

# Preparing for Successful Public Meetings: Checklist for Before, During, and After

These are general suggestions. Formal board, commission or council meetings will have additional and more technical preparation requirements.



## Before the Meeting

### The Issue

- ☐ Develop a clear statement about the topic and how it might affect the public.
- ☐ Set clear expectations about the purpose of the meeting and intended outcomes.
- ☐ Create an agenda with estimated times, and whether an item is information, review or a decision.

### Outreach

- ☐ Identify which types of community members you hope will attend.
- ☐ In addition to advisory boards and task forces, speak to leaders from a wide range of groups (such as school, business, faithbased, health and neighborhood groups).
- ☐ Send out an e-blast; issue a press release; post to blogs.
- ☐ Use social media to announce the meeting and invite people. Include directions, transit routes and suggestions about parking.
- ☐ Reach out to the community; talk to people one on one and to groups at their meetings.
- ☐ Translate outreach materials as needed and share with appropriate community groups.

## Logistics

- ☐ If you have flexibility, choose a time of day that is convenient for those you are trying to include.
- ☐ Make sure the facility and equipment are suited to your intended purpose and audience.
- ☐ Determine if special accommodations are warranted (for example, food, childcare, translation services or devices).

## Information

- ☐ Educate oneself and staff about the topic ahead of time
- ☐ Line up subject matter experts as needed; explain the need to translate technical information into plain language that everyone can understand.
- ☐ Make information available to the public before the meeting, in a variety of formats including online and via community outreach.
- ☐ Invite questions ahead of time
- ☐ Determine application of open meeting laws and assure compliance.

## During the Meeting

### Explaining the Process

- ☐ Be clear who is running the meeting.
- ☐ Define the goal of the meeting, key topics and what decisions will or will not be made.
- ☐ Introduce all public officials.
- ☐ Explain the meeting process, when it is the public's turn and time restrictions (and the reasons for the time restrictions).
- ☐ Clarify how comments will get recorded and used.

### Information Sharing

- ☐ Have high quality visual aids and adequate handouts.
- ☐ Keep explanations as simple as possible and avoid acronyms and technical terms.

### Managing the Discussion

- ☐ Set a friendly tone.
- ☐ Be attentive and use active listening skills.
- ☐ Explain what plan/process the agency is using to determine what is on topic and off topic.
- ☐ Capture off topic comments to be addressed at a different time.

- ☐ Be honest about what the agency can and cannot do; define parameters.
- ☐ Solicit comments from those not heard, using direct invitation, such as a “last call” or cards requesting written comments.

## Creating a Welcoming Environment

- ☐ Provide food (ideally multi-ethnic to match your community’s preferences).
- ☐ Offer name tags and sign-in sheets; collect emails for follow-up (keeping in mind that it is optional for attendees to provide their names and contact information).
- ☐ Express appreciation to all attendees
- ☐ Provide an anonymous feedback form to all attendees to learn what worked well and what can be improved for next time.

## After the Meeting

- ☐ Prepare and post a meeting summary.
- ☐ Send out an “e-blast” about decisions, action items, next steps and any follow-up meetings; provide a specific contact person.
- ☐ Reach out to attendees who did not speak up during the meeting (they may care just as much but may be introverts).
- ☐ Follow up with those who might be disappointed with the decision; encourage them to stay involved.
- ☐ Keep asking for feedback and continue to provide information about the issue
- ☐ Apply the evaluation to the next public process
- ☐ “Before the meeting, educate the public. During the meeting, educate the public. After the meeting, keep educating the public.”

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