

## Running Effective Team Meetings

### Why Meet?

In a workplace context, most organizational management experts advise against standing/recurring meetings because they can become inefficient and unnecessary. In the context of Bass Connections, in which students and faculty have many other responsibilities and scattered schedules, weekly team meetings are critical to sustaining momentum. But not all meetings are created equal. It's important to have a clear purpose and structure for each team meeting. **Meetings should never be held for the sole purpose of sharing information** – that can be done through email, chat, or team discussion sites. While information sharing can be *part* of the picture, meetings should be used to:

- Develop the team (skill development and/or teambuilding)
- Clarify direction and expectations
- Advance the work
- Solve problems
- Discuss and debate important decisions

### The Cycle of Effective Meetings

Don't think of a meeting as a one-time event, but rather a cycle to be managed.

#### Before the Meeting

##### Define the purpose:

- What is the goal(s) of the meeting?
- What important points must be covered?
- What decisions need to be made?

##### Set an agenda:

- Designate specific time allocations for key topics
- Design the agenda to prioritize the important points and decisions
- Consider **how** to accomplish your goals (e.g., brainstorming, pair discussions, voting, sub-groups) and what materials are needed

##### Distribute the agenda:

- Send the agenda in advance (leaving enough time for others to review it and prepare) – include the meeting goals and any pre-work
- Remind team members of upcoming deadlines/work that must be completed before the meeting
- Let team members know if they have a specific role to play during the meeting

##### Don't forget the fun/logistics:

- Efficiency is important, but so is creating an environment that's engaging and conducive to open discussion – consider opening each meeting with a short warm-up or ice breaker to refresh the team; you might rotate responsibility for this amongst team members

- Poor logistics can divert meetings; make sure that logistics are in place well in advance (food, technology, guest visitors, etc.)

### During the Meeting

- Remind team members of team ground rules; consider posting them in a visible location
- Make sure everyone knows their role in the meeting (you might assign, on a rotating basis, individuals to help with meeting minutes, time-keeping, ice breakers, etc.)
- Stick to the agenda – manage diversions and keep the discussion on track (see strategies for keeping your meeting on track below)
- Conclude with a brief summary and re-cap of action items
- Occasionally, you might end with a “pulse check” and ask the team how meetings could be improved (see the Plus/Delta box)

**Plus (+) / Delta (▲)**  
 One easy facilitation trick is to end a meeting by writing a “+” and a “▲” on a board and asking for feedback on what worked and what should be changed for future meetings

### After the Meeting

- Send notes (if necessary)
- Recap, and state in writing, action items **including** who is responsible and the deadline for completion

### Strategies for Keeping Meetings on Track

For both good and bad reasons, meetings can go astray. Participants might become inspired by a new idea. Or a participant might set a negative tone for the conversation. Or two participants might carry on a side conversation. It’s important to be attune to the tenor of the group and to rein in digressions. The most effective facilitators can also judge when it’s ok to let the agenda slip a little in service of a greater goal.

Challenge	Strategies
Side conversations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Let’s have one conversation at a time.”</li> <li>• “Can you all please wait a minute while we finish this discussion and then you are welcome to share your ideas with the whole group?”</li> </ul>
Participant routinely comes late	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask to speak individually: “Is there a reason why you are having a hard time arriving on time? I’m concerned about the tone it sets for our meetings and the message it sends to others who do arrive on time.”</li> </ul>
Participant is obviously unprepared for the meeting; doesn’t follow through on tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan and distribute the agenda in advance</li> <li>• Document action items with owners, specific tasks, and due date in meeting minutes; re-send these prior to the next meeting</li> </ul>
Participant is disengaged; working on non-meeting tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institute a “lids down” rule</li> <li>• Have team members who are on a device request permission from others first: “I’d like to do a quick search to see if existing studies have looked into this question. Do you all mind if I spend a few minutes looking?”</li> <li>• Ask questions to draw the individual in; assign them an active role in the meeting</li> </ul>
Participant monopolizes or dominates the conversation;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interrupt with, “That’s an interesting point. Let’s see what the group thinks of it.”</li> </ul>

interrupts others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “One voice at a time. I believe X was speaking first.”</li> </ul>
Team continues discussing the same topics without making progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “It seems that we have had a similar conversation at a few other meetings. Are people concerned about the decision we reached, or still unclear about our direction?”</li> <li>• “What would help everyone to feel comfortable moving on from this point?”</li> </ul>
Participant rambles off topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interrupt and re-direct as necessary. A facilitator should interrupt others with care but also recognize that it is their job to keep the conversation progressing.</li> <li>• “That’s an interesting point. Let’s see what the group thinks.”</li> <li>• “Just being mindful of the time, let me interrupt quickly and see what others think.”</li> </ul>
Participant seems to be listening but never offers an opinion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “X, you have been rather quiet. I’d welcome your perspective on this issue. Can you share what you are thinking?”</li> </ul>
Participant is frequently negative or skeptical; may put down other team members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet ‘off line’ to discuss your concerns: “I notice that you have been doing X in meetings and I am worried that it may be effecting the attitude of others on the team. I wanted to explore with you how you are feeling about the team ...”</li> </ul>
Team can’t get through the agenda on time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-assess whether the agenda is realistic</li> <li>• Consider if there are tasks that can be taken off-line or restructured</li> <li>• Be more aggressive about interrupting and re-directing; tell participants that you plan to do this to ensure the team can make sufficient progress; ask for permission to do so</li> <li>• Review and agree on the agenda and time for each item at the beginning of each meeting</li> <li>• Use a ‘Parking Lot’ to capture good ideas for <b>future</b> discussion</li> </ul>

