Getting the most out of your Community Meetings

Communities whose members are committed to life long learning will maintain a vitality and resilience that will serve them in times of crisis or change. Some of the skills that will help community members manage the not-for-profit organisations or events that contribute to this vitality and resilience are: managing meetings and workshops and conducting forums

Managing Meetings and Workshops

We need meetings to get things done. Everybody who has ever been to a meeting will appreciate how important it is that they are well run and don't waste time. This means planning ahead and sticking to an agenda and a timeframe.

The following is a simple checklist to assist you when preparing for a meeting or workshop.

Preparation:

- Why are you having a meeting/workshop?
- What is the desired outcome?
- How many meetings/workshops will need to be held to reach an outcome?
- Who are the key stakeholders who will be required to attend?
- Do you need to do a Stakeholder Analysis, or has this been done already?
- Where is the meeting to be held? Will participants require a map? Is the space near public transport?
- Have you engaged participants in the meeting planning process?
- How will you inform participants of the meeting? Is a written invitation necessary?
- Will you circulate a draft agenda and formalise it with the group at the beginning of the meeting?
- Will you provide refreshments, childcare and interpreters?
- Are you creating a "welcoming" environment for all participants?
- Have you considered the unique needs of diverse groups and/or individuals?
- What equipment is necessary to ensure a smooth running event? (Flipchart, butchers paper, writing materials, data projector for power point presentation, marker pens, tape, tape recorders, video or VCR are examples of equipment that may be essential).

- How will you set up the room? Informally around a table is usually preferred, so that everyone can see each other. Try and face the meeting away from the door, to avoid distractions.

Pro forma for a Meeting Agenda

The agenda reflects the way you intend to structure the meeting. A common order of agenda items is as follows:

- Chair notes the time and opens the meeting if a quorum is present
- Secretary or note taker records the names of those present and the apologies that have been received
- There may be some negotiation about items to be added to the agenda at this stage
- The Minutes of the previous meeting are read. Moved, seconded, accepted.
- Any Business Arising is discussed.
- Correspondence inwards and outwards is presented.
- Treasurer's Report. Moved, seconded, accepted.
- Other Reports from sub-committees, project coordinators.
- The meeting is then open for General Business.
- Decisions may be made by moving a Motion which will be seconded, accepted.
- Confirm who has Action to take before next meeting.
- Time of next meeting and items for agenda are decided.
- Closing time of meeting noted.

Other considerations if you are running a meeting:

- You may need to arrange for introductions or use an ice breaker exercise
- Go through meeting purpose (someone could be in the wrong room)
- Set ground rules if this is a new group
- Maintain awareness around ethical issues, such as conflict of interest, transparency and power dynamics
- Initiate discussion
- Work through the agenda
- Help the group stay on track ensuring participation from everyone
- Manage conflict or disruptive behaviours

What are Forums?

Forums are similar to meetings, but whereas meetings might be a regular occurrence for a community group, forums are held to specifically discuss an issue and reach a resolution, lasting from a few sessions to being regularly held for the activity or project duration.

Many of the meeting considerations we have just outlined will be relevant, but here the choice of stakeholder group will be imperative. Your stakeholder group should comprise a range of people who are active in their community, are respected by their peers and who can offer a different perspective.

For more information about conducting a stakeholder analysis and identifying the most appropriate representation for your project, see below:

Stakeholder Analysis – information and form template
www.erc.msh.org/quality/ittools/itstkan.cfm

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