



## Agenda Management

Having a well structured and managed agenda is an essential prerequisite for having an effective meeting. Here are some guidelines for effective agenda management:

### Create an Agenda Before the Meeting

Having an agenda to put on the table at the beginning of the meeting saves a great deal of valuable time. Ideally the chairman will solicit others' suggestions for agenda items in advance of writing the agenda. If this is not possible, it is still preferable for the chairman to complete the agenda based upon his/her best understanding of what needs to be addressed. Additions and changes can be made as part of the agenda's approval process at the meeting. Having a good, rolling agenda of the items to be addressed in future meetings helps to manage every agenda.

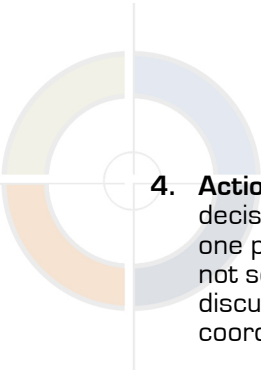
### Establish and Stick to Time Limits for Each Agenda Item

Establishing these time limits is part of the chairman's agenda-drafting responsibility and the group approves the time limits as part of approving the agenda (at the beginning of the meeting). Five minutes before the end of the discussion of a specific item, the chairman can let the group know that the end is near and it is time to either make a proposal or wrap up the discussion. Mastering the art of limiting discussion without cutting people off is a key skill of meeting chairmanship.

### Clearly Identify the Purpose of Each Agenda Item

Each agenda item should be clearly identified as having one of four purposes:

- 1. Information Only:** Reports and updates fall into this category. Make sure that these are not better handled in a written update instead of at the meeting. **For information items, the only discussion that is allowed is to make sure that everyone understands the information.** If material and significant Decision or Coordination (see below) issues arise from reports, they should be scheduled for a later meeting. **Rigor in managing information items often is the single, most important change for having more effective meetings.**
- 2. Decision Making:** The most effective way to manage decision items is to have proposals/recommendations presented at the meeting, rather than using meeting time to figure out a decision. When this is not possible, an effective option is to schedule a Dialogue (see below) to discuss an issue in one meeting and then bring a proposal back to the next meeting for a decision.
- 3. Dialogue (open discussion, brainstorming, etc.):** Dialogue items are topics where you want to have a free-flowing discussion and exchange of ideas in preparation for a future decision. A good way to manage this discussion is to actually avoid making proposals for action, in order to keep options open. Be careful to make sure that everyone in the group understands that this discussion is not intended to reach a conclusion during that respective meeting. Otherwise, action-oriented people can get very frustrated with these dialogues.



**4. Action Coordination/Problem-solving:** These are discussions about how to execute a decision that has already been made or to solve a problem that requires more than one person to solve. The trick here is to stay focused on what the objective is and to not second-guess decisions that have already been made. It is easy for these discussions to lose focus and wander. The best way to structure an action coordination/problem-solving discussion is to address the following areas:

- Clearly answer these questions: 1) What is the outcome that must be produced? 2) If we are successful what results would be accomplished?”  
Often action coordination/problem-solving discussions wander because the objective has not been defined or agreed to.
- Identify the most important immediate action or next step needed to accomplish the outcome. Too often, discussions reveal all the possible steps/actions but never get to the most important, next action step.
- Assign accountability for the next step: Who will do it? What will be done? By when will it be done? Who will they report back to? If there will be additional action after this step, who will be accountable and to whom will they report progress?