

MAKING THE MOST OUT OF MEETINGS

WHAT MAKES A GOOD MEETING

- ✓ Meetings should have a purpose—the group should be trying to accomplish a specific, defined objective. Meeting for meeting's sake wastes time and drives people away.
- ✓ Agendas should be directly related to the meeting's purpose. For example, if the purpose of a group's monthly meeting is to reinforce people's ties to the group, the meeting should be more social and less administrative.
- ✓ The group should all be aware of, and agree to, the meeting's purpose. Circulate the agenda beforehand to make sure this is the case.
- ✓ Allow for social time before and/or after the meeting.
- ✓ Be realistic about the agenda; prioritize goals and seek to accomplish only what's feasible within **an hour or less**.
- ✓ Make sure everyone has a chance to participate and be heard. One way to do this is make time on the agenda for everyone at the meeting to share a piece of news or a highlight.

RUNNING GOOD MEETINGS

- ✓ Set ground rules. It can be very helpful to agree on procedural rules before beginning any substantive conversation—e.g., no interruptions; share airtime; all decisions by consensus; etc.
- ✓ Always start and end on time. Starting on time is very important; if people see that the meeting consistently starts late, they will start showing up late—and they will be frustrated at the outset that the meeting is not well-run.
- ✓ Read the group's body language. If people seem bored or tired, you may need to change the pace of the meeting.
- ✓ Stick to the agenda. People want to feel as if someone is in control of the meeting—so if the group is going over time on a topic, remind them of the agenda that the group agreed on. Ask the group if they want to alter the agenda or table the issue.
- ✓ Make sure that people can make a point without being interrupted; also, ask the opinions of people who don't volunteer to speak.

DEALING WITH CONFLICT

- ✓ When you are confronted with a difficult person or a conflict, don't get personal; remain in the framework of the meeting, the ground rules, and the agenda.
- ✓ Thank the person for his or her thoughts; refer back to the established ground rules and politely and firmly remind the person that he or she is moving away from the agenda or breaking one of the rules.
- ✓ If a discussion between two or more people gets very heated, step in and summarize each point of view. Ask the group if they want to continue discussing the question. Remind people of the ground rules. Try to take the emotion out of the air with a calm tone.

MAKING DECISIONS

- ✓ It's important to allow for ample discussion so that everyone feels their voice has been heard; at the same time, meetings need to have conclusions. Again, read the group's body language to get a sense of whether they are ready to move on.
- ✓ Help the group move to action/decision by summarizing the points that have been expressed and stating the decision that has to be made in clear terms. Ask if anyone has any last comments, then move to make a decision.
- ✓ If the group makes decisions by consensus, poll the members for their views, then summarize the group's decision.