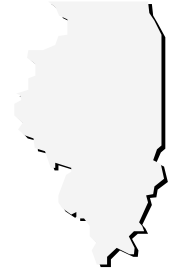




LOCAL GOVERNMENT TOPICS



Effective Meeting Management

Careful planning and preparation are essential to maximizing meeting effectiveness. Because governmental bodies and other groups and organizations must conduct much of their business through meetings, it is important that these sessions be meaningful and productive. Those who participate in these groups are busy people who may be willing to become more involved if they know their time will be well spent.

Establishing Meeting Procedures

Who is responsible for meeting productivity? The chairperson should be in charge of planning, and he or she may delegate some duties to other individuals. But everyone who attends the meeting should be prepared to participate and contribute to the business at hand.

Ideally, a meeting should have a standard scheduled date and starting time. The length of the meeting may be fixed (that is, have a specified ending time), or it may be determined by the volume of business to conduct. At its first meeting, the group should decide whether to set an ending time. It is important that the leader adhere to these times in subsequent meetings.

One of the most important parts of meeting planning is preparing the agenda. The agenda is a helpful tool for guiding discussion. (For more information about developing an agenda, see the fact sheet *The Organized Agenda: A Vital Tool for Efficient Meetings*, also in this series.)

The chairperson may have one or two members summarize the discussion to ensure that all meeting participants clearly understand the decisions made. When decisions and/or

recommendations have been made, everyone needs to support them. For this reason, unmistakable communication is critical. Members not only need to speak clearly, but they also need to be active listeners. Repeating or summarizing someone's contribution can be beneficial to the group's efficiency.

Selecting a Meeting Site

In addition to planning the agenda, the leader should make sure the meeting site has a favorable environment. Meeting participants will contribute to and get more from the meeting if they are comfortable. There are several factors to consider.

- Remember the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and make sure there are no barriers to discourage or prevent some individuals from participating. Parking and room location also need to be considered. If the meeting site is an unfamiliar location, give directions and parking instructions as necessary. Moreover, make sure that others at the location know about the meeting.
- How tables and chairs are arranged can help or hinder meeting effectiveness. If people can see one another—in particular, if they can see facial expressions or body language—they will communicate more readily and clearly. Once the meeting has ended, be sure to leave the room and facilities as they were found.
- The acoustics, lighting, temperature, and noise level of the room also affect the participants' comfort. Furthermore, the meeting room should have capabilities (such as electrical outlets, projection screen, and the like) that will allow for operating any equipment that might be needed.

Understanding Leader Responsibilities

In addition to preparing the agenda and adhering to procedures (such as starting and stopping times), the leader performs a number of tasks to ensure meeting

effectiveness. The leader's responsibilities include the following:

1. Have materials ready and know what needs to be said.
2. Speak clearly.
3. Be confident and enthusiastic.
4. Assign someone to take attendance and minutes.
5. Encourage input from everyone.
6. Keep everyone focused on the specific item of discussion.
7. Make sure everyone understands what has been decided.
8. Close on a positive note.

Although group leaders are ultimately responsible for these tasks, they should delegate specific jobs to other group members.

Understanding Member Responsibilities

Just as the leader has specific responsibilities, so do the other members of the group. Members can do several things to improve meeting efficiency:

1. Be prepared to report or discuss meeting topics.
2. Stay focused on the discussion.

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3. Demonstrate loyalty to the group by sacrificing, compromising, and accepting group decisions.
4. Be active listeners.
5. Support colleagues and demonstrate that their contributions are appreciated.
6. Practice confidentiality.
7. Criticize ideas, not individuals.
8. Feel free to disagree during the discussion, but support the group decision once a consensus has been reached. If a member cannot support the final decision, she or he should ask that the minutes reflect that a minority report will be filed.

Summary

As this fact sheet demonstrates, group leaders and members can do a number of things to ensure that their meetings are productive and efficient. Advanced planning by everyone involved is the key to achieving this goal.

Sources:

Haynes, Marion. 1997. *Effective Meeting Skills: A Practical Guide for More Productive Meetings*. Menlo Park, Calif.: Crisp Publications Inc.

University of Illinois Extension. 2001. *HELP! I've Just Been Appointed to an Advisory Board: Guidelines for Local Government Advisory Boards*.