

Running Efficient Meetings

The time that shared decision making requires is the most frequently cited disadvantage of the process. Here are some tips on running efficient meetings to help ease the time crunch.

Running the Meeting

- Formalize a meeting time and place (e.g., first Monday of every month in the cafeteria.)
- Set and distribute the agenda before the actual meeting day.
- Set a time limit for each item on the agenda.
- Set up a process to make sure that the most important issues (school vision, mission and goals) are addressed, instead of spending time on issues that can be dealt with by one or two people.
- Assign a facilitator, time-keeper, and record-keeper at each meeting; rotate roles from meeting to meeting.
- Decisions should be made on the basis of data collected on the issue rather than hunches or “gut feelings,” which can obscure the difference between treating the problem or the symptom.
- Stay on schedule.
- Make assignments to individuals to follow-up.

Ground Rules

If ground rules are established, purposes kept clear, and time is focused on the issues at hand, teams can stay away from focusing on individual or group behaviors which usually cause conversations to lose focus.

Meeting Etiquette/Norms of Behavior

It might be that your staff needs new ways of behaving as a team. Developing norms of behavior or agreeing on meeting etiquette are ways to get everyone to think about their meeting behavior. It is also a way to monitor the meeting behavior.

Coming to Consensus

Any team’s goal should be to reach decisions that best reflect the thinking of all team members. Use consensus when you want input and support of every member of the team. Consensus means finding a proposal that everyone can support and no one opposes. It does not mean: a unanimous vote (consensus may not represent everyone’s first priorities); a majority vote (in a majority, only the majority get something they are happy with, while those in the minority may get something they don’t want at all); or that everyone is totally satisfied. For coming to consensus you need:

- time to discuss ideas
- the active participation of all group members
- good communication skills (listening, conflict resolution, discussion facilitation)
- creative thinking and open-mindedness

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Your team should decide ahead of time when you will push for consensus. Decisions that have a major impact on the direction of the project should belong to the whole team and be supported by consensus.

Brainstorming for Consensus

One of the most effective tools for coming to consensus is brainstorming. This technique is especially helpful because it allows team members to examine as broad a range of options as possible before making a final decision. It also lets people be as creative as possible without restricting their ideas in any way. Rules to follow in brainstorming include:

- Review the topic, defining the subject of the brainstorm. Ask *why*, *how*, or *what* questions.
- Encourage everyone to freewheel; don't hold back any ideas even if they seem silly — the more ideas the better.
- No discussion during the brainstorm; save it for later.
- No judgement or criticism is allowed of another's ideas, not even with a groan or grimace.
- Allow people to “hitch-hike” by building upon ideas generated by others.