



## Governance Toolbox v 2.1

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Awareness-Raising & Open Space Technology



# i. Preparing an Agenda

## Synopsis

An agenda is a tool that helps keep everyone focused on the matters at hand and enables participants to move through these matters in a clear and systematic manner. It also provides the means to have everyone's issues addressed in a fair and effective way. It is a way to bring together different people's items in an organized manner that can be worked through. It is important to provide the opportunity for everyone to add-to and adjust the agenda before the meeting (one or two days prior) or at the beginning of a meeting.

## Components of a Standard Agenda

1. Check-in
2. Announcements
3. Appreciations
4. Agenda Review
5. Old Business
6. New Business
7. Recap and Next Steps
8. Evaluation



In regular meetings, a simple standard agenda such as the following can be used:

- 1. Check-in:** Give each person a minute or two to update others on important developments in their lives.
- 2. Announcements:** Invite short announcements that have to do with upcoming events. If an announcement turns into a discussion, it can be moved to the agenda.
- 3. Appreciations:** (Optional) Provide an opportunity for participants to give short acknowledgements to the hard work others are doing.
- 4. Agenda Review:** Meeting participants may add new items to the agenda. This is the time to review, prioritize and give time limits to agenda items (if needed).
- 5. Old Business:** Discussion of “tabled\*” items. (\*Items from the last meeting that you did not get to or for some reason chose to put off to this meeting)
- 6. New Business:** Discussion of the new items. You may want to put time limits on each item. If you cannot get through an item in the allotted time, the group can decide to take time from another item or can table the topic to continue the discussion at the next meeting.
- 7. Take-aways/Next steps:** At the end of the meeting, each person states what they think their next task or responsibility is. This works to clarify who is doing what by when. This can also be done at the end of the discussion of each item or by the facilitator at the end of each discussion item or at the end of the meeting.
- 8. Evaluation:** Leave a few minutes to ask how the meeting went for everyone. Is there anything that could be improved?

## ii. Meeting Roles

**Facilitator:** The facilitator is the person responsible for:

- Starting and ending the meeting on time
- Creating the agenda (with the input of other members)
- Presenting the agenda for review
- Setting times for each discussion topic
- Introducing each topic and suggesting how it will be discussed
- Keeping the discussion focused on topic
- Coordinating a decision-making process
- Bringing each discussion to a close
- Closing the meeting by reviewing what decisions have been made and allowing time for evaluation of productivity
- Setting the time/location for the next meeting
- Thanking people for participating

**Scribe:** The scribe is responsible for writing ideas up on a flip chart so that everyone can keep track of what has been said. In smaller groups, this may not be necessary though it can be useful as a tool to focus discussion and clarify ideas.

**Note-taker:** The note-taker is responsible for taking detailed notes of the major points and action items of the discussion at the meeting and recording them in some agreed upon fashion. These can be further formulated into minutes for distribution to all participants.

**Timekeeper:** The timekeeper is responsible for letting the group know when a discussion time is almost over (i.e. 5 minute warning) -- and for letting participants know when the time is up.

**Feelings Watcher:** The person who keeps track of the feelings in the room. Tries to make sure that everyone is fully being heard.

**Snack Master:** (Optional) The snack master is responsible for bringing libations and snacks to the meeting. Food can help people focus on the discussion, especially if the meeting is in the evening or goes through any general mealtime.

### The Role of the Facilitator is to:

- Help group define its goals and objectives;
- Help group assess its needs and create plans to meet them;
- Provide processes that help members use their time efficiently to make well-considered decisions;
- Guide group discussion and keep it on track;
- Assure that accurate notes are kept (generally by enlisting a scribe);
- Help the group understand its own processes in order to work more effectively;
- Make sure that assumptions are surfaced and tested;
- Support members in assessing their current skills, as well as building new skills;
- Use consensus to help a group make decisions that take all members' opinions into account;
- Support members in managing their own interpersonal dynamics;
- Provide feedback so that the group can assess their progress and make adjustments;
- Manage conflict using a collaborative approach;
- Help the group communicate effectively;
- Help the group access resources from inside and outside;
- Set the tone for an environment in which members enjoy a positive, growing experience while attaining group goals;
- Foster leadership in others by sharing the responsibility for leading the group;
- Teach and empower others to facilitate.

*Meeting roles can be rotated between members of the group.*

### iii. Effective Facilitation

#### Implicit Beliefs of a Facilitator

- People are intelligent, capable and want to do the right thing;
- Groups can make better decisions than any one person can make alone;
- Everyone's opinion is of equal value, regardless of rank or position;
- People are more committed to the ideas and plans that they have helped to create;
- Participants can and will act responsibly especially when held accountable for their decisions;
- Groups can manage their own conflicts, behaviors and relationships if they are given the right tools and training;
- The process, if well designed and honestly applied, can be trusted to achieve results.

#### Tips for Effective Facilitation

- Welcome people
- Go over agenda at the start of the meeting
- Do substantial introductions
- Consider seating arrangements
- Explain the guidelines for group discussion
- Explain the decision-making process
- Define your role as facilitator
- Make eye contact
- Use first names
- Use humor
- Change your position/move around the room
- Use visuals
- Record people's responses
- Avoid responding to each comment
- Give time for people to answer
- Invite participation
- Give positive feedback
- Respect differences of opinion
- Seek commitments from people
- End sessions with overview and coordination
- Use evaluations
- Thank people for their work
- Pass out material after discussions



## iv. Guidelines for Group Discussion

The following guidelines are intended to help you make the most of your group discussions. Although some of the suggestions may seem obvious, they serve as valuable reminders.

**Make an effort to be prompt.** When each person takes responsibility to monitor elapsed break time, the discussion can begin promptly.

**Ask for clarification.** If there is something you don't understand, say so. Chances are, you are not alone.

**Help keep the discussion on track.** Make sure your remarks are relevant; if necessary, explain how your points are related to the discussion. Try to make your points while they are pertinent.

**Listen carefully to others.** Make sure you are giving everyone a chance to speak. Jotting down your thoughts may help you to listen more attentively since you won't be concerned about forgetting the point you want to make.

**Avoid whispering and side conversation.** Give your full attention to those who are speaking and help to provide the quiet and focus needed by all who are listening. Side chatter is distracting to both speaker and listener. If there is something you need to say either address the whole group or talk outside.

**Don't monopolize the discussion.** If you tend to talk a lot in groups, leave room for quieter people. Be aware that some people may want to speak but are intimidated by more assertive people.

**Don't withdraw from the discussion.** Your responsibility goes beyond merely listening. Everyone in the group, including you, has unique knowledge and experience, this variety makes the discussion an interesting learning experience for all. Failing to speak means robbing the group of your wisdom.

**Engage in friendly disagreement.** Differences can invigorate the discussion, especially when the group is relatively homogenous on the surface. Don't hesitate to challenge ideas you disagree with. Keep in mind that it is better to understand differences than to obliterate them. Monitor your anger level to avoid loud or threatening behavior.

**Retain your sense of humor.** Remember that humor and a pleasant manner can go far in helping you make your point, while a belligerent attitude may prevent acceptance of what you say.

**Maintain an open mind.** You don't score points by rigidly sticking to your prior statements. Feel free to explore ideas that you have rejected or failed to consider in the past.

**Use your critical faculties.** Feel free to question the assertions made in the readings or by other participants. Think about whether statements are consistent with your perceptions; decide whether assertions are based on observation or inference, assumptions or evidence; be on the lookout for faulty reasoning and vague generalizations.

**Try to understand the position of those who disagree with you.** Your own knowledge is not complete until you understand other points of view. Others have reasons for their beliefs which make sense to them. You should be able to make a good case for positions you disagree with. This level of comprehension and empathy will make you a much better advocate for your own position.

**Remember that we are trying to create a "parallel universe" here.** An important skill for doing so is to be conscious of yourself as "other" in the group. We all have internalized a dysfunctional culture and are very likely to manifest it in our interactions. Strive for compassion, patience and tolerance when someone is offending your or your sense of how things should be if we were perfect.

*These guidelines have been adapted from materials developed by Study Circles Resources, Pomfret, CT.*

## v. Troubleshooting

There is no such thing as a “perfect” meeting. Having a purpose, being organized, getting good leadership and being flexible are important strategies for creating good meetings that people will want to repeat. However, not everything always goes smoothly.

The following are tips on common issues that can get in the way of a good meeting.



### **Cures for Discussion Leader Headaches**

(from SNAP Support System)

1. When a point is being discussed too long:
  - Summarize, or;
  - Suggest tabling the question for a later time.
2. When two members get into a heated discussion:
  - Summarize points made by each and turn discussion back to the group, or;
  - Invite the two to stay after the meeting when the three of you can talk it over.
3. When coping with a “one-man” show:
  - Interrupt with a statement giving the speaker credit for his or her contribution, but politely asking him or her to hold any other points until later, or;
  - Interrupt with “you have brought up many good points that could keep us busy for a long time. Would anyone like to take up one of these points?”
4. When a speaker drifts from the subject:
  - Interrupt, give him credit for the idea but explain that he is departing from the agenda, or
  - Put it up to the group whether it or not to continue to follow the introduced subject, or
  - Bring the discussion back to the agenda topic by connecting the introduced subject to the intended discussion topic.
5. When a member has difficulty in expressing him/herself:
  - Build up her confidence by expressing appreciation for what she has said and then re-phrase her material with a preface such as “Is this what you mean, Amy?”

## v. Troubleshooting (cont'd)

### Techniques for Dealing With Disruptive People

(from SNAP Support System)

In many meetings, there are people who act in ways that disrupt the meeting. Knowing how to handle every disruptive “type”, so the business of your meeting can continue.

1. The **Broken Record** keeps bringing up the same point over and over again.

- Assure that person that the point has been made and heard.
- Have the group assure the person that they have heard the point.
- Ask the group if they want to allow that person a few minutes to finish making his/her point.
- Refer to the agenda to move discussion forward.

2. The **Whisperer** is constantly whispering to the person next to them.

- Walk up close to the whisperers; your physical presence may quiet them.
- Speak to the whole group and say, “Let’s keep a single focus here and not go off in different directions.”
- Turn to the whisperers and say, “Please stop side conversations, I’m having trouble concentrating.”
- If the whispering persists, ask them if they have something that they need to share with the whole group and if not to please talk outside.

3. The **Loudmouth** talks too much and dominates the meeting.

- Set up time limits for speakers.
- Go out of your way to encourage the more quiet people to participate in the discussion.
- Talk to the person outside the meeting and explain that their behavior is disrupting the meeting. Sometimes, loudmouths have to blurt out ideas as soon as these come into their head. Ask them to be recorder for the meeting.

4. The **Interrupter** starts talking before others have finished.

- Step in immediately by saying, “Hold on, let X finish his/her statement.”
- Outside of the meeting, explain to this person that his/her behavior is disruptive to the meeting and disrespectful to others trying to speak.
- Be impartial and hold all interrupters to the same standard.
- Suggest that the interrupter act as the recorder for the meeting.

5. The **Busybody** goes nosily through their bag or papers and ducks in and out of the meeting.

- Give the person a job to do – recording the minutes, keeping time, etc.
- Ask the person politely to stop because it is distracting.
- Outside the meeting, ask the person to stop leaving the meeting because it disrupts the flow and because their contribution is important to the meeting.

6. The **Doubter** puts everything down and is always negative.

- Legitimize the person’s feelings on a difficult issue that by saying, “Yes, it will be a large task to deal with that problem, but there are successful models that we can look at.”
- During the break in the meeting, think of an achievable task and ask the Doubter to take it on; this may help cut down on negativity.
- Ask for positive feedback from the more optimistic members of the group.
- Remember to set achievable goals and celebrate your victories.

## vi. Guide to Decision-Making in Small Groups

### Synopsis

Transparency in decision-making helps everyone know how they can take part in the decision-making process and how power is distributed in the process.

There are generally two ways to make decisions as a group – by majority rules or by consensus. Also, a group can be creative in modifying or combining them. For example, if a group can't reach consensus and it is a timely matter that must be decided, then the group can go to a two-thirds majority vote or the director can have the authority to decide. The important thing is that everyone understands the process and agrees to it.

**Consensus works best when everyone in the group understands how the process works.**

### About Majority Rule

Majority rule voting, in which a decision is made when over half the group supports the proposal, works well for large groups that are not well-versed in the consensus process (see below). However, majority rule means that one part of the community wins and everyone else loses.

Silencing a sector of the population goes against a central goal of community organizing which seeks to empower every member of a community and enliven participation in civic life.

If a group needs to use majority rule, then in order to avoid alienating a large group, they might decide a proposal will only succeed with a two-thirds majority.

### The Consensus Process honors all voices.

An alternative method is consensus. A consensus process aims at bringing the group to mutual agreement by addressing all concerns. It does not require unanimity.

In some cases consensus can take longer than other processes, but it fosters creativity, cooperation and commitment to final decisions.

Consensus asks us to step out of our narrow personal agendas and to make decisions that are in the best interest of the whole group. This is not to say that personal concerns are left out of the process. Effects on or agendas of individuals impact the whole group and are weighed into consideration during the discussion portion of the process.

Someone who has a personal concern with a proposal, but who has had their issues deliberated on by the group and feels they can live with the decision can allow a decision to be made by “standing aside.”

A “block” is a person's means to disallow a decision to be made. A block is only used when a person has a strong moral disagreement or thinks that the decision will fundamentally damage the group. It is not a step to be taken lightly.



## vi. Guide to Decision-Making in Small Groups (cont'd)

### Steps to Reaching Consensus

#### Process:

- 1. State the issue.** What are we talking about? The facilitator asks the person who brought the issue to the group to frame the issue.
- 2. Clarify the question.** What needs to be decided? The facilitator asks each person to speak to the issue.
- 3. Discussion.** What are all the viewpoints? The facilitator asks each person to speak to the issue.
- 4. Make proposal.** The facilitator asks for proposals describing action the group can take that will incorporate all viewpoints.
- 5. Discussion.** The facilitator asks people to speak to proposals by asking clarifying questions or by expressing support or concerns.
- 6. Modify proposal** by friendly amendments or withdraw proposal and solicit new proposals.
- 7. Test for consensus.**

*Call for concerns* – The facilitator restates proposal and asks if anyone still has concerns. If so, ask the person with concerns to restate them and ask that others speak to those concerns.

*Call for objections within consensus* – If people still have concerns even after they have been thoroughly discussed then the facilitator asks if those persons with remaining concerns are willing to stand aside. (“I don’t agree but I can live with it.”)

*Call for blocks* – If persons with concerns cannot stand aside then the facilitator asks if they are blocking. If blocked, the proposal is dropped, discussed further or sent to committee.
- 8. Consensus reached.** Ask everyone to show visual (hand waving) or oral agreement.
- 9. Decision implemented.** Who does what when?

## vii. Conflict Resolution

### Synopsis

People occasionally get into scuffles now and then. A group can be prepared for difficult situations by discussing how they will handle them before they occur.

If members of a project are having difficulties with each other then some steps that may be helpful to agree on before any difficulties arise are:

- 1. Speak directly to one another.** If a person is having an issue with another person, she/he speaks directly to the other person about her/his concerns. (This sounds obvious, but we know how much easier it is to talk about someone than it is to talk with someone.)

During conversation, participants are asked to speak using “I” statements (i.e. I feel hurt and unappreciated when not included in decisions that have to do with my project) and listen actively by setting aside one’s opinion and listening deeply to what the other person is revealing.

Active listening also asks us to not prepare our response while the other person is speaking.

- 2. Ask for third party support.** If a person can’t speak directly to someone alone due to fear or difficulty articulating himself, then he can ask a neutral third person to mediate a meeting.

Often the third person need not do anything but be a witness to the event. The act of witnessing can create an atmosphere of safety and honesty that can help people move through issues.

- 3. Convene a conflict resolution committee hearing, if necessary.** If the third party meeting does not help move through the issue, the problem can be brought to a conflict resolution committee (a committee chosen by the whole group who can participate without conflicts of interest or bias) which “hears” both sides of the issue and gives recommendations for resolution.
- 4. Implement a resolution.** The people engaged in the conflict can voluntarily implement the solutions offered by the committee. If they refuse, then the whole group minus the complainants can take up the issue and decide to require the implementation of the resolution steps or the ejection of one or all of the parties in conflict.
- 5. Engage in whole group reflection.** If the resolutions succeed then the parties in conflict and perhaps the whole group can reflect on what they can do in the future to avoid such problems.



## viii. Holding Meetings

### Community Organizing Meetings

Please note that the tips referred to in this section are primarily for community organizing meetings not public awareness events although there will certainly be some raising of awareness whenever the community gets together. Public awareness events can be much simpler but should still include:

- Welcome statement (see more on the next page)
- (Optional) If the group is small enough have people briefly introduce themselves. If larger have them introduce themselves to someone nearby they do not know.
- Statement on the purpose of the event
- Brief overview and history of the project to date
- Any specific next steps if you have them
- Possible ways that the event participants can become Involved
- After this brief introduction (no more than 15-20 minutes) present:  
Speaker or Film
- Conclude with one or more of the following:
  - Sum up how this event fits into the overall project strategy
  - Facilitate a group discussion
  - Mention future events and next steps

### Open Space Technology

Open space technology can be used to solicit greater participation and gather more information. It is particularly effective for large groups.

To begin, the facilitator explains the process and asks a question such as “What do we want our community to look like in 2020?” or “What assets do we have in our community already?”

Note: If using the latter question allow enough time to have another open space session to answer “What do we need in our community that we do not already have?”

Next the facilitator or scribe records the groups’ comments. By show of hands or some other easy method of counting, the answers are prioritized.

Depending on the size of the larger group, the facilitator will decide how many of the topics will become breakout groups.

Participants then choose a designated table or location to discuss a selected topic. In each smaller group a scribe records the main points and either he or she reports back to the larger group when reassembled.



## Governance Toolbox v 2.1

### **TRANSITION UNITED STATES** **[www.transitionus.org](http://www.transitionus.org)**

Transition United States is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization whose mission is to catalyze, inspire, encourage, network, support and train communities throughout the U.S. as they consider, adopt, adapt and implement Transition Initiatives.

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