

**ORGANIZED
MEETINGS**

VII. ORGANIZING MEETINGS

A. PLANNING

Once you have finished recruiting your initial group, and have had your first meetings together, you will hopefully have a lot more to facilitate.

*Good planning leads to good meetings
and good meetings lead to very effective groups.*

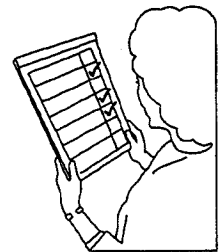
It is important that group members learn what you have to do to make your meetings as good as possible.

Important meeting skills include:

- setting agendas and preparing
- getting started
- discussing
- resolving conflicts
- decision making
- giving and taking responsibilities
- organizing committees
- follow-up and summarizing
- evaluating
- recording

The key to the success of your meetings will depend on how well organized they are. **Setting agendas, the forms discussions may take, and how to resolve conflicts** are three important areas you should understand well.

First, before you make your agenda, you need to think about what is the goal of the meeting. It could be to discuss an event at the school that concerns everyone. You must carefully review the questions you will be asking, because the way questions are framed have much to do with whether the meeting will succeed in shaping a group or provoking disagreements.



You must decide on the place, time of day, and length of time for the meetings, taking into account the audience that will be attending.

In your planning, you must estimate the number of people who will attend, calculate the time it will take for them to answer the questions, and allow for time to open the meeting, explain each section, summarize the discussion, and close the meeting.

Knowing how many people will attend and the purpose of the group will help you to see if you can keep the whole group together, or split them up into smaller working groups. If you have a large group of parents, splitting them into smaller groups may be the only way people can get to participate.

All this planning will give you some idea of the time you must allow for the meeting and also set out for you all the things you need to know to make up an agenda.

You must have your own workplan or approach worked out in your mind. Presentations can have many forms. The manual goes into this in more detail in the section entitled, "The Many Forms of Presentations".

B. THE AGENDA

After you have thought out your planning for the meeting, you must develop an **agenda**.

An agenda is the schedule or program of what is to take place during a meeting. It tells you and the other people involved in the meeting what will be discussed and accomplished, who will discuss what, and in what order.

There are several things you should notice about this agenda--

- **The order of topics**
- **The time allowed for each topic and the total time of the meeting**
- **Who presents the topics**
- **The break**

Typically, you must list the topics to be discussed in their order of importance.

To decide what is most important, you have to ask what is uppermost in the minds of the group members and what they want the meeting to accomplish.

Agendas are prepared for a variety of meetings, and they take their form from the goals that have been set by your group with your help. The agenda is flexible and can be changed. If you see that a discussion is running over the allotted time, ask the members if it is all right if we spend more time on this. Try to make the amount of time that will be spent specific, like five or ten minutes.

Times should always be listed in the agenda so that no single topic takes the time of the entire meeting.

Agendas should be short, so a large part of the meeting can be left free for the discussions.

In any case, meetings should generally not take any longer than an hour.

During the course of a meeting, a break is definitely recommended. It should be brief--no more than five or ten minutes--and come about halfway through the meeting. The break time can be reduced if the meeting is running behind schedule, but should not be skipped.

In the following agenda sample, the break has been placed before the discussion to allow the group members to think more about what they will ask and say.

As a facilitator, while the meeting is going on, you should help control the time spent on other topics or activities apart from the discussion, as well as the time the presenter takes.

An example of how an agenda would look is found in EXHIBIT #8, along with some suggestions as to their format.

**EXHIBIT #8:
SAMPLE AGENDA FOR TYPICAL MEETING**

An **agenda** is a schedule of what should take place during a meeting. It tells you what topics will be discussed and what tasks will be accomplished.

The good **agenda** goes something like this:

To all members of the Parents' Group of Public School 54:

As we agreed in our last meeting, we will be holding next week's weekly meeting at the Hostos Community Center on 51 Main Street, in Room 304, from 8-9 P.M.

Our meeting will discuss the recent worsening in the high school dropout problem, and to help explain it we will have as a featured speaker the noted educational expert Mr. Angel F. Santiago, who will lead the guided discussion.

AGENDA

1.	Start-Up and Introduction	5 minutes
2.	Case Study or Role Play	10 minutes
3.	Break	5 minutes
4.	Guided Discussion	25 minutes
5.	General Announcements	5 minutes
6.	Summary and Evaluation	5 minutes
7.	Next Meeting and Agenda	5 minutes

Total Time: 60 minutes
(1 hour)

Since we agreed to have only one hour of meeting time, most of the time will be allotted for discussion so that everyone will get a chance to be heard.

Looking forward to seeing you there,

María M. Torres

Ideally, the agenda should be mailed or handed out to members of the group days before the meeting. This will give them enough time to look at it, and prepare their questions or presentations. In any case, everyone should read the agenda before the meeting starts, and you should have extra copies with you before the meeting to hand out to those who have left the agenda at home.

C. ENDING YOUR MEETINGS

As the meeting ends, the facilitator or a selected group member, such as the recorder, should set aside a time to go over what happened during the meeting.

This is called summarizing, and it covers:

- **What the group agreed about on each item in the agenda**
- **What was accomplished during the meeting**
- **What decisions were made by the group**
- **Who was assigned to carry out the decisions the group made**

To give a good summary you should have a copy of the agenda, take good notes on key issues and important decisions, and listen very carefully throughout the meeting.

It is sometimes hard to keep your attention for as long as a meeting can take. If you need help, a number of people taking turns summarizing, or you can do the initial summary and ask the group to add anything you may have omitted. **Remember, keep it as short as you can.**

Summaries are important because they give the group a sense of accomplishment, an idea that something has been achieved because they have been working together. Summaries also give the group an indication of what needs to be done and what plans have been made.

At the end of the meeting, you should allow some time for the group to decide what the next meeting's agenda will be.

They should consider:

- **The topics that will be discussed**
- **The order in which topics will be discussed**
- **Who will present the topics**
- **The time that will be needed for each topic**
- **When and where the meeting will be held**

Discussing all this will ensure that everyone will be satisfied with the agenda, and that they know what will be learned at the next meeting.