

Tips for Effective Meeting Structure and Facilitation

Have you ever notice how we think of some meetings with people with eagerness and joy, and other meetings with dread? Apparently, it's not the meeting itself, but whether or not people's needs tend to be met in the structure and atmosphere of the meeting.

Some of the needs that people commonly hope to meet in a meeting for coordinating NVC activities include: contribution, community, connection, inspiration, clarity, progress, and purpose (is my time spent here meaningful?). This document includes suggestions for structuring meetings in ways that are more likely to meet the needs of those attending.

TIP #1: WHO DO I INVITE?

Who you ask to attend your meeting depends highly on the meeting's purpose and the desired outcome(s). The general practice is to invite stakeholders to a meeting. This includes anyone who is:

- Responsible for a final decision
- Going to implement (or provide information to others about) the outcome of, or decisions made in the meeting
- Likely to react to decisions or outcomes strongly with unmet needs; or who may have a unique background or perspective to offer that may affect your decisions or outcome(s).
- Otherwise going to be affected by the outcome of the decision

If your meeting is focused on building a volunteer team to support NVC, think carefully about whether a meeting is intended to introduce and provide information to new people, or if it's more of a working meeting for existing volunteers. While you can mix the two, the new volunteer orientation is important for their sense of belonging and understanding about what is happening.

TIP #2: BEFORE THE MEETING . . . PREPARE!

- **Define objectives:** What is the purpose of the meeting? What are desired outcomes?
- **Create Agenda:** Develop an agenda aimed at meeting objectives and needs of participants. Print a copy of the agenda for all participants, or post it on a flip chart / white board for all participants to see.
- **Confirm Meeting Location/Space:** Confirm that the space will accommodate meeting participants in comfort, and with minimal distraction.
- **Inform Participants:** Send time, date, location information and proposed agenda to meeting participants.
- **Prepare Materials:** If needed, prepare handouts, refreshments, chairs, and other needed materials.
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TIP #3: DURING THE MEETING . . . FACILITATE TO ANTICIPATE AND MEET MUTUAL NEEDS.

- **Start and End on Time:** Respect people's time and other commitments with punctuality
- **Ceremony:** Include an opening and closing that helps people transition
- **Welcoming:** Name tags, names, introductions, etc. to serve needs for belonging and warmth
- **Assign roles:** A facilitator, A timekeeper, a note-taker, etc.

- **Focus:** Help keep group focused on agenda items, or if choose to veer then set a time frame
- **Connection:** Facilitate for connection, helping people understand each other's needs
- **Humor:** Connect with people in a way that encourages play and humor!
- **Rest:** Notice when the group might need a short break for fresh air or chatting
- **Application:** Clarify, summarize, assign, etc. to highlight action steps resulting in discussions
- **Planning:** Plan for the time, place, topic, facilitator, etc. of the next meeting
- **Evaluation:** Invite feedback of needs met/not met in meeting for celebration/mourning/growth

TIP #4: AFTER THE MEETING . . . FOLLOW THROUGH.

- **Reflection/Learning:** Self-reflect on how meeting went, including information from the group's evaluation, and identify learning for next time
- **Celebration:** Celebrate needs that were met. While this might have happened already, chances are you could do more.
- **Transcribe Decisions and Actions:** Write up (or ask somebody else to write up) the notes in terms of outcomes and actions (including who agreed to do what by what date).
- **Distribute Meeting Notes:** Send a copy of the notes to all who were present, and those who missed the meetings. Include a reminder about the next meeting.

BASIC MEETING STRUCTURE:

Using the example of basic 1-2 hour NVC volunteer team meeting.

| Minutes | Agenda Item |
|----------------|--|
| 5 | Welcome and Remembrance (to remind all participants why we're gathered, and to help everyone transition to ensure full participation. This could involve reading a poem, sharing a story, song, or even just having a few moments of silence) |
| 10 | Introductions and Check-In – participants share their name, and answer a question the facilitator poses to the group such as “what’s alive in you right now” or “what do you hope to achieve in this meeting”. |
| 5 | Approve Agenda – Distribute agenda; review proposed agenda with the group. Ask group if there is anything to add or omit from the agenda. |
| 20-45 | Information Updates / Team Coordinator Reports – Depending on the goals of your meeting, request that all or certain team coordinators (such as the promotion coordinator, event coordinator, etc.) provide quick updates on what they're working on. |
| 20-30 | Main Discussion Topic – Depending on the goals of your meeting, use this time to facilitate discussion, question/answer, and creating action items (if needed) for your main discussion item(s). If your discussion brings out a wide array of unmet needs, concerns, etc., it may be wise to table the item until the next meeting (to allow you to end the meeting at your agreed-upon time). |
| 10-15 | Questions, Sharing Concerns and/or Requests for Support |
| 5-10 | Summarize Action Items / Decision and Next Steps |
| 3-5 | Determine Next Meeting Date/Time/Location |
| 3-5 | Closure – A period of silence, a song or celebration to transition participants out of the meeting. |