



Gathering Ideas & Assessing Needs

Hosting a Public Meeting

Once you have established your group, open meetings are a great way to stay in touch, invite new members, find new volunteers, and keep the community engaged.

When planning your meetings you need to consider your purpose and goal for gathering people and be sure to stay on task. Allow conversation to flow between and listen deeply to what is being expressed. It can be helpful to have a couple of activities or topics in your back pocket if the conversation is slow to start.

Here are some things to keep in mind to plan a successful meeting.

1. Planning to Ensure Accessibility

- Host at least two meetings on the same topic, one in the afternoon and one in the evening, so that more people have a chance to attend.
- Schedule your evening meetings late enough (7 p.m. or after) so those with jobs that end at 5 p.m. have enough time to pick up their kids, commute, etc.

2. Considerations for Materials

- Bring all printed materials in alternative formats (such as any languages that are represented in your building and large print)
- Ensure name tags are available for all speakers and participants.

3. Before the Meeting

- Share meeting information at least two weeks in advance so that your community has adequate time to plan for attendance. For example, if you live in a building, post on a message board, if you live in a house, post in a community centre if available.
- Find people who can help with interpretation for those who don't speak English.

4. Facilitating the Meeting

- Offer caregiving support during the meeting.
- Set up your room with several round tables so that participants can interact with each other – avoid the folding chair “assembly in front of a panel” set up at all costs.
- Set the tone of the meeting by saying that everyone in the room has valuable input to share, and that we should be mindful of interrupting and shutting down people's ideas.
- For longer meetings, schedule a break so that people have the opportunity to use the restroom without missing any discussion.
- Find ways to get everyone involved in the meeting. This means ensuring people with hearing or vision issues are seated in good places where they can both see and hear the material being presented. Be sure there is plenty of room between tables and chairs for assistive devices such as walkers, scooters and canes.
- Give a clear, synthesized outline of your group purpose, project or issue at the beginning of the meeting – don't assume that participants are arriving with all the information they'll need to meaningfully engage.
- Describe all visual aids when presenting them – just because a chart or graph is clear to staff doesn't mean people will interpret it in the same way.
- Use inclusive, straightforward language both when presenting and when speaking to participants.

- Ask open-ended questions. If you are not sure what this means then consider if your question can be answered with a yes or no, if you can then try to reframe your question. Maybe instead of “do you like living here?” Ask “What is your favourite thing about our community?”
- Conclude the meeting by giving a quick overview of where you are at in the process and any other initiatives you may be working on to increase awareness and transparency.
- At each step in the meeting agenda, review what was said and agreed upon before moving forward – this helps to close your transparency loop and manage the spread of misinformation.

5. After the Meeting

- Send participants home with an email address where they can reach out to you with suggestions or feedback.
- Ask for feedback – encourage participants to fill out a post-meeting survey outlining their experiences.