

HOW TO CREATE A MEETING AGENDA!

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1: Determine why you're holding the meeting and create a practical outline of the time available.

- Create a written list of discrete outcomes you want to achieve from the meeting.
- Block out and deduct from your productive discussions any times that already have commitments. Breakfast, lunch and dinner... morning and afternoon breaks... ceremonial presentations... off-site tours... key-note speeches all can be anticipated and should be deducted from the time needed to process group discussions.

For instance, retreats, all-day or multi-day meetings usually start in the morning with coffee and continental breakfast prior to the meeting starting. If you want to start at 8:00 am, then schedule time in advance of 8:00 am and let folks know there will be coffee and conversation. Breaks are not optional... they are mandatory!

- Negotiate these times with your sponsors.

2: Determine how many hours and minutes of productive discussion time the group has, and the material that needs to be covered.

- You should have already developed the driving questions necessary for the group to answer in their discussions.
- Working with your sponsor, negotiate priorities for the driving questions. Some questions are “first order” that require resolutions before others can be addressed. Other driving questions may “fall out” if the first order questions are answered. When you're finished negotiating with the sponsor, you will have identified those questions that must be answered, those questions that should be answered, and those that it would be nice to answer.
- Given the net amount of time available for group discussion, and using the five step discussion model presented below, set the sequence, time frames and cut-off points for each of the driving questions.

Five Step Decision-Making Model –

Step 1 - Introduce the driving question by challenging one of the participants to give others a “120 second orientation” to the topic, and a starting point for discussion. This orientation should address the reason the issue needs to be addressed, and any benefits of moving in the proposed direction.

Step 2 – Solicit other positions. Discuss as many alternatives as the group can muster on the topic. Again, identify the benefits of any proposed direction. This is fundamental brainstorming... do not debate the topic at this time. Simply present other thinking and positions.

Step 3 – Ask the group what concerns they have about any of the positions presented by any of the speakers. Identify the weaknesses or costs of moving in any particular direction.

Step 4 – Ask the group if, after hearing all the discussion, there are any **alternatives** that might resolve the concerns and still capture all the benefits. Or likewise, are there any alternatives that minimize costs while maximize benefits?

Step 5 – Finally, ask individual group members if they heard any **suggestions that they believe the full group would support**. If unanimous support is not possible, ask if there are any suggestions or directions that would gain most of the group's support without generating significant opposition. Determine if either a consensus or consent position can be developed. If consensus or consent cannot be created, go back to Step 1 and start over. Repeat the process until the group decides on a direction they can recommend.

3: Develop the draft agenda with a working schedule

- For each time period in the agenda, place the appropriate driving question you want to address, and the maximum number of minutes you will spend on them.
- Move through the five-step group decision-making model and determine if the agenda is realistic. If not, go back through the agenda and cut any lower priority driving questions.
- Leave 10% - 20% of the total time dedicated to group discussion as a “pad” at the end of the meeting. Allow more time for later discussions than is really needed. In this way, if you run long on earlier discussions, you have time to catch up.

4: Distribute the draft agenda to participants in advance of the meeting, asking for comments.

- Let participants know if they need to bring information to the meeting or if they need to prepare by reading or assembling materials prior to attending.
- If participants give you comments, make every effort to incorporate them into the agenda.
- Send a final draft of the agenda to the meeting sponsor. If time permits, send a final draft to participants, as well.

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