

Management and Growth

Community and Fishermen Capacity

By the end of this lesson you will be able to:

- Understand different strategies for improving fishermen involvement.
- Determine what strategies are most appropriate for our community.

Why hold fishermen meetings?

Regular fishermen meetings is one of the most effective ways we've found to empower and engage the fishermen in our community. One-on-one contact with permit banking staff is important and helps fishermen stay connected to the program, but in our experience, great ideas and discussion happen when you bring fishermen together under the same roof.

Okay, so what should those meetings look like?

- Meetings should be regularly scheduled, so that fishermen and staff have an expectation that this'll be an ongoing experience. At the Cape Cod Fisheries Trust, they hold monthly meetings with their scallop group and quarterly meetings with groundfish fishermen. How often you hold your meetings may depend on fishermen interest and how quickly things are changing in your fisheries.
- Have an agenda and assign someone (likely a permit banking staff or possibly a board member) to take notes. The agenda will keep the group focused, while the notes will keep the group accountable for decisions and to-dos.
- Consider asking fishermen if attendance should be required for lessees. In our experience, making this a requirement has meant meetings are well-populated, which means there are more people in the room to tackle problems and discussions together. However, if you decide to do this, it's important that fishermen have buy-in to that choice, rather than feeling they're forced from the top down to go to these meetings. Thus, you should involve the fishermen in discussions about whether to make this a requirement.
- Emphasize issues important to fishermen, rather than administrative questions. In general, meetings that focus on community or policy issues are more productive and engaging than meetings focused on who gets how much quota and when.
- Contact fishermen regularly to remind them of upcoming meetings. The contact method you use should depend on what works best and is most effective for the individual fishermen. For instance, at the Cape Cod Fisheries Trust, staff uses emails and phone calls or texts. But in your community, perhaps a newspaper ad or a flyer at the pier would work better, particularly if you don't have the contact info for and relationships with all the fishermen.
- Think about how to set up the meeting room. It seems silly, but if you arrange the seats in a circle or a U shape, it really does help the conversation flow more freely than if you're set up like a classroom, with all the seats facing forward.

Who should lead the meetings?

Ideally, you'd have a fisherman leader to run your meetings. In our experience, conversations go much more smoothly if they're led by fishermen rather than staff. However, delegating that role from staff to fishermen will require legwork (since staff think about things like policy campaigns and community opportunities day in and day out, while fishermen spend their days fishing).

First, you'll have to identify an interested fisherman (or fishermen). Then, ideally, you'd be able to organize some sort of leadership training for the fishermen so they can feel confident in their ability to run a meeting. (Of course, your fishermen may already be experienced in this — it really depends on the individual, and you should check in with your fishermen leaders first to gauge their interest in training.) Finally, it's a good idea to meet with the fishermen leaders before every meeting to brainstorm meeting talking points and review the agenda contents.

In the end, all this work is certainly more than worth it if it improves your fishing community's ability to feel ownership over the program. But if none of your local fishermen are interested in running the meetings, it's best to at least find someone the fishermen already know, trust, and respect. This will make it much easier for the person in charge of the meetings to run the difficult conversations that often come with fisheries work.

What should the meetings be about?

In addition to the day-to-day work of running the permit bank, it's a good idea to keep an eye on local fisheries policy issues — not just because they could affect the permit bank's assets, but also because it's a good way to create value for the fishermen in their regular meetings. Fisheries policy is a lengthy, involved process, and it can be hard for fishermen to stay plugged in every step of the way. But if you're able to boil pressing policy movements down to quick summaries at the regular meetings, then open the floor to discussion and questions, you can be an important bridge for those fishermen to the policies that impact their businesses.

How do you do that? Stay on top of your local Fishery Management Council's meeting schedule, as well as any relevant state agencies. Invite fishermen to attend those meetings, if they're interested, and attend yourself so you can get your information straight from the source. Build relationships with Council staff and members so that you can stay in the loop even outside the official meetings. Keep an eye on your local paper and trade magazines.

All in all, your focus should be building value and good experiences for the fishermen. These experiences are important to building teamwork amongst your fishermen, and "good experiences" could mean anything from policy initiatives based on things that matter to them, to community volunteering, to permit banking-related events.

One last word of encouragement!

Don't be disheartened if it takes a while for attendance to pick up at your regular meetings. Just like anyone else, fishermen may not start attending until they see a value in doing so. In some cases, that might mean having a consistent policy agenda and updates. In others, it might mean creating a scientific research program. It really depends on your fishery and fishermen and what's interesting and important to them. If you can get just a few fishermen on board, that's a great success. Eventually, they'll start talking about it with other fishermen, and your movement will continue to grow from there.

