

How to Create an Agenda, Step by Step

Creating an effective agenda is one of the most important elements for a productive meeting. Here are some reasons why the meeting agenda is so important.

The Agenda

- ▶ communicates important information such as:
 1. topics for discussion
 2. presenter or discussion leader for each topic
 3. time allotment for each topic
- ▶ provides an outline for the meeting (how long to spend on which topics)
- ▶ can be used as a checklist to ensure that all information is covered
- ▶ lets participants know what will be discussed if it's distributed before the meeting. This gives them an opportunity to come to the meeting prepared for the upcoming discussions or decisions.
- ▶ provides a focus for the meeting (the objective of the meeting must be clearly stated in the agenda)

How to Create an Effective Agenda

You're responsible for planning your project meeting this month. Arrggh!! What to do? Now you understand how important an agenda is to the effectiveness of the meeting, but don't know how to create one. Breathe easy! All you have to do is follow the steps outlined below.

1. Send an e-mail stating there will be a meeting, the goal of the meeting as well as the administrative details such as when and where it will be. Ask those invited to accept or decline the meeting. Make it clear that once they have accepted the meeting, they are expected to attend.
2. Ask participants requesting an agenda item to contact you no less than two days before the meeting with their request and the amount of time they will need to present it.
3. Once all of the agenda requests have been submitted to you, summarize them in a table format with the headings Agenda Item, Presenter and Time. It's your responsibility to ensure that each agenda item is directly related to the goals of this particular meeting. If an inappropriate request is made, suggest that person send an e-mail or memo instead or recommend that this agenda item be discussed in another meeting. Also, you must be realistic in the amount of time you allocate to each presenter. Don't cram an unrealistic number of agenda items into an hour meeting. When people accept an hour meeting, they expect to be finished in an hour. When meetings go over time, people generally tend to get uneasy. It's better to schedule 50 minutes of discussion into an hour time slot. This way you have 10 minutes to spare and if you get done a little early, people will be pleased.
4. Send the agenda to all the meeting participants the day before the meeting with a reminder of the meeting goals, location, time and duration. At this time, ask the presenters if they are happy with the order in which they will be speaking and the amount of time they have been allocated.
5. Of course, the most important part of creating an effective agenda is to follow it during the meeting!