



**TIP SHEET:**  
Managing  
Meetings

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## Purpose of Resource

The purpose of this resource is to provide learners with guidelines and information on managing meetings to support effective planning, development and implementation of population health initiatives and programs.

## Units of Competency

This resource supports learning and completion of assessments for the following units of competency:

- HLTPOP502C Work with the community to identify health needs
- HLTPOP503C Plan a population health project
- CHCORG506D Coordinate the Work Environment
- CHCAD603B Provide Systems Advocacy Services

## Acknowledgement

This tip sheet has been adapted from a range of existing resources which are listed in the reference section of this document.

## The Difference Between Effective and Ineffective Meetings

Ineffective meetings can go on forever. You never seem to get to the point, and you often leave wondering why you were even there.

Appropriate planning, preparation, execution and follow-up are crucial to ensuring an effective meeting.

## What Makes an Effective Meeting?

There are three important elements of an effective meeting:

1. They achieve the meeting objectives.
2. They take up a minimum amount of time (or the right amount of time).
3. They leave participants feeling that a process has been followed and an outcome has been achieved.

## Planning and Preparation

In addition to the usual logistics involved in organising a meeting, it is important to allocate sufficient time to planning and preparation. This includes:

- Being clear about the purpose of the meeting.
- Considering what information is needed for effective participation and ensure any meeting papers are sent out with enough time provided for participants to read and prepare – a week's notice is generally good practice.
- Developing an agreed agenda.
- Developing strategies that will allow all meeting participants to have their say.

## Building an Agenda

A meeting agenda is an important tool which clearly documents the purpose of the meeting and provides a list of meeting activities in order by which they should be discussed. The purpose of the meeting needs to be stated clearly on the agenda.

To build an agreed agenda, a draft agenda needs to be distributed to all meeting participants well ahead of the meeting. When proposing an agenda, ensure participants are aware of the negotiable and non-negotiable agenda items. Be sure to only include items on the agenda that will contribute to furthering the purpose of the meeting.

Put any items that require energy and ideas towards the beginning of the agenda. In addition to this all urgent items should appear early on the agenda in case the meeting has to break with unfinished business.

To prepare an agenda, consider the following factors:

- Priorities – what absolutely must be covered
- Results – what we need to accomplish at the meeting
- Participants – who needs to attend the meeting for it to be fully representational and effective
- Sequence – in what order will you cover the topics
- Timing – how much time will spend on each topic
- Date and Time – when will the meeting take place
- Place – where will the meeting take place

If feasible, try not to make a meeting run too long. If meetings run longer than 2 hours, people can become tired and unproductive. It is a good idea to put time allocations against items, more or less depending on their importance.

When working in rural and remote areas, meetings can sometimes stretch over a full day due to the challenges with distance. In these circumstances it is important to implement a range of strategies to keep participants engaged. Some simple strategies to keep people engaged during long meetings include:

- Make sure coffee is available throughout your entire meeting. Caffeine is a stimulant that helps improve concentration.
- Make sure water is available. Water makes up more than two thirds of human body weight. The human brain is made up of 95% water, blood is 82% and lungs 90%. Dehydration can decrease concentration. A mere 2% drop in our body's water supply can trigger signs of dehydration such as fuzzy short-term memory, trouble with basic math and difficulty focusing on small print such as a computer screen.
- Providing people with food will keep them energised and alert throughout the day. If your meeting starts in the morning and ends in the afternoon, ensure you cater for morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea.
- Ensure there are adequate breaks throughout the day. Take a five minute break every hour in addition to a break for morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea. Taking a five minute break will give attendees with the opportunity to use the bathroom or to stretch their legs. They will come back with higher energy levels and will provide you with more of their attention.
- Ask people at your meeting for their opinion on the information you are presenting or discussing. This is a much more effective way to hold a long meeting than to just speak for hours on end.
- Use of range of different group facilitation techniques to ensure active participation and engagement throughout the day. See Group Facilitation Techniques for more information.

## Execution

It's important to ensure that your team streamlines meetings as much as possible for time efficiency. Follow the agenda to ensure you cover only what needs to be covered and stick to activities planned. The agenda is what you will need to refer to in order to keep the the meeting running on target and on time.

To ensure maximum productivity and participation, there are several things you should keep in mind when facilitating the meeting:

- If people are dominating the conversation, make a point of asking others for their ideas.
- At the end of each agenda item, summarise what was said and ask people to confirm if they agree with the summary.
- Note items that require further discussion and follow-up. List all tasks that are generated at the meeting. Make a note of who is assigned to do what, and by when.
- Be aware of participant's body language and make adjustments as necessary. Maybe you need a break.
- Ensure the meeting stays on topic.

- At the close of the meeting, summarise the next steps and inform everyone that you will be sending out a meeting summary.

### Dealing with Conflict

Managing meetings involve ensuring issues are shared and in some cases addressed collectively. Conflict may arise where participants have different aspirations, issues and priorities.

One strategy is to discuss at the outset of the meeting how conflict will be dealt with if it arises. Participants may be willing to develop and agree to a set of meeting rules so that the discussion runs smoothly and everyone gets a chance to be heard. When a conflict arises the facilitator needs to assess whether they are able to respond to the conflict or if it is too serious to be addressed within the meeting and therefore should be referred elsewhere.

Dealing with conflict can be very stressful for staff and they should discuss coping strategies or at least debrief afterwards with their manager or other staff members.

### Group Facilitation Techniques

There are a number of facilitation techniques that can assist groups to meet effectively and productively. What facilitation technique to use can be determined by a number of factors including:

- The size of the group
- The makeup of the group
- The amount of time you have
- The subject matter, eg, are you calling the group together to inform, to generate ideas or to identify and resolve issues

A facilitator makes no decisions for the group, but suggests ways that will help the group to move forward.

Participatory approaches are just one of the many meeting facilitation techniques that can be used. Participatory approaches are based on shared ownership of decision-making. There are many advantages to participatory process for both the facilitation of meetings and also for planning and developing community interventions.

Benefits of a participatory process include:

- Creates ownership and builds a strong base for the intervention in the community.
- Ensures the intervention will have more credibility in all segments of the community.
- Brings a broader range of people to the planning process and provides a broader range of perspectives.
- Involves important players from the outset.
- Provides an opportunity for often disenfranchised groups to be heard.
- Establishes ties among community members who might normally have no contact.

Some examples of participatory techniques are provided in the table below:

Technique	Characteristics	Benefits	Limitations	Where / how you would apply this
<b>Learning Circles</b>	<p>Participants sit in a circle so they can see all other participants.</p> <p>Participants share previous experiences, recall good and bad memories and describe feelings associated with a topic.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builds respectful relationships</li> <li>• Provides more focus than discussion groups</li> <li>• Seeks to have action-oriented outcomes</li> <li>• Uncovers opinions and feelings about a topic</li> <li>• provides a non-threatening forum which can draw out a variety of views and ideas</li> <li>• Provides a democratic forum by providing equal time and attention for each participant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some participants may feel intimidated by the views and opinions of other participants and</li> <li>• Participants may not be totally representative.</li> </ul>	<p>For small groups of people (generally between five and 20) to come together to discuss and learn about issues which are important to them and their community.</p> <p>They can be used at the start of a process to gather people's ideas and also as a way to measure people's understanding about issues and to explore contentious topics.</p>
<b>Focus Groups</b>	<p>A focus group typically involves six to ten people who have some knowledge of or experience with an issue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be used to gain the views of those who may not respond to other forms of consultation such as written surveys</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some people may feel inhibited in expressing non-consensus views</li> <li>• Not guaranteed to be</li> </ul>	<p>Focus groups are used to explore the opinions, knowledge, perceptions, and concerns of individuals in regard to a particular</p>

Technique	Characteristics	Benefits	Limitations	Where / how you would apply this
	Group discussion is led by a moderator who guides participants through a series of open-ended questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good for in-depth exploration of people's views on an issue/service</li> <li>• Can be used at different stages of a consultation process from planning to the feedback stage</li> <li>• Can target specific groups.</li> </ul>	statistically representative because of small numbers involved	topic
<b>Collective Learning Technique (e.g. World Café)</b>	<p>The aim of the World café is to create a discussion environment that feels like a café.</p> <p>A number of questions are prepared and documented on a number of tables.</p> <p>Groups are initially assigned to a table, and then given a set amount of time to respond to the questions.</p> <p>They are then asked to rotate to another table (and another question) and add to the responses made by</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simple in design</li> <li>• Allows a large, diverse group of people to participate</li> <li>• Enables information sharing on a large scale</li> <li>• Responses can include material and drawing</li> <li>• allows cross-pollination of ideas across a large group of people</li> <li>• A powerful technique for creating shared knowledge of a community's issues and a subsequent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resource intensive (venues, resources, people)</li> <li>• Requires significant planning</li> <li>• Requires a number of skilled facilitators</li> <li>• Significant amount of follow-up is required for further action planning.</li> </ul>	<p>This method is suitable for large groups of people.</p> <p>It provides a diverse group of people with an opportunity to share information and insights into complex issues.</p>

Technique	Characteristics	Benefits	Limitations	Where / how you would apply this
	<p>previous groups.</p> <p>When the final rotation has occurred, a plenary session is conducted to create a sense of connection with the wider group.</p>	<p>sense of 'community'.</p>		
<b>Fishbowl Technique</b>	<p>A fishbowl is a discussion strategy that seeks to maximise participation in identifying and understanding issues in response to set questions.</p> <p>Fishbowl participants are assigned to either a listening or a discussion group. The first discussion group has an agreed amount of time to discuss the question. During the active discussion, the listening group takes notes and prepares commentary. The groups then swap places. This process can</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides an opportunity for participants to actively listen, and then reflect/ respond</li> <li>• Can inform solutions through creative dialogue and opportunity for trust development and a wider</li> <li>• Awareness of issues from a diverse group.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questions considered need to be significant and prompt discussion</li> <li>• Needs to be a certain level of comfort within the group</li> <li>• Requires skilled facilitators and good timekeeping</li> <li>• Must be culturally sensitive</li> <li>• Follow-up planning and debriefing may be required</li> </ul>	<p>Particularly useful for a diverse group of people to explore complex issues in a short timeframe</p> <p>Used for medium-sized groups of people.</p>

Technique	Characteristics	Benefits	Limitations	Where / how you would apply this
	be repeated for a number of questions.			
<b>Deliberative Polling</b>	<p>Deliberative polling is an attempt to use public opinion research in a new way. A random, representative sample is first polled on an issue. After the baseline poll, members of the sample are sent an information pack and invited to gather at a single place to discuss the issue over a number of days.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly representative sample</li> <li>• Provides a human face to poll results</li> <li>• Can inform policy decisions by tracking the impact of education processes on opinion</li> <li>• Sample population can be targeted for ongoing decision-making processes</li> <li>• Is a form of public education in the broadest sense and</li> <li>• can be staged at a national, state or</li> <li>• local level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issues need to be clearly viewed as being in the public interest and of significance</li> <li>• Requires participants to have a high level of literacy</li> <li>• High costs in coordinating this event</li> <li>• Careful consideration needs to be given to the level of importance surrounding the issue versus the cost benefits.</li> </ul>	<p>Used to inform policy decisions at a national, state or local level.</p> <p>Used for large sample sizes ranging between 100 and 500 people.</p>
<b>Citizens' Juries</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Randomly recruited and demographically representative panel that meets for three to five days to examine an issue of public</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is a transparent process</li> <li>• Can promote a culture of citizenship and participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expensive and time-consuming</li> <li>• May be difficult to sustain panel member participation</li> </ul>	<p>Used for groups ranging between 12 and 20 citizens.</p> <p>Used for obtaining</p>

Technique	Characteristics	Benefits	Limitations	Where / how you would apply this
	<p>significance or concern.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jurors are provided with a question or series of questions.</li> <li>• Jurors hear from, and can ask questions of, a variety of experts.</li> <li>• Jurors deliberate, discuss and debate issues together.</li> <li>• Recommendations are presented to the public or to the Minister.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can help to identify solutions to problems</li> <li>• Provides a good opportunity to develop a deep understanding of an issue</li> <li>• Provides informed feedback</li> <li>• General public can usually identify with jury members.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doubt exists about representativeness because of the small numbers of jurors</li> <li>• Can exclude people with low literacy or non-English speakers</li> <li>• No guarantee that the jury's decisions will be taken into account in government decision-making</li> <li>• Not all issues are suitable for consideration via a jury process</li> <li>• Extensive preparatory work is needed</li> </ul>	<p>informed community opinions on complex or controversial issues.</p>

Detailed information on these and many more participatory techniques are available in the Department of Communities. Engaging Queenslanders - A guide to community engagement methods and techniques. Queensland Health via <http://www.qld.gov.au/web/community-engagement/guides-factsheets/documents/engaging-queenslanders-methods-and-techniques.pdf>

## Follow-up

After a meeting is conducted, it is always beneficial to take some time to undertake an internal debrief about what went well and what could have been done better. Evaluate the effectiveness of the meeting based on how well the objectives were met.

Ensure that minutes from the meeting are prepared and circulated to all meeting participants in a timely matter (no more than one week following the meeting). Meeting minutes should include a summary of the key discussion points, items that require further follow-up and a list of tasks generated from the meeting. Make a note of who is assigned to do what, and by when.

Meeting minutes should be brief and to the point to ensure that all participants will take the time review the minutes and provide feedback in a timely matter.

## References and Additional Reading

Our Community, *Orchestrating Great Meetings*, Community Resources, Accessed: 11 November 2013. [http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/boards/boards\\_helpsheet.jsp?articleId=1371](http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/boards/boards_helpsheet.jsp?articleId=1371)

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VSO. *Participatory Approaches: A Facilitator Guide*. [http://community.eldis.org/.59c6ec19/VSO\\_Facilitator\\_Guide\\_to\\_Participatory\\_Approaches\\_Principles.pdf](http://community.eldis.org/.59c6ec19/VSO_Facilitator_Guide_to_Participatory_Approaches_Principles.pdf)

Community Toolbox. *Analyzing Community Problems and Designing and Adapting Community Interventions: Participatory Approaches to Planning Community Interventions*. <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/analyze/where-to-start/participatory-approaches/main>