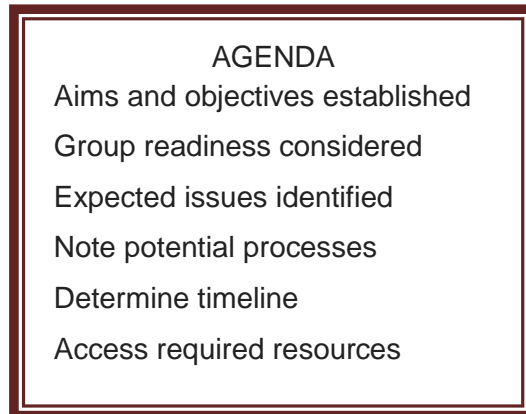


Planning Effective Meetings with AGENDA

AGENDA – An acronym-based reminder

Planning an effective and efficient meeting involves the development of an appropriate agenda for the meeting. The following acronym-based reminder, AGENDA, identifies some of the most important elements in the agenda planning process.



Aims and Objectives Established

An important initial step in the meeting planning process involves carefully considering the reasons for holding a meeting. Clearly, identifying the aims and objectives of the meeting is the first essential step in the planning process. Talking over the purpose of the meeting with colleagues can help ensure that the aims and objectives are appropriate and relevant ones.

Before calling a meeting, it is wise to consider some of the following alternatives to actually holding a meeting: a one-on-one conversation, a memo or email, a telephone or conference call, posting information on a website or online portal. Some of the online meeting software packages can provide excellent technical support for team meetings or discussions of projects. Moreover, travel costs can be significantly reduced by using these collaborative Internet resources.

Group Readiness Considered

Who should be invited to a meeting can often be determined by considering the aims and objectives of the meeting and the outcomes that are expected to be generated by holding it. People who need to be at the meeting should not be left out, at the same time; no one should have to attend an unnecessary meeting.

When the potential participants have been identified it is important to consider the knowledge and skills that they will bring to the table. Some groups will be ready to address complex or challenging issues in an effective manner, while other groups may need considerable support in doing so.

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Expected Issues Identified

Talking over with colleagues challenging issues that might arise prior to an important meeting has proven to be a helpful practice. Considering the readiness of the participants to deal with such issues can lead one to consider different process strategies in an attempt to ensure that the meeting is as productive as possible. Again, discussing with colleagues how difficult situations might be handled has proven to be an especially helpful practice.

Note potential processes

If the meeting is designed to simply share information and provide an opportunity for feedback from the participants, the degree of preparation will be much less than if sensitive issues are to be discussed or important decisions are to be made. Thus, it is important to consider who will be attending the meeting, the nature of the topics that will be discussed, and the types of outcomes that are expected to emerge from the meeting. Most importantly, it is important to identify and note potential group process strategies that might be used if the meeting involves issues that may lead to divisive discussions or unpleasant behaviour. Reviewing appropriate chairing practices, considering potential group decision-making or problem solving strategies, and identifying ways to use sub-committee reports to defray potentially difficult situations are also meeting processes to bring to mind.

Determine meeting timeline

Prior to the meeting, take the time to prepare a list of the potential agenda items. With this list in hand, consider the above processes that might need to be used to address each of the items in an effective manner. Productive meetings ensure that all participants have an opportunity to be heard and people have the time to explain the reasons behind the positions they have taken.

Sufficient time must also be available for questions to be asked and answers to be shared. Most importantly, if decisions are to be made, suitable decision processes should be used. Finally, it is wise to ensure that about 10-15 minutes is left at the end of the meeting for a summary and agreement on the next steps.

During the above agenda building process, estimate the time that will be required for each item and be sure to allow more time for items that may be controversial or problematic. Review the draft agenda and consider whether it is a realistic plan for the meeting; if not, revise it.

Access required resources

Selecting an appropriate location can go a long way to enhancing the effectiveness of a meeting. Crowded, noisy, environments without appropriate

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seating can turn a potentially positive meeting into a very negative experience. Depending on the number of participants, it may be necessary to move people into small groups for discussion or problem-solving purposes. Ensuring that flip charts are available and there is space on the wall to post the ideas that are generated can also facilitate the effectiveness of a meeting.

Final Note – Consider Circulating the Agenda for Input: Developing a sense of ownership within a group or team is an important objective. An effective way of developing increased commitment and ownership within a group is to request participants to submit additions, deletions, or revisions to the agenda when it is distributed. The decision to change the agenda can be made by the Chairperson or it can be discussed by the group at the start of the meeting.

More information on the planning and chairing of meetings is available on theleadershipwall.com website.