

## Defining and Planning for Success

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It's dinner time and your significant other asks the inevitable, "And how was your day?" Having spent the entire day at a conference, you say, "It was great. The speakers were on target. The materials were so good I can share them with my staff. I met three new people who are interested in our work."

That's the ideal. Too frequently, our response is, "It was so-so. I'm not sure what the real purpose of the meeting was. I had hoped to meet some new people, but there was no time for networking and no participants list, so I don't know how to follow up."

When you're a participant, it can be hard to contribute to an effective meeting. However, when you're in the role of meeting convener, you have much more control. Most of the secret lies in preparation. Think through the meeting. Start with the end in mind. Ask yourself what the purpose and desired outcome are for gathering these people. What do you want to accomplish? Why are they coming? What do they expect?

The following questions will help you define purpose and outcome. Using them as a guide as you prepare will help you achieve success.

- Start with the opening question. The session has ended and someone at dinner that night asks you, "How was the meeting?" You answer, "It was great because..."
- How would you define success for this session?
- At the end of the day, what do you want to see happen? What should have happened? What shouldn't happen?
- What do you (define you — steering committee, convener) want to accomplish? Are you all in agreement?
- What constraints do you have? For example, is the venue not conducive to small group discussion? (You're in an auditorium and the seats are bolted to the floor.) Or even though you want the speakers to interact with the audience, this is a group that defines success by the use of slide presentations in dark rooms.
- Who should be there? Why? What do you want from them? What do you want them to do? What do they want from you? From each other?

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- Why are they there? People come together for a variety of reasons. Ideally, there is congruence between what the organizers of the event want and what the attendees want. Participants may come together to:
  - Meet each other
  - Network with each other
  - Learn from presenters
  - Learn from each other
  - Explore ways to work with each other
  - Work together
  - Agree on the issues
  - Agree on an action agenda
  - Commit to action
  - Expect action from others
  - Form an on-going group

If you're not sure why people are coming to the event, ask them. Call a few beforehand and ask how they would define a successful meeting. Not only will the information be helpful, but you may also have gained a few friends who will be flattered that you asked.