

# Conducting Effective Meetings

According to the National Statistics Council, an average of 37% of employee time is spent in meetings. During an average meeting, agenda items are covered in only 53% of the scheduled time, with the remaining time “unproductive.” In the “do more with less time” climate that we are in today, it is important to maximize the effectiveness of meetings.

## Types of Meetings

The meeting objective determines the most effective way to conduct a meeting. Most meetings fall into one of three categories:

**Problem Solving:** The objective of a problem-solving meeting is to discuss an issue or conflict and determine how to solve it. Participants should be briefed about the problem ahead of time so that only a short review is needed in the meeting and the majority of the time can be spent determining how to solve the problem. Participants should leave the meeting with a clear understanding of what the next steps are and who is going to perform them.

**Brainstorming Meeting:** The objective of a brainstorming meeting is to produce new ideas about a specific topic. Participants should be told the objective and their role in advance of the session. Background materials, if available, should be distributed in advance. The tone of the meeting should be loose and informal. A facilitator is recommended.

**Informational Meeting:** The objective of an informational meeting is to provide or receive information about a specific idea or important matter. When scheduling an informational meeting, the first question to ask is “is this meeting necessary?” Or could another form of communication such as email, a memo, or voice-mail be used instead? If a meeting is necessary, be sure the participants have a clear understanding of the objective and are provided with an agenda.

## Length of Meetings

Be careful not to fall into the trap that meetings have to start on the hour (or half hour) and last in 30 or 60-minute intervals. Schedule a 20 or 40 minute meeting if that is the amount of time needed to cover the topic. In a university environment, it is also important to take into consideration that some participants may be teaching class or in a remote location prior to the meeting. Select the start time to minimize the amount of time spent waiting for participants to arrive.

## Ending the Meeting

End on time. Prior to ending the meeting, all decisions and assigned tasks should be reviewed and recorded including names and deadlines for any action items. Plan to end the meeting five to ten minutes prior to the allotted time on the agenda. This allows time for questions and discussion to take place and *still* excuse the participants on time. Remember to thank everyone for attending and encourage them to contact you with any questions or additional comments.

## After the Meeting

What happens after the meeting is frequently as or more important than what occurred in the meeting. Remember to send the proper follow-up information. This acts as a reminder to all participants of who's responsible for what and by when.

## More Tips

- The most effective meetings are organized around *action*—the intention to take action or the results of an action.
- Maximize the amount of business that occurs, minimize the socializing. Socializing at meetings is important, but should not dominate the agenda.
- Avoid negativity and politics. While these are present in all organizations, an effective meeting focuses on what *can* be done and not what can't.

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