

RUNNING EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

Volunteers have many demands on their time. If an organization persists in unproductive, listless, unclear or dreary meetings, it will soon begin to lose its' volunteers. It's important that meetings be as effective as possible and at the same time meets the needs that participants bring. Humour, time for informal discussion and opportunity to get to know one another will ensure that meetings are fun as well as efficient and effective.

Tips for Running Effective Meetings

Meetings have several functions. They give members a chance to discuss and evaluate goals and objectives, keep updated on current events, provide a chance to communicate and keep the group cohesive. But most of all, meetings allow groups to pull resources together for decision-making.

Stay focused.

Meetings can seem futile because they go off on tangents, or grind down over a single point:

- Keep conversation focused on the topic.
- Feel free to ask for only constructive and non-repetitive comments.
- Tactfully end discussions when they are getting nowhere or becoming destructive or unproductive.

Get ideas flowing.

When members are not contributing or meetings are becoming stale you need to encourage people to express and discuss ideas:

- Encourage feedback.
- Ask for opinions – get all points of view.
- Brainstorm.
- Have small group discussion.

Ideas, activities and commitment to the organization improves when members see their impact on the decision making process and make attending meetings worth their while.

Expect some conflict.

Some conflict is good, so long as arguments don't get personal and people aren't driven into a "this is my position" stance. Criticism needs to be aimed at ideas not people:

- Too little criticism may reflect fear or a sense that nothing real will come from the meeting.
- Admit mistakes.
- Problems need to be discussed and suggestions for improvement need be made.
- Letting staff solve specific problems is effective and can help them to think more creatively.
- Ad hoc committees to deal with specific problems and implement solutions may be fast and effective.

Spread the power around.

If success depends on the cooperation of the people at the meeting, it's often best to let them decide, as a group, what ideas they'll use.

- ❑ Let members have a hand in deciding policies or procedures, they have more of a stake in seeing them work.
- ❑ Involvement in decision-making can lower their anxiety; lower absenteeism; and raise the quality of their work.
- ❑ By listening, showing interest and appreciation you build confidence in members.
- ❑ Involvement must be real: people need to define the problem, create potential solutions and choose which path of action.

Always follow through.

Summarize agreements reached and end the meeting on a unifying or positive note.

- ❑ Minutes produced and distributed within 3 – 4 days are the most effective.
- ❑ Quick action reinforces the importance of meetings and reduces errors of memory.
- ❑ Action steps include a summary of what was decided, *what each person has agreed to do*, specific deadlines, and the time and purpose of the next meeting.
- ❑ At the next meeting, the first order of business should be the status of the action steps.
- ❑ Follow-up on delegation decisions. See that all members understand and carryout their responsibilities.
- ❑ Give recognition and appreciation to excellent and timely progress.
- ❑ Put unfinished business on the agenda for the next meeting.
- ❑ And remember, effective meetings will keep them coming back!

Web Resources:

www.toolpack.com

www.meetingwizard.org

Effective Meetings – Tips

Do you dread attending meetings because they are dull, unproductive, disorganized and too long? With proper planning and preparation, any meeting can be effective and enjoyable.

- Know what you want to accomplish at the meeting. A well thought out agenda helps keep you on track.
- Involving the chair in determining the agenda will help the meeting run smoothly.
- Distribute the materials required for the meeting well in advance so members come prepared. Always bring extra copies!
- Set time limits for difficult discussion. Make meetings productive, predictable and as short as possible.
- Start on time. End on time.
- Review the agenda and set priorities for the meeting.
- Stick to the agenda.

Staff plays a big role in making a meeting effective and enjoyable. Start with a careful plan and finish with a thorough follow-up and your meetings will run smoothly. Use these tips to help you make your next meeting successful, productive and even fun.

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