

ROGUE ACTION CENTER

Tools for Organizing: Better Meetings

Invite each person

Ask each person to come – in person if possible, by phone if not, by email as a last resort. If they don't plan to, try to find out why. Even if these contacts don't get each person to come, they provide an opportunity to discuss some of the points that will come up at the meeting.

If turnout from particular parts of the organization is still low, talk to leaders from those areas to see how you can help them.

Areas with high turnouts should be recognized – including *how* they achieve high turnout -- at meetings, in publications, and on the organization's Web site.

Make it easy for people to attend

- Set up carpools and ask people if they need a ride. Often, they won't volunteer that information.
- Provide child care in a separate room or nearby location, staffed by member volunteers or their teenage children. For some members the meeting will then be a welcomed opportunity to talk with other adults without taking care of kids too.
- Invite people to bring their spouses, partners, or friends. Often, their commitment is stronger if someone else close to them understands the issues.
- Provide non-alcoholic drinks or light snacks if the meeting must be held at mealtime.
- Make sure the meeting time is convenient for most people. If necessary, hold a series of meetings to accommodate people with different work schedules.
- Keep meetings brief. If your meetings drag on too long, attendance will drop off. For many groups these days, one hour would be a long meeting.
- Start and end on time. That's the only way to develop a culture of starting on time, make sure people don't leave before key decisions are made, and ensure that each participant doesn't have to invest any more time than needed.
- If applicable, choose a location where people will not feel that they are being watched by someone powerful such as their employer. (This is more important to some groups of workers, depending on how much job security people feel they have.)

Make the meetings interesting and productive

- When possible, advertise one or more specific subjects that will be discussed. Posters and leaflets should tell not only when and where the meeting will be held but also why it is worth attending. The fact that it is the regularly scheduled meeting is often not enough of a reason to come.
- Use outside speakers or videos, and advertise them in advance as well. Be sure, however, that they are relevant to people's concerns and are brief and to the point.
- Ask people to introduce themselves if the group is small enough and they don't already know each other.
- Briefly go over the agenda so participants can see what will be covered and what to bring up when. Remind people what was decided at previous meetings and what has been done since then so the purpose of *this* meeting -- to take further steps -- is clear
- Before discussion, ask that those who talk a lot give others a chance and that those who aren't talkative make an effort to share their thoughts. When feasible, give everyone a chance to make a few notes on a particular topic and then go around the room asking people to share. This gives extroverts a chance to collect their thoughts and makes introverts more likely to speak.
- Plan ways for people to participate. Give as many as possible assignments such as making a report, leading a discussion, taking notes, or arranging for beverages.

Then structure the meeting to ensure discussion. Depending on the size of the whole group, breaking into smaller groups for discussion may help.

- Make sure the person chairing the meeting welcomes participation, keeps a few people from dominating, and asks for other opinions. The chair should also bring the discussion back to the topic at hand when necessary and summarize what's been decided when there really is nothing more to say about it.
- Try to give specific information those participating wouldn't have if they didn't attend.
- Make sure speakers and discussion leaders reflect the diversity of the group so participants don't feel the meeting (and organization) only "belongs" to certain people.
- Plan at least one discussion of actions that can be taken to deal with issues raised at the meeting. Committee members can ask people at the meeting to help them research a problem further, talk to others who are affected, draw up a petition, etc. Have them report on progress at the next meeting. This process can keep people from feeling that "nothing ever gets decided at our meetings."

Use one meeting to build for the next

- Promote the next meeting while people are together and say what will be covered.
- Ask each person to give you one or two names of people they think they could bring to the next meeting. By writing down those names, you will make people feel they should

follow through. Tell them to let you know if people they contact give a reason for not planning to come—no transportation or child care, mad at the organization for some reason, not a convenient time, etc. Then together you can try to figure out what to do about that problem.

- Thank people for coming and recognize that their time is precious.