TRAVEL GUIDE

MAKING MEETINGS MATTER

Regardless of how we feel about it, meetings are here to stay. Well-organized meetings can have real value for participants and their organizations. The question is, are your meetings productive, well-planned, conducted with full participation, and results-oriented? Or are they a bit more haphazard, with recycled topics, inconsistent attendance, and unclear outcomes? The tips and strategies in this Travel Guide will help improve the odds of making your meetings matter.

First things first. Do you really need a meeting?

Meeting just to meet is a time-waster, and it costs a significant amount of money in human resources. Deciding whether a meeting is necessary is an often-missed—but critical—first step. Meetings are generally held for one of these reasons:

- To share information
- To determine recommendations, make decisions, or reach agreement
- To problem-solve through idea generation and dialogue

Before scheduling a meeting, ask yourself these questions:

1. Do we need face-to-face interaction to accomplish this outcome/task?
2. Do we need to focus on relationships or team-building?

If you answered yes to either of those questions, a face-to-face meeting is probably warranted. If you didn't answer yes to either of those questions, consider other options, such as a conference or video call, an email update, a training, or a social event. Perhaps a small working group can accomplish that task rather than engaging the entire team.

Share Roles and Responsibilities

One way to engage more people in the meeting is to share responsibilities. There are at least five roles that can easily be shared by meeting participants. Consider rotating these roles to increase participation.

Convener: This person is responsible for the meeting logistics, including finding a meeting space, sending out the meeting notice and reminders, and getting there early to set up the room. This person also works with the facilitator to define the meeting purpose, identify topics, and set outcomes.

Facilitator: This is a key role and one that requires a specific skill set, which means that it is not as easily rotated among members. The facilitator can be a member of the group or an outside consultant. The key role of the facilitator is to guide the group through the agenda, utilizing processes that engage participants and accomplish the stated outcomes. It's best if the facilitator is neutral related to meeting outcomes. Some groups have co-facilitators who can share the work as well as step in and out of the role when their neutrality is in question.

Note-taker: It's hard to overemphasize the importance of this role because the meeting notes become the written record of the group's activities and decisions. To maximize consistency in the notes, use a template that is customized for your group's needs. The template can be loaded on a laptop and provided to the note-taker at the beginning of the meeting. In the School-level Roadmap Travel Log on page 5, you'll find a sample template for taking notes at a meeting. Have an agreement about when and how meeting notes are distributed and stored.

Snack provider: The best meetings have snacks! If you are able to provide snacks for your meeting, share responsibility for bringing them. If there's a snack budget, make sure the snack-provider knows how much to spend and how to be reimbursed. Set guidelines for healthy snacks as part of your meeting norms. One caution: keep it simple! Don't let snack preparation keep the meeting from starting on time.

Process observer: This is a role that may be new to some groups. The purpose of a process observer is to give the group objective, non-personal feedback about the group's process and dynamics during the meeting. Process observations are given at the end of the meeting, and should take no more than a few minutes. Examples of process observations might be:

- Members had lots of questions about the budget
- There was very little side talk going on
- We didn't start the meeting until 20 minutes after our agreed-on start time

Groups that pay attention to process observations are able to improve the group's functioning over time.

Did You Know?

A common complaint is that meetings are all about information-sharing or updates. If that's the case, find a different way to share the information (e.g., email, newsletter). People are generally willing (maybe even enthusiastic!) about attending meetings that are action-oriented and end with a clear result. That's your goal.

Add These Actions to Your Meetings

Norms

Meeting norms are created by the group to define acceptable meeting behavior and identify ways to participate in the meeting. Many groups create norms initially and revisit them at each meeting, revising or adding to them as necessary. Some groups have more in-depth Operating Agreements that may encompass meeting norms (refer to the *Travel Guide* on Creating a High Performing Team).

Warm-up activity

This is typically a short activity, designed specifically to relate to the meeting agenda. An effective warm-up activity helps the meeting participants get settled and thinking about the topic(s) that will be discussed. You can also prepare a warm-up activity with the purpose of team-building. These take longer and must be appropriate for the group's stage of development.

Process pauses

These are intentionally scheduled pauses throughout the meeting. Process pauses provide time for people to apply what they just heard, consider the consequences of a decision, or just wake up the brain after a discussion. Examples of process pauses are: individually writing down notes about key information, debriefing in pairs or small groups, and engaging in a physical activity break. Process pauses need to be included on the facilitator agenda with the appropriate amount of time allowed.

Planning for follow-up or next steps

A simple way to track follow-up actions is to develop a task list during the meeting. Before the meeting, create this matrix on chart paper and display it in the room. During the meeting, write down any tasks that are identified, with a timeline and person responsible. Allow time at the end of the meeting to review the task list and fill it in completely. The note-taker should include the task list in the meeting notes, and it should be revisited at the beginning of the next meeting.

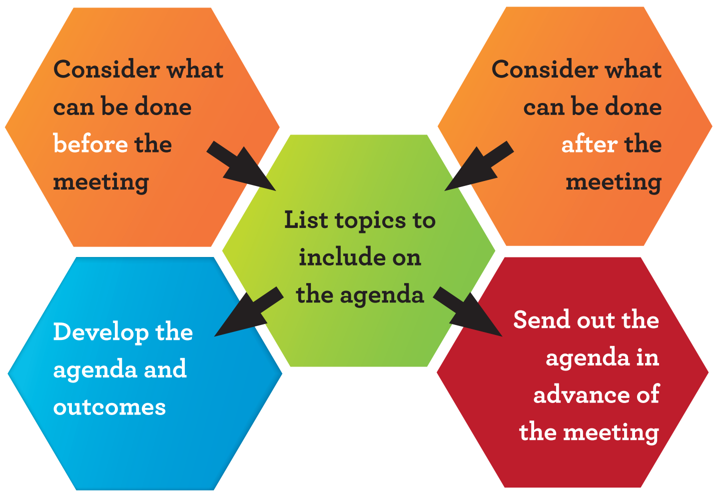
Task	Who	When

Closure

How many times have you been at a meeting where the facilitator suddenly looked at the clock and said something like "Oh no! We're out of time," and people started leaving? That's the worst way to end a meeting––it leaves people hanging, decisions unclear, and next steps unknown. The way to avoid this is to set aside time for closure when creating the agenda, and––this is important––actually take that time for closure at the end of the meeting. Look at the sample facilitator agenda (bottom of page 3) to see how closure can be managed. Closure is critical for participants to reflect on meeting outcomes, integrate key decisions, and make a mental bridge to the next meeting.

Create the Agenda

When asked about their pet peeves related to meetings, most people rank the lack of an agenda high on the list. An effective agenda takes into account the groups' past decisions as well as future goals. Here's a look at the steps in preparing an agenda:



*Remember: not everything needs to be covered during a face-to-face meeting. Some items can be handled before or after the meeting by a small group, through email, or a conference call.

Sample Facilitator Agenda

District Health Advisory Committee Meeting
December 3, 2015, 3:00 – 5:00 pm
District Media Center

Time	Topic	Who	Outcome
3:00	Welcome • Introduce new members • Agenda overview • Create/review norms • Warm-up	Pat	New members introduced, stage set for topic discussions
3:15	Develop a plan to present district progress in implementing Coordinated School Health to the School Board. *Process pause (pairs) to discuss content of the presentation. Follow with group discussion.*	Deb, Geraldo	Outline content to include in the School Board presentation. Create initial task list with persons responsible and timelines.
4:00	Finalize team member responsibilities for staff training to be held on February 3, 2016 Note: *Review training task list from previous meetings. Allow 20 minutes for co-presenters to meet, and 10 minutes for group discussion.*	Chris	Create final training agenda with presenters, times, and handouts required. Write additional assignments on task list.
4:40	Closure • Group members complete this sentence: *Before the next meeting, I commit to...* • Review task list and timelines • Role assignments for next meeting • Process observations • Reminder of next meeting time/location	Pat	Commitments shared publicly, task list finalized, roles assigned for next meeting
5:00	Adjourn	Pat	Clean up room, reset tables and chairs

The participant's agenda might have less detail. Some facilitators prefer to give the participants an agenda without specific times––this gives the facilitator more flexibility without having members fret over exact times.

Sample Participant Agenda

District Health Advisory Committee Meeting
December 3, 2015, 3:00 – 5:00 pm
District Media Center

Meeting Topic	Outcome
Welcome: agenda overview, review norms Warm-up activity *Pat*	All members introduced, meeting outcomes defined
School Board presentation on implementation of Coordinated School Health in the district *Deb and Geraldo*	Outline content of the presentation and create initial task list
February 3rd Staff Training *Chris*	Finalize agenda, tasks, and handouts required
Closure *Pat*	Commitments made

Template for Meeting Planning

In the Travel Log, you'll find a sample template for planning a meeting. You can customize it to meet the needs of your group. Here's the catch: this takes time. It's not possible to plan an effective meeting the day before. Start early, get input, share roles, and be clear about the meeting purpose and outcomes. Be realistic about how much can be accomplished in your timeframe. Set the standard that your meetings are well-prepared, well-run, and worthy of people's time.

Using Conference Calls to Conduct Meetings

Meeting face-to-face is not always possible or necessary. In those instances, a well-run conference call can be an effective substitute. As with a face-to-face meeting, the success of the conference call lies largely in the planning. The information provided earlier about meeting planning, agenda development, and note-taking is also relevant to conference calls. Identify those roles that can reasonably be shared on a conference call (e.g., note-taker, process observer). If you are able to utilize a video component, you can also create a working task list during the meeting for everyone to see. Take a look at the graphic below to learn more about the critical components of a conference call.

Conference Call Participant?

If you are a participant on a conference call, here are some tips to get the most out of the call:

- *Avoid using a cell phone if possible. On a land line, you won't have to deal with connection issues or interference.*
- *If you are using a speakerphone with others, test it out ahead of time and become familiar with the phone's features.*
- *Keep your phone muted until you intend to speak, and remember to identify yourself when you do.*
- *Avoid the urge to multi-task during the call.*

BEFORE THE CALL

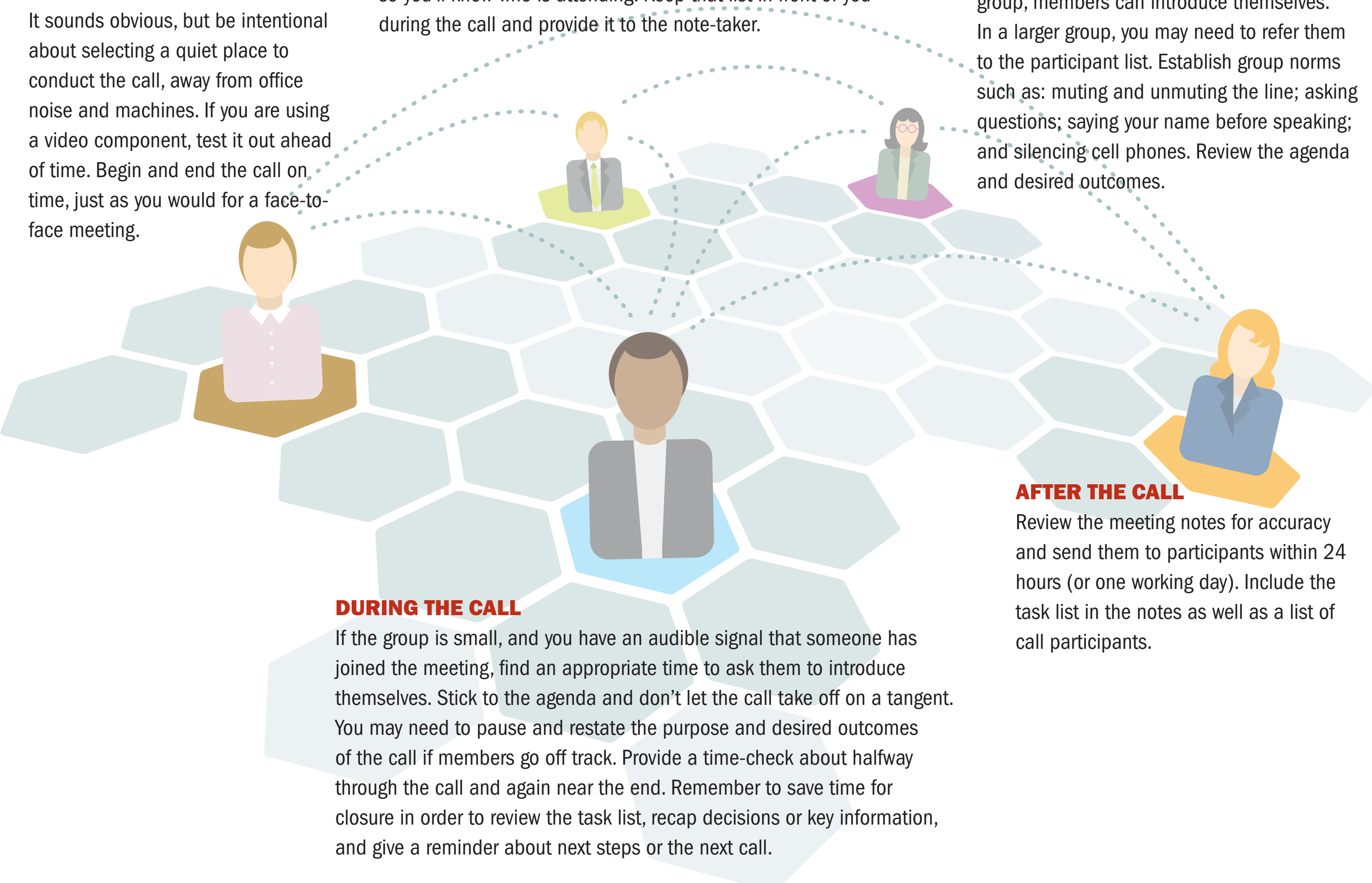
At least one day before the call, send all participants the agenda and any meeting materials, including a participant list with names, titles, and contact information. Tell participants how to connect to the call and what they should do if they have connection issues. Instruct participants who join the call in progress, or have to leave early, to email that information to you along with any questions or comments. Have participants RSVP for the call so you'll know who is attending. Keep that list in front of you during the call and provide it to the note-taker.

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CALL

Depending on the time available, the size of the group, and the meeting purpose, you'll need to decide how to handle introductions. In a smaller group, members can introduce themselves. In a larger group, you may need to refer them to the participant list. Establish group norms such as: muting and unmuting the line; asking questions; saying your name before speaking; and silencing cell phones. Review the agenda and desired outcomes.

THE BASICS

It sounds obvious, but be intentional about selecting a quiet place to conduct the call, away from office noise and machines. If you are using a video component, test it out ahead of time. Begin and end the call on time, just as you would for a face-to-face meeting.



AFTER THE CALL

Review the meeting notes for accuracy and send them to participants within 24 hours (or one working day). Include the task list in the notes as well as a list of call participants.

DURING THE CALL

If the group is small, and you have an audible signal that someone has joined the meeting, find an appropriate time to ask them to introduce themselves. Stick to the agenda and don't let the call take off on a tangent. You may need to pause and restate the purpose and desired outcomes of the call if members go off track. Provide a time-check about halfway through the call and again near the end. Remember to save time for closure in order to review the task list, recap decisions or key information, and give a reminder about next steps or the next call.

TRAVEL LOG: MEETING PLANNING TEMPLATE

Meeting Date: ____________________________________

Time (starting): ___________________________________ Time (ending): ___________________________________

Location: ____

Planning Checklist:

- ❑ Agenda sent to all members in advance of meeting
- ❑ Meeting roles identified:
  - Convener: ________________________________
  - Facilitator: ______________________________________
  - Note-taker: ______________________________
  - Snack provider: __________________________________
  - Process observer: __________________________

Meeting Elements Checklist:

- ❑ Review of norms (or creation of norms if this is the first meeting or a one-time meeting)
- ❑ Warm-up activity
- ❑ Topics and outcomes
- ❑ Decisions to be made
- ❑ Process pauses included
- ❑ Time to complete task list
- ❑ Closure activity

Detailed Agenda for Meeting Convener and Facilitator

Time	Topic/Activity	Who	Outcome

TRAVEL LOG: MEETING PLANNING TEMPLATE SAMPLE

Monthly Healthy Schools Team Meeting
March 3, 2015
9:00–11:00 am
Elementary School Library

Planning Checklist:

- [x] Agenda sent to all members in advance of meeting
- [x] Meeting roles identified:
  - Convener: Ming
  - Facilitator: Bill
  - Note-taker: Lee
  - Snack provider: Finn
  - Process observer: Kelli

Meeting Elements Checklist:

- [x] Review of norms (or creation of norms if this is the first meeting or a one-time meeting)
- [x] Warm-up activity
- [x] Topics and outcomes
- [x] Decisions to be made
- [x] Process pauses included
- [x] Time to complete task list
- [x] Closure activity

Detailed Agenda for Meeting Convener and Facilitator

Time	Topic/Activity	Who	Outcome
9:00–9:20	Welcome, review group norms Agenda overview Warm-up activity	Bill	Group reminded of norms Team-building
9:20–9:45	SHIP updates and requests for help, create task list	Ming & Lee	Tasks and timelines negotiated and/or established
9:45–10:00	New school team budget reviewed, forms passed out, process pause for questions	Finn	All members familiar with team budget and required forms
10:00–10:45	Review data from survey; decide how to share information at staff meeting	Ming	Plan developed to share key parts of survey at April staff meeting
10:45–10:55	Review task list, complete as necessary Process observations	Kelli	Commitment to action steps Opportunity to reflect on group process
10:55–11:00	Closure: reminder of next meeting and roles	Bill	Team agreement on date and roles for next meeting

TRAVEL LOG: NOTE-TAKING SAMPLE TEMPLATE

Meeting Name: ______________________

Date/Time/Location: ______________________

Persons in Attendance:

Meeting Roles

- Convener: ______________________
- Facilitator: ______________________
- Note-taker: ______________________
- Snack provider: ______________________
- Process observer: ______________________

Updates:

Topics Covered:

Decisions Made:

Task List:

Task	Who	Due Date

Next Meeting Date/Location:

Assignments for Next Meeting:

- Convener: ______________________
- Facilitator: ______________________
- Note-taker: ______________________
- Snack provider: ______________________
- Process observer: ______________________

Location where minutes are filed electronically: