Meeting in a Box

January 2018
Key Points:

Why use an agenda:

1. Topics for discussion
2. Presenter or discussion leader for each topic with contact information
3. Time allotment for each topic
   - Provides an outline for the meeting (how long to spend on which topics)
   - Can be used as a checklist to ensure that all information is covered
   - Let’s participants know what will be discussed if it’s distributed before the meeting (which we highly recommend-- via email or hard copies). This gives them an opportunity to come to the meeting prepared for the upcoming discussions or decisions.
   - Highlights key points (dates, numbers, goals) at the bottom of the agenda as a quick reference
   - Encourages and provides a place for attendees to take notes
   - Provides a focus for the meeting (the objective of the meeting must be clearly stated in the agenda)

How to create an agenda:

- All agendas should include the following administrative details:
  - Meeting start time, end time
  - Meeting location
  - Topic headings
  - Some topic detail for each heading
  - The time each topic is expected to last
  - Who will be leading each discussion and their contact info
- Set an objective for the meeting:
o Helps you plan the meeting: make concrete meeting goals
o Provides a measure against which you can evaluate that meeting: Did you meet objectives? Why or why not? Is another meeting required?
o Allows you to continuously improve your effective meeting process.

• Solicit agenda items/topics for discussion from ACS staff and sub-committee chairs/co-chairs 3-4 days before the meeting

• Write out each topic heading/agenda item as a goal or an action
  o Rather than writing down "discuss budget" as an agenda item, analyze the goal for the item. Write it as a specific task that needs doing such as: "define budget categories and develop tentative amounts in each category".
  o Making a task focused agenda helps to organize the thinking of the participants and makes it very clear exactly what is being done or asked for.
    • Group agenda items into one or more of these categories:
      o Exchange information
      o Get input
      o Generate ideas
      o Learn something
      o Evaluate alternatives
      o Make decisions
  
• Rank agenda items in order of importance and give them the appropriate amount of discussion time

• You can send out the agenda (or outline of topics to be discussed) to all participants 1-2 days prior to the meeting and hand out a hard-copy at the beginning of the meeting

• The most important part of creating an effective agenda is to follow it during the meeting!

Conducting an ice-breaker/ Mission Activity/ Why I Relay Story
At the beginning of a meeting, members have to make a transition from being an individual to being a member of a group. Some sort of warm up activity is good to do prior to the meeting’s start.

- **Icebreakers** are beneficial tools during the first few meetings.
  - The activity will help members get to know one another and loosen up a bit.
  - Injecting a little fun into your meetings will engage members and encourage participation and creativity.
  - They help relax participants, and that makes them more receptive to listening and contributing.

- **Mission Activities** are great ways to teach and learn more about the Mission of the American Cancer Society. Why do we do what we do?
  - Check out Facebook, YouTube and other Social media for inspiration. (@CampusRelay)
  - Think about every aspect of the American Cancer Society.

- **Why I Relay moments** are great to help the committee get to know one another.
  - It reminds people about the personal, impactful side of Relay, rather than just get lost in the logistics. Also promotes relationships and respect amongst members.

**Engage Adults as Adults:**
- College students are adults. Don’t forget to treat them that way.
- Challenge them. Speak to them as responsible adults.
- Respect them & their time (start and end as scheduled).
- Give feedback professionally.

**Ensure equal participation**
- Here are some tips on keeping the discussion productive and equal.
  - Pass out post-it notes or small pieces of paper where everyone can write down their suggestions/questions. That way everyone's voice is heard even if they are too shy to speak up.
Avoid eye contact with those who want to continue to dominate the discussion - ask direct questions of the quieter people.

After a meeting, privately make people aware of their tendency to dominate - ask for their help in drawing others out.

Listen to what the participants say and how they say it.

- Observe body language – negative signs may include
  - Rolling eyes
  - Avoiding eye contact
  - Crossed arms and legs
  - Leaving the room frequently
  - When you notice a problem, listen closely to questions so that you can fully answer them by rephrasing their questions, to confirm your understanding.

Provide a safe environment

- People need to practice skills before they can be expected to use them in their work environment. You can create a sense of security by:
  - Using humor and self-deprecation
  - Stressing the importance of learning from feedback
  - Being a role model, then inviting feedback on how you are doing
  - Establishing a learning contract that stresses the importance of helping one another through feedback

- Review
  - Clarify that meeting minutes and/or actions will be reported back to members within the week (this helps to keep momentum going).

Have FUN!

People learn best when the environment is relaxed and they are enjoying themselves. This will not detract from the importance of the subject at hand.
● Use short activities that are fun
● Have music when people come in
● Open each meeting with a joke, inspirational quote, or startling statistic.
● Add a recognition moment at the beginning of each meeting to recognize a committee member who has gone above/beyond since the last meeting. This provides motivation for other committee members to keep working hard, and helps them feel valued for all of their hard work.
● Have food. Ask a different member at each meeting to bring a snack for the next meeting or have a snack potluck.
● Rather than memos or emails to announce an upcoming meeting, make party invitations or tickets for admission.
● Make the meeting room an uplifting place with pictures, balloons, or other decorations.
● Send a puzzle piece to each member, then have them bring the pieces to the meeting to put together. Have the puzzle relate to the meeting specifically.
● At the close of the meeting, go around the room and have each person state something they learned in the meeting, give appreciation to another member, commit to a specific task, or give a one-word summary of the meeting or group.
  ○ Alternatively, use post-its during the meeting to write down your highlights from the meeting and toss them into the middle of the table, or collect them at the end of the meeting. Reading these aloud to close the meeting is a great way to end on a high note!
● For larger committees, give appreciation to the subcommittee and highlight something their committee is doing to ensure each subcommittee’s voice is heard at every meeting.
● Use pictures, slides, or comic strips to illustrate points.

Manage Conflict:
Meetings will often times include at least one person who is disinterested, hostile, or withdrawn. These behaviors should not be ignored; you may need to intervene whenever the behavior is affecting others in the meeting.
• approach the person after the meeting
• make the person aware of your concern
• focus on the problem, do not make a personal attack
• listen to any complaints the person may have
• offer help, insofar as you may have control over the problem
• ask for the person's cooperation by appealing to his or her maturity
• use your Staff Partner as a resource

Meeting Minutes:
• are a recap of the content of your meeting
• are an important communicating vehicle
• provide an update for team members who were absent from the meeting
• help to clarify and confirm your decisions and maintain the group memory
• provide a record of activities from year to year and a means of leaving a legacy
• should be distributed within 3-4 days after the meeting (after being approved by the event chairs and staff partner)

Tips for the recorder/scribe:
• Ensure that all of the essential elements are noted, such as type of meeting, name of the organization, date and time, venue, name of the chair or facilitator, main topics and the time of adjournment.
• Prepare an outline based on the agenda ahead of time, and leave plenty of white space for notes. By having the topics already written down, you can jump right on to a new topic without pause.

• Prepare a list of expected attendees and check off the names as people enter the room. Or, you can pass around an attendance sheet for everyone to sign as the meeting starts.

• To be sure about who said what, make a map of the seating arrangement, and make sure to ask for introductions of unfamiliar people.

• Don't make the mistake of recording every single comment. Concentrate on getting the gist of the discussion and taking enough notes to summarize it later. Think in terms of issues discussed, major points raised and decisions taken. If an attendee commits to taking responsibility for an action item, capture the item, the name of the person responsible and a deadline for completion.

• Use whatever recording method is comfortable for you, a notepad, a laptop computer, a tape recorder, a steno pad, or shorthand.

• If you are an active participant in the meeting, be prepared! Study the issues to be discussed and have your questions ready ahead of time. If you have to concentrate on grasping the issues while you are making your notes, they won't make any sense to you later.