FIFTEEN MINUTES TO BETTER MEETINGS:
AGENDA PLANNING

Do you start every meeting with a long list of discussion topics…and end with only a couple of them completed? Does it seem like you talk and talk and don't get anything concrete done?

Just fifteen or twenty minutes spent setting your agenda using the attached template will result in a more effective and efficient use of meeting time. The examples used here come directly from actual organizations with which I've worked, with identifying information altered.

When I began working with one board, the meeting agendas looked something like this:

**BOARD MEETING
AGENDA**
- E.D. report
- Budget
- Staffing changes
- Spring newsletter
- Board leadership
- 2010 conference
- Awards dinner

Basically, a laundry list of topics and issues. The participants started discussing the first item on the list; talked about it until they ran out of steam; and continued down the list until the meeting time was up. Often several of the items never got discussed. Does this sound familiar?

LOOK FOR OUTCOMES AND SET PRIORITIES

Using the Agenda Planning Template on page 3, put each topic in one of the Topic squares. Step one in your meeting upgrade is to look at each item and determine the desired outcome. Why is this on the agenda? What action is needed? Do you need to make a decision? Create a list of ideas? Or are you just disseminating information?

(One-to-many dissemination of information is often not the best use of face-to-face group time. Put it in a memo or newsletter, and spend your meeting time doing what groups do best – creating solutions, brainstorming ideas, evaluating options, making decisions. If you do need to report information, do it briefly and quickly.)

As you clarify the purpose and desired outcome for each item, think also about its importance and priority to the overall mission of your organization. Also consider its time sensitivity – will something bad happen if we don't do this now? In the far left column, number the items in order of priority, with 1 designating the item that most needs to be handled in this meeting.   If you are unable to cover every item in the time allotted, you can drop items off the agenda starting from the bottom of the list, knowing that your most crucial actions have been taken.

DIFFERENT FORMATS FOR DIFFERENT OUTCOMES

Once you know what you are trying to accomplish, you can choose a format or activity that will help you get there. The tools for generating ideas are different from those useful for evaluating and prioritizing those ideas.

Formats for Generating Ideas and Soliciting Input	Tools for Evaluating and Prioritizing Ideas & Actions
- Brainstorming - Frames - Visualization - Mapping - SWOT analysis - Small groups - Asking good questions - Shelter scales - Kinetic mapping - Straw polls - Role playing	- Time sensitivity/Importance matrix - Dot voting - Binary comparison - Pros and cons - Ranking - Criteria

Add the chosen formats to the template. Guesstimate how much time each one will take and add it to your template also. (Hint: Most things take longer than you might imagine!) If you have more items than time, leave out the least important items…or add them at the end under the heading "If Time Allows."

CLARIFY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Note also who will be in charge of each section of your meeting and what their role will be. Is there information that needs to be presented? It is usually good to have one person make the presentation and a different person facilitate questions and discussion.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

By now you should have your template all filled out. (See page 4 for an example.) To create the final agenda, re-arrange items in priority order and leave out those that didn't make the cut. You may want to send out a version with slightly less detail, but make sure your facilitators have the detailed version and that all presenters know their time limits and what they're supposed to do. Be sure to include information on meeting time and location.

It can also be helpful to add any notes about things that meeting participants need to do in advance to prepare for the meeting – documents to review, calls to make, etc. Having it all in one easily accessible place increases the likelihood that folks will actually <u>do</u> it all! See page 5 for an example of a final agenda.

After a fifteen-minute explanation of this template, the group mentioned above adopted it as their standard agenda planning method. Their meetings have become far more efficient and effective!

AGENDA PLANNING TEMPLATE

PRIORITY	TOPIC	DESIRED OUTCOME	FORMAT	ROLES	TIME

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AGENDA PLANNING TEMPLATE: EXAMPLE

PRIORITY	TOPIC	DESIRED OUTCOME	FORMAT	ROLES	TIME
3	2010 conference	Short list of ideas for conference theme	- Brainstorm - Dot vote to narrow list - Give list to conference planning committee	Sue - facilitator	20 min.
1	Fundraising	Criteria for selecting fundraising consultant	- Review list brainstormed at last meeting and suggestions received via email - Discuss which are "must haves" and which are "value added" - Development committee will make final decision based on this input	Bob - presenter Juanita - facilitator	45 min.
2	Board leadership	New officers elected	- Majority vote	Stefan - facilitator	10 min

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AGENDA AS SENT TO PARTICIPANTS

[Name of Organization Here] BOARD MEETING AGENDA

Date: March 12, 2009 3:00 – 5:00 pm
Location: Community Center Board Room

MEETING PREPARATION:

- Review minutes from February meeting
- Complete all assigned action items from February meeting
- Read attached article on direct fundraising campaigns

TOPIC	DESIRED OUTCOME & FORMAT	ROLES	TIME
Fundraising	Criteria for selecting fundraising consultant • Review list brainstormed at last meeting and suggestions received via email • Discuss which are "must haves" and which are "value added" • Development committee will make final decision based on this input	Bob – presenter Juanita - facilitator	45 min.
Board leadership	New officers elected • Majority vote	Stefan - facilitator	10 min
2010 conference	Short list of ideas for conference theme • Brainstorm • Dot vote to narrow list • Give list to conference planning committee	Sue - facilitator	20 min.

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