How to Run Effective Meetings
Guide

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Anyone can run effective meetings with a little bit of practice and planning.

Meetings are important for building relationships, getting to know the people in your community; they save time, allow you to share information, communicate effectively, agree on a plan of action, and make decisions. Therefore, you could say that they are the key to making Transition happen in any community.

Things you can do to ensure an effective meeting

1. Define the purpose and agenda of the meeting

- Think about why you are calling the meeting. Is it to discuss, to inform, or reach an agreement?
- Make a list of things you want to discuss prior to the meeting;
- Put priority items in the middle, so people have a chance to tune in and focus on them;
- Add the "standing/ standard" items which repeat every meeting (see sample meeting agenda below);
- Add a Miscellaneous item at the end for smaller points or some questions that might arise;
- Try to estimate how much time it would take for each item on the list;
- Ask people to agree on the agenda and timings when the meeting starts.

2. Communicate the expectations and agreements of the meeting

- Model a calm and positive attitude;
- Agree as a group what behavior is acceptable and expected once the meeting starts (see sample agreements below);
- If you are meeting in the same group, you can define the ground rules once and continue using them for the following meetings;
- Challenge behavior that goes against the ground rules or is disruptive;
- Give breaks for people to stretch, have a drink and re-energize if meetings are longer than 1,5 hours. Or give a break for people to calm down if discussions get heated.

3. Agree roles in the meeting

Usually a meeting has at least 4 roles:

- Facilitator - leads or facilitates the meeting;
- Time Keeper - keeps track of time;
- Record Keeper - takes notes;
- Keeper of the Heart - speaks up and intervenes if discussions get heated or tense.

4. Keep the discussion on track

- Facilitate the discussion; kindly ask people to come back to the main point if they veer off;
- Remind people how much time has passed and how much time there is remaining;
- Ask people to put extra questions that might arise on a “parking lot” or “bike rack” (by writing them on a post-it note and sticking them in a designated space) for them to be answered at the end of the meeting, or after the meeting.

5. Define next steps and actions

- Ask everyone to read out their action points till the next meeting;
- If there are big discrepancies in the responsibilities that different people have taken on, you can address this and suggest a reshuffling of tasks;
- Make sure you have recorded the action points in the meeting notes.

6. End the meeting on a positive note

- Summarize briefly what has been done and celebrate the hard work;
- Agree when the next meeting is taking place;
- Thank everyone for their participation.

Tips for running in-person meetings smoothly

- Think about the physical set up of the room. Make sure all participants can see each other and are facing each other.
- Think about what materials you might need – a flipchart board and paper, markers, a printed agenda, and so on.
- If culturally appropriate, make and maintain eye contact when speaking to others.
- Observe body language and non-verbal cues. For example: if people seem disengaged, or if they seem slouched and unfocused, you can offer a break.
- Rapport is easier to build at in-person meetings, so think of activities you might be able to do during or after the meeting to help support this. For example: do a team-building activity together; or go for a meal or a drink after the meeting.
- Send the notes after the meeting to everyone who attended.
- For a more detailed guide on making decisions, see Decision Making.

Tips for running online meetings smoothly:

- There is a learning curve in using video conferencing software, so do not worry if it is chaotic the first time, you will get there.
- Pick a platform that is easy to use for most people. Google Meet, Zoom, WhatsApp, Viber, and Jitsi (among others) offer free video conferencing capabilities.
- Ask everyone to join earlier to check their video and camera.
- Use headphones for best sound quality and privacy; and remember to check your lighting.
- Practice sharing your screen for document sharing and/or playing a video. This will help everyone remain focused and enable you to work together in real-time.
- Send the agenda to everyone prior to meeting and post it in the chat.
- Acknowledge that people might have a lot of distractions (such as messages and reminders) and ask them to think about how they can deal with that.
- Ask people to keep their camera on as this helps engagement and it makes it possible to observe a bit of the body language. They can turn it off if they have bandwidth issues.
- Ask people to use the chat function to post questions or give feedback.
- Allow more response time and thinking time when asking questions as delays in audio might happen.
- Think of virtual icebreakers you can do with the group to increase socialisation and build rapport.
- Use the option of making Breakout rooms for smaller group discussions.
- If time zones are different you can use Google Calendar, Teams, or time zone converters to make sure everyone knows the correct time for the meeting .
- For more details see Decision Making, see Virtual Teams.

Sample Agenda

1. A go-round or check-in. People go around the room and say how they are feeling or something they are enjoying at the moment.
2. Set up roles, agree on agenda and timings
3. Check on action items from the previous meeting. Were they completed, or not?
4. Agenda item #1 for the current meeting
5. Agenda item #2 for the current meeting
6. Review action points for everyone from items n. 4 and 5 for next meeting
7. Define when next meeting is taking place
8. Quick poll/ feedback on how the current meeting was run
9. Close the meeting. Thank everyone for their participation.

Sample Agreements

- Be respectful to each other. Don't use offensive language.
- Practice active listening. Ask questions.
- If you need to answer your phone, step away.
- Raise your hand to speak.
- Step up, step back. Do not dominate the meeting, if you have spoken several times, give others a chance to speak.
- If something said hurts you, say "ouch".
- What is said in the meeting is not discussed outside the meeting.

Related Resources

Decision Making
Virtual Teams Guide
Connective Activities for Meetings
Group Agreements
Effective Groups
Working Together Well
Shared Governance and Working in Circles
Making Space for Uncomfortable Emotions
Compassion for Challenging Behaviour

References

Facilitating Meetings - Seeds for Change
Facilitation Tools - Seeds for Change
Ground Rules for Respectful Discussion - adapted from STSci
Icebreaker questions for getting the conversation going
Icebreaker questions for online meetings
100 Ways to Energize Groups
Dowd, Elle (2020). "Step Up, Step Back."

For more resources like this one, go to https://resources.transitionnetwork.org/
or to the Transition Network international website www.transitionnetwork.org

Transition Network international