

## Creating an Agenda for Meeting Success

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A neighborhood meeting regarding curbs and sidewalks that I once attended quickly deteriorated into a free-flowing discussion dominated by the most vocal people in the room. An important tool for managing the meeting had been overlooked—an agenda.

The agenda is very important to running a successful meeting. It sets the stage and establishes parameters. For the convener, the agenda is an important preparation tool. For the participants, the agenda is a road map that confirms the goals of the meeting and the way to reach them.

Let's assume you are going to convene the curbs and sidewalks meeting. Developing an agenda will help you think ahead about the timeline, activities and outcome of the meeting.

The activities of the meeting will be dictated by what you want to happen at the end. How much information needs to be communicated? How many speakers will there be? What topics need to be discussed? How much discussion? Based on your answers to these questions, you can map out how much time each portion of the meeting will take. You are estimating, but it should prevent running out of time without discussing important issues.

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Important discussion and information items should be labeled as such on the agenda. Think about who should provide the information or lead the discussion. Maybe a subject expert, in this case an arborist, an engineer or the mayor, might be preferable as discussion leader to you as meeting chair. Think about ways to focus the discussion. Rather than general questions such as "what do you think?" consider listing several key questions related to the discussion topic. The traditional 5Ws (who, what, when, where and why) are a good starting point. Assume that the participants can change these questions, but in most cases they will agree and use them to guide their thoughts. For example, in my curbs and sidewalk meeting, the answer to, "Why do we need curbs and sidewalks?" included the federal Clean Water Act and the re-grading of the street.

Most important, decide how to end the meeting. Does the group need a list of further areas to explore or additional questions to be asked? Should a committee be convened to continue the explorations? Do you need to reach consensus or is a simple yes/no vote enough? Will you need to create an action plan?

So let's see how your agenda for the curbs and sidewalks meeting might look.

Please continue

## **Agenda Public Meeting on Curbs and Sidewalks**

Date, Place, Time 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm

Goal: To explain the issues surrounding street reconstruction

Introductions of staff and community members  
Chair (10 minutes)

Saving the trees  
Arborist (15minutes)

Drainage  
Water company representative (15 minutes)

Scheduling  
Engineer (10 minutes)

Parking, trash pickup, notifications, etc.  
Construction representative (10 minutes)

Community concerns (15 minutes)

### **Adjournment**

Note that this assumes a 90-minute meeting. The agenda covers 75 minutes, but you've allowed 15 minutes extra. The agenda as outlined affords you the opportunity to say, "We've come to the formal end of the meeting. Let's take a two-minute break for those of you who need to leave. For anyone who would like to stay, the staff will remain to answer your questions personally."

Your preparation has paid off in a focused and organized meeting. All the participants, although they may not say so, have a level of comfort from seeing the planning that went into the meeting. Yes, you still may have some disruptive people. However, you now have two tools to work with—ground rules and the agenda. In many cases, other participants themselves will help with the disruptions by calling attention to the ground rules and agenda. Remember that most of the people in the room will be grateful that you provided a structure to allow civil discussion.

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