



Appendix A-8

How To: Public Meetings

A-8 a. The Public Meeting Survival Guide
From R-1 and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife



The
**Public
Meeting
Survival
Guide**

**A user friendly workbook
for getting into - and out of -
meetings [alive]**

“Why should I use this book?”

“I've held lots of meetings before!”

We've all been to meetings that could have been more productive and/or efficient. Meetings are expensive and time consuming, therefore meetings you hold should be productive and professional. This booklet can help.

“But I don't get involved in PUBLIC meetings.”

Well... 'ever hold a meeting for a half-dozen staff members to review a situation or solve a problem? Have you ever been to an inter-agency "coordination meeting" that went nowhere except for setting a time to meet again? Have you ever been instructed to "get some public input on this before we decide?"

If you think of anyone who participates in a "face-to-face sit-down" as your PUBLIC, the procedures and strategies outlined in this booklet will apply. The basic elements of objectives, agenda, content, roles, summary and implementation never change.

- Meetings are a necessary part of doing business, whether that business is public involvement or solving management problems. Use this meeting booklet as a tool to doing your job better!

GIVE IT A TRY... Flip through this booklet (it's been designed to be as painless as possible) and see if you can pick up a tip or two that may help your next meeting be more successful.

Public Meeting Survival Guide

You've been to lots of meetings before that were something less than productive, professional or efficient. Use this workbook to help your meeting be all that the others weren't.

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1

DO YOU WANT TO HAVE THIS PUBLIC MEETING?

The first thing you must decide is **why** you are having this meeting. Your answer to that question does make a difference on the type of meeting required. Meetings generally fall into one of these categories.

1. This is a meeting you want to do. You need to hear from participants on an issue
2. This is a meeting that may be one of several sessions. It could be part of a planning process or similar longer-term activity. You want input that will help you in that effort.
3. Meetings that don't fit the above
 - You have to do it. It's a one shot deal.
You don't want to, but somebody said you must!
 - You need input in order to solve a problem
 - You want to give information and get feedback
 - Someone else called this meeting.
You have no control.

All Things Considered

You are involved in this meeting. It is important that you be professional about it – meaning it is not a waste of your time or theirs. This booklet will help you be efficient, productive and responsible with your participation.

Good Luck!

Helpful Hints

Your public might be:

- An interagency group
- A group of your own staff working on an issue

As well as:

- Citizens or representatives of user groups

Therefore a Public Meeting may be appropriate when you want:

- Information or advice
- Their involvement in solving a problem or making a decision
- Clarification of an issue
- Public pressure has prevailed
- The issue involves several groups

A public meeting is *not* appropriate when:

- The decision has been made
- There is inadequate data
- There is not enough time to deal with input
- Emotions are too high to allow constructive input

Helpful Hints

Remember the difference

Public Meetings:

- Are informal
- Are interactive
- Have a general record of events
- Allow everyone to participate

Public Hearings:

- Are formal
- Have a verbatim record
- Solicit formal statements
- Meet legal requirements

WHAT'S THE
LEVEL OF
INVOLVEMENT?

2

The second step is to decide how much involvement you expect or want in this meeting.

1. Get input (information, ideas, advice)
 2. Develop decision (active involvement in solving a problem)
 3. Get reactions to plans or present information.
- If your intent is to explain or inform people of a decision, a meeting may not be appropriate.

All Things Considered

Don't try to fool your public!! If a decision has already been made, tell 'em of the decision in other ways, such as a news release, press conference, newsletter, printed statement, etc. "Meeting" implies you are willing and able to accept input.

3

WHO IS THE AUDIENCE?

Now, ask yourself some key questions about who you want to be involved in this process.

(Don't try to write anything now, just think about the questions. The worksheet comes later.)

Audience:

- **Who are they?**
- **What do they know about the topic?**
- **What is their attitude about the process, the agency, you?**
- **Are all sides of the issue represented?**
- **Are all groups affected by the issue represented?**
- **Who are the decision makers... and will they be present?**

All Things Considered

Make sure all the key players are involved on all sides of the issue *and* from the agency – If anyone is missing, the outcome will be suspect for everyone, and you just held a tough meeting for nothing.

Helpful Hints

Prior to the meeting:

- **If you are not sure about answers to these questions, make a few phone calls!**
- **Ask a known critic who his/her adversary might be.**
- **Ask the meeting participants "Who else needs to know about this issue."**
- **Ask who needs to be at the next meeting to resolve this issue.**
- **If the "big guns" can't come – have them send someone with the authority to act for them. If they won't delegate the decision, then hold a meeting when they *can* come.**
- **A decision doesn't have to be made at the meeting, but the decision maker does need to be there.**

Helpful Hints

Public Meetings Are:

- Most effective *early* in a plan or decision process
- Used as "scoping" or "What do you think?" input sessions.

Meetings then become a positive component of a reasonable process.

WHAT MEETING
FORMAT DO
YOU WANT?

4

Meeting Formats (Examples)

1. Open house
2. Small group break-out
3. Staff panel discussion
4. Question & Answer
(Like Donahue and Oprah)
5. Presentation/ discussion
6. Explanation/testimony
7. _____
(Whatever you need)

All Things Considered

Determining the meeting format can be tricky. You might want to talk with your public affairs experts for suggestions.



You've made a couple of decisions.

Before you go any further, tear out the following page and use it as a work sheet as you go through the steps. When you're finished, the work sheet will have a complete outline of your meeting plan.

All Things Considered

Most of the time the "public" attends meetings to tell you what *they* think. The days are over when government can hold a meeting, dump a lot of data on folks, and expect them to agree. Remember, meetings provide a forum primarily for emotional input – be prepared for it! You may want to talk to your public affairs person at this point.

Helpful Hints

In General:

- Take care when considering meetings held late in a plan / decision process. Written input on a complete draft may be a more appropriate step.
- Meetings late in a process tend to foster "postures" and "statements" more appropriate for a hearing...
...or for the first meeting of your process.

Meeting Worksheet

1

**WHY ARE YOU
HAVING THIS
PUBLIC MEETING**

Write in what you are trying to accomplish.

Jot down your answer as a sentence, "I want to..."

**WHAT'S THE
LEVEL OF
INVOLVEMENT?**

2

3

**WHO IS THE
AUDIENCE?**

Answer questions briefly.

**WHAT MEETING
FORMAT DO
YOU WANT?**

4

5

**WHAT ARE
MEETING
OBJECTIVES?**

Write down some SMART objectives.

cut here

Meeting Worksheet

6 What is Your Agenda?

7 ARE YOU READY TO PLAN YOUR PRESENTATION?

Use effective presentations worksheet in appendix.

8 DO YOU WANT INPUT?

Decide and list here...

9 HOW DO WE END IT ALL

Refer to bottom of checklist.

10 PLAYERS ON YOUR TEAM

| Name | Role |
|------|------|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

11 DETAILS, DETAILS

Refer to meeting checklist.

12 POST GAME

Evaluation Summary _____

Your Viewpoint _____

Participant's View _____

cut here

Helpful Hints

Objectives should be..

Sensible
Measurable
Attainable
Relevant
Trackable

Clearly separate the objective of *this* meeting
.... from the objective of your program, plan or issue-solving process.

Objectives become a ruler to measure productivity.

WHAT ARE
YOUR MEETING
OBJECTIVES?

5

The next step is to identify your meeting objectives. Objectives should sound like this:

"At the end of this meeting,
I want the audience to....."

Examples:

- understand the new rules on..."
- know the difference between..."
- develop lists of alternatives on..."

Once you have decided on objectives, transfer them to your work sheet for easy reference. Most meetings are two-fold – presenting information *and* receiving input from all attendees.

Read on —>

All Things Considered

Always identify your objectives verbally and display them visually at the start of the meeting – both for your process and for the meeting at hand. When folks get long-winded or off track, refer to the objective statement and ask... "How do your comments help us meet these objectives?"

6

WHAT IS YOUR AGENDA?

A written and displayed agenda is not optional – it's a must! It should include the following.

- A welcome, introduction and statement of purpose for the meeting (objectives)
- A written agenda noting start, stop and break times
- A sequential breakdown of meeting content
- A "what happens next" explanation

Sample Agenda

7:00 - Welcome/Introduction
7:10 - Obj./Agenda/Procedure
7:15 - Staff subject presentation
7:45 - Explain procedure for input
7:50 - Public comments/questions
8:30 - Break
8:45 - Public input continued
9:50 - Wrap-up/Summary of meeting
10:00 - Adjourn

All Things Considered

The agenda sets up the ground rules that can be enforced by the meeting manager. Changes can only be made by consensus of all participants (including you). State this at the beginning of the meeting. The agenda and its timeline may be your only defense in a discussion that takes a wrong turn.

Helpful Hints

Always schedule a break (even a short one) in your meeting.

Why?

Because:

- Comfort leads to reason. Uncomfortable people are difficult.
- No one is at their best when uncomfortable.
- Energy vent – a chance to cool off if emotions are high
- "The agenda said we had to." (You all agreed an hour ago, so do it!) This puts the focus back on the process, regardless of the issue.
- Gives you a chance to re-group. Changes in agenda may be suggested to meet objectives.
- Gives those who really don't want to stay a chance to split (and they will).
- Chance to refocus group on objectives and agenda when they return.

Helpful Hints

By giving your meeting this much thought, your chance to be a part of a professional, productive meeting is getting better

Your professionalism in conducting this meeting will inspire professionalism in participants.



(again)

TIME OUT

Notice how many decisions you have made so far?

You are well on the way to accomplishing your meeting.

Now you are going to get into some of the agenda content. But first, give *yourself* a break – then come back.

All Things Considered

Remember all those boring, frustrating, non-productive meetings you've attended in the past? Use this workbook to make yours everything those weren't.

7**ARE YOU READY
TO PLAN YOUR
PRESENTATION?**

Welcome Back!

The agenda has been developed and now it's time to put the meat on the bones.

You need to think about how to package the information that you would like to give your audience.

1. Make an outline of the information to be delivered. (See appendix for a briefing guide.)
2. Decide on the best format (Slides, handouts, overheads, wall charts, videotape, hands-on activity, none of the above, all of the above)
3. Decide who is to present it.
4. Set up room to best accomplish objectives.

All Things Considered

If you are holding a meeting to "go over" information already in print – re-write it! *Send* it out for review, and take written comments. *Then* hold a meeting to iron-out concerns.

Helpful Hints

- Your presentation adds a *verbal* and *visual* component. Both will reinforce any technical information or data (which is best-handled in a written hand-out).
- Extensive or complex data should be made available to participants *before* the meeting.
- Review of multiple pages of info or data is *not* a reason to hold a face-to-face meeting.
- If someone is only patiently waiting for you to finish so they can tell you what *they* think – they are probably not listening.

Note: Meetings often are a poor *learning* environment!

Helpful Hints

Input can be:

- Brainstorm lists of:
 - concerns
 - issues
 - problems
 - pros and cons
 - opportunities
- Participants can:
 - prioritize
 - group their input
 - resolve concerns one at a time
- Written
 - response
 - formal letters
- Verbal
 - captured on a flipchart
 - tape recorded

On highly emotional or polarized issues:

- Have participants write down their concerns, then have participants share one per person until all are out. (Note: they can turn their cards in if they do not want to share.)
- Set a maximum time limit per individual before you start – then stick to it!

DO YOU
WANT INPUT?

8

So, you've decided how to *give* the people information, but you also need to decide *if* you want to get information *back* from them.

(Check steps 3 and 4 again)

If you do want to get information back, decide in what form it will be. Ask for the information the way you can use it.

- Brainstorm lists
- Written comments
- Verbal feedback
- Prioritized preferences, etc.

All Things Considered

Since you have gone to all this trouble to try and get input – make sure it's useable. Use a handout that summarizes your information. Use a one-pager that can be written on, folded and mailed in later. Try to make the point that you want serious comment, not a "vote by mail" numbers effort.

9

HOW DO WE END IT ALL?

So, you've made it through the body of the meeting okay...

Now how do you plan to finish this thing?

- What will be done as a result of this meeting?
- When?
- By whom?
- How will participants be notified or involved in efforts?
- What steps and schedule remain in the overall process?
- Any elements of the process/decision that are outside of your agency's control?

Answers to the above will provide a basis for closure of your meeting.

All Things Considered

We want to end as professionally as we started. Referring to the objectives and agenda can summarize and also foster a sense of accomplishment. Even if everyone still disagrees on the issue, they can take some pride in having tried to resolve it in a civilized manner.

Helpful Hints

Identify the timeline

- Let participants know how their input will make a difference.
- Clearly identify how the decision will be made.
- Say who will make the decision.
- Let participants know when the decision will be made (timeline again).

Helpful Hints

Recorder:

(often overlooked, yet key role)

- Don't recruit from the audience unless that person is briefed on the rules.
- Checks with facilitator, not with audience for clarification.
- Writes quickly, gets down key words – not a verbatim transcript.
- Doesn't contribute own ideas.

Flipchart rules:

- 12-15 lines per chart.
- Switch colors with each new contribution. Use dark colors for text; only use red for highlights..
- Label and number pages.
- Post charts on wall.
- When full, *never* flip a page out of sight (this leads to redundancy and stifles higher-level thought).
- Abbreviations are acceptable.
- Spelling is not important – legibility is!

Now that your meeting is planned, here are some things to make it run more smoothly.

PLAYERS

10

Everybody at your meeting has a role to play. Defining these roles is critical to a successful outcome.

Key roles are: • = critical role x = secondary role

- **Meeting manager:** Sets the tone, keeps group on task and on time, assures fairness of input, moves through agenda
- **Fact or contact person:** Provides necessary information, does not "editorialize" and is not defensive
- **Participants:** Have a right to be *heard*, not to *prevail* (at the expense of others or staff)
- **Decision maker:** Adds legitimacy to meeting, should be a listener not a responder
- x **Facilitator:** Plays similar role as meeting manager, but in smaller groups
- x **Recorder:** Writes input on charts (see Hints), does not interact with participants, does not contribute own ideas
- x **Elected official:** Listens, supports staff with opening statement, welcomes participants

All Things Considered

Your boss, the expert on your issue, participants, etc. all have roles. At the start of the meeting, get agreement on who does what and stick with it. If "the boss takes over" or a politico is playing the crowd – tough it out until the break, then confront/resolve discrepancy and re-adjust as necessary. It is not professional nor productive for a meeting to dissolve into frustration for all.

You're at the end (whew!) The meeting is all planned. So now just go and do it. Right?.... Wrong!

What about logistics – where should you hold it? Do you have all the equipment you need? Do you even know what you'll need?

There's a checklist in the appendix that will help you figure out what you need, then help you keep track of getting it together.

All Things Considered

If you are organized, unhurried and under control with the physical setting and logistics, your credibility will be enhanced and your confidence will carry over into the meeting content.

Helpful Hints

- Start on time... End on time.
- Bring your own slide/film projector if possible.
- Orient room toward a wall if lots of chart-hanging is expected.
- If microphone is available, USE IT. (Nothing is more frustrating than not being able to hear).
- Arrive (minimum) of one hour before start time.
- Use nametags for staff – participants too if small group.
- Sign the way to meeting room from parking lot.
- *Always* post objective and agenda.
- Find the light switches ahead of time.
- Have handouts available at the door, don't pass them out during the meeting.
- Consider having a sign-in and/or a mailing-list sheet.

Evaluations

Be careful how you ask for evaluation. You don't want to leave with a long list of negatives on everyone's mind.

Simply ask:

"What are some things you like about this meeting... and what are some of the things we can do better next time?"

- Ask participants to jot answers on a card.
- Ask if anyone would like to share any comments written on their card. (Take a few positives and negatives... thank everyone, and have them leave their cards on the way out.)

Now, you really are finished planning this thing. Right?... If you said "Wrong!" you're either a terrible cynic, or you're catching on to this process.

There's just one more thing... really. Once the actual meeting is over, you should decide how well you did. Evaluation not only tells you how what you accomplished, but can give you a feel for your next step in dealing with an issue; or help you realize what level you must hit with your next public involvement strategy.

All Things Considered

When it's all over, ask yourself:

- Do you need another meeting? (Go to page 1)
- How will it be different from this one?

You're well on your way to a positive, productive, professional meeting. Your survival is guaranteed. (Besides, workman's comp covers meeting related injuries.)

Many thanks to the contributors - ODFW/Cispus Crew: Paul Ingram, Barbara Coenen, Jim

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reviewed, conspired and inspired the
development of this publication.*

Public Meeting Survival Guide 1990

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WHY... are you doing this?

Give them a **reason** for your effort. Use analogies in explaining how it fits into the big picture. Identify your place in the timeline. **Briefly** give an overview using visuals if possible (title chart, graphic, logo, etc.), of the information you plan to cover in this presentation.

1

WHAT... is this based on?

Mixing the use of charts and graphs with verbal comments, deliver your background **data**. Outline the information and the steps you used in establishing that a need or problem exists. Have details available as handouts, don't try to cover everything verbally.

2

HOW... will it work

Identify the **problem** in more detail. Explain your solution in practical terms. Give them your "bottom line". Describe process/procedure needed to make it happen. How will things be different? Short and to the point!

3

SO WHAT... happens next?

Clarify how this is important to them. Explain how your **action** will be carried out and how it will affect them. What happens if you do nothing? In closing, reiterate the Why one more time, then ask for comment/discussion.

4

Your presentation should take a comfortable 20 minutes, with 30 minutes as a maximum!

(See further instructions on back)

*Things that help make your meeting work!***Things to do for _____ Meeting**

Date _____
 Day _____
 Time _____
 Place _____

Don't Forget to invite local...

- Commissioners
 - Legislators
 - Key Public Officials
- ...personally to your meeting

BEFORE THE MEETING

- Meeting space
- Who has key to building?
- Tables/chairs - enough?
- (who puts 'em back?)
- Can you darken?(Slides/film)
- Public address system?
- (find controls ahead of time)
- Parking/central location?

- Materials
- Sign-up procedure
- Mailing labels
- Signs
- Name tags
- Handout materials
- Refreshments /cups,etc.

MEETING NOTICE

- Mailing list
- News media
- Personal contacts
- Purpose statement

VISUALS

- Displays
- Directional signs (from parking to door)
- Slide program/overheads

AT THE MEETING

- Physical arrangements
- Don't use the stage!
- Find the rest rooms
- Wall space for charts/visuals
- Tape-off unused seating
- Room arrangements
- Start on time, end on time
- Money/PO for facility

- Miscellaneous Supplies
 - Flip carts and paper
 - Magic markers (several colors)
- Pens, pencils for sign-up
 - Masking tape
 - Extension cords
- Projector/screen/take-up reel
 - Recorder/tapes

AFTER THE MEETING

- Document meeting - who will transcribe?
- Add names to mailing list
- Collect response cards/evaluations (who will summarize?)
- Put everything back the way you found it!
- What's been accomplished?
- What's next?
- Who will do it?

Dear Presentor,

When we talk to someone, we generally assume that they are listening to what we are saying. We also assume that if we explain things carefully, they will understand completely what we just said. After all, it makes perfect sense to us, right? Wrong!

Research in the education field, focusing on how people learn, has clearly defined four different kinds of learners. Some people can learn by just watching and listening to others talk. Some are much more comfortable and efficient learners when they read information. One group learns by actually participating in the process in order to “try it out” for themselves. And finally one group was found to be able to quickly assimilate information because they were impatient, wanting to “get on with it” to see if things are different as a result of this new information.

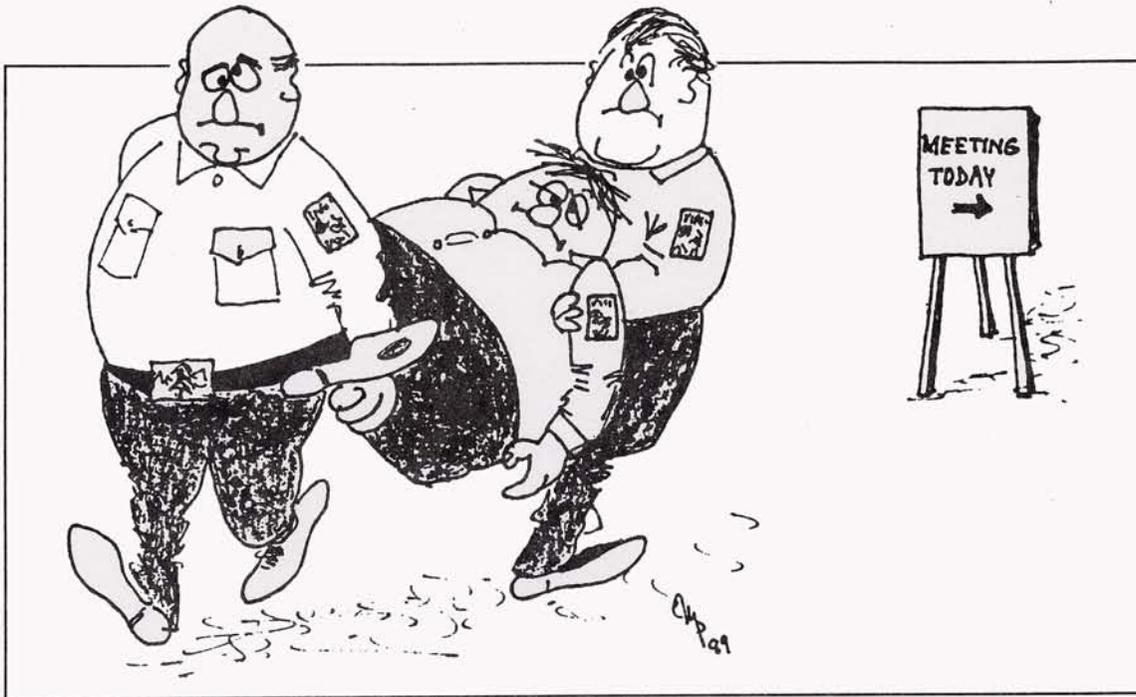
So, what does this have to do with your presentation? Simple. Your audience is a combination of the learners described above. In fact, all of us have learned things by all four ways at one time or another. If you want to be effective in getting the most comprehension of our subject by an audience, it makes sense to address all the ways that people learn.

The work sheet we’ve designed (see previous page) will help you cover all the learning “bases” with your presentation. The emphasis or time you place on each question depends on the kind of information you have. Very technical presentations spend a lot of time answering questions two and three, while a presentation of an idea or concept may dwell on questions one and four. But in either case, it is essential to touch on all four questions in order to have the best chance of your audience clearly understanding what you are trying to tell them.

Our natural tendency is to teach the way we like to learn. That’s OK if your audience thinks and learns just like you, but chances are they don’t; so you have to stretch your thinking a bit to give them information in a way that makes it easy for them to understand. If people understand what you are trying to tell them they will be better able to make decisions, find solutions, agree with you, or whatever it is you want from them as a result of your presentation.

Oh! One more thing. Those education researchers also found that people are more willing to listen and have better retention of subject matter if you present information answering the questions in the *sequence* we’ve suggested. Start with they WHY and proceed from there as you jot down the elements of your presentations on the worksheet.

Your presentation is important or you wouldn’t be doing it. Use this worksheet to help them understand. Good luck!



“If you give people a chance to be reasonable . . . they’ll respond reasonably”
(Unknown bruised and bloody facilitator)

All Things Considered

We don't hold meetings to be dumped on, yelled at or used for sport by opponents. We also don't hold meetings just to “show the flag” . . . “convince ‘em we are right” . . . or to “confuse and conquer.” We have tough decisions with the resource at stake and we want their help. If that’s not your motive . . .

DON'T HOLD A MEETING

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