

# A Guide to Meetings

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**Community  
Waikato**

He piko he kaainga

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## Introduction to Meetings

### Meeting - “a getting together”

Meetings are an integral part of life for many of us. Making the most of that time spent in meetings is essential. Effective, enjoyable meetings don't just happen by accident. They require planning and attention to the meeting process.

#### Why do people meet?

Some reasons for meetings:

- ⤴ To accomplish a goal of a group of people
- ⤴ To make decisions and move on to action
- ⤴ To share information
- ⤴ To identify, develop, or gather ideas and insights
- ⤴ To build group/organization support for a goal
- ⤴ To better understand a policy (e.g. school board)
- ⤴ To develop better working relationships among members
- ⤴ To express unity of purpose
- ⤴ To have some fun, a good feeling working with other people to reach an important goal

#### Why is it important to have successful meetings?

Meetings are a key aspect of the group decision-making process. It is only by meeting and communicating that groups can make decisions and move to action.

Well structured and conducted meetings can be rewarding. Knowing how to conduct effective meetings will help groups to reach your goals.

#### What makes a meeting successful?

Meetings can be an effective method for generating ideas, expanding on thoughts and engaging group participation. However, this face-to-face contact with team members and colleagues can be less than successful without adequate preparation and management. Meeting success is dependent upon three key factors; your meeting preparation, meeting management and follow up actions.



## Meeting Preparation

### Key elements for successful meetings:

#### What it means to facilitate

To facilitate is to make easy or more convenient. A facilitator assists the group to make its work easier. A facilitator's job is to manage the way the group works together, not to influence the outcome or results. If you choose to take on the role of facilitator, make sure you:

- ⚡ An effective leader (or facilitator) must possess the skills and understanding of what makes a successful meeting.
- ⚡ Flexibility. There are different ways to conduct a meeting – understand the situation and recognize that there is not just one way. Generally, the higher the stakes, the more formal the meeting procedure.
- ⚡ Commitment of all members
- ⚡ Adopt meeting guidelines or terms of reference
- ⚡ Conducive physical setting
- ⚡ Pre-Planning is crucial.

It is essential that the facilitator and the group are all clear, and agree about the purpose for each meeting. For a small meeting, this may simply require clarifying the items for discussion at the beginning. For a larger meeting, it may be necessary to negotiate and agree on the purpose with the group.

It may be useful to call in an independent facilitator when:

- ⤴ it is a big meeting with a long agenda and wide range of people attending (possibly with divergent views)
- ⤴ the group is stuck and not successfully achieving its purpose
- ⤴ everyone in the group wants to take part in the meeting and doesn't want the responsibility of managing the meeting process.

### Preparation as the facilitator

To ensure everyone involved has the opportunity to provide their input, start your meeting off by designating a meeting time that allows all participants the time needed to adequately prepare.

Once a meeting time and place has been chosen, make yourself available for questions that may arise as participants prepare for the meeting. If you are the meeting leader, make a meeting agenda, complete with detailed notes.

In these notes, outline the goal and proposed structure of the meeting, and share this with the participants. This will allow all involved to prepare and to come to the meeting ready to work together to meet the identified goals.

The success of the meeting depends largely on the skills displayed by the meeting leader/facilitator.

### Preparation for a meeting:

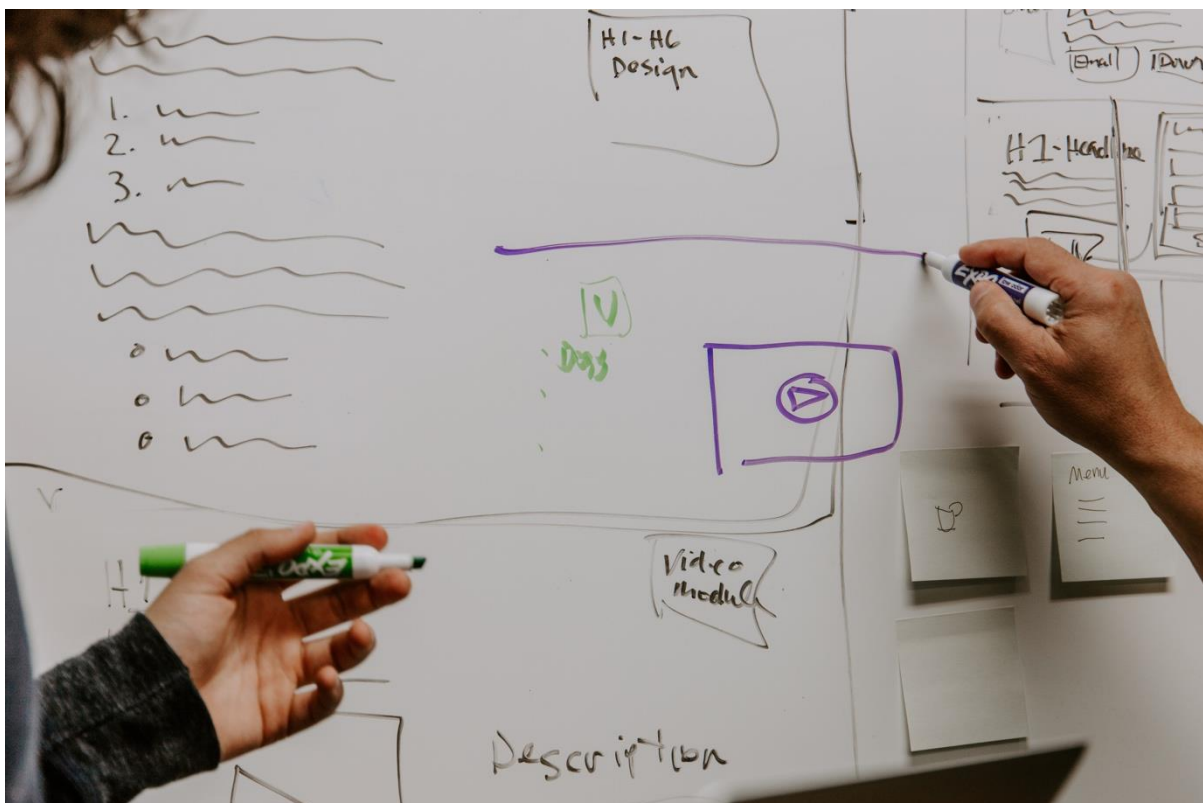
Before the meeting:

- ⤴ Clarify the purpose of the meeting
- ⤴ Identify the relevant participants to invite
- ⤴ Carefully consider the appropriate timing for the meeting to enable maximum opportunity to participate
- ⤴ Consider the physical setting: comfort, equipment, seating conducive to situation and group interaction.
- ⤴ Book a suitable meeting venue and inform participants where it is being held
- ⤴ Prepare an agenda. If possible, seek input from others about agenda items.
- ⤴ Circulation of minutes of previous meeting (if any) and background material for discussion and proposed agenda

### Preparation to effectively participate in the meeting:

Meetings can be daunting, especially if it is with a group of individuals you don't meet often, or, if this is the first time you have met together. It is important that a meeting runs effectively but at the same time ensuring opportunity for all issues to be discussed thoroughly.

- ⚡ Ensure any matters you have to report on or actions to undertake are done.
- ⚡ Reading of minutes of any previous meeting.
- ⚡ Reading of the material provided, perhaps taking notes or preparing points you want to discuss.
- ⚡ Prepare what you want to say.
- ⚡ If you have a large number of points or have found additional information, type them out and either circulate to other members or bring paper copies with you to the meeting.





## Meeting Management

Choosing the relevant participants is key to the success of any meeting. Make sure all participants are able to contribute and choose good decision-makers and problem-solvers.

If you are the leader/facilitator, your role is to ensure everyone's thoughts and ideas are heard by guiding the meeting so that there is a free flow of debate with no individual dominating and no extensive discussions between two people. As time reduces for each item on the distributed agenda, you may find it useful to stop the discussion, then quickly summarize the debate on that agenda item and move on to the next item on the agenda.

When an agenda item is resolved or action is agreed upon, make it clear who in the meeting will be responsible for this. In an effort to bypass confusion and misunderstandings, summarize the action to be taken and include this in the meeting's minutes.

## During the meeting

- ⤴ Begin on time. Be clear at the beginning about the finishing time and breaks, and stick to them. Check that these times suit everyone.
- ⤴ Welcome everyone, make appropriate introductions. If group is not well acquainted, consider name tags.
- ⤴ Check that people can hear and repeat any unclear questions from the floor.
- ⤴ Establish ground rules that all members agree to follow.
- ⤴ Decide how decisions are to be made (consensus, majority vote, or by chairperson).
- ⤴ Review agenda with group at beginning of meeting, seek amendments and agreement then follow it. Address the most important items first.
- ⤴ Clarify the meeting purpose or desired outcomes for meeting.
- ⤴ Assign time frame for each item, allocate time frame according to importance of items
- ⤴ Assign jobs of recorder, time watcher, and other relevant roles
- ⤴ Start the discussion and encourage active participation.
- ⤴ Record key discussion points and decisions accurately on flip chart or white board for all to see.
- ⤴ Breaks - Food, air, water. Ensure you include breaks – this is often the time where the real meeting actually happens!
- ⤴ Managing energy - Meetings have a natural ebb and flow, be aware of this and ensure people have enough breaks and time doing a range of activities to keep their energy up.
- ⤴ People management - If agenda items go over time draw this to everyone's attention and ask if they want to leave that point now or cut into time for talking about something else.
- ⤴ Where actions are agreed, record who is responsible for getting it done.
- ⤴ Summarize the discussion and the recommendations at the end of each logical section.
- ⤴ In closing, verify assigned responsibilities of members. Check with the group that the purpose has been achieved. If not, another meeting may need to be organised.
- ⤴ Verify date, time, and place of next meeting
- ⤴ Acknowledgement - People love to be acknowledged, for large and small things.
- ⤴ Debrief – A meeting debrief may be as simple as asking everyone at the end of the meeting, “How did it go?” or get the participants to fill in a short feedback form.
- ⤴ End on time



### Suggested ground rules for successful meetings:

- ⤴ Turn up just before the start time, to allow the meeting to start on time
- ⤴ Prepare to participate effectively
- ⤴ Stay focused on the agreed agenda
- ⤴ Be aware of how long and often we speak so that everyone has a chance to contribute
- ⤴ Respect each other's right to speak without interruption. If you want to/need to contradict what they are saying or disagree with what they have said, you can easily do this when they have finished.
- ⤴ Make every effort to listen to each other so we understand the different perspectives.
- ⤴ Speak for ourselves- "I think..." or "I feel..." rather than "everyone knows..."
- ⤴ Be constructive, relevant and concise with comments
- ⤴ No personal attacks or put downs
- ⤴ Use inclusive language (i.e. not racist, sexist or ageist, etc)
- ⤴ One person speaks at a time- no side conversations
- ⤴ Turn off cell phones
- ⤴ If you are unable to attend, send apologies. Thus the leader or facilitator knows you will not be attending and will not spend time waiting for you to turn up.

### The meeting agenda

The chairperson or facilitator is responsible for preparing the agenda in advance of the meeting. Consulting with some members in advance is a good idea to make sure the key items are on the agenda. Let members know ahead of time if you expect them to make a report on the progress of a project at the meeting.

An agenda is a written order of business to conduct a meeting; it is a list of things to be done. It is an invaluable tool to help a group focus on the business at hand and more quickly achieve its goals.

### An agenda can help your group:

- ⤴ Brainstorm
- ⤴ Get feedback
- ⤴ Report
- ⤴ Plan
- ⤴ Make decisions
- ⤴ Solve problems

### The meeting agenda includes:

- ⤴ Date
- ⤴ Time
- ⤴ Location
- ⤴ Name of the group
- ⤴ Title or topic of the meeting
- ⤴ Name and phone number of a contact person

## The meeting environment

An important aspect of a productive meeting is creating an environment that encourages a “group process” where everyone is encouraged to participate.

### Attributes of a desirable meeting environment:

- ⤴ Movable tables and chairs, arranged so everyone can see and hear the other members of the group. This shows that each person is important.
- ⤴ Quiet
- ⤴ Well-lighted, well-ventilated
- ⤴ Comfortable temperature
- ⤴ Restrooms nearby
- ⤴ Equipment on hand –whiteboard flipchart stand, pens, sticky notes, blue tack
- ⤴ Wall space to post flip charts, for everyone to see
- ⤴ Refreshments available – more sociable, builds group togetherness

### Room setup:

- ⤴ If everyone can see and hear all other participants, chances are you will have more active participation by all members of the group.

## Keeping the meeting to time

Meetings are notorious for eating up people's time. Start and end the meeting on time – you'll earn member's respect. It is often helpful to specify the start time for each item and the amount of time to be spent on each item – this can help keep the meeting focused on the most important items and the meeting moving along on time.

### Here are some ways of ensuring that time is not wasted in meetings:

- ⤴ Start on the advertised time.
- ⤴ Don't recap what you've covered if someone comes in late: doing so sends the message that it is OK to be late for meetings, and it wastes everyone else's valuable time.
- ⤴ State a finish time for the meeting and don't over-run without consultation.
- ⤴ To help stick to the stated finish time, arrange your agenda in order of importance so that if you have to omit or rush items at the end to make the finish time, you don't omit or skimp on important items.
- ⤴ Finish the meeting before the stated finish time if you have achieved everything you need to.

## Meeting Procedure

### It is desirable to use a meeting procedure that is:

- ⤴ Understandable and open
- ⤴ Involves members of group
- ⤴ Helps group make decisions in a timely manner
- ⤴ Encourages a group to make decisions and move on to action
- ⤴ Best suits the group's purpose

### Formal meetings- Westminster System or Parliamentary Procedure

Generally, the higher the stakes, (legislative action) the more formal the procedure used.

- ⤴ The form and safeguards of formal procedure were invented for democratic governance
- ⤴ These procedures are important for groups sharing power and who are responsible to those who have elected them to represent others.
- ⤴ Usually applied when groups become larger and the issues more complex or controversial

### A less formal meeting procedure

- ⤴ A 'modified' parliamentary procedure
- ⤴ More focus on discussion, agreement, and working together – process is more “open” and “friendly”
- ⤴ Used more in community, voluntary and not-for-profit groups
- ⤴ The procedure “language” is more everyday language – not formal PP
- ⤴ More focus on helping the group reach its goals

### Reaching agreement and gaining consensus

Reaching agreement in a group can sometimes be simple, but more often than not, it takes considerable discussion. In conventional meetings, voting is generally used to reach decisions. This approach may create a win/lose dynamic where the “majority rules” and those who did not support the decision may feel unempowered and lack ownership if the result.

Consensus decision making can be a useful alternative, where options are discussed until one is found that either everyone supports, or those that don't support can

agree to accept. The consensus process is more inclusive but generally takes more time to achieve.

Voting can be used to get an indication of people's feelings, and is particularly useful when there are a large number of issues to prioritise. However, ideally, voting should be considered a step towards decision making, rather than the final outcome itself.

Voting can be followed with a reflective discussion, to consider:

- ⚡ how people whose priorities are not among the most popular feel;
- ⚡ whether popular options can be modified to take other ideas into account;
- ⚡ if some of the lower prioritised ideas can still be pursued by a sub group perhaps



## After the Meeting

Mentally review and assess the meeting as soon as possible afterward – problems and successes.

- ⤴ Send all participants' a copy of the meeting minutes
- ⤴ Remind participants of agreed actions and plans for the next meeting

### **Meeting Minutes**

Minutes record the decisions of the meeting and the actions agreed. They provide a record of the meeting and, importantly, they provide a review document for use at the next meeting so that progress can be measured – this makes them a useful disciplining technique as individuals' performance and non-performance of agreed actions is given high visibility.

The style of the minutes issued depends on the circumstances – in situations of critical importance and where the record is important, and then you may need to take detailed minutes. Where this is not the case, then minutes can be simple lists of decisions made and of actions to be taken (with the responsible person identified). Generally, they should be as short as possible as long as all key information is shown – this makes them quick and easy to prepare and digest

## EXAMPLE TEMPLATE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF (ORGANISATION):

Date:			
Time:			
Location:			
Attendees:			Minute taker:
Apologies:			
TOPIC	DISCUSSION	ACTION & TIME FRAME	PERSON/S RESPONSIBLE
1. Examples in this column: Financial report Project updates Training Staff reviews General Business	A summary of the conversation and any decisions made. Include names of mover and seconder.	List the tasks and date to be completed	Who has taken on responsibility to complete the task
2. Funding	e.g. Stuart led a discussion on the need for office supplies such as reams of paper to produce the newsletter quarterly.  It was agreed that we apply to the Tindall Foundation for \$800 for office supplies. S Jones/ H Kneebone		
Meeting closed:		Chairperson's signature:	
Date and Venue of next meeting:		Date:	