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.”

Make and Share Free Checklists

checkli.com