

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR GROUP MEETINGS

1. Personal invitations to meetings are the most effective way to get people to turn out.
2. Set down an agenda and communicate it in advance of the meeting. Avoid last minute surprises if at all possible.
3. Use a blackboard or some other easily readable form to post the agenda and record the decisions which have been made.
4. A new group with little meeting experience may want to appoint a facilitator. More experienced groups should consider having many, if not all, of their members practice facilitation skills and share facilitation tasks. Decisions and discussions go more smoothly when all members are attentive to the needs of the group and share responsibility for the meeting process. Even if a facilitator is appointed, it may be helpful for the role to rotate, both from meeting to meeting and within the meeting itself.
5. Start and end the meeting on time. Set time limits for particular agenda items when possible. It may oversimplify a complex topic, but can effectively focus the discussion and deal with it without burning out the participants.
6. Start the meeting with a few songs or a round-robin of recent highlights or successes from each person. This can start the meeting on an upbeat note and help people to connect with one another.
7. Be especially aware of and sensitive to those who don't talk much. Try not to speak a second time until everyone has at least had the opportunity to speak once. This may involve several silent pauses while those who are more quiet, or who need more time to consider the issue, prepare to speak. Try to notice if you have spoken more or less often than others.
8. Leave time for other people to speak by making your comments brief and to the point. Don't fight to speak next by talking loudest or fastest. Try to listen courteously and attentively, and remember that listening is more than just waiting for a previous speaker to finish. Several seconds should elapse before another speaker begins. If you find yourself preparing your own speech rather than listening to those speaking, you perhaps should not be speaking at all.
9. Try to understand (and keep separate) your political analysis vs. your personal feelings. Where personal feelings and needs are to be shared, do not mask these as political imperatives everyone must share. This tendency can stem from insecurity - try to trust the people in the group (including yourself!).
10. Don't hesitate to tactfully steer the discussion away from irrelevant tangents, rambling speeches, and personal ego trips. This can prevent much confusion and impatience for the entire group.

11. When considering issues, define the problem first, then search for solutions. The more ideas and alternatives brought up the better. Try to bring out all positions before analyzing, criticizing or defending some. Paraphrase peoples' statements; ask for more information or clarification. When all positions have been presented, don't speak to defend your original stand, but rather to advance the group decision-making process.

12. Look for the most general, basic agreements first, and build on them. Periodically summarize the collective thoughts of the meeting. Sometimes seemingly conflicting positions can be reconciled ingeniously, so don't be afraid to bring out disagreements. Have persons with strong feelings meet in small groups when there are basic disagreements on issues or proposals, or when there is a need to work out specific wordings. Whenever unnecessary persuasion begins, use small groups.

13. Avoid repetitive discussion. When arguments are repeated, it's probably time to make a decision. List comments on a blackboard or poster paper to reduce repetition.

14. Take breaks, play games, sing a song, etc. when people get glassy-eyed and/or stuck on an issue.

15. When the group appears to be coming to a decision, have the minute-taker repeat back the decision before it is finalized.

16. Decide on some specific actions as a follow-up to any meeting; just calling another meeting is not enough. Ensure a mechanism for carrying out what is decided upon. Pin people down and make them declare responsibilities for specific tasks. 17. Evaluate the meeting process by asking what went well and what could be done differently in the future.

18. Be flexible in implementing these or other suggestions. Enjoying the meeting is more important than following guidelines to the letter.