Tools Groups Use

What are helpful tools groups use?

1. Meeting Facilitator
2. Ground Rules
3. Agenda
4. Meeting Minutes
5. Written Guidance
6. Open and Closed Sessions

1. Meeting Facilitator

Even if groups have a designated leader, sometimes it is helpful to have a *meeting facilitator*. This person keeps the discussions on track and on time while making sure everyone is able to share. *See Section 8 for more information on skills that will help you facilitate meetings.*

2. Ground Rules

Ground rules help create a successful meeting where thoughts and opinions can be openly shared. It may be helpful for the group to agree on a set of ground rules and review them at each meeting, especially if new members join the group.

Some examples of ground rules are:

- Start and end on time; stay on task.
- Put cell phones on silent or vibrate.
- Everyone gets a chance to speak.
- Side conversations are discouraged.
- Use open and honest communication.
- Respect the viewpoints of all members.
- All shared information is confidential.
- Learn what happened when you were absent.

Families Ask Questions

Recently, meetings have become very tense. Sometimes I think you could hear a pin drop. How can the group get back to a better place?

"Seek an objective third party who can understand and interpret the views of both parties involved so the issues can be heard fairly."

–Karen, parent

Tip:

Sometimes meetings are very formal and follow rules and procedures. Other meetings are very informal and may feel more like a conversation. It is important for groups to agree on how meetings will be run.

Tools Groups Use

Consider this...

Challenging group dynamics may pose a need for some changes to be made. Sometimes a group needs to take a "time out". This could be a time to review ground rules, group norms and processes.

-Kenneth Crow, author

3. Agenda

An *agenda* is a roadmap for the meeting. Usually the leader of a group makes the agenda. Agendas, just like meetings, can be formal or informal. They should only include what the group will be discussing at that meeting. Many groups ask their members if they would like to add anything to the agenda. This is a good way to put your topics or issues in front of the group. You will see sample agendas on the next few pages.

Agendas may include:

- Welcome and Introductions
- Role assignments (facilitator, time keeper & note taker)
- Approval of agenda and minutes from previous meeting
- Announcements
- New business and old business (items from previous meetings that need more discussion)
- Overview of handouts and materials
- Reports from staff, officers, or committees
- Public comment
- Meeting summary or wrap-up
- Time to identify future agenda items
- Time to decide next meeting date and location
- Purpose of the group, list of ground rules, meeting details.

Families Ask Questions

We have lots of meetings, but don't seem to get much done. What's going on?

Below are the most common reasons that meetings aren't productive:

- Participants aren't prepared
- No agenda is prepared in advance
- Group doesn't follow agenda
- Not everyone considers themselves "participants"
- Data is lacking, so critical decisions can't be made or are made without being based on data
- No action items are highlighted (who will be doing what)
- No timelines/deadlines are set
- No follow-up on action items occur

Tip:

If any of these issues apply to your group's meetings, call or meet with the leader of your group to talk about it.

Tools Groups Use

Sample agenda for a formal meeting

SCHOOL BOARD AGENDA

ORDER OF BUSINESS

1. CALL TO ORDER Regular BOE Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES– (minutes are considered "draft" until approved)

ACTION REQUIRED: Motion to Approve Minutes· SEE ATTACHED MINUTES

3. COMMUNICATIONS

A. Correspondence/Board Communication

B. Citizen Comments

C. Committee Reports

D. Recognitions of Students and Staff

4. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

A. Upcoming Events and Updates

5. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Administrative/Business Services

B. Employee Services

6. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION/DISCUSSION

A. Continuous Improvement Plan Update SEE ATTACHED POLICY 1-A

B. Policy review- (example: 1-A Philosophy of Education)

C. Budget Discussion

7. ITEMS FOR CALL TO ACTION

8. ADJOURN TO CLOSED SESSION UNDER S.S. 19.85 (1)(b) and S.S.19.85 (1) (e)

A. Personnel Matters

B. Negotiations Update

9. RECONVENE INTO OPEN SESSION

10. NEXT MEETING DATES AND ADJOURNMENT

Tools Groups Use

Sample agenda for an informal meeting

Purpose of the Group: The purpose of the School Leadership Team is to support a better understanding of how families and schools can work together to meet students' needs as well as to support parents on district and school leadership teams.

Meeting Date: June 6, 2015

Time: 10:00 – 2:00 p.m.

Place: CESA 1

Meeting Purpose:

Collaborate, share ideas and continue work

Date-Place of Next Meeting:

To be determined

Handouts:

- Minutes from 4-28-15 meeting
- Role of Parent (draft for review)

Ground Rules - Review the ground rules and norms at each meeting.

- Start and end on time.
- Keep the discussion focused on the agenda topics.
- Participate in both talking and listening- 2B4 ME.
- Use open and honest communication.
- Respect all team members and be open to the viewpoints of others.
- Accept and support each other and decisions made by the team.
- Each member is responsible for learning what occurs when unable to attend.

AGENDA

10:00-10:10 Review agenda, minutes, assign facilitator, time keeper & note taker.

10:00-12:00 <u>Old Business</u>

12:00-12:30 lunch

12:30-2:00 <u>New Business</u>

Action Items: (to be determined)

Next meetings: (to be determined)

Items for next meeting: (to be determined)

Tools Groups Use

Consider this…

Differences of opinion are natural and expected. Seek them out, value them, and try to involve everyone in the decision process. Disagreements can improve the group's decision. With a wider range of information and opinions, there is a greater chance the group will hit upon a better solution.
-Kenneth Crow, author

4. Meeting Minutes

At each meeting someone should take the **meeting minutes**. This is a "play-by-play" of what happened at the meeting. Meeting minutes are the formal record of that meeting and are very important. The minutes record decisions made and actions to follow-up on.

One of your roles on a group will be to make sure that meeting minutes from the last meeting are correct. Between meetings the minutes are typed and distributed by one of the members to the other members of the group for their review. At the beginning of each meeting the previous meeting's minutes will be read. Corrections or additions may be made and then the minutes are "approved".

An example of informal meeting minutes is provided on the next page.

Groups that receive any type of government funding should make sure that their meeting minutes are made available to the public in some way.

RELATED RESOURCES

For more information on **taking good meeting minutes,** please visit:

https://www.lifehack.org/804185/meeting-minutes

Families Ask Questions

What do I do when meetings don't start and end on time?

"Make sure you are prompt and prepared for the meeting. This will make your participation in the meeting more efficient.   When you arrive, be sure to tell the chairperson that you will need to leave at the designated meeting end time. This will remind others that the meeting needs to end on time."

-Dawn, parent

Consider this…

If a meeting is running over the time limit, you could suggest that the topic be continued at the next meeting.

If meetings continue to run over time, you may ask the group:

- Is the agenda too full?
- Do ground rules need to be established?
- Does there need to be a 'time keeper'?
- Does more time need to be scheduled for meetings?

Tools Groups Use

Sample minutes from an informal meeting

Meeting Date: September 1, 2015

Attendees: (list names of who was present)

Assigned Roles: Facilitator (name), Time Keeper (name), Note Taker (name)

Meeting Purpose: The meeting was to help plan the annual conference.

Approval of Agenda: The agenda was approved after (name) made one addition (specify).

Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes: The minutes of the previous meeting held (date) were approved.

Announcements: (list all announcements shared by members at the meeting)

- New members (names)
- Upcoming events (list)
- Changes to planned activities (list)

Action Items: (discussion on Old Business)

- Event poster design was approved
- Lunch caterer was decided

Decisions Made:

- Menu options (list details)
- Event handouts will be printed in-house

Action Steps:

- (Name) will add menu options to event registration form.
- (Name) will sign and mail the caterer contract.

New Business: (list new topics that came up during the discussion– state and explain what should take place)

- Research will begin to replace the photocopier in time to make event handouts.

Next Meeting Agenda: Items for discussion were set for the next meeting.

- (Name) will send agenda by email 2 weeks prior to meeting date.
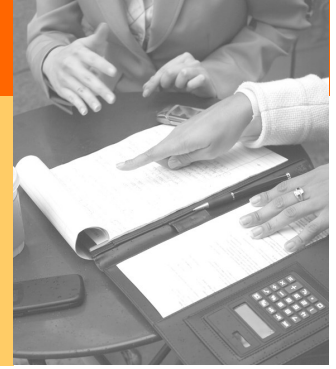
Next meeting date and location: (date/location)

Adjourn: The meeting dismissed at (time).

Tools Groups Use

5. Written Guidance

Written guidance helps an individual know how to interact with the group. One of the first things to do when you begin to serve on a group that has any written guidance is to ask for a copy and read them. All of the business your group does must conform with the organization's written guidance and may include the following items:

- *Bylaws* are rules that a group makes and its members must follow. They typically explain who can serve on the group; how long people can serve; how to fill open spots; the duties of the board's officers; the types of committees that need to exist; etc.

- *Policies* typically describe how a group will take action on a decision to make sure it is lawful, fair, and consistent.

- *Procedures and protocols* are a series of steps or a set of instructions on how to do something a certain way.

- *Compacts* are like agreements. Groups can find it helpful to write a statement of common purpose, goals and actions they will commit to. By writing the information down and having everyone sign the agreement, it becomes very clear how they will share the responsibility. Reviewing the compact will help keep the group focused. It also helps them see what they have accomplished together.

Families Ask Questions

How do I find out what the "hidden rules" of the group are?

"Every group I've ever been a part of had its own personality or culture. A lot of times this includes certain hidden or unspoken rules that are part of the group's dynamic. These rules aren't necessarily bad things, just issues to be aware of.

One group I belonged to had an unspoken rule that ALL members ALWAYS attended the group's fundraising events. This was important for me to know so I could find out about the fundraising dates far in advance and place them in my calendar so I would be able to attend.

Over time, you begin to understand what some of the hidden rules are in each group. You can also learn about these rules by chatting with someone who used to be a member of the group. Or, if you have formed a good relationship with another current member of the group, ask them."

-Courtney, non-profit administrator

Tools Groups Use

6. Open and Closed Sessions

Some groups are required to conduct their meetings openly—which means they are open to anyone who wants to attend. There are times, though, that a group may need to discuss issues privately, or in a 'closed session' meeting.

Open meetings build trust and credibility in your work as a group. Groups are considered 'transparent' when the public is invited to listen to the group's discussion and are given an opportunity to share their views on the topic.

Closed sessions may be used by a group when it is not appropriate for the public or non-members who are attending the meeting to listen to the discussion on an agenda item. There are certain topics that groups need to deal with in 'closed session' (meaning not in front of the public). Two topics typically covered in 'closed session' are personnel issues and confidential information.

RELATED RESOURCES

For more information about *Wisconsin's open meetings laws*, please visit:

https://www.doj.state.wi.us/office-open-government/ask-the-oog/when-does-meeting-occur-such-open-meetings-law-applies

http://wcwrpc.org/WI%20Open%20Meetings%20Law%20Summary.pdf

Putting It Into Action

The Reading Improvement Committee was created by the school board to address reading concerns in the school district. At the first meeting, the superintendent asked if there were two committee members who would like to co-facilitate the committee. This is a committee of the district and it was the desire of the school board that someone other than an administrator or school board member lead the committee. John volunteered to co-facilitate as did one middle school teacher. Their job will be to set meeting agendas, keep meetings on track, and lead the work of the committee. One of the first tasks of the facilitators is to help the committee establish group norms and ground rules. Another task is to establish a schedule for the group.

The superintendent's secretary will take the meeting minutes of each Reading Improvement Committee meeting and post them for all members and the community. The committee agreed to keep all work documents in a shared Google Drive Folder so that all members had access to the work of the committee. All subcommittee work will be shared there too.

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