed the intended purpose and objectives.
 - This may also be accomplished through a 'Round Table' exercise where each participant gets a chance to share his/her experience of the meeting.

After the Meeting

- Prepare and distribute the minutes. Include any further documentation that was provided during the meeting (i.e. PowerPoint presentations, additional reports, etc.).
- Thank any guests that participated in the meeting.

Use the suggested responses to help keep your meetings focused and on track.

| The Situation | Suggested Response |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Need to test for consensus | "Do we all agree that ...?" |
| Need to move ahead | "As I see it, we should ...?" |
| Need to solve a problem | "Why don't we list the options ...?" |
| Need to focus on outcomes | "There are a lot of issues we could discuss. Today we need to focus on ..." |
| Need to bring the group together | "Let's take 5 minutes and begin by sharing any breakthroughs since our last meeting" |
| Need to summarize and move on | "We have talked about ..." |
| Need to clear confusion | "Does anyone know why ...?" |
| Need increased participation | "I suggest each participant should indicate what they ..." |
| Need to use a process | "What is the process we are using?" |
| Need to diffuse friction | "Can we handle this discussion another way?" |
| Need to understand the conflict | "What is the issue here?" |
| Need to come back to the agenda | "That is interesting, but our objective is ..." |
| Need to deal with participants that arrive late | Don't hold up the meeting for them. "Could someone please fill them in later?" |
| Need to stop a 'rambler' or someone who monopolizes the discussion | Catch one of their phrases and say "Why don't we look at ...?" |
| Need to establish common ground | "What do we agree on?" |
| Need to confirm understanding | "I heard you say ..., do I have that right?" |
| Need to stop a stubborn director/leader | "Does anyone else feel that way? Do we need to talk about it?" |

Meeting Evaluation Form Board and Committees

Name of Board/Committee _____

Meeting date _____

Rating scale

| | Terrible | Poor | Satisfactory | Good | Excellent |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------|------------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. My overall rating for the meeting. | | | | 1 | 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. Please rate each of the following by circling the number that best represents your experience: | | | | | |
| a. Consistent with traditional cultural values | | | | 1 | 2 3 4 5 |
| b. Positive, respectful atmosphere | | | | 1 | 2 3 4 5 |
| c. Agenda items consistent with Board role | | | | 1 | 2 3 4 5 |
| d. Role of the Chair | | | | 1 | 2 3 4 5 |
| e. Contribution of other members | | | | 1 | 2 3 4 5 |
| f. Time was well managed | | | | 1 | 2 3 4 5 |
| g. Clarity of the agenda; goals were clear | | | | 1 | 2 3 4 5 |
| h. We achieved our goals | | | | 1 | 2 3 4 5 |
| i. Quality of meeting materials | | | | 1 | 2 3 4 5 |
| j. Quality of staff-board relations | | | | 1 | 2 3 4 5 |
| k. Clear follow-up identified | | | | 1 | 2 3 4 5 |
| l. I was able to participate effectively | | | | 1 | 2 3 4 5 |

3. Comments:
4. Most valuable aspect of the meeting:
5. How the meeting could be improved: