# Making Meetings Effective

A session for Providence Civic Entrepreneurs
February, 1999
Roberts & Kay, Inc.

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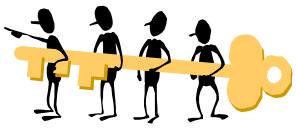
# Meeting Anatomy

| *Parts* | *Keys*  |
|---|---|
| Preparation | Commitment, Achievement |
| Opening | Warmth, Purpose, Participation, Agenda, Ground Rules |
| Heart | Generate, Organize, Decide |
| Closing | Plans, Responsibilities |
| Follow through | Timeliness |
| Preparation | Commitment, Delivery |

# Meeting Math

(Or is it “Convening Calculus?”)

- 20 people X 2 hours = 1 work week
  *Make it worth everyone’s time investment.*

- 10 hours prep for every hour in the meeting
  *More for larger groups*
  *Much more for important public or community meetings*

- For every committee:
  2 hours X members X meetings

- 5/5 is the right number for committee reports
  *Five to prepare; five to report*

# Preparation for groups that meet regularly: Task forces, boards, work groups, committees, teams

- What is the purpose for meeting?
  *"We will meet to plan the dialogue we will have with the Neighbors Council."*

- Where will we meet?

- What will the agenda be?

- What will the ground rules be?

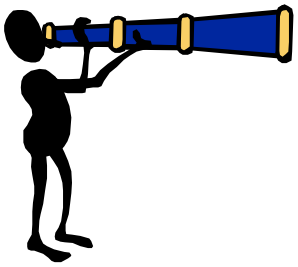
- How are people being invited or reminded to come?

- How are people being reminded and assisted in completing their assignments?

# Answering the “where” question

Think about these things in choosing the building:

- Parking, lighting, and readable signs
- Accessibility in every sense
- Cost
- User friendliness



Think about these things in choosing the room:

- Size (well matched to your expected group size is best)
- Light (lots of natural light is good in the daytime)
- Heating and cooling (in your control is best)
- Tables and chairs (Can you arrange them? Comfort?)
- Walls: can you use tape?
- Proximity to water, kitchen, rest rooms
- Will you need electrical outlets?
- Are there constraints on your finishing time?

# A Traditional Agenda
# (Quite a bit better than nothing)

Lincoln Community Development Corporation
Monday, March 9, 2002, 7:00 p.m.
Lincoln School Cafeteria

I. Welcome and Introductions

II. Description of purpose (for new participants)

III. Report from Asset and Problem Identification Committee

IV. Report from Long Range Goals Committee

V. Consider request to appear on WWKN talk show to describe Community Development process

VI. Adjourn

# Way beyond the traditional agenda

Lincoln Community Development Corporation
Monday, March 9, 2002, 7:00-8:30 p.m.
Lincoln School Cafeteria
Leader: Board Chair Kit Ovey
Facilitator: Jerri Gibbs
Final Decision Maker: Lincoln Community Development Corporation Board

7:00 Welcome and Introductions
Action needed: Introduce new members to old folks
Person responsible: Frida Kurtz
Time: 10 minutes

7:10 Description of purpose (for new participants)
Action needed: Provide a quick background to new group members
Persons responsible: Jerri Gibbs, Tom Mascio, Rita Delaney, Elena Ruiz
Time: 15 minutes

7:25 Report from Asset and Problem Identification Committee
Action needed: Choose key opportunities and problems the LCDC will address next year
Person responsible: Lina Antero
Time: 20 minutes

7:45 Report from Long Range Goals Committee
Action needed: Report on progress on the five year plan
Persons responsible: Jill Maguire and Rudy Terne
Time: 15 minutes

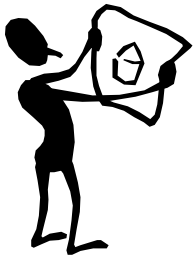
8:00 Consideration of request to appear on WWKN talk show to describe CDC process
Action needed: Choose spokesperson
Person responsible: Ben Wang
Time: 10 minutes

8:10 Evaluation
Action needed: Discuss how to improve LCDC functioning
Person responsible: Jerri Gibbs
Time needed: 15 minutes

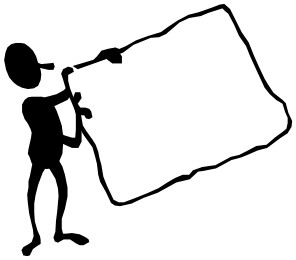
8:30 Adjourn

# **Meeting Blueprint**:

## Planning the agenda for an established group: Team, committee, task force, work group, board



| % of Time | Meeting Activity |
|---|---|
| 10% | Welcome and check-in (with reintroduction as needed) |
| 5% | State charge, mission, or purpose, and discuss, if necessary. Make arrangements to introduce new members to the charge in some detail outside the regular meeting time. |
| 40% | Assess progress of work already underway; review and adjust plans |
| 25% | Consider new issues; use creative approaches to generate new options and possibilities for future consideration |
| 10% | Evaluate meeting effectiveness and make decisions about needed changes in meeting process |
| 10% | Summarize assignments, set next meeting(s), adjourn |



# Ground Rules

Here is a set of conversation guidelines we often propose when working with new groups:

1. Share your ideas with the group.

2. Listen with respect to other people's ideas, and encourage them to speak.

3. Aim to create something new as a group during this meeting.

4. Use consensus to make decisions, unless it is impossible to reach. In that case, vote.

5. Give the facilitator the power to keep the meeting on track and recognize people to speak, if necessary.

6. Abide by common courtesy: listen without interrupting; no personal attacks; no side conversations; no disrespectful behaviors toward others.

# More Ground Rules

Here is a set of conversation guidelines a group of high school students produced for a dialogue project they were conducting:

| Proposed Ground Rules | |
|---|---|
| **Yes** | **No** |
| Speak your truth; tell what you know and believe. Speak from the edge of your knowledge | Interrupting<br><br>Naming unnecessary names |
| Ask questions of other participants | Whining |
| Listen to hear what others mean to say | Fixing blame without offering a solution. |
| Talk with respect for others and for yourself. | Personal attacks |
| Follow the moderator's guidance about time and whose turn it is to talk. | Hitting, spitting, hairsplitting. |

# Knowing the heart of the meeting

*Hint: It's not about ventricles.*

After opening well, and before closing well...that's the ❤ of the meeting.

- Generate
- Organize
- Apply Criteria
- Decide
- ???

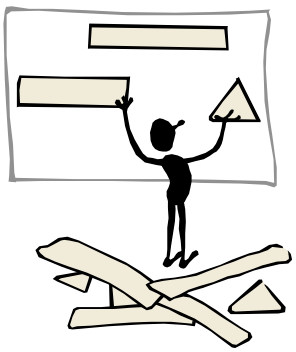
*...and learn when to do each and when to switch.*

# Ways to generate

Every good meeting generates energy.

- Develop and ask good questions.
- Present sharp ✂ committee reports.
- Show an article, ✈ object, video, or photograph as a "launch pad" for ideas.
- Tell a story.
- Ask group members to tell stories.
- Develop lists alone or in small groups.
- Brainstorm as a whole group.
- Take a short walk or field trip together.

# Ways to organize



*Organizing can help a group make a transition.*

- Use colored pens to mark up flip chart notes. Circle, check, or use symbols.

- Put sticky notes (one per idea) in clusters on a wall.

- Use index cards (one per idea) and sort them into stacks of similar items.

- Rewrite ideas into new categories on flip chart paper.

- Figure out together what the categories are.

  *"Does anyone see any themes in all these ideas, any things that seem to go together?"*

  *Trust in the group: someone will be an organizer.*

# Before deciding...A call for *criteria*

Criteria are the standards or means for testing different decisions.

- ✏ *Our decision must have the support of the neighborhood.*
- ✏ *Our decision must be made with the next generation as our first concern.*
- ✏ *Any activity we choose must cost less than $500.*
- ✏ *We can order any color tee shirts that will look good with pink plaid.*

Most groups can agree on criteria more easily than on decisions.

Once a group sets criteria, its decisions become easier as well.

# Ways to decide

*Weight*. “Each person gets 14 green dots.”

*Rank*. “Which item goes first? Second? Third?”

*Rate*. “Put a plus sign by the ideas you want to keep and a minus sign by the ideas you want to lose.”

*Assign priorities*. “How many action steps go in our ‘A’ list as most important?”

*Choose*. “Which of these four approaches will work best for us?”

*Vote*. “Everybody gets three votes.”

*Scan*. “We’ve spent most of our time talking about forming a new neighborhood association and starting an after school watch program. Are these the two projects we want to do?”

# Was it a good meeting?

- ☻ Did people stand around in the room or in the parking lot talking long after the meeting ended?
  - ☹ Were they upset?
  - ☺ Were they laughing, enjoying each other?

- ☻ Can you remember something significant each person contributed during the meeting?

- ☹ Do people seem drained, and slow down as the meeting goes on?

- ☻ Do people tell you “We got a lot done”?

- ☺ Do people say “We need to get Maria involved in this; she would like it and she could help us”?

- ☻ Do YOU feel satisfied and excited about future activities after the meeting (even though you may be tired)?

- ☹ Do YOU feel drained and without enthusiasm after the meeting?

- ☻ Do people keep coming, or numbers increase?

# Being about learning: Options

1. Simply ask yourselves three questions, and record the answers:

   What do we want to keep doing in our meetings?

   What do we want to stop doing in our meetings?

   How do we want to change specific parts of our meetings?

2. Go around the room at the end of a meeting and ask each person to say what s/he would like more of, less of, and the same amount of in your meetings.

3. Use a short, anonymous questionnaire every third or fourth meeting.

**In my view, our meetings are (please circle one)**

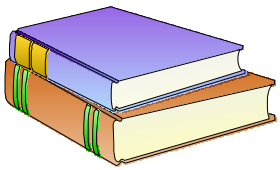
Winners nearly every time  Hmmm. Okay, but could improve  Don't ask

**Our facilitation (please circle one)**

Award winning  Nothing special, but gets the job done  Hurts the group

**Please comment or make suggestions:**

_____



# Wanna read some things?

Bohm, David. *On Dialogue*. Ojai, CA: Routledge Press, 1990. Order from Routledge at 800.634.7064. Cost: $16.95

The best 41 pages you are ever likely to read on this subject.

Doyle, Michael and David Straus. *How to Make Meetings Work.* Wyden Books, 1976.

Essential. The foundation.

Fletcher, Winston. *Meetings, Meetings: How to Manipulate Them and Make Them More Fun.* New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984.

Frank, Milo O. *How to Run a Successful Meeting in Half the Time*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989.

Gordon, Myron, Ph.D. *Making Meetings More Productive.* New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 1981.

Hackett, Donald, Ph.D and Charles L. Martin, Ph.D. *Facilitation Skills for Team Leaders*. Crisp Publications, Inc., 1993.

Hammond, Sue Annis. *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*. Second Edition. Plano, Texas: Thin Book Publishing Company, 1998. Order from the publisher at 888.316.9544.

Introduces a way to think about developing questions to guide conversations or meetings that has a lot in common with asset-based thinking. Intriguing.

Haynes, Marion E. *Effective Meeting Skills: A Practical Guide for More Productive Meetings*. Crisp Publications, Inc., 1988.

Short and practical.

Hegarty, Edward J. *How to Run Better Meetings*. McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1957.

Kearney, Lynn. *The Facilitator's Toolkit: Tools and Techniques for Generating Ideas and Making Decisions in Groups*. Amherst, MA: Human Resource Development Press, Inc., 1995

Lots of tips and techniques.

Kelsey, Dee and Pam Plumb. *Great Meetings! How to Facilitate Like a Pro.* Portland, Maine: Hanson Park Press, 1997.

Good.

Kieffer, George David. *The Strategy of Meetings*. Simon and Schuster, 1988.

McMahon, Tom. *Big Meetings, Big Results.* Lincolnwood, Illinois: NTC Business Books, 1990.

Owen, Harrison. *Open Space Technology*. Abbott Publishing, 7808 River Falls Dr., Potomac, MD 20854, (301) 469-9269. (It has been republished by Berrett Koehler, as well.)

All you need to know to plan and facilitate effective, innovative meetings for people passionate about a particular topic who want to make their own work agenda once they come together for their meeting. Works with extremely large numbers (more than 1500) when peer learning and exploration are the aims. Unsuitable for transmitting information (training, teaching.)

Rohnke, Karl E. *The Bottomless Bag.* Beverly, MA: Wilkscraft Creative Printing, 1988.

Schwarz, Roger M. *The Skilled Facilitator.* San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass Publishers, 1994.

A text based on theory. A first.

Snell, Frank. *How to Win the Meeting*. New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1979.

Wynn and Guditus. *Team Leadership by Consensus*. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1984.

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You might also enjoy wandering around the RKI website, particularly looking at the text of several editions of our short newsletter, *Best Practices*. Several issues have dealt with meetings. Check it out at www.robertsandkay.com