**Department Climate:** Hints for More Effective and Inclusive Meetings

Some simple strategies described in this handout may help meeting participants feel heard and will assure that meeting time is productive. These strategies may seem awkward at first, but once they become your group’s practice, most of these ideas, with tweaking to meet your group’s needs, will help your meetings better meet their objectives, start and finish on time, and satisfy those participating.

**Deciding to meet:**

Generally, people are happier to attend meetings that are purposeful: those meetings that genuinely solicit feedback, that attempt to accomplish real work, or that share information that is so complex or controversial that it should not be shared in another way. Make sure that there are objectives for the meeting.

**Setting agendas**

* Set a clear agenda and distribute the agenda and any important supporting materials well in advance of a meeting.
* Invite participants to add to the agenda, to help order items, or to clarify items well in advance of the meeting. (This can cut down on procedural conflict at a meeting.)
* Make sure agenda items are clear and descriptive so that all attending know what will be discussed and can prepare for that discussion.
* Let people know if they will be asked to report information so they can prepare.
* Design a good agenda format. A good design should include space to record the agenda items, discussion, action taken. Action taken could include votes, implementation plans, tabling items for more research, etc. Action items should have name or names of responsible parties, as well as when the group expects those actions to be completed. (Sample on back.)

**Running the meeting: practices and procedures to consider**

* Develop practices that allow the full participation of all present. These practices can be as simple as a chair who encourages those who have shared to step back, and encourages participation from those silent. Some groups need a timer and a two-minute rule for speaking. Others may ask that each person speak no more than twice on an issue. Articulating your group’s culture on sharing/not sharing to newcomers is a welcoming practice.
* If there are especially tense or contentious issues, invite anonymous written feedback before the meeting, compile it and share all of it, as written, with the group. Make sure the group’s chair does not attempt to paraphrase or interpret for the group.
* Ask each reporting subcommittee for clear and accurate minutes of their meetings.
* Close all meetings by clarifying who has responsibilities for action items.

**Voting and related procedures**

* Have an agreed upon procedure for voting, introducing motions, framing discussion, amending a motion, calling the question, and other meeting functions. Your group doesn’t need a parliamentarian, only clear procedures and shared practices. If these are written down, they can be shared with new members, inviting their participation because they have been told the group’s shared values.
* Secret paper ballots on all votes assure that every person is heard. Consensus can actually feel terrible to those group members being forced to conform their opinion.
* Give everyone time to consider ideas before a vote. Wait until the next meeting to vote on important issues.

**After the meeting:**

* Distribute clear and accurate minutes after every meeting.
* Hold individuals accountable for action on items assigned at previous meetings.

**Sample Agenda:**

**Agenda: Committee Name**

**Date*:***Date, Time, Place of meeting

**Members:** Names of expected participants

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Agenda Item** | **Discussion - Conclusion** | **Recommendations or Action Taken, what will happen, who will do it, by what time** |
| Approve minutes of previous meeting |  |  |
| **Old Business**   * Item 1 * Item 2 * Item 3 |  |  |
| **New Business:**   * Item 1 * Item 2 * Item 3 |  |  |
| Any other agenda items? |  |  |
| Review action Items |  |  |

**Next meeting:** Date Time Place of next meeting

**Topic:**