

Keeping Meetings on Track

Meetings are an important aspect of student activity work. With limited time to meet and members who are often overscheduled, it is essential that meeting time be put to good use. Take the following steps to ensure that members leave your meetings feeling their time was well spent.

Define the purpose of the meeting. Every meeting must have a purpose acceptable to its participants. If there is no real reason, don't hold the meeting! Sometimes the purpose is clearly stated, sometimes it's taken for granted. Do you want people to experience an activity? Learn something? Make decisions? Plan a project? Consider various activities that will help accomplish your purpose, and structure your meeting to accomplish the purpose you have in mind.

Plan the agenda. Once you know your objective, write down an outline of the items to be handled during the meeting. List them in the order in which they are to be addressed, indicate how much time will be spent on each item, and who will be handling each item. Also consider what method will be used for each item, such as

presentations, brainstorming, buzz groups, etc.

Many groups follow a simple version of the order of business recommended in *Robert's Rules of Order*. Items are usually handled in this order:

- Call to order
- Roll call
- Reading and approval of minutes
- Reports of officers
- Reports of committees, both standing and special
- Unfinished business
- New business
- Program announcements
- Adjournment.

Some meetings call for a less formal agenda than the one listed above. Even a committee meeting or a quick meeting of officers should have some idea of the specific results group members want to obtain. If an agenda hasn't been developed before the meeting, develop one on the spot at the start of the meeting so everyone knows

what will be covered.

Consider your time limit.

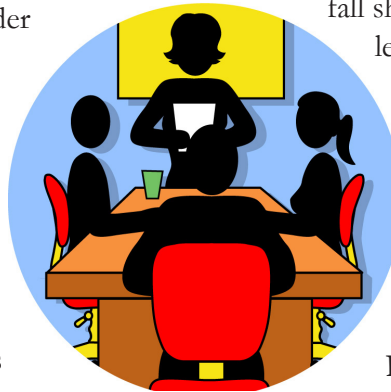
Times of meetings vary greatly. How much can be dealt with in the time available? An over-ambitious agenda is easy to fall into and sets the group up to fall short of its goals,

leaving some members frustrated because their business was not dealt with. Plan your agenda so that everything can be handled within the time allowed.

Plan for the people who will be involved.

Consider who will be present at the meeting. Are they familiar with the business at hand? If not, how can you bring them up to speed? How motivated will they be to participate? Who will be leading the activities? Answering these questions will help determine the activities of the meeting.

Schedule the meeting in an appropriate setting. Plan an atmosphere that will be conducive to participation and productivity. Consider such things as size of room, seating arrangement, lighting, sound, temperature, and equipment needed. For example, if your



objective is to get small groups of people together to discuss an issue and come up with potential solutions, you wouldn't want to hold the meeting in the auditorium, where small group discussions are awkward at best. Hold it instead in the library or cafeteria where groups can gather around a table.

Follow your plan. Work through the agenda items one at a time, being careful to stick to time limits and avoid getting off track. Be flexible enough to adjust your plan if truly needed, but don't allow one item to take over the meeting unless it's warranted.

Keep the meeting focused on the task at hand. For example, either brainstorm or evaluate ideas, not both at the same time. List possible solutions or alternatives, then talk about criteria for selecting among them (time, cost, people required, likelihood of administrative support, etc.)

Review decisions made. All agreements made during the meeting should be verified at the end of the meeting, such as tasks assigned, committees formed, chairs appointed, etc. Plan steps that need to be taken before the next meeting to advance projects undertaken and pin down the who, what, when, and where.

Evaluate the meeting. Take a few minutes at the end of the

meeting to evaluate how successful the meeting was. What went well? What could be improved upon for the next meeting? Focusing on the process will help all members

have a better understanding of what a good meeting should be like and help ensure that each meeting becomes more effective than the last.

Checklist for Planning a Meeting

Although meetings take many forms and serve many purposes, they all share some things in common. When planning the meeting, take the following items into consideration to ensure a productive meeting.

Before the Meeting

- Members have been notified well in advance the time, date, and location of the meeting.
- Letters of invitation have been sent to guest speakers or other non-members who are to attend the meeting. Include directions.
- An agenda is planned and copies are prepared for attendees.
- There are time estimates of how long each agenda item will take
- People who will be leading activities or presenting information during the meeting have been notified ahead of time and understand what is expected of them.
- Committee reports or other handouts are ready and copied for participants
- Room reservations have been made so there will be no conflict with another group trying to use the facility.
- Necessary equipment (microphone, projector, video or DVD player, computer, etc.) has been tested to make sure it works.
- Layout of the room has been checked to make sure activities planned can be carried out there.
- Appropriate number of chairs, tables, etc. are available.
- Room set-up arrangements are made.
- Custodial requests have been made.
- Name tags are purchased.
- Copies of previous minutes are prepared.

- Visual aids are prepared.
- Refreshments are ordered.
- Meeting evaluation form is prepared.

Just Before the Meeting

- Seating is arranged according to plan.
- P.A. system is hooked up and working properly.
- Refreshments are ready.
- Name tags and agendas are available.
- Meeting evaluation forms are available.
- Other materials available.
- Greeters are standing at entrance.

After the Meeting

- Clean up the facility.
- Return equipment.
- Send thank-you notes to everyone who helped.
- Read and analyze meeting evaluation forms to see what could be done better next time.
- Prepare minutes of the meeting and distribute to attendees.
- Phone or write to remind people of the commitments made during the meeting—to complete jobs, contact people, carry out an activity, etc.
- Make plans for the next meeting.

Source: Checklist is excerpted from the *National Leadership Camp Leadership Curriculum Guide* © 1994, NASSP.