

Section 2.5
Effective Meetings

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INTRODUCTION

Every organization must work within the confines of its budget and particularly in the public sector, must account for expenditures and maximize the use of the resources they have at their disposal. Given tough economic times, getting the most out of scarce resources has become a priority and to accomplish this, both public and private sector organizations are increasingly relying on performance measures, benchmarking and other business tools to improve efficiency and effectiveness. One of the ways to make the most effective use out of an organization's human resources is to ensure that time spent in meetings is productive time.

So, you've been selected to be chair, now what do you do?

The Chairperson

Understanding your responsibilities in chairing a meeting is an important factor in how effective the meeting will be. No matter how large or small the meeting, a chairperson has certain responsibilities.

The chair should begin by getting to know who the members of the group are, what skill sets, strengths or weaknesses each member brings to the table, and what each member might be expected to contribute.

The chairperson is responsible for planning the meeting. Planning involves assessing the situation, deciding on goals (if that has not been clearly defined by a higher authority), assessing the options for achieving those goals, and selecting the optimum course of action.

In addition, the chairperson is responsible for the group members. The chair should involve and motivate, as well as educate the group. The members should be informed specifically what will be expected from them, the time-frame in which they have to accomplish the task at hand, and any budgetary constraints they may have. Also, the chair is responsible for delegating tasks according to the skill sets of the group members, and to encourage, and where necessary assist, each group member to contribute to the overall success of the project.

Michael Winer, a consultant and founder of the organization "4Results", a company dedicated to mobilizing individual, organizational and community resources to achieve results through joint efforts, reports the following statistics regarding meetings:

- Leaders spend over 50% of their work day preparing for, attending or following up on meetings,
- 36% of meetings do not achieve the intended outcome,
- 50% of meetings have no agenda,
- 70% of leaders have no training in meeting effectiveness,
- 30% of meetings are perceived as unnecessary.

With these sobering statistics in mind, there are ways to ensure that time spent in meetings is time invested wisely.

If you don't know where you are going, how will you know when you get there?

WHY HOLD A MEETING?

The reasons why a meeting might be called vary. Meetings may involve the simple dissemination of information, an exchange of ideas and experiences, communication of internal or external changes to the work environment, or team development.

Whatever the purpose for the meeting, the chair and the participants need to be very clear about why they are meeting, and what the intended goals are. The basic reasons for holding a meeting are as follows:

1. Build Relationships

An underrated purpose for holding a meeting is to network, build working relationships, socialize, and promote team work. This type of meeting can lay the groundwork for more effective working relationships in future undertakings.

2. Disseminate Information

Sometimes the best method of disseminating information is to gather the stakeholders in a room together and give a presentation on a topic of mutual interest or concern. Often information is most effective if it includes a visual component and time is allotted for addressing any questions or concerns that people might have.

3. Set Goals

Cohesiveness in a working group or team is important for the successful outcome of any venture. Whether embarking on a new project, or conducting a standing meeting of a working group or team, goal setting can bring the team together to focus on the same goals. Having clearly articulated, achievable, goals and a definite time frame for accomplishing those goals is the first step toward success.

3. Obtain Feedback

When topics are to be presented that require feedback or input

from a group of stakeholders in order to enhance, improve or just gather new insights or ideas a meeting of those involved can be the best way to decide which path to take next.

5. Make a Decision

In instances where it is a group decision that is required, the interaction of the stakeholders is key to the decision making process. This would be a situation where the group is making the decision rather than a decision-maker simply seeking input or feedback from the group.

6. Post-Project Debrief & Celebrate Success

Often times when a group has been involved in a project, the best way to wind up a successful venture is to bring participants together for a debriefing. This allows an opportunity to review the processes and procedures to ensure that predetermined outcomes have been met, and to prepare a course of action for the next stage. Of course a very important part of this debriefing is to celebrate the group’s successes. Order a pizza and celebrate everyone’s hard work.

A single meeting may be held to cover any one or all of the reasons illustrated above, however before a meeting is called, there are alternatives to consider.

ALTERNATIVES

Is there a better way to accomplish your goals?

Certain issues may be most effectively resolved by making an executive decision without extensive input from stakeholders or staff. When it is necessary to consult with colleagues, information can also be disseminated by means of a memo, letter, fax or by email thereby precluding the necessity of holding a meeting. In the simplest terms, consultation can be carried out by using the telephone.

If all the options have been considered and it appears that a meeting is necessary, there are still other alternatives that allow for group consultation to occur without the need for people to leave their normal workplace to attend.

The internet provides a variety of options for web conferencing, real-time online meetings, and virtual collaboration. The technology allows participants to use whiteboards, share applications, present PowerPoint and other presentation software programs in addition other tools that would be available in a traditional meeting. Participants wishing to take advantage of this type of online meeting would require a telephone and a PC with internet access.

There are a number of software programs that allow online conferencing and offer the capability for participant interaction and presentations in real time over a distance. An internet search should provide a number of possible software and program options.

“Managers who find themselves in meetings a quarter of the time or more are wasting time.”

Peter F. Drucker *The Effective Executive*

THE PLANNING PROCESS

What Do You Want to Accomplish?

Once you have established why a meeting is necessary, the key to a successful outcome is to identify what you expect to accomplish, and what the intended outcomes will be. For example you may expect to have decisions made on a number of items, or you may want to provide information on certain issues to staff or working group members. Maybe you need to acknowledge and celebrate recent accomplishments.

Having the outcomes defined in advance allows for participants to focus on the job at hand and ensures greater productivity. Research shows that setting doable goals set in advance, and having those goals clearly communicated to participants, will enhance the likelihood of a successful outcome.

The Attendees

As Stephen Covey says in “*Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*”, “Begin with the end in mind.” The meeting purpose will determine the focus, the agenda, as well as the participants.

The decision about who to invite to attend depends entirely on what

you expect to accomplish. Having the right people at the table can make the difference between accomplishing your goals and wasting everyone's time.

Determine in advance what skill sets are going to be required, what stakeholder groups may need to be represented, and who among the various stakeholder groups might best provide the skills required to accomplish the task.

If necessary, consult with colleagues to determine who might be the most effective people to include. It is usually better to postpone rather than hold a meeting without critical staff present.

When approaching people to work on the project, make preliminary contact with the individuals to explain the purpose of the meeting, what you hope to accomplish, what you expect them to contribute, and why you feel they will be an important contributor to a successful outcome.

Follow-up this initial contact with a meeting notice, which will include the agenda, and any pertinent background information. Include specifics on where the meeting will be held and when, as well as a list of all the participants. Ensure that each information package contains the name and phone number of a contact person if there are any questions.

Prior to the meeting, select one of the participants, or have a staff person designated to attend in order to take notes on what was discussed, tasks that may have been assigned, and who may have volunteered to carry out a specific task. The notes should also indicate the expected due date for each task to be accomplished. More details on recording the minutes of a meeting will follow.

What Type of Meeting Best Suits Your Needs?

There is a wealth of information on the internet on hosting effective meetings. A quick internet search can provide some valuable insight into how to chair a successful meeting. Jo Schlegel, Editor-In-Chief, www.Salary.com provides a wealth of information on this topic.

Basic Types of Meetings:

According to Ms. Schlegel, the basic types of meetings are as follows:

- **Standing meeting:** A regularly scheduled staff get together to discuss projects and progress. For example, when a working group or team meet regularly to discuss a specific project until it is completed would be standing meetings. The format and agenda for such meetings tend to be relatively well established after a while and each member of the group knows what to expect. Estimating the time involved for such meetings becomes easier over time. If your organization has an electronic calendar system, standing meetings can be booked months in advance.
- **Topical meeting:** A meeting called to discuss a specific subject, such as an issue that has arisen at work, or an external development that may impact the group. This type of meeting may occur as a result of a crisis or issue that needs to be addressed by the working group.
- **Presentation:** This is a more highly structured meeting where one or more people are invited to speak. A facilitator may be retained to lead the meeting and provide continuity. The purpose of this type of meeting is to provide detailed information on a particular topic or number of topics. Attendees may have an opportunity to ask questions, but typically their participation is limited. This type of meeting may be scheduled on a fairly regular basis to keep staff up to date on what has been happening with the organization, or to inform them on new developments or plans the organization may have for the future.
- **Conference:** A conference meeting is usually more structured, and would have a number of speakers or facilitators with a master of ceremonies to maintain continuity. This type of meeting is similar to a presentation meeting, and would involve various experts providing in-depth information a particular topic. This type of meeting provides an opportunity for networking, in addition to the educational sessions where participants can learn from various presenters and compare notes with their colleagues on best practices.
- **Emergency meeting:** A meeting called to address a crisis, whether internal or external to the organization would be an emergency meeting. These are often arranged with little advance notice. People attending such a meeting would either

be directly affected by the crisis in some way, or would be providing essential information to the public or other stakeholder groups, and their attendance would be mandatory. In an emergency situation, such a meeting would take priority over other types of meetings.

- **Seminar:** Seminars are formally structured meetings, usually with an educational purpose. Seminars are usually led by people with expertise in a specific subject matter such as finance, municipal law etc. Professional development opportunities with a specific focus or topic would be seminar meetings.

Public Consultation Meetings

At times it is beneficial to consult with community members on projects or topics which will impact the larger community. Public consultation sessions may raise some additional concerns for the meeting planner.

When attendees arrive for a public consultation, a staff person or committee member should be on hand to greet them as they arrive and to record the names of attendees as well as any group or organization that they may represent. During the meeting if key messages are brought up it will be very helpful to know what group might be taking a particular position on the topic. The same advice applies here, that a positive working relationship can be established by a warm friendly greeting and offering refreshments to people as they arrive. This way the facilitator and other working group members will have an opportunity to mingle with the attendees and establish a relationship with the individuals and groups that are being consulted.

Selecting a Location for your meeting

All the advance preparation and dissemination in the world may still result in a fiasco at a meeting if the wrong location is selected. The success or failure of meetings may simply come down to how comfortable the participants are during the session. For example, a room that is too small for the number of people attending will make participants very uncomfortable and result in not achieving the intended goals.

Some particulars to be mindful of when choosing the location for an important meeting include:

- Budget concerns - The budget allotted to the project may be the deciding factor in a lot of decisions involved in planning a meeting. The location may be selected based solely on the fact that a boardroom is available without having to pay a rental fee. However, even if the room is free, there may be other budget issues to consider, for example audio visual requirements. Will the facilitator or presenter provide any special equipment for Powerpoint presentations, or an overhead projector? If not there may be a need to borrow or rent equipment.
- Vary the location - Are all your meetings of a particular group held in the same location? Sometimes just bringing the working group to new surroundings can result in creative thinking and innovative solutions. When the working group consists of people who must travel to attend meetings, rotating the location of the meetings from one member's location to another not only provides an opportunity for each person to showcase their particular region, it also provides a welcome change of venue for the group. In addition, the burden of travel is shared equally among all members of the group when meeting sites are rotated in this way.
- Centralize the location - By holding meetings at a site central to all participants, no one individual is expected to travel excessively. Also, turf issues and work related interferences may be reduced or avoided altogether by holding the meeting at an offsite location central to everyone.
- Consider the amenities - A site may be selected because it is central to all participants therefore no individual has to travel a great deal more than the others to attend, however there is something also to be said for holding the meeting at a location that provides ulterior incentives for participants to attend. It may be that there are nearby shopping, or other attractions that people can avail themselves of either before or after the meeting. A simple matter of convenient parking may be the deciding point in selecting a specific location. Important also is to consider any accessibility issues that may arise with attendees.
- Refreshments - Probably one of the most important

considerations in planning a meeting of any size is the requirement for refreshments. This is particularly important if people are traveling any distance to attend the meeting. Morning meetings in particular should be arranged so that coffee, tea, fruit juices and most importantly bottled water is available to the attendees. It may also be advisable to provide muffins or other foodstuffs as well.

If the meeting is planned to coincide with mealtimes, arrangements should be made to provide a meal for the participants as well. Often times this may be simply a plate of sandwiches and an assortment of fruit. In winter sandwiches should be accompanied by a hot soup or in summer by a light salad. However, it should be kept in mind that sandwiches can become very tiresome especially for people who are attending frequent meetings. Meals should be accompanied by coffee, tea, and bottled water as well as soft drinks or juice for those who do not drink tea or coffee.

Providing meals for meeting participants can offer an opportunity to showcase a local restaurant by having them cater the occasion with one of their menu specialties. This not only highlights what is available in the local community, it gives participants the opportunity to experience local cuisine. Having the meal catered also ensures that there will be variety in the food provided at recurring meetings.

The room

The first concern in selecting a room for the meeting is ensuring that the space is the appropriate size to accommodate the expected number of attendees. Having a room too small or too big might lead to discomfort for participants and may have a detrimental effect on concentration levels as well as personal comfort.

Does the room have adequate lighting, fresh air or air conditioning? Are there noises from outside the room that may possibly interfere with the meeting. Are the chairs comfortable, but not so much so that participants will feel too relaxed to work on the tasks required?

The temperature should be at a comfortable level and the lighting should be adequate for reading and writing. It is also a good idea to have lighting controls easily accessible for dimming lights for

presentations. This might be accomplished simply by having blinds that may be closed on sunny days.

Arrangements should be made for appropriate audio visual equipment should prior to the meeting. Time can be wasted and attendees will become frustrated and even angry if at the last minute the organizers are involved in trying to locate necessary equipment and delaying the progress of the meeting.

Seating arrangements can be important. Depending on the type of meeting, it may be advisable to have participants face one another across a table to facilitate interaction. At other times, it may be more desirable to have the audience face the front of the room where audio visual equipment is set up. If the meeting is to be a working session, adequate numbers of tables to allow each participant room to take notes etc. should be provided.

For larger events it may be advisable to seek the assistance of a conference planner who is experienced and capable of helping you to organize the event. Most hotel and conference facilities that cater to business meetings will have a staff person dedicated to assisting in meeting and conference planning. The conference planner will provide valuable assistance in determining what seating and table arrangement will best suit your specific needs.

Agendas provide:

- 1. A list of topics for discussion.**
- 2. Time allotted for each topic.**
- 3. A summary of the meeting.**
- 4. A checklist to ensure everything is covered.**
- 5. A focus to keep the meeting on track.**

AGENDA SETTING

There are two essential documents produced by a meeting. The first and some would say the most important is the agenda. Setting the agenda is one of the tasks that falls to the chair, and it is crucial to achieving the goals of the meeting. The agenda defines the boundaries of the discussions that participants will follow and allots a specific time frame for each item. It is important to remember that whoever controls the agenda, controls the meeting.

Why have an agenda?

In most cases the agenda provides a focus for discussion, but in those cases where controversy or confrontation are a possibility, an agenda is essential in order for the chair to maintain control. Agendas keep participants on track, and when each of the items on the agenda have been covered, it provides the chair with a clear point for adjournment.

Any participant who wishes to add items to the agenda should be required to submit those items to the chair well in advance of the scheduled meeting. This allows the chair to be sufficiently prepared to address any items on the agenda. One other reason for submitting additional items in advance is to allow enough time for printing and distribution prior to the meeting. Perhaps more importantly, having agenda items submitted well in advance allows the chair an opportunity to ensure the topic is relevant to the purpose of the meeting.

If certain items are submitted for inclusion on an agenda that fall outside of the scope of the planned meeting, or concern topics which may have been thoroughly discussed at a previous meeting, the chair then has an opportunity to explain why the item will not be included.

For example, there are situations where a participant may not be happy with a decision that has previously been made, and repeatedly attempts to raise the topic again. In cases such as this having a formal agenda will allow the chair to curtail any further discussion as the item is not on the agenda and falls outside the intended focus of the current meeting.

Having the agenda prepared and distributed in advance also provides an opportunity for the chair as well as the participants to come to the meeting sufficiently prepared to hold informed and intelligent discussions. The agenda also serves as a reminder for participants for any “homework” that they might be expected to have accomplished prior to the meeting.

Setting the agenda

In order to facilitate the smooth progress of a meeting where there may be a number of difficult decisions to be made, it may be best to schedule one of the easier topics first, then follow with the more difficult topics and finish off the meeting with some easy or lighter items in order to end on a positive note.

Some items on the agenda might require exploratory discussion while other items might require some action or decision. Items on the agenda should be identified as for discussion only or requiring action.

List all the topics to be discussed, the name of the person who is

expected to lead each discussion and the time allotted to each topic. Having a specified time for discussion or debate on each item will help to keep people on track and can eliminate endless debate on topics of contention.

If one item appears to exceed the time allotted by a significant amount, a member of the group or the chair can request that it be rescheduled for the next meeting to allow for more in depth research, preparation, and discussion.

Finally, having an agenda planned in advance allows the chair to begin the meeting on time, schedule breaks when the meeting is expected to go longer than an hour, and most importantly, end the meeting on time. An agenda also provides the participants with a record of what was discussed and any decisions have been made or tasks assigned during the meeting.

Pre Meeting Information

Sending out information prior to the meeting is an effective way of enabling the participants to arrive at the meeting informed and prepared to make decisions based on that information. However, deciding how much information to send in advance can be a problem. Some people will not read anything prior to the meeting, and some will conscientiously read all the supporting information they can get their hands on.

Documentation that may help achieve the meeting goals might include staff reports; media reports; detailed charts and graphs; paper copies of presentations; key discussion points; as well as minutes, notes and follow-up from earlier or related meetings and projects. Distribution of this kind of pertinent information will assist participants in becoming informed and arrive ready to discuss and make decisions on topics to be covered during the meeting.

There are a few things to consider when deciding what and how much to send out ahead of time:

Pre-meeting information packages	
Do's	Don'ts
Provide sufficient information prior to the meeting to enable participants to arrive with a good understanding of what the meeting goals are.	Assume that everyone wants or needs his or her own copy of lengthy or technical documents.
Provide web site URL's instead of paper documents when possible, Or send electronic versions of documents or reports.	Send documents or materials without an explanation of how they relate to the agenda.

Do You Need a Facilitator?

Generally, most meetings can be facilitated by the team leader or the senior staff person involved. However, there are times when possibility of a successful outcome of a meeting is enhanced by using a professional facilitator. How do you know if you need a professional?

Meetings that might require the use of a professional facilitator include retreats, idea generation sessions, strategic planning and problem-solving meetings. A professional facilitator can be extremely effective when a group has reached an impasse or has lost its momentum.

Professional facilitators can get the group "unstuck", identify and focus on key issues, help to make decisions and allow the group move forward. One of the reasons that professional facilitators are so effective is that they bring objectivity and tend to be detached or more focused on process and less on the issues.

Charlie Hawkins in "Facilitate This!" points out why it may be a good idea to bring in an outside facilitator.

"When group leaders facilitate their own meetings, they often cross the line into control and advocacy for their point of view."

In turn, this will shut down participation from others. Separating the leader and facilitator roles will help ensure that at least one person is focused on group process issues, e.g., staying on agenda and keeping people involved.”

The Day of the Meeting

Be on hand to welcome the participants as they arrive for the meeting. Establishing a friendly atmosphere, and providing an opportunity for introductions can go along way to establish a positive atmosphere. If the topics to be discussed are controversial, or some of the expected participants have a tendency to be argumentative or disruptive, establishing a positive and proactive environment can diffuse a potential negative situation before it has a chance to develop. Offering coffee and other refreshments as people arrive will also aid in establishing a good working relationship.

When participants have arrived and the preliminaries are out of the way, it can be helpful to review the purpose of the meeting and go over the planned agenda briefly.

Probably the most important aspect of conducting a meeting of any size is to start and end on time and to keep discussion on individual topics to a predetermined period of time allotted for that topic. See Appendix A, for a brief checklist on planning and holding a meeting.

Understanding Group Dynamics

Forming a Team

A critical task for the new chairperson is to turn an group of individuals into an effective team. Once you have a team formed there are certain guidelines that will assist the team in keeping on track and working effectively together. Michael Brassard and Diane Ritter have written a concise and clearly written guide to effective planning entitled *“The Memory Jogger: A Pocket Guide of Tools for Continuous Improvement and Effective Planning”*. This is a handy reference for any size organization, and covers topics such as holding brainstorming sessions, conducting effective meetings, as well as a

variety of other tools and techniques which are helpful to anyone planning a meeting, leading a team, or embarking on a new project. The following guidelines are adapted from this guide.

- **Establish Ground rules** - At the first meeting develop a set of ground rules for acceptable and unacceptable individual or team behavior. For example, one ground rule could be that no one in the meeting is to have a cellphone turned on.
- **Decision Making** - Determine whether decisions will be made by consensus, majority rule, or anarchy! Discuss whether there are, or should be exceptions to when the group deviates from it's usual process.
- **Communication** - Emphasize the value of each team member being allowed to speak, and how important it is for the others to listen while someone is speaking. Part of effective communication is effective listening and providing constructive feedback.
- **Participation** - Each team member is responsible for participating consistently in discussions. The entire team should constantly be working to “pull back” the dominant members and draw out more reserved members who may not be contributing to their capabilities.
- **Values** - Acknowledge and accept the unique insight of each team member. Establish an environment where all suggestions and ideas are valued. Do not allow team members to belittle or devalue any idea, as something that might seem silly at first glance may have potential if developed.
- **Progress mapping** - Establish an estimate of the steps that are required to reach the goals that have been set for the group, and develop a time line for each of these goals. Estimate the date when the project will be completed.

Meeting Etiquette:

- Raise your hand and be recognized before speaking,
- Be brief and to the point,
- Make your point calmly,
- Keep an open mind,
- Listen without bias,
- Understand what is said,
- Avoid side conversations,
- Respect other opinions,
- Avoid personal agendas,
- Come prepared to do what's good for the group,
- Have fun!

Group Discussions

A good team leader manages the group so that each member has an opportunity to contribute their ideas and feel like they are involved in the decision. The key word here is involved. Some techniques for accomplishing this are:

- **Comment-** When one person, either the chair, the facilitator or perhaps one of the group has been speaking for a while, or an interesting suggestion has been made, the chair might ask for feedback from each member of the group. Group members in turn respond to what has been said with a brief one sentence opinion and no one is permitted to speak at length. This limit will quickly encourage members to be clear and concise in their responses.
- **Survey** - The chair can ask for a quick show of hands to gauge group support for a proposed idea, or to decide a course of action.
- **Working groups** - In larger meetings it may be desirable to break off into smaller groups in order to generate ideas, break the ice and provide an opportunity for everyone to contribute. Small subgroups such as this return to the larger groups to review and discuss what was discussed in the smaller subgroups.
- **Brainstorming** - To ensure success in a brainstorming session there must be a few ground rules for the group to follow.

- The wilder the idea, no matter how impractical or “out there” it might be is recorded,
- Quantity versus quality, the more ideas generated the better. The more ideas, the better chance that there will be some gems among them.
- Build on ideas. Have the group take the ideas and expand on them to see how far they can go. Even the ideas that seemed silly or ridiculous can generate innovation. No criticism permitted!
- Have someone record all the ideas on a flipchart or blackboard briefly and accurately.
- When the list has been generated, critically review and clarify any items that might require further thought or expansion. Look for something positive in every idea suggested.

For more detailed information on how to hold a brainstorming session see Local Government Resource Handbook - Risk Management, Section 6.3 Appendix A3.

Handling Conflict

Most experts in the field of conflict resolution emphasize the importance of dealing with disputes quickly and openly. The sooner controversy or disagreements between team members are dealt with the easier it is to resolve the conflict.

Conflict in itself may not necessarily be a bad thing. When conflict is managed properly, it can result in benefits to the team. Allowing participants the freedom to air their views and concerns in a controlled setting may result in creative or innovative ways of addressing the issue.

The key is to have a chairperson or group leader who can maintain control and allow each person to speak, and insist that the others listen to each point of view before coming to a decision.

There are specific steps to follow in resolving conflict and they are similar to the steps one would follow in solving a problem.

- First the group needs to recognize that there is a problem and to identify and define exactly what the problem entails. Quite often only one member of the group recognizes that a problem exists and the onus is on that individual to bring the issue to the attention of the rest of the group.
- Second, it is essential that the group has all the necessary information required to address the problem. The group needs to share and fully understand all pertinent information in order to properly assess the possible cause or causes. Only by having a thorough understanding of all sides of the issue can areas of agreement be identified.
- Third, potential solutions can now be proposed based on information and understanding. A mutually acceptable resolution may result from discussing the alternatives.
- Finally, implement the selected option and evaluate the successes or failures based on how the group perceives the results.

When meetings get out of control over controversial issues, it may be beneficial to schedule a break in the discussions at about the time that issue comes up on the agenda. If possible arrange for refreshments and allow for participants to have an opportunity to chat and become acquainted.

When the meeting reconvenes do a short recap of what was discussed briefly outlining opposing perspectives. In some cases it may be useful to have each side summarize the opposing position. Again, with a thorough understanding of each side of the issue, participants are more prepared to come to a mutually acceptable solution.

Responsibility for agenda items:

When committees are formed, teams assembled, or individuals made responsible for certain agenda items a brief note in the minutes provides a convenient reminder to the participants of what was agreed to and what responsibilities have been delegated. It may also be beneficial to make clear what authority the committee as a whole or individual committee members may have? Do they carry through with a decision and report back to the larger group, or are they supposed to plan a strategy and report back to the group before it is implemented?

This may be extremely helpful for the participants to determine the criteria for their success, and to avoid any confusion later with regard to any authority the working group or committee may have.

Taking the Minutes

Minutes should contain the following basic information:

- **Date, time and location of the meeting,**
- **List of people in attendance and what organizations they may be representing,**
- **The time the meeting was called to order,**
- **Approval of the previous meetings minutes and any amendments that may have been agreed to,**
- **A summary of any reports, announcements, or other information that was provided**
- **Details of any proposals, resolutions, motions, amendments put forward, and who made the motion or proposal. Also include a summary of any discussion and the final decision made on each particular item,**
- **The time of the adjournment,**
- **The date, time and location of the next meeting,**
- **The name of the person taking the minutes**

Assigning a Recording Secretary:

Some groups may assign the task of taking the minutes to one person, the recording secretary, or may rotate the job from person to person from one meeting to the next. Recording the minutes need not be an elaborate affair. Brief notes scribbled on a printed agenda during the course of a meeting might be sufficient for some purposes, however, in most cases a more formal record might be best. The person who is assigned the task of recording the minutes should be informed beforehand just what is expected of them and how the minutes should be taken during the meeting. In some cases you may just want to record the topic and the decision that was made, in most cases however, some record of the discussion that followed each agenda item might be preferable.

Recording the Minutes:

Keeping accurate minutes of a meeting is important because the minutes provide an historical record of what occurred at the meeting, what decisions were made, what tasks were assigned and to whom.

The minutes provide a record where human memory may falter, and they provide information to those who were not in attendance. Minutes also provide background information for the future so that an organization will not have to reinvent the wheel at some future date.

Headings:

In general, meeting minutes should follow the agenda that was followed. In fact, the agenda will provide the headings for the recording secretary to use in the minutes.

The meeting minutes normally begin with the name of the organization, the date time and location of the meeting being recorded, a list of people in attendance, and may also include a list of people who have sent their regrets.

For Council and board meetings, this section should also include a statement to the effect that sufficient notice was given prior to the meeting, and a quorum was in attendance

The first item in the minutes is normally the approval of the minutes from the previous meeting. Following approval of the minutes the rest of the headings should follow the agenda.

Progress Reports:

A section of the meeting should be set aside for the group members to provide updates on previously assigned tasks. Progress reports or updates from the various committees or individuals provide a record of the progress made towards achieving goals, or accomplishing tasks. It provides an opportunity for the group to become well informed on any issues that may impact the group successfully completing their goals, or the time required to accomplish those goals.

Discussions:

Each heading or topic from the agenda should be expanded to include a brief summary of the discussion that took place and any decision that was made. The name of the person who put forward the motion on the topic and the name of the person who seconded the motion should be recorded for each agenda item where a decision was made. Some items will be for information purposes only and will not require a decision or a motion to be made. It should be noted in the minutes that this was an information piece.

The *Municipal Government Act* provides detailed information on the voting process at council meetings, including how questions are to be decided, the procedure in event of a tie, and how to handle a councillor who abstains from voting. See *Municipal Government Act Sections 19 through 22*.

While these procedures are legislated for council meetings, they may be used as a guide for other meetings as well.

Recording People's Comments:

It is rarely necessary to record a word for word transcript of what was said and by whom at a meeting. In fact, it is better to have just a brief summary of the discussion and not refer to any individual by name. The recording secretary should provide an impartial non-editorialized account of what happened during the meeting. Minutes are not the place for personal comments or any statements that would indicate the recorder's opinion on the proceedings, or decisions made during the meeting.

Deferred Items:

Any unresolved issues or items that have been deferred to a later date should be outlined in the written record so that important issues will not be neglected.

A Final Word on Minutes:

Having a written record enables the possibility of reviewing the meeting in order to ensure that the workload is being shared equitably and that one or two individuals are not expected to do an inordinate amount of the work. Accomplishments are less likely to be overlooked in the future when there is a written record and people can be celebrated and recognized for their achievements.

Rules of Order:

There are a number of publications dedicated to the procedures to follow during a meeting. These procedures or "rules of order" may vary from one organization to another but most organizations will follow Robert's Rules of Order, or Bourinot's Rules of Order.

Legislative Requirements:

In Nova Scotia it is also important to keep in mind the legislative requirements regarding public access to government information. *The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* provides the parameters for public access to government records including minutes of meetings.

In addition, the Nova Scotia *Municipal Government Act* is quite specific on municipal council and committee meetings. Specifically, the Act states that all council and committee meetings are open to the public except in specified cases. For more detail on council and village commission meetings see Information Bulletin #7 in the *Municipal Government Act* Resource Binder, and Sections 22 and 408 of the MGA.

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy 1993, c. 5, s. 1.

Purpose of Act

2. The purpose of this Act is

- (a) to ensure that public bodies are fully accountable to the public by
 - (I) giving the public a right of access to records,
 - (ii) giving individuals a right of access to, and a right to correction of, personal information about themselves,
 - (iii) specifying limited exceptions to the rights of access,
 - (iv) preventing the unauthorized collection, use or disclosure of personal information by public bodies, and
 - (v) providing for an independent review of decisions made pursuant to this Act; and
- (b) to provide for the disclosure of all government information with necessary exemptions, that are limited and specific, in order to;
 - (I) facilitate informed public participation in policy formulation,
 - (ii) ensure fairness in government decision-making,
 - (iii) permit the airing and reconciliation of divergent views;
- (c) to protect the privacy of individuals with respect to personal information about themselves held by public bodies and to provide individuals with a right of access to that information. 1993, c. 5, s. 2.

Evaluation:

Evaluating the meeting may simply involve asking participants to complete a paper evaluation and share results. Evaluation may be as

simple as posing informal questions to participants such as, "Do you feel like we accomplished what we needed to today?" or "How do you think the meeting went?"

In some cases, particularly large meetings, a more detailed evaluation would be helpful and a questionnaire can be distributed to each participant to answer. Questions on each aspect of the meeting such as the suitability of the location, the quality of the presentations, or the quality of the food can be covered in such a survey. When a questionnaire is used, it is usually helpful to provide a space for participants to respond with their comments. It may or may not be helpful to have them put their name on the questionnaire depending upon the circumstances.

Some questions that may be formulated to evaluate the value of the meeting might include topics such as:

- **Location:** Was the facility appropriate for the occasion? Was there sufficient parking close by, were the facility staff helpful and available? Was the room large enough, or too large, too stuffy, too hot, or too cold?
- **Refreshments:** Was the food appropriate, enjoyable, served on time, sufficient in amount, too hot, too cold?
- **Timeliness:** Did the meeting start on time and end on time? Are the meetings being held too frequently? Not frequently enough?
- **Presenters:** Were the presenters appropriate for the intent of the meeting? Was the session informative and useful? Were the speakers interesting, well informed and engaging, or were the sessions boring?
- **Focus:** Are the participants staying on topic? Was the agenda clear and well defined? Were there items that should have been included that were not? Were there items discussed that would have been better left for another venue?
- **Participation:** Are all those in attendance actively participating in discussions and decision-making? Is the atmosphere conducive to having people contribute?
- **Follow-up:** When tasks are assigned are there progress reports

at subsequent meetings? Are people accomplishing the tasks that they are assigned? Are one or two participants doing all the work?

Brief paper surveys are a good way of gauging how successful your meeting was, but the key is to keep it as brief as possible. No more than one page should be devoted to surveying the participants in order to keep response rates as high as possible. Survey results should be aggregated and shared with the organizing group. Any weak spots should be identified in the evaluation review at a follow up meeting, and steps taken to amend the process so that future meetings will be improved. A sample questionnaire for evaluating a meeting may look something like the following:

How Good are Your Meetings?			
	Yes	No	Sometime s
1. There is a clearly defined, results-focused theme and agenda .	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. They are without conflict.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Everyone contributes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. No one dominates discussions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Communication is open and positive.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Creative ideas are generated.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Alternative ideas and solutions are explored.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Everyone is energized and focused.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9 The knowledge and expertise of all participants is welcomed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Meetings begin and end on time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Participants meeting skills are continually developed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. The desired results are achieved.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. There are concrete measurable outcomes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. The process is enjoyable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. The meetings are effective.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Decisions made as a result of the meeting are implemented.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Meetings are not called unnecessarily.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Source: Mind your meetings: How to become the catalyst for culture change. Communication World. San Francisco: Feb/Mar 2003. Vol. 20, Iss. 2; pg.26, 4 pgs.</p>			

For conference or seminar type meetings an evaluation questionnaire might look like this:

Evaluation

Thank you for taking time to answer a few questions about today's session. We would like your feedback to assist in planning future sessions. All ratings and comments will remain anonymous unless you choose to include your name.

1. Content:

How would you rate the information provided in this session?

Excellent Very Good Good Fair Poor

2. Presenters:

How would you rate the presenters?

Excellent Very Good Good Fair Poor

3. Audio Visual:

How would you rate the quality of the audio visual aspects of the presentation?

Excellent Very Good Good Fair Poor

4. Facility:

How were the facilities?

Excellent Very Good Good Fair Poor

5. Food:

How were the meals and nutrition breaks?

Excellent Very Good Good Fair Poor

6. Comments:

Were there topics that were not on today's schedule that you would like to see included in future sessions? Please use the back of this sheet to provide additional comments on any aspect of today's session.

Thank you

Conclusion

There is a wealth of information available to anyone who wishes to delve into the subject of effective meetings. The internet is a valuable tool and as well there are assorted publications dedicated to the subject.

Basic tenants of the literature have been covered in this chapter but for more detail, the reader is encouraged to seek out other sources to pursue other information that will aid in developing meeting skills.

The reader is also advised to review the *Municipal Government Act* S. 19 - 22, and to become familiar with *Freedom of Information and the Protection of Privacy Act*, the *Public Records Act* of Nova Scotia, and the *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act*.



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APPENDIX A: MEETING PLANNING

Meeting Planning Checklist																										
#	Details	✓																								
1	<p>Meeting objective: _____</p> <p>Date: _____</p> <p>Time: _____ to _____ a.m./p.m.</p> <p>Place: _____</p> <p>Participants: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>																									
2	<p>Facilitator or speakers required</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>																									
3	<p>Agenda (and meeting notice) <i>items to be covered and the time allotted to each item</i></p> <table border="0"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: center;"><i>Item</i></th> <th style="text-align: center;"><i>Time</i></th> <th></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>_____</td> <td>_____</td> <td>___ <i>Prepared (list items</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td>_____</td> <td>_____</td> <td>___ <i>Sent (list participants</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td>_____</td> <td>_____</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>_____</td> <td>_____</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>_____</td> <td>_____</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>_____</td> <td>_____</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>_____</td> <td>_____</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Time</i>		_____	_____	___ <i>Prepared (list items</i>	_____	_____	___ <i>Sent (list participants</i>	_____	_____		_____	_____		_____	_____		_____	_____		_____	_____		
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_____	_____																									
4	<p>Budget: _____</p> <p><i>(cost of meeting room, refreshments, equipment rental etc.)</i></p>																									
5	<p>Meeting Location _____</p>																									
6	<p>Food and Beverages required: <i>(indicate number of each required)</i></p> <p>___ Coffee ___ Juice ___ Soft drinks ___ Lunch ___ Water</p>																									
7	<p>Meeting Materials required <i>(indicate number required)</i></p> <p>___ Notepads, pencils ___ Name/place cards ___ Name badges</p> <p>___ Handouts ___ Other _____</p>																									

8	<p>Equipment required</p> <p>___ Overhead projector ___ Spare lamp</p> <p>___ Slide projector ___ Spare lamp</p> <p>___ Proxima ___ Spare lamp</p> <p>___ Screen (Size)</p> <p>___ Charts ___ Pointer</p> <p>___ Chalkboard</p> <p>___ Chalk</p> <p>___ Videotape ___ TV/VCR</p> <p>___ Marking pens</p> <p>___ Microphone</p> <p>___ Lectern</p> <p>___ Extension cord ___ Other _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	
9	<p>Assign recording secretary _____</p>	
10	<p>Post meeting</p> <p>___ Prepare task list and indicate who is responsible</p> <p>___ Next meeting</p> <p> Date / Time: _____</p> <p> Place _____</p> <p> Distribute minutes:</p>	