How to Run an Effective Meeting

* **Few people look forward to meetings. But effective meetings provide direction and incentives for everyone, allowing members to carry out their responsibilities in an efficient manner. In short, meetings can either benefit an organization or act as a barrier to accomplishment.**
* All productive meetings begin the same way: **planning**. Lack of preparation is the main reason why meetings fail. When officers and members of an organization wait until the last minute to think about what they want to accomplish and how they will do so, the results are often disastrous. To plan an effective meeting, consider the following:
  + **Environment**
    - Environment has a significant effect on behavior. Thinking and participating are easier when people are comfortable. Therefore, you should select and arrange your meeting space with care.   Most campus clubs will likely meeting in classrooms, where you have a white board and important technologies available.
  + **Meeting space**
    - Make sure that the room is the right size. A room that is too small can become stuffy and create tension. On the other hand, a room that is too large will feel empty. The room should have adequate ventilation and lighting and be free of extraneous noise.
  + **Seating**
    - Try to arrange the seating in a semi-circle with the leader in the center. This allows members to see one another and participate, yet allows the leader the opportunity to guide the meeting. If you can, provide table space so that members can write and take notes. If this is not possible, at least have a table for the leader and secretary. You may also want to use the whiteboard and markers to make notes that the entire group can see.
  + **Agenda**
    - The purpose of an agenda is to ensure that your meeting has a purpose and that everyone knows what the specific objectives are.
    - Think of the agenda as a blueprint that contains a list of the various topics that your group will discuss during the meeting (of course, if there are no topics to be discussed, you should not have a meeting.)
    - In preparing an agenda, solicit items from officers, members, and other relevant sources. Collect documents and other papers that support each agenda item.
    - Be sure you know the point of each agenda item. Is it a(n):
      * Information item
        + You strictly informing the group and no discussion or decision need be made.
      * Discussion item
        + Do you want your group to discuss a particular topic before you come to a decision about it?
        + How will you navigate the debate? What happens if your group disagrees?
      * Decision item
        + Does this topic require the group to come to a decision?
        + How will you make the decision as a group, by majority or do you want everyone to agree?
    - Distribute the completed agenda two days before the meeting.
    - Distribute supporting documents in advance, or have them available for examination at the meeting.
    - Before the meeting, be sure that the people responsible for agenda items are ready to make their presentations.
  + **Rules**
    - Before you have your first meeting, there should be general agreement on how formal your meetings will be. This will depend on such factors as the size of your group (larger groups often need more rules to function efficiently) and your purpose (a social group will probably want to be very informal). Some decisions to be made include:
      * Who will lead the meeting and what powers will that person have?
      * Will you keep a written record of your meeting (minutes) and, if so, who will be responsible for taking the minutes?
      * Will you repeat information for members who arrive late? (It is usually unwise to do this.)
      * Will people be asked to submit reports and proposals in writing?
      * How will the group decide if a long discussion should be continued, postponed, or terminated?
      * Will the group depend on volunteers for most of its work, or will someone have the authority to appoint people?
      * What will the group do if the meeting runs beyond the stated time limit?
  + **Meeting Time**
    - Choose a meeting time that is convenient for as many of your members as possible.
    - Although you might want to allow some flexibility, it is usually best to have regular meetings at the same time and place.
    - In addition to a starting time, designate a set ending time to allow members to plan their personal schedules.
    - Send out notices of the meeting well in advance.
    - If your group does not meet on a regular basis, it might be helpful to phone people the night before a meeting.
* **Finally, develop an action plan:**
  + What comes next now that the meeting is concluded?
  + What plans have you put into place and what is the timeline for completing them?
  + What are the most urgent things that need to be done?
  + Follow up with your club members by emailing them the minutes (or notes) from the meeting, so everyone is clear on what was discussed and what plans were made. The benefit of minutes (or notes) is that they also help catch up club members who were unable to attend the meeting.
* **Congratulations on successfully completing your effective meeting!**