

Effective Meetings

What Successful Partnerships Do: A series of practical guides

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INTRODUCTION

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A meeting is two or more people sharing ideas or information. Meetings can be an efficient way to disseminate information, obtain feedback, or make collective decisions. They are an indispensable tool for finding innovative solutions to problems¹. Sometimes, though, we have so many meetings that we can't get our work done! Other times, inefficient meetings keep us from progressing. How do we find the balance between enough and too many meetings? How can we hold useful, efficient meetings?

This resource offers advice to community organizations and partnerships on the necessary components of effective meetings. Most of the advice in this resource can be applied to virtual as well as in-person meetings.

THREE STEPS FOR EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

L'Institut Atlantiques d'Aménagement des Territoires, in their excellent guide to working together², outline three steps to effective and efficient meetings:

1. Preparing the meeting

Effective meetings require preparation and planning. Pre-meeting planning should include:

Determining who should attend: Using lenses of inclusion and effective time management, consider who should be present at the meeting. Is there anyone missing whose perspective would add useful diversity? Who doesn't need to attend but should be sent the minutes and otherwise kept informed?

Determining goals and objectives: Effective meetings have a clear goal or purpose, relevant objectives, and clear outcomes. We recommend that meeting attendees contribute to the meeting goal and objectives where possible (for example, at the previous meeting).

Preparing the agenda: Once you are clear on the goal, objectives, and outcomes for the meeting, structure the meeting in order to accomplish these. Identify the main agenda items and allot time for each. In general, meetings should last no more than 90 minutes. Concentration and motivation diminish after this time.

Distributing the meeting invitation and agenda: Send a clear and simple invitation, along with supporting materials, to all participants as soon as the meeting date is confirmed. Aim for no later than one week before the meeting date. Improve turnout by providing a reminder the day before the meeting by email, phone, or calendar update.

Arranging meeting logistics: Arrange for audiovisual requirements, room set up, refreshments, supplies (pens, paper, tape, etc.), and printed materials. Consider any specific accommodations that your meeting attendees may need in order to participate actively, such as remote participation options, physical accessibility considerations, hearing or visual considerations, languages spoken, childcare, and so on. Test any necessary technology, ensure participants are able to use it, and make backup plans in case it fails.

Meeting agendas should include:

- ▶ Title, location, date and time of the meeting
- ▶ List of invitees
- ▶ Welcome and introductions
- ▶ Review of the meeting guidelines
- ▶ Review of the goals and objectives for the meeting
- ▶ Review and approval of the agenda
- ▶ Review of the minutes from the last meeting
- ▶ List of agenda items to discuss, with allotted time for each item
- ▶ Wrap up and next steps, including date and agenda items for the next meeting

2. Facilitating the meeting

Facilitation is the art of guiding groups of people through processes to help them reach agreed-upon goals in a way that encourages participation, ownership and creativity from all involved, while fostering respect and trust³. Good facilitation is an essential component to achieving success as a group³. Facilitation techniques vary depending on whether you want to gather information, create shared understanding, identify possible solutions, set priorities, or take action.

Select facilitation techniques that will ensure that everyone can participate. Consider the current community context, the people or groups who will be participating, the overall purpose and desired outcomes of the event, and goals and expectations of those involved⁴. Facilitation techniques should advance a spirit of equity and inclusion⁵. HC Link's [Facilitation for Healthy Communities Toolkit](#) offers brief descriptions and instructions for a number of techniques that HC Link consultants frequently use.

End the meeting on time.

3. Following up after the meeting

At the end of each meeting, conduct a brief evaluation. Discuss what worked well and what could be improved. Use this feedback to help plan the next meeting. You will find examples of practical, engaging and short evaluation techniques in HC Link's resource [The Power of Reflection: An introduction to participatory evaluation techniques](#).

Send out minutes for each meeting within 24 hours⁶. Action items should be clearly defined, clearly assigned, and well understood. To encourage group ownership, divide tasks among group members.

Meeting minutes should include:

- ▶ Date, time and location of the meeting
- ▶ List of those in attendance and those who sent regrets
- ▶ The goal and objectives for the meeting
- ▶ Any action items from the previous meeting
- ▶ Discussion, decisions and actions (including the person responsible)
- ▶ Date, time and location of the next meeting

PARTING WORDS

Adequate preparation, a participatory and inclusive approach and an appropriate agenda are the key ingredients for effective meetings.

An effective and productive meeting gives participants the information they need in order to complete their assigned tasks. Meetings should increase engagement and group motivation to accomplish shared goals. Meeting participants should leave the meeting with the feeling that progress has been made and that the meeting was a good use of their time.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Facilitation for Healthy Communities Toolkit](#) *HC Link*

[The Power of Reflection: An introduction to participatory evaluation techniques](#) *HC Link*

[Facilitating Meetings](#) *Seeds for Change*

REFERENCES

¹ Conseilrh.ca. [Un milieu de travail convivial : Réunions fructueuses](#).

² Institut Atlantique d'Aménagement du Territoire, Poitou-Charentes. [Guide méthodologique du travail en commun : Animer une réunion](#). 2005.

³ David Sibbet. *Principles of Facilitation: The Purpose and Potential of Leading Group Process*. The Grove Consultants International, 2002.

⁴ HC Link. [Facilitation for Healthy Communities Toolkit](#). Toronto, ON. 2017.

⁵ Ville d'Ottawa et l'IVTF. [Guide de l'Optique d'équité et d'inclusion : Une ressource pour les organismes communautaires](#). rév. 2015.

⁶ Association paritaire pour la santé et la sécurité du travail (APSSAP). [Santé psychologique : Quelques clés pour avoir des réunions efficaces](#). 2013.

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Suggested Citation: Andrea Bodkin and Robyn Kalda. *Effective Meetings*. Toronto, ON: HC Link. August 2017. This document has been prepared with funds provided by the Government of Ontario. The information herein reflects the views of the authors and is not officially endorsed by the Government of Ontario.