

# ***People, Partnerships, and Communities***

*The purpose of the People, Partnership, and Communities series is to assist The Conservation Partnership to build capacity by transferring information about social science related topics.*

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Social Sciences Institute

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## **Running Effective Meetings**

*This issue contains key points to keep in mind when designing and conducting effective meetings. It also includes a checklist that you may copy and use when planning, running or attending a meeting.*

### **Why should you use this?**

An effective meeting can be described as one which achieves goals, and involves all participants. This sounds simple, but many meetings, through a lack of planning and poor execution, are not effective.

As The Conservation Partnership moves into "bridge-building" with a broader audience, meetings of all sizes and kinds will become more important to our business activities.

Remembering the key points and using the checklist will help you conduct more effective meetings. It will also allow you to make better use of your time and resources.

### **Who should use this information?**

People who conduct and participate in meetings.

### **When can this information be applied?**

This information can be used when a member of The Conservation Partnership needs to conduct or participate in a meeting. These simple techniques are effective for meetings designed to obtain or distribute information, garner community input, and resolve differences.

### **How do you run more effective meetings?**

Effective meetings don't just happen. They are the result of a three part process that accounts for the needs of both meeting organizers and meeting attendees. These process stages are preparation (before the meeting), conducting a meeting (during the meeting), and follow-up (after the meeting).

These stages are provided in the handy checklist that follows. Make copies of this checklist and take it with you when plan, run, or attend a meeting.

***"If you don't have a clear goal and agenda, don't have a meeting!"***

*(continued on reverse side)*

**Key Items for Effective Meetings**

- ◆ Prepare agenda
- ◆ Have specific goals and objectives
- ◆ Roles (leader, facilitator, recorder) are recognized and accepted by all participants
- ◆ Emphasis of a meeting should be on getting the job done rather than on who controls the meeting
- ◆ Maintain an informal, relaxed atmosphere
- ◆ Stay with agenda times and items
- ◆ Encourage all meeting attendees to participate
- ◆ Everyone understands and accepts the agenda and goals for the meeting
- ◆ Brainstorming is encouraged; i.e., all suggestions are visibly written, no suggestion is right or wrong.
- ◆ Everyone's ideas should be heard; encourage sharing of ideas.
- ◆ If possible, agreements are reached by consensus. If consensus is not possible, a majority decision is desirable.
- ◆ Criticism is frank and without personal attack

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# Effective Meeting Checklist

## Before the Meeting

- Define the goal of the meeting. Make sure it's realistic.
- Decide what to accomplish at the meeting.
- Make sure the goal can be accomplished in one meeting.
- Develop a list of questions and problems to start group discussion.

### *Prepare the following in advance:*

- Facilities (For example: seating, audio visual equipment, lighting, temperature, etc.)
- List of participants (keep numbers in line with meeting purpose)
- Agenda with time frames
- Discussion outline

## Conducting a Meeting

- Start on time.
- Group members should introduce themselves.
- Discuss "housekeeping" items. (For example: breaks, restroom location, refreshments, etc.)
- Follow the agenda to accomplish the desired purpose.
- Make sure everyone participates.
- Stimulate, guide, and control discussion.
- Strive to achieve consensus (at best), or majority decisions (at worst).
- Accurately capture comments.

### *Before You Adjourn:*

- Firm up decisions.
- Make assignments for pending work items.
- Set up next meeting times, dates, and purpose, if needed.

## Follow-up

- Have action items, tasks, people, and times clearly identified.
- Prepare report/minutes of the meeting.
- Periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the meeting.
- Decide how subsequent meetings can be improved.
- Leader should periodically check on progress of work items.

## Where to look for more information:

Carnes, William T.  
Effective Meetings for Busy People:  
Let's Decide It and Go Home  
IEEE Press ed., 1987

Tropman, John E  
Effective Meetings:  
Improving Group Decision Making  
Sage Publications, 1996

Shelton, Maria M. and Laurie K. Bauer  
The Secrets of Highly Effective Meetings  
Corwin Press, 1994