



## Planning a Successful Meeting

Presented by the Leadership Development Committee

One of the responsibilities of being a leader is planning and running successful meetings. Meetings should be efficient, inspiring, and maximize productivity. The chairperson or facilitator needs to focus on the content of the meeting and ensure group dynamics. Respectful communication needs to be maintained and off-side conversations kept at a minimum as they often distract from points being made.

### Tips for Productive, Enjoyable Meetings

- There should be pre-determined guidelines for membership of meeting attendees. The roles, functions, goals and objectives should be clearly stated and understood by all members who attend the meetings.
- Meetings should be pre-scheduled for at least 6 months to a year in advance to capitalize on the attendance of all members.
- It is generally best to meet in the same place at the same time. The meeting location should be free of distractions and conducive to the group size. The room set-up should enhance conversation flow.
- On-line information-sharing content should be maintained and accessible to all members of the group. Generally, it is best to circulate documents prior to the meeting so attendees have an opportunity to review them in advance and be prepared for discussion.
- Agendas should be distributed 3-7 days before the meeting. There should be a consistent agenda style to keep the meeting structured. All members of the group should be encouraged to submit items for the agenda.
- The meeting should be started on time even if it means starting before everyone is present. This shows respect for those who are on time and sends a strong message to those who are late. Designate a timekeeper to keep the meeting on track.
- Invited guests and new members should be introduced at the beginning as well as their purpose for being there.
- Discussions should be kept on track. Seek consensus of the group, not unanimous decisions. If an item is irrelevant or beyond discussion at hand, state when and where the item can be discussed at another time.

- Be cognizant of the stress level within the group. If the meeting becomes stuck on an issue, change the frame of reference to allow a flow of ideas.
- Finish the meeting on time. Be sure all stakeholders are kept informed of work-in-progress. All items that require additional work should be assigned to appropriate people with realistic timeframes for completion.
- End the meeting on a positive note. Provide positive feedback and recap all decisions. Thank everyone who attended. This will ensure that participants feel their time and input was valued.
- Distribute minutes within a reasonable time after the meeting. Be sure there is opportunity for interim work to be done and completed before the next meeting.

## **Recommendations for Effective Meeting Chairing and Facilitation**

- Guide and stimulate discussions. Be sure that all sides are heard and no one side dominates.
- Invite ideas from the group before expressing your own thoughts.
- Avoid lecturing the group.
- Use questions to seek information and clarify what you have heard from the group.
- Summarize periodically what has been said and what decisions need to be made.
- Do not let conversation continue without direction or purpose.
- Deal firmly with people who are disruptive or engage in a negative fashion.
- Encourage everyone to participate and avoid dealing in individual personalities.
- Manage talkative people with a direct statement such as, "Please hold on to that thought while we get ideas from others that we haven't heard from in a while."

## **Conclusion**

Every minute counts in a busy workday. Being productive and efficient are the goals of a successful meeting. The challenge of being an effective chairperson or facilitator can be enhanced by practicing proven strategies. Collaborative decision-making and personal development can produce rewarding benefits and go a long way to keeping the team intact and the meetings enjoyable!