

Tips for the Effective Conduct of Meetings

George Cheney, The University of Utah

Preparing for the Meeting

- Don't hold a meeting for its own sake, unless meetings in themselves are important for the identity and cohesion of the organization (as they sometimes are).
- Find a location that is accessible and as comfortable as possible for participants.
- If a meeting is expected to be more of a retreat than a forum for regular business, be sure to hold the meeting in a location away from the usual work area and signal the gathering's importance for participants.
- If a meeting is meant to be more of a working session than a general discussion of the day's business, limit the number of participants to a range of five to nine participants. (The same applies to ongoing committee and subcommittee work.)
- Offer opportunities in advance for participants to help formulate the agenda, to the extent possible.
- If a meeting is extraordinary, urgent or otherwise unusual, make all participants and other relevant parties aware of this issue.
- Try to publicize the agenda in advance, for both regular participants and potentially interested parties (like related departments with which you must coordinate activities or projects).

During the Meeting

- Normally begin a meeting with an opportunity for some informal chat as well as an opportunity for participants to make last-minute changes to agenda.
- If certain possible agenda items are better handled by memo or email, don't waste precious discussion time on them.
- When planning an agenda, classify topics and items as very important ("We must get through these"), somewhat important ("We'd like to get through these") and not important ("It would be nice to get through these but not a necessity"). Be sure not to place important items at the latter part of the meeting.
- Turn over the role of meeting facilitator to another person if you encounter a conflict of interest with the topic under discussion.
- For sensitive issues, approach the group to decide upon the best procedure for discussion.
- Practice good facilitation skills:
 - Issue questions and comments that stimulate discussion, especially on important matters.
 - Ensure relatively complete and equal participation around the group.
 - Ask questions of clarification and suggest connections between and among different comments.
 - Offer feedback to others that is timely, specific and constructive.
 - Try to summarize points of agreement, disagreement and conclusions, taking care not to prematurely declare consensus or resolution.
- Respect minority voices in discussions, even when they counter prevailing wisdom.
- Allow for the unexpected—especially in terms of the expression of emotion.