

Managing meetings

Meetings are essential to communicating in disasters. But they frequently produce limited outcomes. Following a format and process that produce results is essential.

The role of the chair is to facilitate the meeting in such a way that the collective wisdom of the attendees is tapped into, while keeping discussions in line with the meeting's objectives.

The participants' role is to prepare for, and engage constructively in meetings, so that objectives can be achieved.

Planning and Preparation

WHY	<p>What are the purpose and expected objectives of the meeting?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ generate ideas ▪ find solutions / solve problems / make decisions ▪ give or share information, feedback, reports ▪ develop trust, relationships, teams <p>Who needs to agree these objectives? What do participants want from the meeting? Is the meeting part of an on-going process?</p>
WHAT	<p>What topics need to be on the agenda?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ use the agenda to explain how each topic will be handled, and for how long ▪ list what people need to bring <p>What is the best way to notify people of the meeting and circulate the agenda beforehand? Bring spare copies!</p>
WHO	<p>Who should attend?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ who needs to attend for decision-making <p>Are the right people available? Is there a protocol for invitations and seating?</p>
WHERE	<p>Which is the best location and venue to suit everyone?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ security, travel requirements, accessibility, stigma ▪ space, equipment, ventilation, catering <p>What is the best layout for the style of meeting – formal or informal?</p>
WHEN	<p>When is the best time for this meeting? Is there a clear start and finish time which is culturally acceptable to all? Is there sufficient time to achieve the objectives? What breaks will be needed? Will the meeting be free from interruptions?</p>
HOW	<p>What is the best way to start, engage all cultures, encourage contributions, and clarify purpose and expectations?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introductions, ground rules, ice-breakers <p>What translation and interpretation is needed? How will you record, clarify and circulate decisions and actions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ flipchart or whiteboard; in minutes?

When you run a meeting you are making demands on people's time and attention – use it wisely.

Virtual meetings

Facilitating a virtual meeting is more challenging than face-to-face and can be **real-time** (e.g. VOIP like skype; telephone; chat; collaborative real-time editors like GoogleDrive) or **non-real time** (e.g. email; voice messages; shared file systems like Dropbox).

Skills include:

Build trust and understanding:

develop clear, shared aims and where possible meet in person.

Preparation is even more important:

- check times of day suit all across time zones
- check everyone has access to hardware and software
- ensure all information is available to everyone (agenda etc.).

Facilitation styles

Very clear facilitation is essential:

- explicitly explain the processes for contributing
- summarise often verbally and in writing if possible
- plan regular breaks to maintain attention
- engage people who are not contributing
- in real time, take names as each person speaks.

Additional resources on All In Diary website:

Facilitating consensus in Virtual Meetings, Seeds for Change 2013
 A Consensus Handbook, Seeds for Change, 2013
 Organising Successful Meetings, Seeds for Change, 2009

Web links for further information

Tips: <http://james.shepherd-barron.com/clusterwise-2/21-managing-effective-meetings-2/>
<https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/resources>