Meeting Management

A Mock Commission Hearing

A workbook to accompany the video

Michael Chandler, moderator and developer

American Planning Association

Planning Commissioners Service
Meeting Management: A Mock Commission Hearing

Table of Contents

Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 1

Preparation for Watching the Video ............................................................................... 2
  Meeting Characteristics ................................................................................................. 3
  Watching the Video ...................................................................................................... 4
  Agenda for the Mock Hearing ...................................................................................... 6
  Copies of Slide Illustrations ........................................................................................ 9

Defining the Video .......................................................................................................... 21
  Instructions .................................................................................................................. 22
  Content Observation Guide .......................................................................................... 23
  Process Observation Guide .......................................................................................... 25
  Summary Meeting Impressions ..................................................................................... 26

Improving Your Commission’s Meetings ..................................................................... 28
  Points to Consider and Exercises .................................................................................. 29
  Debriefing Your Commission ........................................................................................ 31
  Leadership Skills for the Commission Chair .............................................................. 32
  Tips for Better Meetings ............................................................................................... 34
Introduction

Meeting Management: A Mock Commission Hearing is a video and workbook training package that will help planning officials and planners improve their meeting management skills. Conducting an effective and legal commission meeting is one of the most important tasks of the commission. This staged hearing provides you with guidance, among other things, on how to:

- handle unruly citizens
- move through the business expeditiously
- consider the image the commissioners project to the public.

Using this video for instruction is easy. This package is ideal for group viewing by commission members. If you are organizing the training, please read the workbook in preparation for showing the video. You may make multiple copies of the workbook for group instruction.

To begin the instruction, review the section of the workbook titled, "Preparation for Watching the Video." Turn to the agenda and the copies of the slide illustrations and keep them at hand as you watch the video. Next, watch the video. If you wish to stop and discuss aspects of the video as you watch it, there is a convenient break before the commission rules on the variance (the title "The Vote" appears on screen), when your group can stop and discuss what you have seen. You may also watch the video straight through and then use the workbook as your debriefing guide. The workbook provides a complete debriefing guide with step-by-step instructions for analyzing the mock hearing. Simply follow the instructions as you read through the remaining sections of the guide. Read the article, "How to run a Meeting" from the Harvard Business Review to complete the background reading. Viewing the video, working with the workbook, and reading the article will take approximately two hours.

This video and workbook were developed by Michael Chandler, Associate Professor and Extension Planning Specialist with Virginia Technical University, Blacksburg, VA. Chandler is a trainer in the APA Planning Commissioner Workshops conducted each year at the APA National Conference, as well as a trainer with the Virginia planning officials program.

This video and workbook training package are products of the Planning Commissioners Service. PCS provides a variety of training materials for planning officials. For more information on the service, contact:

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Chicago, Illinois 60637
(312) 955-9100
PREPARATION FOR WATCHING THE VIDEO
Serving on a planning commission and attending meetings are synonymous. It is hard to do one without the other. Meetings are important because they have become the medium most groups use to conduct business, gather opinions, solve problems and make decisions. A planning commission is no different. It is through meetings that a planning commission will attend to its mission and charge. As such, meetings are the lifeblood of a planning commission.

MEETING CHARACTERISTICS

Like people, all meetings share a common set of characteristics. And, it is important to realize that a meeting will succeed or fail due to the interplay of these characteristics. Thus, it is of vital importance that a planning commission be able to recognize and distinguish the baseline characteristics common to all meetings. A listing of the leading characteristics, many of which are highlighted in the video, are as follows:

People
All meetings have people involved. Depending on the issues, a planning commission meeting may involve several hundred or just a handful of people. The needs of the people expected to participate in the meeting, including the commissioners themselves, should be considered when planning a meeting.

Purpose
All meetings have, or should have, a reason for people coming together. Sometimes these purposes are clearly stated and sometimes they are taken for granted. A key point to remember is that a meeting’s purpose will affect your meeting planning, as well as the outcome of the meeting itself.

Atmosphere and Climate
All meetings have an atmosphere or climate. The atmosphere will include the physical surroundings, the temperature of the room, the patterns of seating people, and the patterns of involvement or non-involvement during the meeting. If advance thought is given, most meetings can have an atmosphere that will contribute to the meeting’s productivity.

Space and Place
Meetings are held in a space and place, and as one thinks about a place and space, it is important to consider the following characteristics: the access to the space, its size, the kinds of movable furniture available, the acoustics, whether or not there are adequate parking facilities, how the space relates to the purpose of the meeting, equipment needed, lighting and temperature controls. Space and place have much to do with the way people feel as a result of participating in a meeting.
Costs
All meetings have some kind of cost attached to them. Some of these are carried in a regular ongoing budget, such as a commission budget. Other costs include people's time. This involves the business principle known as opportunity costs.

Time Dimensions. All meetings have beginnings and endings, although the actual length of time may vary greatly. Also within that time there is some kind of planned sequence or agenda. It is important to think through who makes the time decisions.

Plans, Program, and Agenda
Most meetings have a meeting plan. This should be a common element of all meetings, an explicit agenda, which can be shared by all participants. Things to be thought about here are: who makes the agenda, to what degree are participants involved in making the agenda, what kind of items can be dealt with, and how many in the time that is available.

Beginnings, Middles, and Endings
All meetings can be looked at in terms of a beginning, middle and ending. In general, little thought is given on how to begin, or how to end a meeting. Most of the focus is on the middle of the meeting, the work to be done. It is however, important to give thought to the beginning and ending phase.

Follow-up
It is rare that meetings end without some need for follow-up activities. The preparation of minutes and the monitoring of work activities between meetings are representative of follow-up activities common to most planning commissions.

WATCHING THE VIDEO: WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Welcome to the April 7, 1994 meeting of the City of Exaction Planning Commission! Please study the agenda before viewing the video in order to get a sense and feel for what you are about to observe. (The agenda follows this overview.)

The primary goal of the video is to present situations that could arise when a planning commission is faced with a rezoning request. On the agenda are twelve items. The video, by design, focuses on the first five items only. As you might imagine, the bulk of the commission’s time will be spent with item five, which is ordinance 1044.

As with any planning commission meeting there are several things to look for as you watch the video. Please keep in mind the meeting characteristics you reviewed a few moments ago. Many of the characteristics are captured in the video, just as they are during an actual meeting of a real commission. Be on the lookout for them. They may play a role in making or breaking the hearing you are about to observe!

In addition to the meeting characteristics, there are several other "keys" to look for as you watch the video. Chief among them are the following questions:
1. Was the agenda reviewed by the commission prior to taking up items of business?

2. How would you characterize the contribution made by staff (Mr. Shades O'Gray)?

3. What impressions do you have relative to the staff report concerning Ordinance 1044? Was enough information given to the Exaction Planning Commission?

4. What impressions do you have regarding the visual aids used by the staff, as well as the visual aids used by the applicant? Were they adequate? Were they appropriate?

5. What strengths are witnessed by the commission during the public hearing on Ordinance 1044? What weaknesses, in your opinion, are present? Does the commission, during the hearing, display any bias?

6. Follow the actions of the chair closely. What kind of job does she do relative to the following situations:
   - Guiding the discussion?
   - Brokering disputes?
   - Keeping control?
   - Involving her fellow commissioners?
   - Managing the agenda?
   - Dealing with the public?
   - Maintaining her poise?

7. Mentally critique the conduct of the commission as they proceed through their agenda. What impressions do you have regarding the conduct, or actions, displayed by the Exaction commission toward the following groups or individuals:
   - The staff?
   - The applicant?
   - Persons who address the commission?
   - The commission chair?
   - Toward each other?

8. How would you characterize the action taken by the Exaction commission? Did they do the right thing? Would you have done something different? If so, what and why?

9. Imagine you are a newspaper reporter! How would you write up the meeting you just observed? Would the story be easy to write or difficult to write?

10. Record three positive impressions, as well as three negative impressions, you have as a result of watching the mock hearing.
AGENDA FOR THE MOCK HEARING
AGENDA
CITY OF EXACTION
PLANNING COMMISSION

APRIL 17, 1994
9:00 AM - 10:20 AM

Council Chambers, Municipal Building

I. CALL TO ORDER - 9:10 AM

II. ROLL CALL

III. CONSIDER ADOPTION OF THE APRIL 17, 1994 AGENDA

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval of Planning Commission Minutes - March 21, 1994
   ACTION: Approved

B. Approval of Subcommittee Minutes
   ACTION: Approved
   1. Development Study Committee—March 29, 1994
   2. Long-Range Planning Committee—March 30, 1994

C. Ordinance #1045 - Hemlock Park: James and Alice Noonkester. A rezoning request from A-10 (Agricultural) District to R-12 (Single Family, Residential) District on Meadowbrook Drive, approximately 200 yards south of the intersection of Shadow Lake Road.
   ACTION: Refer to Environmental Quality & Land Use Committee; Schedule Public Hearing for May 16, 1994.

V. PUBLIC HEARINGS

   1. Staff Report
   2. Public Comment
   3. Action

VI. PUBLIC ADDRESS

This is the last opportunity during this meeting for the audience to address the Planning Commission on any subject, whether it is on the agenda or not. Please state your name and address and limit your speaking time to a maximum of five (5) minutes in order to allow time for all comments.
VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Bikeway/Sidewalk Advisory Committee - Pollster
B. Zoning Ordinance Rewrite Steering Committee - Fast
C. Gotcha County Planning Commission Visit - Servant
D. Greenway/Urban Stream Committee - Dozer

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Board of Zoning Appeals Report - Servant
   1. Summary of March 12, 1994
   2. Agenda for April 25, 1994

B. Chairman's Report - Swayne

C. Report from Planning Director - O'Gray

IX. CITY COUNCIL ACTIONS

A. Ordinance #1040: Theodore B. Simpson. Rezoning from R-12 (Single Family Residential) District to R-14 (Multi Unit Residential) District at 801 Tom's Creek Road.
   APPROVED

X. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Neighborhood Meeting: Hemlock Park, April 26, 7 PM, City Council Conference Room.

B. Joint City Council/Planning Commission Work Session on Open Space Initiative, April 29, 3 PM, City Hall.

XI. OTHER BUSINESS

XII. ADJOURNMENT - 10:20 AM
COPIES OF SLIDE ILLUSTRATIONS

In Order of Presentation in Video
DEBRIEFING THE VIDEO
INSTRUCTIONS

The mock commission meeting you just observed is a real case. Thus, what you observed was authentic for it actually happened.

The purpose of this section of the workbook is to provide you with an opportunity to more formally debrief the meeting you just observed. To assist with this activity, a content and a process observation guide are included here.

The observation guide stresses two dynamics - content and process - that are always present during meetings. Generally speaking, content refers to the subject or issue being discussed. In the case of the video, the issue being discussed is Ordinance 1044. Process, on the other hand, focuses on how an issue is discussed. In addition, process is also concerned with the actions of the individuals who are involved with the discussion. In this instance, everyone associated with Ordinance 1044 can be part of the process observation.

Completing the process observation guide may necessitate watching the video a second time. By doing so, you will be able to look for specific behaviors and actions you may have missed the first time. Irrespective of the number of times you watch the mock hearing, you will need to review the observation guide so you will know what to look for before you watch the video. Once you are comfortable with the guide, watch the mock hearing and record your impressions.
# CONTENT OBSERVATION GUIDE

(Check one blank for each question)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>In Between</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Did the Commission members seem to understand the meeting’s purpose?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Did the Chairman, prior to discussing an item, explain the issue involved?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Did Commission members seem to be well-informed about the issues being discussed?</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Did Commission members display an understanding of the technical aspects associated with the issues being discussed?</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Did Commission members appear confident when they took action on issues?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Did the Commission (through the chair) initiate discussion on agenda items or did the Commission defer to the staff for discussion?</td>
<td>Initiated</td>
<td>Deferred</td>
<td>Combination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Did the Chairman guide the meeting in a fair and consistent manner?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Did the Commission conduct its business in a mature and professional manner?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Did the Chairman summarize the actions of the Commission following the discussion?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Did the public have an opportunity to comment on agenda items?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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### PROCESS OBSERVATION GUIDE

(Check one blank for each question)

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The meeting atmosphere (among members) seemed friendly and pleasant.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>In Between</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. All members seemed eager to participate in the meeting.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>In Between</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. All members participated in the discussion, not just a few.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>In Between</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Members seemed to stay with the task; there was little wandering.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>In Between</td>
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<td>5. Members felt safe in speaking out.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>In Between</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The chair initiated, directed and encouraged discussion of agenda items.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>In Between</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The meeting ran smoothly; there was little grandstanding by members.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>In Between</td>
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<td>8. Did the Commission actively listen for citizen input.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>In Between</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Staff persons present (planner, administrator, etc.) provided only technical assistance to the Commission. Staff did not actively become involved in the meeting.</td>
<td>Yes ___</td>
<td>No ___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>In your opinion, was the Commission interested in what the public had to say.</td>
<td>Yes ___</td>
<td>No ___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Did it appear to you that Commission members had already made up their mind relative to agenda items.</td>
<td>Yes ___</td>
<td>No ___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>At the end of the meeting, the Commission evaluated (debriefed) the process.</td>
<td>Yes ___</td>
<td>No ___</td>
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**SUMMARY MEETING IMPRESSIONS - CONTENT AND PROCESS:**

In addition to studying the content and process elements associated with the mock hearing, several other debriefing issues are worthy of observation and comment. Chief among them are the following:

1. Do any members of the Exaction Planning Commission have a conflict of interest? If so, what action would you recommend they consider and why? Record your response.

2. In your opinion, did any members of the Exaction Planning Commission engage in ex parte communication? Was this wrong? Would it be wrong in your community? What can be done to avoid ex parte communication? Record your response.
3. Should witnesses who appear before a planning commission be sworn in? What is the rule in your community? Record your response.

4. How far should a planning commission go in getting its business out to the public? Should meeting dates be posted? Record your answer.

5. What should a commission chair do when citizens become unruly, loud or disruptive? Should citizens be asked to leave? Can citizens be removed from a hearing? Record your answer.
IMPROVING YOUR COMMISSION MEETINGS
POINTS TO CONSIDER AND EXERCISES

Several strategies, as well as resources, can be used to improve the quality of local planning commission meetings. The videotape you have watched, as well as the accompanying workbook, were developed to function as learning tools for managing commission meetings. In addition to these resources, we would like to use this opportunity to comment on several meeting management strategies that may be of assistance as you seek ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of your planning commission meetings.

Rules of Procedure
Taking time to capture in words how your meetings will be run, how business will be transacted, how the public will be treated, and expectations the commission will place upon its membership, are typically included in a rule of procedure statement. Rules of procedure can be included in the commission’s bylaws, or it can be a stand alone publication. Strong consideration should be given to developing rules of procedure.

Improved Time Management
The success a commission achieves is a function of numerous variables, including the efficient use of meeting time.

The road to more effective meetings should begin with an examination of how you currently manage your time. Two rather simple exercises can help provide you with this information. All you need to complete the exercises are a sheet of paper and two drawings of blank clock faces, showing a 60-minute span of time.

Exercise #1: Determining the Relative Proportions of Your Pre-Meeting Time.
To complete the first exercise, list the various planning commission related activities you engage in before scheduled meetings on the blank sheet. Such activities could include time spent reading and studying reports, visiting sites that will be featured in upcoming meetings, talking to staff members or citizens, and the like.

Next draw and label lines on the first clock face that correspond to the activities and the amount of time you devote to each. At this point in the exercise it is important to understand that you must "condense" your activities to fit the sixty minute time frame. In other words, if you spend half your between-meeting planning related activity on reading and studying reports, you should draw a line on the clock running from twelve to six, representing half of the total sixty minutes - regardless of whether the actual time you spent reviewing reports was, say, one hour or three hours. The goal is to determine relative proportions.

Exercise #2: Determining the Relative Proportions of Your Meeting Time.
This exercise is the same as the first one, except that you are now indicating how you spend your meeting time. Again, first list the kind of activities your commission engages in during meetings (i.e., public hearings, discussing issues, old business). Next, determine the proportion of time you spend on each type of activity, and display this on the second clock face.
By calculating how you spend your time, and then seeing it starkly displayed on a clock face, you might be surprised. Do the relative amounts of time you spend on various activities - both at your meeting and between meetings - correspond to their relative importance? Does your time allocation correspond to your commission's priorities? For some commissions and commissioners, this exercise may reveal that real priorities are being "buried" by time spent on activities which are not as significant.
DEBRIEFING YOUR COMMISSION MEETING: A MORE FORMAL APPROACH

Your commission can also improve its meetings through another technique—a formal debriefing survey. The survey form listed here may help your commission and staff identify weak areas, as well as confirm things you're doing right. Try conducting this survey at the end of your next commission meeting.

**Debriefing Survey Form**

Circle the appropriate number:

1- strongly agree, 2-agree, 3-undecided
4-disagree, 5-strongly disagree

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<tr>
<td>1)</td>
<td>I was notified of this meeting in sufficient time to prepare for it.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2)</td>
<td>I understood why this meeting was being held and what specific outcomes were expected.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3)</td>
<td>I understood what was expected of me as a participant and what was expected of the other participants.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4)</td>
<td>I understood how the meeting was intended to flow and when it would end.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5)</td>
<td>Most participants listened carefully to each other.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6)</td>
<td>Most participants expressed themselves openly, honestly, and directly.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7)</td>
<td>Agreements were explicit and clear, and conflicts were openly explored and constructively managed.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8)</td>
<td>The meeting generally proceeded as intended and achieved its intended purpose.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9)</td>
<td>My participation contributed to the outcomes achieved by the meeting.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10)</td>
<td>Overall, I was satisfied with this meeting and feel my time was well spent.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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</table>
LEADERSHIP SKILLS FOR THE COMMISSION CHAIR

The skill a chairperson displays in running a meeting can mean the difference between success and failure. Ideally, the leader should facilitate the meeting by encouraging open communication, ensuring equality of participation, and interpreting and clarifying the discussion towards the resolution of objectives or purposes identified by the group. An additional responsibility of the leader is to alert group members that they also share in the responsibility for successful or less than successful meetings. Reviewing task functions and maintenance functions is one way to accomplish this task.

Task functions are those activities which contribute to the purpose; objective, or goal of the group. Maintenance functions are those activities and actions which must be monitored in order to keep the group in good operating order. Although all group members share in this total responsibility, the group leader must be particularly conscious of the functions and their interface in a meeting environment. A summary of common task and maintenance functions follows.

Task Functions

These are functions required in selecting and carrying out a group task.

1. Initiating Activity: proposing solutions, suggesting new ideas, new definitions of the problem, new attack on the problem, or new organization of material.

2. Seeking Information: asking for clarification of suggestions, requesting additional information or facts.

3. Seeking Opinion: looking for an expression feeling about something from the members, seeking clarification of values, suggestions, or ideas.

4. Giving Information: offering facts or generalizations, relating one’s own experience to the group problem to illustrate points.

5. Giving Opinion: stating an opinion or belief concerning a suggestion or one of several suggestions, particularly concerning its value rather than its factual basis.

6. Elaborating: clarifying, giving examples or developing meanings, trying to envision how a proposal might work if adopted.

7. Coordinating: showing relationship among various ideas or suggestions, trying to pull ideas and suggestions together, trying to draw together activities of various subgroups or members.

8. Summarizing: pulling together related ideas or suggestions, restating suggestions after the group has discussed them.
Maintenance Functions

These are functions required in strengthening and maintaining group life and activities.

1. Encouraging: being friendly, warm, responsive to others, praising others and their ideas, agreeing with and accepting contributions of others

2. Gatekeeping: trying to make it possible for another member to make a contribution to the group by saying, "We haven’t heard anything from Jan yet," or suggesting limited talking time for everyone so that every member will have a chance to be heard

3. Standard Setting: expressing standards for the group to use in choosing its content or procedures or in evaluating its decisions, reminding group to avoid decisions which conflict with group standards

4. Following: going along with decisions of the group, thoughtfully accepting ideas of others, serving as an audience during group discussion

5. Expressing Group Feeling: summarizing the group’s feeling, describing reactions of the group to ideas or solutions

Combined Task and Maintenance Functions

1. Evaluating: comparing group decisions or accomplishments to group standards, measuring accomplishments against goals

2. Diagnosing: determining sources of difficulties and appropriate steps, analyzing the main blocks to progress

3. Testing for Consensus: tentatively asking for group opinions in order to find out whether the group is nearing consensus on a decision, sending up trial balloons to test group opinions

4. Mediating: harmonizing, conciliating differences in points of view, making compromise solutions

5. Relieving Tension: draining off negative feeling by jesting or pouring oil on troubled waters, putting a tense situation in wider context

A group strengthens itself and improves its chance of being effective when its members become more conscious of the role function needed at all times, as well as more sensitive to and aware of the degree to which they can help meet group needs through their group actions. This sense of "oneness," in many instances, is the quality we see in some groups but have a hard time labeling.
TIPS FOR BETTER MEETINGS

There is no foolproof way to insure that a meeting will always be productive and effective. However, good planning, member involvement, and competent leadership are steps in the right direction. The following meeting management techniques, which should be viewed as a unitary design, will also help.

Before the Meeting

• Define the purpose for the meeting

• Develop an agenda and plan the activities for the meeting

• Distribute the agenda in advance of the meeting

• Arrange the meeting room such that members will feel welcomed and will want to participate

Starting and Conducting Meetings

• Start the meeting on time

• Review the agenda and explain the meeting’s purpose

• Stick to the agenda and move through it in an efficient manner

• Seek to involve everyone in the discussion

• Keep the discussion focused by keeping notes and summarizing

• Serve as a meeting facilitator and not meeting dominator

End of the Meeting

• End the meeting on time

• Recap the meeting’s highlights/accomplishments

• Review and assign any after-meeting duties

• Debrief the meeting with the participants

• Brainstorm about the next meeting’s agenda

• Set the date, time and place for the next meeting

• Thank everyone for attending and participating
After the Meeting

- Review the debriefing results
- Prepare the meeting’s minutes and distribute them
- Compare the meeting agenda with what actually happened
- Monitor the progress toward completion of assigned duties and tasks