

# Five steps to take to improve your meetings

## Start and end on time

The cost of meetings is hidden. If you counted up the hourly rate of all of the participants in your meetings you would be more intentional about using that time wisely. Furthermore, starting late wastes the time of people who showed up on time. Running past the starting time can be stressful for staff who planned other activities that follow your meeting. Not coming to any conclusions about next steps is frustrating for everyone.

## Create group agreements

Think of your meeting as a game. Good games have clear rules, so set up rules for your meetings. Ask staff to help create them. Things to consider include handling the use of cell phones, monitoring air time, and dealing with conflict.

## Record notes where all can see them

Use a whiteboard to record the conversation and send out the notes after the meeting. People will see that you heard their ideas. And you will have a record of the meeting. Remember, conversations disappear, objects persist.

## Use a structured process to guide the conversation

People do not usually engage in linear conversations, instead veering off in different directions as new thoughts emerge. Use a structured process to keep the meeting on task. An excellent process is Focused Conversation (1997). The process includes four levels of questions and can be used for nearly any type of meeting. Whether you are planning, making a decision, coaching, or interpreting information, the process can help you reach meaningful next steps.

## Ask participants to create the agenda

You want people to participate and one way to improve the chances of that is to make sure you are discussing topics that are important to the group. Ask people for their ideas about what to include in the meeting. If you generate a list that contains more items than can be discussed at one meeting, ask people to prioritize the list and use the list to generate future agendas.

## Reference

Stanfield, R.B. (1997). The art of focused conversation: 100 ways to access group wisdom in the workplace. The Canadian Institute for Cultural Affairs.