

Running an Effective Meeting

Meetings have several functions: they give members a chance to discuss goals and objectives, to keep updated on current events, and provide a chance to communicate and keep the group cohesive. But most of all, meetings allow groups to pull resources together for decision-making. Start with careful planning, finish with a thorough follow-up, and the meeting will almost run itself. Here are some tips to make your next meeting successful and productive.

BEFORE

1. Define the purpose of the meeting. If there is no purpose, don't have a meeting.
2. Have an executive board/officers' meeting a few days before the general meeting. Develop the meeting agenda at this time. An example agenda:
 - Call to Order
 - Approval of the Agenda
 - Correction and Approval of the Minutes
 - Officer Reports
 - Committee Reports
 - Unfinished Business
 - New Business
 - Announcements
 - Adjournment
3. Distribute the agenda and circulate background material such as lengthy documents or articles prior to the meeting so members will be prepared and feel involved.
4. Choose an appropriate meeting time. Set a limit and stick to it. Remember that members have other commitments.
5. If possible, arrange members so they can face each other. For larger groups, try U-shaped rows. A leader has better control when he/she is centrally located.
6. Choose a location suitable to group size. Small rooms with too many people get stuffy and create tension. A larger room is more comfortable and encourages individual expression.
7. Use visual aides as appropriate, such as posters and charts.
8. Vary meeting places, if possible, to accommodate different members.

DURING

1. Greet members and make them feel welcome.
2. If possible, serve light refreshments: they are good icebreakers.
3. Start on time. End on time.

4. Review agenda and set priorities for the meeting.
5. Stick to the agenda.
6. Encourage group discussion to get all viewpoints and ideas: leads to better quality decisions.
7. Encourage feedback. Ideas, activities, and commitment to the organization improve when members see their impact in the decision-making process.
8. Keep the conversation on topic. Feel free to ask for only constructive comments.
9. Delegate responsibilities and establish due dates. Give members a voice in the decision-making.
10. Keep minutes of the meeting for future reference in case a question or problem arises.
11. The leader should act as a role model by listening, showing interest, appreciation, and confidence in members. Admit mistakes.
12. Summarize agreements reached at the end of the meeting on a unifying or positive note.
13. Set a date and time for the next meeting.

AFTER

1. Prepare and distribute minutes within 24 hours. Quick action reinforces importance of meeting and reduces error of memory.
2. Discuss problems during the meeting with officers so improvements can be made.
3. Follow up on delegation decisions. See that all members understand and carry out their responsibilities.
4. Give recognition and appreciation to excellent and timely progress.
5. Put unfinished business on the agenda for the next meeting.
6. Conduct a periodic evaluation of the meetings. Weak areas can be analyzed and improved for more productive meetings.