



CALAFCO 2010 Conference

Managing Effective Meetings

Tips  Tricks  Techniques
and getting work done too!

with
Michael Colantuono and Bill Chiat

DILBERT *By Scott Adams*



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Sharing information and resources

MAKING MEETINGS MANAGABLE

Michael G. Colantuono

**MAKING MEETINGS
MANAGEABLE**

Meeting Management
Tips for LAFCo
Commissioners & Staff

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Goals of Meeting Management

- Comply with the law
- Balance efficiency w/ public input
- Make meetings shorter
- Relieve “meeting anxiety”
- Deal w/ disruptive people
- Avoid parliamentary paralysis
- Present a public face of competence, civility and efficiency

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Public Participation Requirements

- Brown Act: off-agenda, on-agenda, and special meeting comment
- CKH and CEQA Public Hearing Requirements
- Due Process
- First Amendment – no content-specific regulation other than to preserve purpose of the meeting

Types of Meetings – Formal

- Roles strictly observed
- Audience speaks only when called on
- Time limits apply
- Commissioners speak only when called on
- No straying from the topic
- No debates / communication via chair
- Rules of decorum & procedure strictly followed

Types of Meetings – Informal

- Fewer barriers between audience and Commission
- Town-meeting atmosphere
- Participation is encouraged and less structured
- Generous or no time limits

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How Much Formality is Needed?

- Attendance
- Controversy
- Skill of Chair
- Potential for Disruption
- Length of Agenda
- Size of Meeting Room
- Seating of Commission and Audience
- Broad- or web-casting

How Much Formality is Needed?

- Formality is a tool for meeting management
- Use as much as is needed for the circumstances
- You need not employ the same degree of formality at all times or in all settings

Why Meetings Go On and On

- Audience Problems
 - Hostile audience
 - Disruptive "regulars"
 - Exceeding time limits
 - Wandering from subject
 - Speaking on every issue
 - Refusing to take "yes" for an answer
 - Rude behavior & personal attacks

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Why Meetings Go On and On

- Staff problems
 - Unprepared staff
 - Incomplete staff reports
 - Non-responsive answers
 - Overly talkative staff

Why Meetings Go On and On

- Agenda problems
 - Poorly Organized
 - Overly long
 - Poorly Timed Closed Sessions
 - Time matters are placed on the agenda
 - Too soon for meaningful discussion
 - Too late for meaningful discussion

Why Meetings Go On and On

- Chair Problems
 - Too passive
 - Too controlling
 - Unprepared, disorganized
 - Fails to perceive mood of group and allows one person to dwell on something the group is ready to move on from

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Why Meetings Go On and On

- Commissioner Problems
 - Talk too much
 - Failure to distinguish large from small issues
 - Unprepared / reading reports on dais
 - Disorganized

Organize the Agenda

- Limited public participation at beginning of the meeting
- Public Hearings Early
- Consent Calendar – and Pulled Items – Late
- Start and Finish on Time
- Use Study Sessions
- Schedule Closed Sessions so as not to keep the public waiting
- Keep agenda realistic in length

Be Prepared

- Ask questions at meetings the public needs to hear; get your own information needs met “off-line”
- Give staff a heads up about your public questions
- Read the agenda packet and write down your questions and comments where you can find them

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Don't Be Too Efficient

- Don't violate the Brown Act by deciding matters outside of meetings
 - Daisy change and serial meetings
 - Email
- Don't give the impression you aren't listening

Manage Public Input

- Use speaker lists and pre-announce next few speakers
- Enforce reasonable time limits
- Insist speakers address the Commission (position the podium to reinforce this)
- Allow Commissioner questions of speakers but discourage debates and dialog

Manage Public Input

- Consider "Commissioner response" and "staff response" times after public comment
- Keep the audience informed as to where you are and where you are headed on the agenda
- Be polite and encourage courtesy – be firm about heckling, booing and harassment

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Dealing with Disruptive People

- Options
 - Rise above it
 - Respond in kind
 - Remind audience to be civil
 - Meet with offenders privately
 - Positive reinforcement of good behavior

Dealing with Disruption

- Take a break
- Eject a violator after on-the-record warnings
- Clear the room of all but press
- Only the first is without legal risk

Discourage Repetition

- Encourage people to avoid repetition
- Ask for a show of hands
- Allow a spokesperson more time
- Curb straying from the subject
- Discourage applause and demonstrations
- Enforce time limits
- Prohibit dialogs
- Encourage written submittals
- Reflective listening

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Staff Reports

- Summarize rather than read reports
- Give the public enough information to follow the discussion
- Avoid debates with public or Commissioners

Manage Conflict

- Manage debates and prevent repeated debates on a single issue
- The Chair should remain above the fray
- Cooperate to create a positive image for the Commissioners and LAFCO
- Rotate the chair
- Team-building, retreats, study sessions, and social contacts to foster cooperation and trust

Manage Conflict

- Disagreement is inevitable; mistrust is not
- Don't send people home angry if you can avoid it

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Don't Attack Staff

- You look like a bully because staff cannot defend themselves
- Doing so makes LAFCO look incompetent (you hired these people, didn't you?)
- Questions about staff performance belong in closed session or the EO's office

Know Your Limits

- Adjourn at a reasonable hour
- Take breaks – 7th inning stretch
- Snacks

Written Procedures

- Consider written rules of decorum and procedure
- Disseminate written rules by placing them on the table where the public gets the agenda and speaker slips

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MAKING MEETINGS MANAGEABLE:
Meeting Management Tips
for LAFCo Commissioners and Staff

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by

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This paper is an outline of ideas to assist LAFCo Chairs, Commissioners and staff to identify meeting management issues. It is not intended as legal advice and is not a fully developed, narrative discussion of the issues presented. If you have questions about these matters or their application to specific facts, you should seek appropriate counsel.

1/ My thanks to my former law partner Michael Jenkins, who prepared an earlier version of this paper and upon whose work it is substantially based.

I. GOALS OF MEETING MANAGEMENT

- A. Complying with legal requirements for public participation in a way that balances public participation with the need to get the LAFCO's business done.
- B. Making meetings shorter, while allowing thorough and meaningful discussion.
- C. Relieving Commissioners and LAFCO staff of "meeting anxiety."
- D. Dealing effectively with disruptive people.
- E. Preventing rules of parliamentary procedure from become obstacles to, rather than tools for, meeting management.
- F. Presenting a "public face" for LAFCO of competence, civility, and efficiency.
- G. Accomplishing these goals without violating the Brown Act, due process rights of constituents, or the privacy rights of LAFCO employees.

II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS

There are four sources of public participation requirements in public meetings:

A. *The Brown Act*. Since 1987, the Brown Act has required that the agenda of every regular meeting of a legislative body (such as a LAFCO or a standing subcommittee) include a time for public participation (Government Code Section 54954.3). If a Commission generally allows public comment on all agenda items when each item is considered, the public comment period is usually reserved for items not on the agenda. The public comment period may be placed anywhere on the agenda. The Brown Act requires that the public have an opportunity to address every item before it is acted on by the Commission. Therefore, unless you wish to allow public comment on every item of business, some portion of the public comment period must appear at the beginning of the agenda. Comments may be limited to those matters within the subject matter jurisdiction of the body. Reasonable time limits may be imposed; you should probably hear everyone who signs up (the law is silent on this point) unless the lateness of the hour makes it unreasonable to do so.

B. *Other Statutes.* A number of State statutes compel legislative bodies to conduct “public hearings” on various subjects, including the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act (CKH) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Examples include zoning matters, the establishment of some fees, and the formation of assessment districts. Members of the public must be accorded the right to participate in public hearings. Reasonable time limits may be imposed on speakers, consistent with the importance of the matter at hand and the number of speakers. You have greater leeway with a “legislative” matter (such as actions under CKH), than with a “quasi-judicial” matter (such as a CEQA action).^{2/} You may establish reasonable rules for hearing the testimony, such as sequence of speakers, or whether to give an applicant or a spokesperson for a group more time than others.

C. *Due Process Clause.* The Due Process Clause of the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution, and similar provisions in the California Constitution, apply to a quasi-judicial proceeding in which a “property” or “liberty” interest is at stake.^{3/} CKH actions rarely involve due process interests, but CEQA actions commonly do. In those cases, those with an interest in a matter must be given due process – that is, reasonable notice of the matter and a meaningful opportunity to be heard – whether or not a statute requires a public hearing.

You should show some flexibility in your procedure and evaluate what “process” is required in each situation. Not every applicant can present a case in a standard allotment of time – the amount of time required depends on the importance and complexity of the matter at stake. A minor sphere amendment for a utility district necessarily takes less time to discuss than an incorporation proposal.

The difficulty here is balancing two competing concerns. On the one hand, rigid reliance on fixed rules may violate due process if the interests at stake are so significant that a more lenient rule is required. On the other hand, deviation from usual rules without good reason creates the appearance of arbitrary, and perhaps discriminatory, conduct. Therefore, you must use your judgment. It is helpful when deviating from usual rules to explain to the audience in advance why a change is needed (“This is a very complicated matter, so we will give the applicants and the project opponents more time than we usually allow.”) When in doubt, ask the LAFCO Counsel for guidance about what due process requires.

2/ While you should ask your Counsel if a particular matter is legislative or “quasi-judicial,” as a rule of thumb, if the matter involves a request from a particular person for a decision which will affect only that person or a small group of which he or she is a part, it is more likely to be “quasi-judicial” than is a matter which involves the formulation of a rule to govern a large class of people in the future.

3/ Many court decisions are devoted to defining the “property” and “liberty” interests protected by the Due Process Clause. For now, it is enough to note that most quasi-judicial land use decisions affect the “property” interests of all who own or lease land near the site which is the subject of the decision, as well as the applicant and the owner of the site. Employees who cannot be fired without legal cause have a “property” interest in their employment and employees and others have a “liberty” interest in their reputation in the community. “Liberty” interests most commonly arise in “name-clearing” hearings for terminated employees. “Property” interests arise in many settings.

D. *First Amendment*. The “free speech” clause of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution and the parallel provisions of the California Constitution do not accord citizens a “right” to speak at a LAFCO meeting. The courts have recognized that meetings are business sessions, and not unlimited First Amendment forums as are parks and streets, where people may freely express themselves. Citizens do not possess the right to speak at a meeting, or to speak whenever they want, or on any subject they want. The First Amendment permits “reasonable time, place, and manner rules” as well as rules designed to limit comments to the subjects with which LAFCO is concerned. Apart from this general subject matter restriction, however, the First Amendment *does* forbid LAFCO to regulate speech based on its content, unless it is disruptive. You cannot suppress someone’s speech merely because you do not like what they are saying; if you do, you violate the First Amendment, and potentially put the LAFCO, and yourselves personally, at risk of liability for damages under the Federal Civil Rights Statute, Section 1983 of Title 42 of the United States Code.

Unless they disrupt a meeting, people can say just about anything at a Commission meeting. You can require speakers to stick to matters relevant to LAFCO’s business. What’s “relevant”? A subject is irrelevant if it simply has no bearing on the issue at hand or on matters within the jurisdiction of the LAFCO (or of the committee the speaker is addressing).

Citizens may denounce Commissioners and call for their removal from the Commission. The Brown Act specifically provides that the LAFCO “shall not prohibit public criticism of the policies, procedures, programs, or services of the agency, or of the acts or omissions of the legislative body.” (Government Code Section 54954.3(c).) They may make personal attacks, to the extent that they involve LAFCO business. All comments in a meeting are absolutely privileged from liability for defamation under Civil Code Section 47(b).

III. TYPES OF MEETINGS

Formal

- Roles of participants are strictly observed.
- Audience speaks only when called on.
- Time limits established for speakers.
- Commissioners speak when called on.
- Everyone sticks to the issue at hand.
- Debates are not allowed – communication via the chair only.
- Rules of decorum and procedure are strictly followed.

Informal

- Fewer barriers between audience and Commission.
- Town-meeting atmosphere.
- Participation is encouraged and less structured.
- Generous or no time limits.

Every Commission must decide on the degree of formality that works best to accomplish its goals. Some factors to consider include:

- 1) How many people attend the meetings?
- 2) How controversial are the issues?
- 3) How well does the Chair keep the meeting on track?
- 4) Is audience disruption a regular problem?
- 5) How long is a typical agenda?
- 6) How big is the meeting room?
- 7) Where does the Commission sit vis-à-vis the audience?
- 8) Are the meetings broadcast or videotaped?

Each Commission must decide what degree of formality works best depending on the combination of these factors. Generally, more control can be obtained if the meeting is more formal. Meetings need not be uniformly of one type or another; each meeting may be more or less formal than the last, depending on the presence or absence of the above factors; but if so, the inconsistency should be explained (Example: “We’ve got a lot more folks here than usual tonight, so in order to stay organized, we’re going to use speaker slips and limit everyone to three minutes.”)

Formality has the advantage of keeping tighter control over the meeting, appearing more business-like and moving through the agenda more quickly. However, it is less personal, more intimidating to the public, and allows less spontaneity. Less formal meetings offer a more approachable government, but are more difficult to manage, especially with larger audiences. Even with a small audience, an extremely informal approach, where the audience is given free rein to participate, often leads to long-winded discussions and lengthy meetings. Obviously, though, an overly formal meeting style would look silly if only a handful of people regularly attend meetings. Thus, you should adjust to your own particular situation and use those elements of formality necessary to accomplish your objectives.

IV. WHY MEETINGS GO ON ... AND ON ... AND ON

A. *Audience problems*: hostile audience, disruptive “regulars,” exceeding time limits, wandering from the subject, speaking on every issue, speaking when it’s obvious the Commission is doing what the speaker wants (“refusing to take ‘yes’ for an answer”), rude behavior and personal attacks.

B. *Staff problems*: unprepared staff, incomplete staff reports, non-responsive answers to questions, overly talkative staff.

C. *Agenda problems*: poorly organized agenda, overly long agenda, poorly timed closed sessions, placing matters on the agenda before they are ready for decision or too late for productive discussion.

D. *Chair problems*: a Chair who is too passive and fails to move the meeting along, an autocratic Chair who invites resistance and argument from the Commission or audience, an unprepared Chair, a disorganized Chair, a Chair who fails to perceive the feelings and desires of the audience and Commission and allows one person to drag on a discussion when the bulk of the group is ready to move on.

E. *Commissioner problems*: Commissioners who talk too much, who don't distinguish between important and unimportant issues, who aren't prepared and delay the meeting while they read the staff report, who are disorganized and waste time trying to remember what it is they wanted to know or say about an item.

Knowing the source of the problem is the key to managing it. We are all given to these behaviors at one time or another and effective meeting management requires collective effort by all Commissioners to cooperate toward a common goal of effective meetings.

V. TECHNIQUES FOR MANAGING MEETINGS

A. *Organize the Agenda.*

Meetings are, in a loose sense, a form of theater – organize your agenda in a way that makes the most sense, prevents pent-up frustration due to long waits and is responsive to the audience.

< Consider placing a limited audience participation period (perhaps 15 or 30 minutes) at the beginning of the meeting (allowing overflow later) so people don't have to wait all night to comment on something not on the agenda and people who have come to speak about something that is on the agenda are not delayed indefinitely.

< Put your public hearings early, especially if you know people are present to testify, so people can speak on the item they came for and then leave. Similarly, you may want to schedule early on the agenda items of interest to children, invited guests and others who may not wish to stay for the whole meeting.

< If your consent calendar tends to take longer than it should, put it later in the agenda, because it usually contains routine items. It is a good practice not to take items “pulled” from the consent calendar up right after the vote on that calendar (or before the consent calendar), better to discuss these at the end of meeting, under “new business.”

< Start on time and finish at a reasonable hour; otherwise you communicate to the public that you do not mind wasting their time and do not invite their participation.

< Be prepared and organized so the business moves along smoothly, in an orderly and business-like fashion. Read the agenda well in advance and direct routine questions to staff before the meeting. Write down your comments and questions in anticipation of the meeting. Remember, there are two different reasons to ask a question: to get the answer and to make a public point. You can get your answers before or after the meeting. Making a public point may require a public question. Even if the question must be asked at the meeting, staff will be grateful, and answers will be more useful, if you let staff know in advance that they should prepare for the question.

< Use study sessions to tackle difficult and time-consuming issues in a more informal setting, so that they do not interfere with regular Commission meetings.

< Schedule closed sessions so that they do not interfere with the public portion of the agenda.

< In your enthusiasm to increase efficiency and shorten meetings, be careful not to pre-decide issues outside the meeting by use of so-called “daisy chain” or “seriatim” meetings (in which a series of conversations among Commissioners effectively resolves an issue out of public view), to prematurely cut-off audience input (especially in a public hearing setting), or otherwise give the impression that you are steam-rolling through the agenda in a predetermined direction without regard to public input.

< Develop a process for placing items on agendas so agendas are not unrealistically long.

B. *Manage Public Input*

You can accord speakers a meaningful opportunity to be heard without giving them unlimited time:

< Use speaker slips; announce who will speak next so they can be ready and it isn't necessary to wait for them to get to the podium.

< Enforce reasonable time limits.

< Insist that the speaker address the Commission as a whole and not the audience, the television audience or an individual Commissioners (think about positioning the speaker table or podium to subtly reinforce this rule).

< Allow Commissioners to ask questions of speakers but avoid debates between the Commission and speakers or among audience members, but avoid cross-examination and abusive exchanges.

< Avoid debates between Commissioners and staff.

< Consider using a “Commissioner response” period after audience comments so Commissioners can respond or give staff direction immediately, yet not when a speaker is at the podium; a “staff response” time can avoid encouraging debates between members of the public and staff.

< Tell people what is going on as you work through the agenda so that the audience is fully informed. People are more likely to participate if they don’t feel lost or intimidated. Borrow from television news practice of telling people where you are on the agenda and what’s coming up, and what the evening’s rules are for participation. Try to make the public feel comfortable participating in the meeting to get “buy in” for your decisions.

< Be polite and encourage politeness; but do it firmly. The audience can be told to quiet down and a speaker can be told to conclude politely, rather than by bullying. Be firm about heckling, booing and harassment of other speakers.

C. *Dealing with Disruptive People*

So, how do you deal with persistent, vicious public commentary? You have at least these options:

- 1) Rise above it by ignoring it, smiling, and thanking each speaker for his/her comments; effective use of appropriate humor can also be helpful.
- 2) Respond in kind (rarely advisable for a public figure).
- 3) Periodically remind the audience to be civil and observe commonly understood rules of decent behavior.
- 4) Meet with the offenders privately to see if their concerns can be resolved.

5) Compliment offenders when they behave well, praise their commitment to the community in attending meetings, and give them the attention they may be seeking in positive ways that encourage positive behavior.

6) All of the above.

Each alternative has its pro's and con's, and its predictable consequences. There is no single solution; sometimes only time, patience, and peer pressure to observe the rules of common courtesy will work in your favor.

It is always best to treat the audience with respect and in a manner that responsible adults prefer to be treated. In general it is better to serve as an example than to be perceived as a bully or an object of ridicule.

Be aware of your body language, both positively and negatively. Reaching for the microphone is a non-disruptive way to ask for the floor. Crossing your arms, rolling your eyes, turning your chair, etc., tell the speaker that you are not listening. Facing the speaker, sitting still, making eye contact, all say that you are listening.

You can eject disruptive people from meetings, but before doing so, you should establish a "record" by giving them clear and ample warnings and alternatives, providing the person an opportunity to leave or reform his/her behavior voluntarily, and calling upon the sergeant-at-arms as a last resort. Alternatives include clearing the room under Government Code Section 54957.9 or simply taking a short recess to cool things down. The press has a right to remain after the room is cleared. Government Code Section 54957.9.

Consider efforts outside the public meeting to address the concerns of persistent or regular complainers. This could be a conversation with the complainers or with the Commissioners or staff members who react to the complainers in a counterproductive way.

Whatever your style, don't make threats you won't carry out. Ejecting someone from a Commission meeting and clearing the room are serious legal matters and can lead to lawsuits, so we recommend consulting with your LAFCO Council or law enforcement before doing so.

D. *Discourage Repetition.*

The Audience. When you have a full house and many members of the audience want to speak, you can:

< Encourage people to avoid repetition (and even interrupt to remind them not to repeat what prior speakers have said).

< Ask for a show of hands as an alternative to individual comments.

- < Ask for a “spokesperson” from a group and give him or her more time than the others.
- < Firmly curb straying from the subject.
- < Discourage applause and other demonstrative activity.
- < Enforce time limits.
- < Prohibit dialogues and encourage written testimony. Written testimony is especially useful in complex matters.
- < “Reflective listening” – in which the Chair or a Commissioner summarizes what has been said and encourages input which is not repetitious – tells people that you are listening, that they have been heard, and they needn’t belabor the point.

Staff. Encourage staff to summarize, rather than read, their staff reports; reading the entire report wastes time and suggests to the public (and Commissioners) that the Commission is not (or need not be) prepared. Do provide enough information to allow the public to follow the meeting.

E. *Manage conflict.*

Conflict among Commissioners can lead to repeated debates which waste time. It may be best to agree to disagree respectfully and to encourage the Chair to manage or prevent debates. Obviously, the Chair should not get so involved in debate that he or she forgets that it is his or her primary responsibility to manage the meeting. If the Chair gets into a prolonged debate, it is difficult for anyone else present to get the meeting back on track (although the Vice Chair might take on this role). It may also be useful to attempt “team-building” via retreats, study sessions, and social contacts among Commissioners.

Cooperate to create a positive image for the LAFCO. Like it or not, the Commission is likely to be perceived by the community as a whole, not as five or seven individuals. Therefore, you all have an interest in creating a positive public perception.

Rotating the chair among Commissioners can expose the Commission to a variety of meeting management styles and give all Commissioners an appreciation for the Chair’s job.

Use team-building retreats, study sessions, and social contact among Commissioners and staff to foster an environment of cooperation and trust. While conflict is inevitable, mistrust is not.

Don’t send people home angry if you can avoid it, even if only by thanking them for attending.

F. *Don't attack or embarrass staff.*

The Commission will look better, and LAFCO, too, if you avoid “ambushing” or embarrassing staff. You look like a bully if you attack the people who work for you: they can't fight back. You also increase disrespect for the LAFCO as an institution and ultimately for you – you hired these people (or didn't fire them), didn't you?

You can respectfully disagree with staff's recommendations; but address the issues, not the personalities. If you have serious questions about the performance of a staff member, take it up with the Executive Officer or schedule a closed session to evaluate his or her performance. This will also avoid suits claiming that a Commissioner has invaded the privacy of a staff member.

G. *Know Your Limits*

Adjourn at a reasonable hour. No one does their best work late at night after a long day.

If a long meeting is unavoidable, consider a short break or a “seventh inning stretch” to allow people to refresh themselves and come back to the table with renewed focus.

A snack can be a good idea, especially for a late closed session. Keeping people's blood sugar levels up can contribute to effective meetings!

VI. WRITTEN PROCEDURES

A. Consider written rules of decorum.

B. Disseminate written rules governing meeting procedures and public participation by placing them at the back of the room with the agendas and speaker slips.



CHECKLIST FOR MEETING PLANNING

1 Purposes and Outcomes

- ✎ What is (are) the purpose(s) of the meeting?
- ✎ What are the intended outcomes of the meeting?
- ✎ What do you expect to leave with?





2 Who Needs to Participate

- ✎ Who will decide who should be invited to the meeting?
- ✎ Who should be invited to the meeting? Factors to consider:
 - ◆ Who has the primary responsibility for assuring that the outcomes of the meeting are achieved?
 - ◆ Who is the meeting leader?
 - ◆ Are there others who must approve the recommendations formulated by the group?
 - ◆ Who has a significant stake in achieving the outcomes of the meeting and/or who might block the implementation of recommendations made by the group?
 - ◆ Who is most knowledgeable or expert within the organization relative to the intended outcomes of the meeting?
 - ◆ Who is knowledgeable within the organization as to how decisions might be received by those critical to successful implementation?
 - ◆ To whom must decisions of the group be communicated, and when must the decisions be communicated?
- ✎ Is the nature of the meeting's content such that a neutral meeting facilitator is highly desirable or necessary, or should the meeting leader also facilitate the meeting?
- ✎ Who must review the recommendations of the group for approval? Who should be viewed as the primary person who will review recommendations?


3 Where and How Long

- ✎ What is the guesstimated number of meeting hours that will be required to achieve the purpose and outcomes for the meeting?
- ✎ Where should the meeting be held? Is an off-site location desirable in order to control interruptions or establish neutrality?

4 Prepare for the Meeting






-  Are there any materials that should be distributed to participants in advance of the meeting? For example:
 - ◆ Relevant work previously done by others
 - ◆ Articles or data that will contribute to building an intelligent data base relative to the outcomes
 - ◆ Instructions for work to be done by participants before the meeting
 - ◆ Directions to the meeting location; parking instructions
 - ◆ Assignments to be completed by participants before the meeting
-  Who will be responsible for preparing the meeting agenda? Approving the agenda?
-  Who will be responsible for sending out the agenda and preparatory materials to meeting participants in advance of the meeting?
-  Should any people be interviewed before the meeting for the purpose of either (a) building the agenda or (b) helping the meeting leader or facilitator better understand the work?


5 Equipment Needed

-  What equipment is needed for the meeting?


<input type="checkbox"/> Flip chart, easel and markers	<input type="checkbox"/> Microphone: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Handheld wireless<input type="checkbox"/> Handheld wired<input type="checkbox"/> "Lavalier"	<input type="checkbox"/> Extra flip chart paper
<input type="checkbox"/> Overhead projector	<input type="checkbox"/> Laptop computer	<input type="checkbox"/> Playback
<input type="checkbox"/> Slide projector	<input type="checkbox"/> Wireless connection	<input type="checkbox"/> Video
<input type="checkbox"/> White board	<input type="checkbox"/> Computer projector	<input type="checkbox"/> Audio
<input type="checkbox"/> Clipboards or laptop writing surface		<input type="checkbox"/> Video camera
		<input type="checkbox"/> Audio recorder
		<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)


6 Facility Preparation

-  Is wall space adequate for hanging flipcharts? Are there any prohibitions against putting masking tape on the walls? Can any decorations be taken down?
-  Who will be available to handle any problems with the room or supplies? (temperature, equipment, etc.)
-  Is there adequate space for separate small-group work areas with flip charts and a large-group meeting area with tables? (This is usually the preferred task-group arrangement when sufficient space is available.)
-  Where should food and refreshments be set up? If group is "on its own" for meals, what restaurants are nearby and where are they located?
-  Is the available equipment exactly what you want, and is it all in working order? Where are the electrical outlets, and will extension cords or multi-outlet boxes be needed?

 What time is the meeting facility available for entry and set-up? Whom do you see to get in?

7 Room Set-Up


 How many people are expected to participate?

 How should the room be arranged?

- | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Theater style | <input type="checkbox"/> Rows | <input type="checkbox"/> Tables and Chairs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom style with tables | <input type="checkbox"/> Circle | <input type="checkbox"/> Chairs only |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> U-shape | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> O-shape | |


 Who will be responsible for the room set-up?

8 Bring to the Meeting


 Agendas and meeting materials


 Markers, extra pens and paper


 Name tents or name tags for participants

 Sign-in sheet

9 At the Meeting

 Are there "ground rules" for the meeting?


 What is the agreement on use of cell phones and communication devices during the meeting?

 Which of the following roles will be established for the meeting, and who will play the role?





- | | |
|---|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Facilitator | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recorder/Minute Taker | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Timekeeper | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Small-Group Facilitators | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Equipment Technician | _____ |

 Which mode will be the primary way of making decisions in this meeting?






- CONSENSUS (All must be willing to support or "live with" decisions.)
- CONSULTATIVE (Leader decides following consultation with group.)
- CONSULTATIVE CONSENSUS (Leader consults with group, seeks consensus, then makes decision.)
- VOTING (Specify majority, two-thirds, other)

 What will be the "fall-back" mode(s) for decision-making?

10 After the Meeting

-  Who will be responsible for room clean-up and getting materials and equipment back?
-  Who will be responsible for collecting and typing up any flip chart notes?
-  Who will be responsible for preparing the minutes?
-  When will the minutes and notes be distributed? Do you have all of the contact information for the participants?

11 Meeting Follow Up

-  What are the next steps following the meeting?
-  Has the next or follow up meeting been scheduled?
-  Has an action plan with assignments and due dates been prepared and distributed?
-  Who is responsible for checking on the follow-up of each item?
-  Who is responsible for preparing the next meeting?

COMMON MEETING DILEMMAS

Regardless of how well a meeting is prepared, there are always things that can go wrong. Here are some common meeting dilemmas and strategies that can help.

SCENARIO 1 THE GROUP RESISTS STRUCTURE

The group desperately needs structure for its discussions, but doesn't like following a step-by-step process. You're a frustrated participant. Sometimes there's a controlling chairperson present and he or she rejects the idea of having anyone else facilitate or help lead the meeting.

Strategy: Facilitate from your seat at the side of the table. At appropriate moments, offer the group methods for tackling parts of the discussion. Informally act as timekeeper. Facilitate the discussion innocuously: ask questions, paraphrase, synthesize ideas and include quiet people, just as if you were up at the front of the room. Make notes on regular paper and offer your summaries when they're appropriate.

Potential mistake: Accepting that the group doesn't want process help and letting them flounder. While it's always best to be able to "officially" lead or facilitate, it's possible to help a group by covertly playing the process role. Some attention to process is better than none.



SCENARIO 2 EARLY ON IT APPEARS THE AGENDA IS WRONG

In spite of data gathering and proper planning it becomes clear that the entire premise for the meeting is wrong. The group legitimately needs to discuss something else.

Strategy: Stop the meeting and verify your assessment that the existing agenda is now redundant. Take time to do agenda building. Ask members what they want to achieve at this meeting. Prioritize the issues and assign times. Take a fifteen minute break to regroup and create a new process design. Ratify the new agenda with the members. Be flexible and stay focused on the needs of the group.



Potential mistake: Forcing the group to follow the original agenda because of the energy and preparation that went into creating the design.

SCENARIO 3 THE MEETING GOES HOPELESSLY OFF-TRACK

Members are usually good at staying focused but have now gone totally off-track and refuse to return to the planned agenda.

Strategy: Stop the off-topic discussion and determine if members are aware that they're off topic and if they're comfortable with this. If you are a meeting participant, point out that the group is off-agenda. If they decide they want to stay with this new topic, help structure their discussion.

Ask:

*How long do you want to devote to this?
What's the goal of this new discussion?*

Then move to the new discussion. If at any point they decide to return to the original agenda, 'park' the current discussion and return to it at the end of the meeting to determine what should be done with it.

Potential mistake: Stepping down from the leadership role because the group isn't following the planned agenda, or allowing the group to have a lengthy off-topic discussion in an unstructured manner. Trying to force the group back on topic when members feel a pressing need to discuss something else creates unnecessary conflict.

SCENARIO 4 MEMBERS IGNORE THE PROCESS THEY ORIGINALLY AGREED ON

There is a clear process for the meeting, but the members simply ignore it. When you attempt to get people to follow the agreed method, they revert to random discussion.

Strategy: Let them go on this way for a while, then ask the following questions:

How's this going? Are we getting anywhere?

Once a group has recognized that it isn't making progress, members are often ready to accept a more structured approach.

Potential mistake: Giving up and ceasing to watch for an opening to step back in and offer structure. Taking an 'I told you so' attitude if members admit frustration with their approach.

SCENARIO 5 THE GROUP IGNORES IT'S OWN NORMS

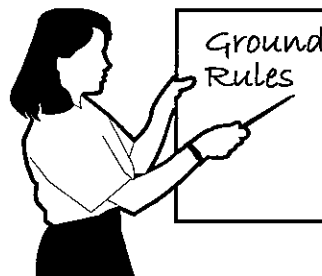
Members have set clear behavioral norms or ground rules, but start acting in ways that break their own rules.

Strategy: Allow them to be dysfunctional for a while, then ask the following:

How do you feel this meeting is going in terms of the rules we set?

Why do you think it's so hard sticking to the rules?

How can we make sure we follow the rules?



Implement member suggestions. If they don't suggest anything recommend that one or two group members be in charge of calling

the group's attention to the rules any time they're being ignored or broken. This puts the onus on members to police themselves.

Potential mistake: Making all the rules yourself and failing to use peer pressure to manage behavior.

SCENARIO 6 PEOPLE USE THE MEETING TO UNLOAD EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE

The agenda is swept off the table as people start venting their frustrations about their job, other people or the organization.

Strategy: Often groups can't focus on the task at hand because of pent-up feelings that have not been dealt with or recognized. In some cases it may be healthy to encourage participants to release feelings by getting them out into the open. The key is to structure the venting so that it can be managed and the feelings channeled into appropriate actions.

Some useful questions for managing venting meetings include the following:

How important is it that we share these feelings now?

Do we need to have any rules (safety norms) about how we do this?

How long do we do it?

Are any of these issues problems we can solve?

What can we do to solve these problems?

Potential mistake: Trying to suppress the venting process or letting it happen without any

structure. Employing this strategy in meetings that involve outside participants or participants from several organizations.

SCENARIO 7 NO MATTER WHAT TECHNIQUES ARE USED, NO DECISION IS REACHED

The group has been discussing options for hours and no clear decision is emerging. The discussion is spinning in circles and precious time is being wasted.

Strategy: Stop the action and look at the decision method that is being used. There are many decisions that simply cannot be made through consensus or voting. Consider using another method like a decision grid that allows for a comparative rating of individual aspects of competing options.

Another approach is to analyze the blocks to making a final decision. Ask the question:

What are all the things that are keeping us from making a decision?

List these and spend some time removing these decision barriers.

Potential mistake: Letting the group spin around for the entire meeting without checking the decision method and/or examining the decision barriers.

SCENARIO 8 MEMBERS BALK AT ASSUMING ANY RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACTION

People love discussing problems and brainstorming ideas, but when it comes to action, everyone is suddenly too busy or insecure about their ability/to complete the task.

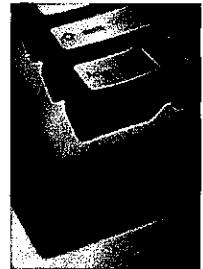
Strategy: Ensure that it's clear from the start that any problem-solving exercise includes action planning and that members will be expected to assume major responsibility for implementing their ideas.

Implementing action plans is often a growth activity if people can be given support and encouragement to stretch beyond their present capabilities. When people are concerned that they can't succeed, ask them the following:

What training, resources or other support do you need?

Work to provide those enabling resources.

If members have time barriers to participating in implementation, these need to be identified and problem solved. Organizations often ask the same hardworking people to be on every committee. If there's any control over who is going to be asked to work on an activity, considerable thought should be given to whether these individuals have the time needed to devote to the activity.



Potential mistake: Letting people 'off the hook' too easily by not problem solving the blocks or letting the same people shoulder all of the work. The worst strategy of all is to take responsibility for the action steps yourself.