Planning Effective Meetings

Which set of words best describes your organization’s meetings?

A. Productive
   Well planned
   Just the right length
   Have a direction

B. Unproductive
   Disorganized
   Too long
   Aimless

If you can relate to the “B” list, read on!

Few people look forward to meetings. But in the most effective organizations, meetings can provide direction and incentives for everyone, allowing members to carry out their responsibilities in an efficient manner. In short, meetings can work FOR the organization rather than as a barrier to accomplishment.

All productive meetings begin the same way:

PLANNING

Lack of preparation is the main cause of meeting failure. When officers and members of an organization wait until an hour before a meeting to think about what they want to accomplish and how they will do so, the results are often disastrous. Instead, strategic planning should happen in the areas listed below.

Meeting Space
Environment has a significant effect on behavior. Thinking and participating are easier when people are comfortable. Keep these tips in mind:

- Select and arrange your meeting space with care.
- Be sure that the room is the right size for the group. A room that is too small can become stuffy and create tension. On the other hand, a room that is too large can feel empty.
- The room should have adequate lighting and be in a noise-free space.
- Arrange the seating in a semi-circle with the leader in the center. This allows members to see one another and participate, yet allows the leader the opportunity to guide the meeting.
- Provide table space so that members can write and take notes. You may also want to have a chalkboard or newsprint and markers to make notes that the entire group can see.
**Agenda**
The agenda is the blue “blueprint” for your meeting. It is a list of various topics that your group will discuss during the meeting. An agenda ensures that your meeting has a purpose, and everyone knows what the objectives are. In preparing an agenda, solicit items from officers, members, and other relevant people. Collect documents and other papers that support each agenda item. Be sure you know the point of each agenda item (e.g. Is there a decision to be made? Information to be shared and discussed?) Having more specific action items can help the group determine the purpose.

**Rules**
Before you have your first meeting, there should be a general agreement on how formal your meetings will be. This will depend upon such factors as the size of your group (larger groups need more rules to function effectively) and your purpose (a special interest club will probably have more informal rules). Some decisions to be made are:
- Who will lead the meeting and what powers do they have?
- Who will keep a record (minutes) of the meeting and when will they be shared with the group?
- Will you repeat information for those who arrived late? (not recommended)
- Will members be asked to submit written or oral reports?
- How will the group decide if long discussions should be continued, postponed, or terminated?
- Will the group depend upon volunteers for most of its work or will someone have authority to appoint members to do work?
- What will the group do if the meeting runs beyond the stated time?

A good resource for these issues and others is Robert’s Rules of Order. This book contains helpful rules and language you can use to run more effective meetings.

**Meeting Time**
Choose a meeting time that is convenient for as many of your members as possible. Although you might want to allow some flexibility, it is recommended to have regular meetings at the same time and place. As well as designating a starting time, indicate an ending time for meetings. This allows your members to plan their personal schedules. Send out notices of the meeting well in advance. If you do not meet on a regular basis, it might be helpful to phone people the night before a meeting.

Of course, planning is not the only ingredient for effective meetings. Groups must also find productive ways to discuss topics during their meetings. But planning is the first necessary step that allows all members to participate fully in the business at hand.

For more tips and resources, please contact the Peer Advising Team (PAT) in Student Leadership and Engagement, UC 115.
Visit us at [www.usfca.edu/sle/peers](http://www.usfca.edu/sle/peers)