

6 tips to make meetings more productive

Churches are busy places!

They plan weekly services, church programs, and countless events throughout the year. Planning typically involves meetings with a team of people who help to get things done. This results in meeting invitations – and the hope that the organizer is successful at facilitating productive meetings.

Do you enjoy meetings?

What is your response when you hear that you have a new meeting on your calendar? Do you dread it, or are you excited to be part of a team that plans events, works on the church budget, or participates in an improvement process? It's funny how different the responses are when you ask people this question. You immediately know their perceptions of meetings.

Unfortunately, many people don't see meetings as a good use of time. This is because meetings, without purpose and structure, are a waste of time and valuable resources. To illustrate, the next time you are sitting in an unproductive meeting, look around the room and calculate the approximate hourly rate of all the attendees to see the real cost of the meeting time. This number can be staggering – which is why it is so important to make good use of our time when we schedule meetings at work.

6 Tips to make meetings more productive

1. Set an agenda

Agendas are the structure for productive meetings. This first step is the most important in successful meeting planning. A well-thought-out agenda is one of the most important aspects of meetings that produce results. An agenda should have several components:

- a. Agenda items – discussion topics
- b. Topic expert – someone who can articulate the topic/issue to be discussed
- c. Times – each agenda item should have a time allotment/limit
- d. Timekeeper – every meeting should have someone who facilitates the meeting and keeps everyone on the agenda and the allotted time limits.
- e. Beginning and end times—Every meeting should have a start and stop time. Participants should be required to show up on time and be promised that the meeting will conclude promptly at the end time. Send the agenda out to attendees a day or two ahead of time to give them time to prepare.

2. Have the right people in the room

Take the time to think about who should be part of the team you will be asking to meet. Select and invite the right people to ensure the meeting is a success. All stakeholders (anyone affected by the decisions made) should be represented. It makes no sense to discuss a topic without the people who understand the issues of the topic. For example, if there is a meeting scheduled to plan a big church event, volunteer coordinator would be an example of a stakeholder who should be included.

3. Facilitate the process

Effective meetings need to be facilitated. Meeting facilitation is a skill that can be learned.

A trained facilitator is important because, in order for a meeting to stay on track and achieve its purpose, someone needs to take the lead and make it happen. The role of the meeting facilitator is to:

- identify a timekeeper
- assign someone to take notes
- manage the conversation to ensure that everyone participates
- assign responsibility for action items
- make sure the meeting starts and stops on time

This trained facilitator is responsible for ensuring all topics are covered, that notes are sent to participants, and that attendees show up and are dismissed at scheduled times.

4. Agreed on next steps

Effective meetings move the needle and result in natural next steps and action items. Unless a meeting is a one-time gathering, the next steps should be agreed upon and assigned to someone before the meeting ends. Identify action items (homework) and assign team members to accomplish them before the next meeting. The next steps can include researching additional information, collecting data, or simply creating a form for the group to use. Identify the next steps and assign responsibility to ensure the necessary work gets done.

5. Start and end meeting on time

Few things frustrate meeting participants more than people showing up late for a meeting or a meeting that runs past its end time. Be diligent with starting and ending the meeting on time. This can be done by taking the time to establish meeting ground rules at the first team meeting and assigning someone to be a timekeeper to ensure the meeting stays within the allotted agenda time. This requires discipline and focus on the task at hand.

6. Send out meeting summary

After a meeting has ended, send out meeting notes that summarize what was discussed and the next steps. This creates a record of the meeting and serves as a reminder for meeting participants about what was discussed and **who** will be doing **what** before the next meeting. Team membership should also be reevaluated regularly to ensure that the right people are on the team to help it achieve its objectives.

We all want productive meetings

Meeting success is a result of well-thought-out agendas, great team leader skills, and meeting facilitation. This includes the ability to manage the personalities in the room to ensure that everyone participates and that the dominant personalities don't monopolize the conversation. Take some time to plan your meetings and enjoy the response from team members who consider participation a privilege rather than a punishment!

What are some creative ways you manage meetings at work?