



Tools for Running Effective Meetings



Committee Meetings

Effective meetings help your committee stay informed, connected and focused on its work.

Meetings may look very different depending on your committee, from a small working session to a large committee meeting with presentations and updates.

As a leader, your role is to:

- Create structure
- Keep things moving
- Make sure volunteers leave knowing what they need to know and what happens next



Before the Meeting

- **Have a clear purpose:** Know what the meeting needs to accomplish and whether agenda items are intended to inform, discuss or make a decision.
- **Create and share an agenda:** Prioritize the most important items and be realistic about what can be accomplished in the time available.
- **Plan the flow of the meeting:** Consider the order of topics, transitions between presenters and how much time each item should receive.
- **Prepare your presenters:** Let anyone presenting or providing an update know how much time they have and what you need them to cover.
- **Know what's coming:** Ask presenters to provide an overview of their topic, key messages or materials in advance. This allows you to identify duplication, clarify expectations and make sure the overall agenda works together.
- **Share materials in advance when appropriate:** If volunteers need background information to understand a topic or make a decision, give them an opportunity to review it before the meeting.
- **Confirm the detail:** For larger meetings, consider room setup, technology, microphones, presentation materials and who will support each part of the meeting.



During the Meeting

1. Start with Clarity

- Begin on time, welcome volunteers and set expectations for the meeting. Highlight the key items on the agenda and identify anything that requires discussion or a decision.
- For larger or presentation-style meetings, let volunteers know when there will be opportunities for questions and how they can participate.





During the Meeting

2. Keep Presentations Focused

- Help presenters stay within their allotted time and focused on the information volunteers need to know. As the leader, you may need to provide a time reminder or step in when an update or discussion is running long.
- Encourage presenters to focus on the key message, what volunteers need to know and any action required, rather than providing every detail.
- When transitioning between agenda items, briefly summarize the takeaway or next step before introducing the next presenter.



During the Meeting

3. Keep the Meeting Moving

- Watch the time throughout the meeting. If one agenda item begins taking more time than expected, consider whether the conversation needs to continue now, move to a future meeting, or be followed up on separately.
- Topics that need further discussion can also be captured for follow-up rather than allowing them to take over the meeting.

If discussion gets off track, try:

"That's a good point, but I want to bring us back to what we need to accomplish today."



During the Meeting

4. Create Appropriate Opportunities for Participation

Not every meeting needs significant group discussion. In larger meetings, participation may simply mean providing an opportunity for questions, feedback, or clarification.

When discussion is part of the meeting, create space for different voices and perspectives.

If someone is dominating the conversation, try:

"Thanks, you've raised some helpful points. I'd like to hear from a few others before we continue."



During the Meeting

5. Manage Disagreement Constructively

Different opinions are healthy and can lead to better decisions.

Keep discussion focused on the issue rather than the individual and reinforce respectful communication when needed.

If discussion becomes unproductive:

"It sounds like we have a few different perspectives. Let's clarify where we agree, where we don't, and what we need to decide today."



Ending the Meeting

End with Clear Next Steps

Before wrapping up:

- Summarize important updates and decisions.
- Confirm action items, including who is responsible and by when.
- Identify anything that requires follow-up or needs to return to a future meeting.
- Remind volunteers of important upcoming dates or activities.
- End on time whenever possible.

After the meeting, share minutes, decisions, materials or action items in a timely way and follow-up on commitments before the next meeting.



Assess Meeting Format

If attendance or engagement is declining, consider whether the meeting format is still serving its purpose.

Ask yourself:

- Does the meeting have a clear purpose?
- Are we sharing information that volunteers actually need?
- Could some updates be communicated outside of the meeting?
- Are presentations concise and relevant to the broader committee?
- Are we making good use of volunteers' time?
- Is the frequency, length and format of the meeting still appropriate?

Not every update needs a presentation, and not every topic needs a meeting. The goal isn't simply to hold a meeting. It's to make the time together worthwhile.