

## HOW TO HAVE EFFFECTIVE STAFF MEETINGS

By Susan Gross and Robin Katcher

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## **Goals for Staff Meetings**

First, get clear on the goals you want to achieve by having staff meetings. We recommend having the staff discuss what they would like to use staff meetings for and agree on the key goals. For example, staff meetings can be used to:

- Create a sense of community, connectedness, and being one team working toward the same mission.
- Enable staff to understand, appreciate, value, and support one another's work.
- Bring a wide variety of voices and collective wisdom to bear on important issues or problems facing the organization.
- Enhance staff members' sense of ownership and importance by inviting them to meaningfully participate in decisions that affect them.
- Improve the planning and coordination of activities that have an organization-wide impact.

## Planning the Agenda

Second, plan the agenda, and select and structure the discussion of agenda items in ways that forward the goals. Some concrete examples of how staff meetings can be used to advance the goals are:

- Ask staff members or departments within the organization to <u>briefly</u> report on the activities they have been most involved with (or that are most important for the rest of the staff to know about). The challenge here is to strike a balance between having people talk about the key aspects of their work without allowing it to devolve into a series of laundry lists.
- Publicly acknowledge staff for their individual or collective achievement. For instance, an executive director could thank the entire staff for making the annual conference a success or congratulate the staff attorney for winning a key motion in an important case.
- Request input from the entire staff on decisions that affect them all, including topics such as updating the computer system, focusing on a new issue area, or starting a development department.
- Discuss issues or problems that staff face, individually or collectively, that would benefit
  from the brainstorming, suggestions and input of the entire staff. For instance, not enough
  local groups in a group's national network are responding to action alerts. The staff could
  brainstorm answers to the question "why is this happening and how can the organization
  more successfully mobilize them?"

- Plan or coordinate staff activities on large projects, such as the release of a major study, that involve everyone or nearly everyone on staff.
- Share information relevant to everyone on staff and answer questions or concerns. For example, update staff on the organization's financial status or describe a new statute that will impact the organization's work.
- Celebrate successes and occasions with the entire staff, like meeting fund-raising goals, winning a legislative victory or acknowledging a staff member's birthday.

Do not throw the agenda together at the last minute. Ask everyone on staff for their ideas on what to include in each meeting's agenda. Be sure to include at least one juicy topic that will engage the entire staff. To help focus discussions at the meetings, prepare and circulate in advance a written agenda and brief memos that present background information, key questions and options for further action. The more thoughtfully you plan and prepare for staff meetings, the more productive and valuable they will be.

In general we don't suggest holding staff meetings more frequently than once a week or less frequently than once a month. It is important to respect coworkers time and commitments by stopping and starting meetings on time.

Before the meeting, designate someone to lead the meeting and be in charge of moving the agenda forward; usually this person is the executive director. Others on staff should be asked to lead conversations about matters for which they are responsible.

## Other Tips

- Avoid topics that are only relevant to a small portion of the staff; instead use smaller meeting for this purpose.
- The meeting leader should strike a balance between encouraging full discussion and keeping the conversation focused on the most essential topics.
- Do not use staff meetings to review an individual's work or monitor where they are in completing tasks and assignments; and never criticize individual staff members about their job performance in front of other staff. Instead, schedule individual meetings between supervisors and supervisees to
- Evaluate and discuss workloads and performance.
- Discourage the "show and tell dynamic" in staff meetings where staff slip into trying to impress others by talking about everything they do.

- Do not allow people to interrupt, monopolize the discussion, have side conversations, or crowd out less assertive staff members.
- Do not ask for the staff's input unless you are truly open to what the staff may have to say. Nothing is more disempowering or frustrating for staff than being asked to provide input on an issue that has already been decided.
- Assign someone to write up important outcomes of staff meetings so they are remembered and implemented.
- Be sure to keep track of important topics for the next meeting.
- From time to time revisit your goals to see how well staff meetings are fulfilling them and make whatever adjustments are necessary.

Do not strive for perfection. No matter how well you plan staff meetings, they will not please all of the people all of the time.