Quick Reference Handout 9.2: Effective Meetings—Tips for PC/PB and Committee Chairs/Co-Chairs

Effective meetings encourage sound, data-based, inclusive decision making. Members participate, feel involved, and choose to remain active. Ineffective meetings often lead to poor decision making. They discourage engagement and retention, and can make it harder to recruit new members. Be aware of **warning signs** like the following:

- High levels of tension and conflict
- Divisions among different groups of members—providers vs. consumers, new vs. veteran members
- Limited participation in discussion—a few members do most of the talking; consumers do not speak out
- Lack of respectful listening to each member
- Low attendance—trouble reaching quorum
- Inability to complete scheduled tasks and make needed decisions
- Time spent on topics that are not on the agenda
- A feeling that the PC/PB or committee is not making progress or making a difference

Here are some tips and strategies for planning and running effective PC/PB and committee meetings.[1]

1. **Plan the meeting carefully,** with PC/PB support staff help:
   - Establish meeting goals and use them to guide meeting planning and implementation. Know what *must* be decided to meet PC/PB and recipient deadlines.
   - Be sure the meeting location ensures full access to all members, including individuals with limited mobility—the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires "reasonable accommodations" for individuals with disabilities including limited mobility[2] in federal programs, and accessibility should never be a barrier to participation by members or the public. If your PC/PB allows members to connect remotely, be sure the meeting room and communications equipment enable everyone to hear each other.
   - Determine what recipient staff, guest experts, or other non-members should be invited based on the agenda. Give as much advance notice as possible to these individuals. This includes identifying whether a meeting would benefit from community input, then actively reaching out to targeted groups.
   - Arrange for interpretation if needed, so all members can participate fully.

2. **Develop a clear agenda to structure the meeting** that:

   - Starts with core topics that are almost always included (a "standing agenda").

   - For full PC/PB meetings, includes items identified for action at the Executive Committee meeting.

   - States what must be accomplished by the end of the meeting—for Committee meetings, this includes tasks that must be completed so recommendations can be made at the next Executive Committee meeting.

   - Lists in order every activity or topic of discussion planned for the meeting.

   - Schedules the most critical items relatively early in the agenda, when attendance is highest, to assure adequate time for discussion.

   - Includes timeframes (starting and ending times) for the entire meeting and for each item.

   - Specifies who will present information for each agenda item (such as a committee chair or staff member).

   - Clarifies which items involve action items and which are for discussion only.

   - References relevant materials, preferably available in order and numbered by agenda item.

   - Is finalized by the Chair/Co-Chair, working with PC/PB support staff.

   - Is sent out and posted online as required by open meeting/sunshine laws and PC/PB policies and procedures.

3. **Be sure all needed materials are provided:**

   - Identify needed materials well ahead.

   - Approve materials so PCS staff can distribute them at least several days in advance, including minutes of the last meeting and a timed agenda, plus information needed for decision making.

   - Be sure printed versions of materials are made available for members who need them—do not assume that all members can print out materials—and/or project them on a laptop or tablet during the meeting.

   - If your PC/PB includes members who read their materials on a smartphone rather than on a computer, avoid sending materials in PDF format.

   - Provide materials to members of the public so they can understand and follow the discussion (especially materials not projected or not easily readable on a large screen).

   - Make materials as concise as possible, write them in plain language, and present them in user-friendly formats.

   - Provide electronic or printed copies of PowerPoint presentations.

4. **Be sure other materials that might be needed for reference during the meetings are readily available.** Examples include Bylaws, policies and procedures, ground rules/Code of Conduct, the PC/PB or committee work plan, service category definitions, most recent priorities and allocations. Often the Chair and PCS staff work together to ensure that such documents are available at every meeting on a flash drive or in hard copy.

5. **Be sure meetings are open and accessible to the public and that people who attend feel welcome.** In addition to following all local or state open meeting/sunshine law requirements, comply with RWHAP legislative requirements for well-publicized open meetings, public access to materials provided at meetings, and access to minutes. After member introductions, the Chair can ask members of the public to introduce themselves.

   Establish and carefully follow policies and procedures for public comment, including whether people need to sign up, how long they may speak, etc. Provide a public comment period at the beginning and/or end of each meeting. Allow structured public input to certain discussions at committee meetings. You may want to provide an opportunity for public input on a particular discussion topic during a PC/PB meeting, managing the process to receive that input and maintain order, and then give PC/PB members time for discussion.

6. **Establish and consistently enforce a "code of conduct" or "ground rules"** that apply to everyone. Here are some commonly used ground rules. Establish your own, project them, or post a copy in your meeting room. As Chair, enforce them consistently.

Example Ground Rules for PC/PB Meetings and Committee Meetings

For PC/PB or committee members and the public:

- Treat everyone with respect.

- Let every member or recognized guest speak, without interruptions.

- Focus on issues, not individuals. Do not attack people or criticize them personally.

- Help everyone understand the discussion by using plain language, avoiding use of acronyms and complex terms, and not assuming knowledge of past actions.

- Follow the direction of the Chair; for example, where necessary, observe limits set by the Chair on speaking time for individuals, and give each member an opportunity to speak before calling on members who have already spoken on the issue.

- When information is shared in confidence, maintain that confidence. Do not share information on anyone's HIV status, medical condition, or personal situation unless the individual has told you it can be shared publicly.

For PC/PB or committee members:

- Follow the decision making process in the Bylaws—or agree on a special process prior to discussion.

- Know when to be an advocate and when to be a planner—recognize your responsibility to present and consider the concerns of specific communities or people living with HIV (PLWH) subpopulations, and to make decisions that consider the needs of all PLWH.

- Make decisions based on the best available data, not your own self-interest.

- If you feel a proposed action or process does not follow the Bylaws or policies and procedures, immediately but politely bring that to the attention of the Chair.

- Accept and support decisions made by the PC/PB in the agreed-upon manner, regardless of your personal position.

- Speak positively about the PC/PB and its members in public. Address problems with the group, not outside it.

- Take responsibility not only for following these ground rules, but also for speaking out to assure that other members follow them.

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7. **As Chair, provide informed meeting management and facilitation:**

   - Follow simplified *Robert's Rules of Order* or other agreed-upon procedures.

   - Start and end on time—be prepared to extend discussion on a topic when necessary, but explain how this will affect the rest of the meeting.

   - Follow the established agenda unless the group approves an agenda revision (and open meeting laws permit this).

   - Keep track of policy decisions and action items during the meeting.

   - Use an agreed-upon decision-making process that is familiar to all participants—whether a show of hands or a secret ballot.

   - Encourage active participation by all members. If you feel consumers or some other group are not being heard, ask for their input.

   - Maintain order and respectful interaction.

   - Establish a balance between "doing business" and building a sense of teamwork.

8. **Learn from experience.** Ask for advice and help in improving meetings:

   - Try going around the table at the end of the meeting, asking everyone to comment on what went well and what should be improved.

   - Several times a year, ask members and guests to complete a written assessment of meeting content, flow, management, use of member time, and productivity/results.

9. **Ask that minutes be completed promptly,** review them quickly as Chair/Co-Chair, ask for approval at the next meeting, and work with staff to be sure they are posted on the PC/PB web-site within 6-8 weeks after the meeting.

References

1 Refined from information from the Training Guide: Preparing Planning Body Members, HIV/AIDS Bureau, 2002. Developed by Mosaica; updated by EGM Consulting, LLC; last updated April 2019.

2 See "Introduction to the ADA" (undated), at https://www.ada.gov/ada_intro.htm.