How to run an effective meeting

Tony Brett
LGBT Staff Advisory Group Chair
and IT Services

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It’s not just the meeting itself…

- Planning
  - Objectives and outcomes
  - Agenda and papers
- Place
  - Directions
  - Accessibility
  - Environment
- Timing, chairing, minutes, technology, follow-up
Fail to plan…

• Really important to plan and prepare properly

• Meetings are expensive
  • An average grade 8 costs £50k p.a.
  • Assume 46 weeks of work at 37.5 hours
    - that’s 1725 hours per year
  • A 2 hour meeting with 10 people is 20 hours
  • Cost is £50k/1725*200 = £579

• You can buy a decent laptop for that
• People will respect you for not wasting their time
Know what the meeting is for

- Are you:
  - making plans?
  - generating ideas?
  - sharing updates?
  - communicating something?
  - wanting a decision?

- Be clear on objectives and outcomes
- All are valid so tell people which it is so they are not left guessing!
- If you don’t know what it’s for, don’t have it!
Agenda is all-important

• It **MUST** include
  • Date, time, location
  • Invitees (essential and optional)
  • Topics (and order)
  • Identify priority for meeting
• Put actual item times on agenda
• Plan a break if longer than 90 minutes
  • Coffee, toilet, email, phone etc
Pre-meetings increase meeting value

- Agenda input from key participants
- Test the water on tricky issues in advance
- Agree how much time items will take
- Think carefully about who & why you’ll invite to the meeting
  - People who need to know about changes are not the same as those who are good at solving problems
  - Check up on last meeting’s actions and nag if necessary
- Could take longer than the actual meeting
People are rubbish at reading papers

- You must get them out early (1 week)
- Use tricks to make them read
  - Short and interesting
  - Ask questions about them in invitation
  - Give people jobs to do and report at meeting
- Avoid sending a jumble of different file formats
- One PDF is good
- Offer hard copies and provide on request
Can they find it and access it?

• Give clear directions unless all have been to the venue before:
  • Google map link
  • Signs in the building
  • Meet / greet
• What about wheelchair users?
• What about those with hearing or sight issues?
• What adjustments can you make?
Right environment = right behaviour

- Enough chairs?
- Place to hang coats etc
- Temperature?
- Noise?
- Lighting?
- Decent table space
- Name badges / cards?
- Tea / coffee / water / biscuits
- Is it lunchtime? Can you provide lunch?
- Where are the loos?
- Is there a fire alarm test scheduled?
  - What to do if it goes off
Technology can help or distract

- Some like to take notes on a tablet / laptop
- Others like to read email
- Don’t be too directive – it’s C21!
  - Are there power sockets? WiFi?
  - Do people need access details?
- It’s OK to ask people to use a quieter keyboard etc
- Make sure confidentiality is agreed at start of meeting if tweeting etc is likely
Immediately before the meeting

• Get into the zone

• Don’t rush into it

• Let people chat and catch up before the formal start

• Make sure everyone knows why they are there

• Work out who needs to be in which parts of the meeting
  • Give people choice about which bits they attend
Some tips for chairing

• Make sure you can see everyone
• Thank them for coming and introduce people
  • Ask for names and roles
  • Do a names map for your use
• Remind about speaking only when invited
  • Use eye contact to do this
• Note names as people indicate they want to speak, then invite them in order: “I’ve got A then B then C then we’ll move on”
• Sense consensus – test and only vote if needed
• Keep to time
More chairing tips

• Much easier from a hard copy
• Have a pen / pencil to note comments and speakers
• Sit next to minute-taker so you can clarify points
• Don’t chair and take minutes at the same time
• Watch body language: be informal but still directive
• If some are dominating invite others for their views
• If time is slipping, ask meeting if they want to make changes to timetable, but try to avoid this!
• Adjourn if meeting gets out of control
Good meeting behaviours make good meetings

- Avoid interrupting others
- Can’t listen to more than one person at once
- Wait for chair to invite you to speak
- Avoid formulating what you want to say while someone else is speaking – you can’t listen then!
- Pause between speakers to absorb and think
- Listen to and watch all meeting participants, even those who are not speaking verbally
- Make space for anyone who wants to speak a first time before you speak a second time
Make decisions carefully

• Listen to others properly
  • As important as speaking
• Speak for yourself
  • Express your own thoughts
  • Refer to your own experiences
• Avoid being hypothetical
• Only challenge others respectfully
  • Acknowledge their viewpoint
Keeping to time

- Put actual time of each item on agenda
- Gather AOB (but don’t discuss) at the start so you can leave time at the end for them
- Start on time
- End on time – then folk will come again!
After the meeting

• Follow up quickly while things are still in minds
  • Ideally same day - at most 48 hours
  • Always same week!
  • Diarise time to do this
• Remind people in a memo
  • Responsibilities given, tasks delegated
  • Actions accepted / given
  • Deadlines and next meeting date
• Captures meeting value
Reflection

- Ask one or two trusted meeting members how it went
- Plan how to improve meeting for next time
- Ask what you could have done better
- Note for next planning meeting
- Strive for continual improvement
Minutes

- Don’t need to be a script
- No need to recreate the meeting
- Must record decisions and actions
- Must record presence and apologies
- Should use professional, business-like language only
- Can be used as evidence in the future so be careful of audience for them (some are public record)
- Need to be completed and circulated quickly while still relevant
- Should be presented and agreed at next meeting
Remember!

- Effective meetings are time-limited and know what they are trying to achieve
- Proper planning, chairing and follow-up maximise the value realised by all parties
- People hate having their time wasted so run good meetings so you don’t waste their time and they’ll respect you and come again
QUESTIONS?