

MEETINGS

FIVE STEPS TO RUNNING AN EFFECTIVE MEETING

Step 1: Make every meeting matter

Make sure a meeting is needed and that one is not being held just because it's on the schedule. Only invite people who really need to be there. These are people who have something to contribute or who have something to gain from the meeting or who have the power to move an action plan forward.

You might want to invite some people to only a portion of a meeting. A good idea, for instance, is to set aside about 15-30 minutes at the end of a meeting to update the person on what they should know and what you need from them to move forward.

Make sure meetings are scheduled as far in advance as possible so members can schedule around the meetings. This promotes meeting attendance. It is also a good idea to send out meeting reminders. Even though the meeting is on the calendar, a reminder reinforces how important it is for everyone to attend.

Step 2: Establish an agenda and set goals for the meeting

Write an agenda and if appropriate, distribute it to attendees before your meeting. This will ensure that everyone understands the objectives of the meeting, and it's a good 'refresher' to get team members thinking about the upcoming meeting—it gets everyone on the same page.

When you send out the agenda to attendees, ask them whether you've missed anything that needs to be added to the agenda: this facilitates more participation. The meeting agenda is also an attendance promoter. If the agenda clearly indicates action items and decisions that need to be made, members will want to be at the meeting.

Five Rules for an Ordered Agenda

1. Agenda Integrity: All items on the agenda are discussed when they are scheduled.
2. Temporal Integrity: Keep to a sensible internal schedule of items within the meeting.
3. Rule of Halves: Get all items to be discussed to the agenda maker half the time between meetings (e.g., if a meeting runs monthly, items are submitted two weeks in advance). This allows the chair to prioritize and to get any back up information required.
4. Rule of Thirds: The chair orders the items so that the most important items come in the middle third of the meeting. Unfortunately and realistically, there are usually late-comers and people who must leave early. The middle third of the meeting is when you will likely have the highest attendance and energy.
5. Rule of Three-Quarters: At the three-quarters point between meetings, all relevant material is sent to the committee members. This way they can read and prepare for the upcoming meeting.

Step 3: Take charge of your meeting

At the beginning of each meeting, set aside time up front to set the stage for an open, engaged meeting. Consider:

- Reviewing the agenda (and revising if necessary)
- Reviewing your Team Guidelines or Ground Rules
- Making the space as comfortable and welcoming as possible

MEETINGS

FIVE STEPS TO RUNNING AN EFFECTIVE MEETING *continued*

Step 3: Take charge of your meeting *continued*

Begin and End Meetings on Time!

If someone is late to a meeting, catch them up during a break. It is disrespectful to those who are on time to wait for those who are tardy. It also cuts into your working time. Ending on time, unless you've agreed as a group to work longer, is just as important. People might have other engagements shortly after the meeting.

Stay on Track

Use a meeting agenda with time allotted for each topic (i.e., Topic #1: Review staff feedback on project—15 minutes). If the topic begins to run off the rails, bring the conversation back to the topic at hand. Remind people of the topic time limit. If the new topic seems important to the group, you may need to revise your agenda. You can decide to build in more discussion time for that item and eliminate other items of less importance, or add the item to the agenda for the next meeting. The group needs to determine the priority of agenda items.

Step 4: Encourage input from everyone

Make sure everyone is heard. Nudge quiet types, curb the longwinded, reign in tangents and control outbursts. Foster a respectful environment where everyone is heard and where one person does not dominate the conversation. Call on those who do not speak and gently remind those who speak too much. Shutting someone down or immediately saying 'no' might hinder brainstorming, so be respectful and encourage all participants. You can reference the team guidelines/agreement to support your statements and requests.

Reaching decisions can be complex and challenging. Proceed carefully, listen to concerns and opinions and consider alternatives. When a decision has been made, it is more likely that participants will accept and support it if they've been involved in its creation.

After all discussion has finished, the chair should summarize discussion and opinions and ask if everyone is clear on the issue and options discussed. Then a vote can be taken. By summarizing, the chair assures everyone that their views have been considered and everyone has had an opportunity to influence the decision. If people believe they've been given a fair chance, they can accept and support the group's decision more easily even if they "lose" on the actual vote.

Step 5: Leave with a plan

At the end of a meeting, review action plans and ensure everyone knows what and when things are expected of them. This ensures action items are followed up and the project keeps moving forward. These action plan items are a commitment or "contract" among team members, and it's important to get confirmation from individuals that they understand what they're being asked to do before the next meeting.

All too often little work gets done between meetings because action plans are not clearly laid out.

Whenever possible, determine the next meeting date if it's not already scheduled.

1. Adapted from the 2007 Provincial Nursing Workload Committee Toolkit, accessible here: www.bcnu.org/Documents/pnwp_resource_toolkit.pdf, and from Mina, E. (2009). 101 Boardroom Problems and How to Solve Them. Amacom, NY.