

Network Meetings



**National Youth Network
Scouts Canada**

Introduction

Meetings can make or break your network, forum, or any other group. Properly run meetings are the key to successful groups. Anyone can run a meeting, the key is to run an effective one. The following chapter will help you along. By following the advice in this section, you will be able to run a successful meeting in no time.

This chapter contains everything you need to run an effective meeting, as well as ways to deal with members of your group, how to brainstorm, and how to carry out an effective decision making process. If you are a newcomer to the position of chairperson, this section will be very useful to you. And even if you've been running meetings as long as you can remember, don't worry, this section has plenty of useful tips for you, too. So read on, and discover the wonderful world of meetings!

7. USE A POSITIVE BEFORE A NEGATIVE:

Agree with what the person is saying before you say something negative. Saying something like "I understand what you're saying, and I see where you're coming from but..." can help the person to take your criticism better.

8. FOLLOW THROUGH:

If you've made a mistake, admit it! If you have contributed to the problem, you can probably contribute to fixing it.

9. LOOSEN UP:

There is always an exception to the rule. Don't have solid, concrete rules that can never be bent or broken. What goes around comes around. If you take time out to help someone, they will probably return the favour sometime.

Dealing with complaints isn't always fun, but you can do it! Just follow these nine steps, and you will be able to use complaints as constructive criticism to make stronger.

4. BE A GOOD LISTENER:

Don't interrupt. Let the person have their say. Show concern in your facial expression, and with the occasional nod of your head. You can even take notes to show that you are serious about following up on the complaint.

5. REPEAT THE COMPLAINT:

Say something along the lines of "Let me see if I understand you properly...", and then repeat the complaint. Don't patronize or be sarcastic. If you repeat the complaint, the person making it will see that you are listening to them. They will also be able to hear their complaint coming from someone else. Sometimes this may help them to see that it is not important, and they may even tell you to forget about it.

6. DON'T BE CONDESCENDING:

Never tell the person who is complaining that s/he is unreasonable. Don't sit back and smirk, or use any other body language to make the person think that you feel the complaint is not valid or worth your time. That's insulting, and since you probably don't like being insulted, chances are, other people don't either.

How to Run a Meeting

Meetings can perform several functions. They can provide a place for members of the group to share information, have a real input into decision making, solve problems, and delegate tasks. Meetings should provide an opportunity for group members to express their thoughts and opinions, react to others' thoughts and opinions, and work together to create solutions. However, not all meetings fulfill their purpose. These meetings are looked at as a waste of time. Meetings that don't fulfill their purpose are usually said to be:

- too long
- too boring
- dominated by a small number of people with hidden agendas
- called too frequently (or not frequently enough)
- disrupted by members who are not focused on the issues being discussed

People who attend meetings such as the one described above usually leave feeling discouraged. They tend to feel that they have wasted their time. In order to avoid this follow the basic outlines in this section for preparation, conducting the actual meeting, and meeting follow-up.

STEP ONE:

BE PREPARED

1. Know the Purpose

It is always important to know the specific purpose of your meeting. When deciding the purpose of the meeting, take the suggestions of your group members into consideration. This will ensure that the issues discussed at the meeting are issues that are important to all members of the group, and not just yourself. Also, asking members for their feedback will create anticipation and curiosity. Your members will really look forward to the meeting.

Always start your meeting with a statement of purpose. This is a brief statement (a few sentences) that tells everyone at your meeting why the meeting was called. (Ex. "Our group is planning a camp for this weekend. This meeting was called, so that we can figure out a program for the weekend, and make sure that all arrangements are made before the camp.")

2. Do Your Homework

If necessary, research the topics you will be discussing at your meeting. If you aren't properly informed, chances are that no one else will be either. By doing research, and preparing a short report, you can ensure that the meeting runs more smoothly. People tend to be more attentive if they know what's going on and if you know what you are talking about.

How to Handle Complaints

No matter what you do, at one time or another, you will have to deal with complaints. Here are nine steps to help you with handling complaints.

1. DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY:

The complaint was not simply to spoil your day. Chances are, it's not even aimed at you. Try to handle it with a mature attitude.

2. GET COMFY:

Try to make the person who is complaining feel comfortable. Their complaint is legitimate. It may even regard something you have overlooked, and by listening, you can improve things for yourself and the other group members as well. Some people have trouble opening up to others. Come out from behind your desk, sit beside them, and invite them to begin. Treat the person like an equal, and s/he will treat you with the same respect.

3. ASSUME IT IS A LEGITIMATE CONCERN:

Even if the person complaining does not have a legitimate reason to gripe, s/he believes s/he does. Keep an open mind, the concern may be genuine.

What to Include in Minutes:

Official minutes vary with the nature of the organization, but for the purpose of your network or forum, general guidelines to include in the minutes are:

- Name of organization (Scouts Canada)
- Level of network (Group/Area/Council/National)
- Type of meeting (e.g. Forum, Executive, General)
- Date, time and place of meeting
- Name of chairperson and members present
- Agenda of the meeting
- Approval of minutes of previous meeting
- Exact wording of motions, who made the motion and the seconder, and the result
- Record of vote taken
- Main points in debate
- Routine business
- Time of adjournment

Don't forget the three golden rules of minute taking:

BE BRIEF.

BE SPECIFIC.

BE ACCURATE.

3. Create an Agenda

The most important part of preparing for a meeting is preparing an agenda. (See section entitled "Making an Agenda for your Meeting".) An agenda will ensure that the meeting fulfills its purpose. When creating an agenda, once again accept feedback from your group members. Remember that the meeting is for them too. You will want to make copies of the agenda for everyone, so that you can distribute it prior to the meeting.

4. Inform Everyone

Make sure that everyone is informed about the meeting. Call everyone a few days in advance to remind them of location, date, and time. This is especially important if your meeting date was set a long time ago or if the regular meeting time or date has been changed.

5. Setup

It is very important where your meeting is held. There are many possible locations for meetings:

- Church hall
- A building in town (e.g. rotary club, city hall, civic centre)
- Someone's house
- Council office
- School
- Lecture hall

- Library
- Gymnasium
- Hotel conference room

Regardless of where your meeting is held, you will want to make certain that it is:

- Well lit
- Quiet
- Large enough for your purpose
- Distraction-free

Another important factor to consider is seating. There are different ways to seat people. One way is the lecture hall setup. In this setup, the group sits as one body, and the chair sits alone at the head of the group. This is a good setup for a meeting that consists strictly of someone giving information to the group. It is ideal for presentations, but not very effective for meetings where everyone's input is required.

The more popular setup is the "horseshoe" setup. In this setup, the group sits as a horseshoe, with a panel at the open end. This is an effective setup for meetings that require everyone's input.

In order for a consensus decision to work, the group must be able to live with the decision, and make some personal commitment to the decision. Now that you know all there is to know about consensus, use it as a tool in effective decision-making!

How to Write Minutes

Minutes may seem unimportant but don't be mistaken, they actually represent the history of your group and serve as the official record for the issues, decisions and policies of your group. The minutes of your group may be the only written proof of the fact that your group has done anything. But beware, although they are taken during meetings, which can be long at times; minutes are meant to be brief. They are a record of ACTION and decisions, not long descriptions of discussion. Before we further discuss how to take minutes, a few words regarding the purpose of minutes is in order.

Minutes:

- Are official and legal record of the group.
- Help in following up on assignments and decisions.
- Help in formulating the agenda for the next meeting.
- Are a valuable review of the activities of the past.

the solution out rather than flipping for it.
Treat differences in opinion as an indication
that somebody hasn't shared all information.

5. View differences of opinion as opportunities to incorporate constructive, helpful options. The more ideas expressed, the greater the chance of everybody being happy with the decision. Be emphatic. Consider the other parties' point of view, even if you do not support it. Don't cut down someone else's ideas!!! Before a group decision is achieved, make sure everybody has arrived at the same solution for the same, or complementary reasons.
6. Avoid all forms of influence and decision modification. As an example, when a dissenting member finally agrees, don't feel that individual should be rewarded or compensated by having his or her way on a later point. Once a decision had been made, resist changing it without good reason, and without consulting the rest of the group.
7. Be willing to entertain the possibility that your group can excel at its task. Avoid negativity.
8. Paraphrase as a method of checking the other person's meaning rather than simply their words.
9. Devote your energy wisely, recognize other people's turn to speak; be an active listener.

STEP TWO: START FAST

1. Welcome!

Welcome people as they come in. If you have time, start a brief conversation with someone. It is especially nice to look after anyone who is new, or shy.

To start the meeting, you should, welcome and introduce everyone. If it is a regular weekly or monthly meeting, just a brief "thank you all for coming again" will do as a welcome. Make sure that any new people are properly introduced to everyone. If necessary, go around the room and allow everyone to introduce themselves. This will promote a friendly atmosphere, and allow people to share their ideas openly and willingly.

2. Start on Time

There is nothing more frustrating than clearing time in your busy schedule for a meeting, only to get there and wait twenty minutes for it to start. Always start your meetings on time! The people at your meeting have better things to do than to wait around for your meeting to start. Meetings that don't start on time cause people to leave feeling frustrated and dissatisfied; like they have wasted their time. If you always start your meetings on time, no matter how many people are present, people will learn to be on time in the future.

3. Open with an “Attention-Getter”

Grab their attention right from the beginning. Crazy stories get attention quickly, and so do statements concerning self-interest.

Something like: “Anyone that helps out with this activity will automatically win a new car. Now that I’ve got your attention, ...”

Do this before your introductions, or anything else. It will capture the attention of people who have heard your boring opening before, and tend to tune you out.

4. Review the Agenda

After everyone is properly introduced, review your agenda. Take any suggestions from the group changing the order of items on the agenda in order to ensure that important issues are discussed adequately. Any new issues can be added to the bottom of the agenda, and talked about if time permits. If not, table them, and make sure to put them on your next agenda.

5. Statement of Purpose

After you’ve discussed your agenda, it’s time to tell everyone exactly why they’re there. State your purpose. If it seems that anyone is unclear, say it again.

Consensus

In order to reach consensus within your group, there are several hints that your group should use.

Start off by clearly defining the problem to the network, or the youth that the network represents. Everyone must be aware of the issues. Each person must display the following negotiating skills:

1. Approach the situation with logic and reasoning. Do not argue in favour of your own opinion, but the opinion of the youth that you represent. Don’t forget to listen to the reactions to your point. They can help to better express how the youth in your area feel.
2. Avoid “win-lose” statements in the discussion. Try to compromise and find the best alternative for all group members. Try to eliminate hard feelings and competition within the group.
3. Do not give your support to an idea simply to avoid conflict. Withstand pressures to yield which have no sound foundation. Strive for enlightened flexibility. Remember, you are going to have to live with the group’s decision, as well as the reaction of the youth that you represent.
4. Avoid conflict reducing techniques such as majority vote, average all best points, bargaining, coin-flipping, and the likes. Work

Minority Decision - A minority (often one person) makes the decision, either because he/she has authority or because he/she is autocratic	
<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
Fast and efficient (especially during a crisis)	One person has all power
Useful is the decision-maker is an expert in the field	Members lose interest and it prevents sharing of ideas

Consensus - All members come to a decision as a group. Usually involves negotiating.	
<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
All members are involved and agree on the decision	Time consuming
All members can contribute	Hard to reach with a large group

STEP THREE: STAY ON TRACK

1. Stick to the Agenda

The most common reason that meetings don't achieve their purpose is that people don't stick to the agenda. It is very important to follow the guidelines that you have set for your meeting. If you don't, important issues may be left out. You can make people stay on topic by saying something like "That's a great idea, but I think that it would fit in better when we're discussing that subject a little later." If members are talking about something that is not on the agenda, you can offer to insert it under "New Business" at the bottom of the agenda.

2. What Do I Do?

"What do I do?" is a common question that the members of your network will ask you. Everyone in your group should be given the chance to feel involved, like a part of the group. At every meeting, you should assign tasks. Split up the big tasks, so that one person does not have to take everything on. And speaking of one person taking everything on, make sure you don't either. Don't be afraid to delegate. You're not a one-person network. Give jobs to as many people as possible. Even if it's something small, like calling McDonald's to reserve the orange juice container, you can delegate it to someone anyway. What seems like a tiny job to you could mean a lot to someone who is just beginning to get involved.

STEP FOUR: WRAP UP

1. Warn that the End is Near!

Signal to your members that the meeting will be over soon by saying something along the lines of:

“Well, we have just a few minutes left, so...” or
“Okay. Now to wrap up...” or

“We’ve been here for a while now. Let’s take a break, and reconvene at ...”

This will let everybody know that the meeting is almost over, and you are ready to begin wrap up. This will make your group members more attentive, as they know that the end is near.

2. Summarize

Just before you end the meeting, briefly summarize what has been discussed. Make sure to emphasize any major agreements or decisions that have been made. Also, remind people of any jobs that they have been given.

3. End on Time

Finish your meeting at or before the agreed time. Think of how you feel when a teacher asks your class to stay “just a couple more minutes” after the bell in order to finish the class. This is exactly how your group members will feel if you ask them to stay after the meeting is supposed to be finished. If there are still

Types of Decisions

Unanimous Decision - All members of the group agree.	
<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
Speed	May not be well thought out
Everybody is happy	Group may not have considered any alternatives or new views

Majority Decision - Usually by vote, the wishes of the majority overrule the minority.	
<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
Everyone gets a chance to express their feelings and can try to convince the others	Minority often feels frustrated and overlooked
Works well with a large group	May cause bad feelings with the group

Example:

1.
 - District X doesn't have a youth delegate.
 - Last month the old delegate moved away and no one has been named as a replacement.
 - There has been no communication with the district since.

The district needs to have a delegate, so a decision must be made.

2.

Alternatives:

- Talk to the District about appointing a new delegate.
- Find someone you know in the district and convince them to be the delegate.
- Leave the position vacant.

The first alternative is the only appropriate choice.

3.
 - Call the District Commissioner next week to discuss the situation.
 - Attend the next District Council meeting to help select an appropriate delegate.
 - Help new delegate get accustomed to their position.

Problem solved!

things left to talk about, make sure that they are put on the agenda for the next meeting, and schedule the next meeting for the next day, or at least within the same week. People will appreciate being able to get away at the time they anticipated, so that they can carry on with the rest of their plans, and they usually won't mind having another meeting if there is unfinished business.

4. Closing

First, thank the group for coming. Then acknowledge the contributions they've made to make the meeting successful. Always close with a powerful statement. You want to leave the group with a motivational boost.

STEP FIVE: AFTER THE MEETING

1. Minutes

Hopefully, your secretary was taking minutes. After the meeting, arrange with him/her when the minutes will be printed and ready for distribution. Then arrange how the minutes will be distributed. You must make sure that everyone who was at your meeting, as well as members who were absent, get a copy of the minutes, as well as members who may wish to attend the next meeting.

2. Check Up

It is important to make sure that all the tasks that were delegated at your meeting are accomplished. Do not hound people to get things done, as they will become resentful, and be less likely to carry out their task properly. A friendly check up or reminder is a good idea, though. Just make sure that everything is being done well enough to satisfy the purpose, but don't step on any toes. Trust the members of your group. You gave them the job for a reason, so let them do it!

3. Begin Again

Now it is time to start preparing for your next meeting. Take a little break, and then go back to STEP ONE.

The Decision-Making Process

Are you unsure of where to start when making a decision? It is important to realize that decision making doesn't start with the decision itself. There are two parts, each containing several steps, that the network, or any group, should follow in decision-making.

1. Identification of the problem or situation
 - a. Perceive the Problem.
 - b. Define the Problem.
 - c. Analyze the Problem (The 5 W's and H).

Now the group must decide whether the problem is relevant to them and whether to go ahead with the decision-making process.

2. Identification of the solution
 - a. Generate alternatives.
 - b. Define the criteria that the groups will use to evaluate alternatives.
 - c. Evaluate alternatives, define criteria.
 - d. Talk to the youth that you represent on the network. Your voice is their voice.
 - e. Make the Decision!

3. Implementation of the decision
 - a. List things that must be done to implement the decision.
 - b. Prioritize tasks by time line.
 - c. Delegate tasks to various people.

There are various ways that decisions can be reached. Each has its advantages and disadvantages.

Decision Making

As a youth network or forum, you will often be faced with various important decisions. Some will be tedious and unimportant, while others may be extremely important. Some decisions will be snap, while others will be long and carefully thought out. The decision-making process can almost be considered the primary activity of certain groups, because decisions are the only way to make progress. We all know the frustration of a meeting that just drags on and on, with no decisions being reached.

There are many factors that will influence your networks decision-making:

- Makeup and values of the group.
- Advantages and disadvantages of the various alternatives.
- Consequences of each alternative.
- Time line.
- Importance of the subject, and clarity of alternatives.
- Most importantly, the views of the youth that your network represents.

There are also factors that can slow a group during the decision-making process. Watch out for these:

- The group is tired.
- The conversation is going around in circles.
- The consequences of various alternatives.
- Individuals within the group who try to dominate.
- Personal conflicts within the group.
- Skipping steps in the decision-making process.

YOUR PARTICIPATION MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Even though you are running the meeting, don't be afraid to give your input and suggestions. You are an important part of the group too. Support the group's efforts by focusing talents and energy on issues being discussed. Get involved in the discussions. Share your thoughts, and express your opinions. Be creative in your suggestions, and you will really add to the results. Make sure to always take a positive approach, and keep an open mind. You are setting an example that others will follow. After all, enthusiasm is contagious!

Making an Agenda

Good meetings are the result of advanced planning. After all, how can a successful group plan and organize for others if they cannot organize for themselves. An agenda, which provides a brief outline of what you intend to discuss, is a good first step towards getting your meetings under control and as efficient as possible. The agenda also provides order and direction to the meeting by helping to streamline and shorten it.

TIPS ON MAKING AN AGENDA

Whenever your meetings are held, chances are that the members of your group will be on a tight time schedule. Decide when you want the meeting to end and don't go over this time. To accomplish this, it is important to decide how much time you will give to each topic and stick to your schedule. Plan your time realistically. It is important to leave time for the assignment of tasks.

- Make a list of all the "odd" (items that were left undiscussed at the last meeting) as well as new items and prioritize them. Number them from most important to least important. This is the order you should use, so that in case it takes longer to discuss the things than you planned, at least time hasn't been wasted discussing matters irrelevant to most of the members. If some items are left over at the end of the meeting, you can add those items to the agenda of your next meeting.

Sample Action Plan:

Personal Action Plan

March 1 - Area Youth Network Meeting

1. Contact District Commissioner regarding participants for youth training conference.
To Be Completed By: March 10.
2. Publish Area Youth Network Newsletter.
To Be Completed By: March 21.
3. Hold District Scout Forum to discuss new Scout program.
To Be Completed By: April 12.
4. Talk to other Area Youth Networks to discuss joint activities.
To Be Completed By: April 1.

Next meeting: April 26.

Action Plans

At the end of all your meetings each member should leave with a personal action plan. This should outline what they have to do before the next meeting and what task they are responsible for.

Some of the benefits of having action plans are:

- Everyone has a clear sense of what they are responsible for.
- Ensures everyone is working equally.
- Makes everyone accountable.
- Ensures all tasks are completed.
- Prevents the “I didn’t know I was supposed to do it.” excuse.
- Serves as a reminder between meetings.

At the end of every meeting everyone in the group should discuss what is on their action plan. When meetings begin, everyone in the group should report on what work they have done towards completing the tasks on their action plan.

Your group could benefit from a group action plan as well. It should include all the projects your group is currently working on and who is responsible for them. This action plan can be included with the minutes. This will help others understand what you are doing and will act as an additional reminder for the members of your group.

- Put subjects on the agenda that concern the group. Leave matters out that could be decided by the executive or the commissioner and the staff support at a later date. However, be careful when doing this because you don’t want to exclude members of the group from being part of the decisions.
- Provide brief statements on the agenda outlining each topic for discussion. Also, try to make the items on the agenda somewhat thought-provoking.
- Hand out agendas in advance or at least at the door so members have a chance to skim the agenda BEFORE the meeting begins.
- Make a table that lists the subject, due time, person responsible, and the goal that this project will achieve. This can serve as a summary for your group’s activities. It tells people who is accountable for each activity, and when they must have their tasks done. It can help the chair, act as a reminder for present members or summary of the meeting for those who weren’t present at the meeting.

A SAMPLE AGENDA:

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. OPENING REMARKS
Welcome to old and new members.
3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
Minutes from the last meeting are amended (if needed), and approved.
4. APPROVAL OF AGENDA:
Anything that needs to be added or changed can be taken care of now.
5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS:
Anything from the last meeting that was not resolved
All items that need to be further discussed or reported on.
6. NEW BUSINESS:
All new items belong here. This means anything that has become a concern to the group since the last meeting is discussed in this section.
7. OTHER BUSINESS:
Items that were not on the agenda but were brought up during the meeting.
9. SUMMARY & ADJOURNMENT:
Set time, date, and place of next meeting
Summarize this meeting: review all decisions made and tasks delegated

Roles of People in Meetings

CHAIRPERSON:

- Makes up agenda.
- Presides over meetings.
- Delegates responsibilities.

VICE-CHAIR:

- Takes over the responsibilities of the Chairperson in case of absence.
- Assists chair.

SECRETARY:

- Records everything that is said during the meeting.
- Arranges for typing and distribution of minutes.

TREASURER:

- Handles financial transactions of the group.
- Gives financial reports.
- Prepares statements for auditing.

PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER:

- Responsible for all external relations of group.
- Handles all advertising and publicity.

OTHER MEMBERS OF EXECUTIVE:

- Give reports and updates about new occurrence dealing with their specific position.

OTHER MEMBERS:

- Give ideas and suggestions, participate in the meeting.