



MEETING TIPS: AGENDAS and Facilitation

Good meetings are a cooperative effort. All attendees know what is going on and have a stake in the outcome. No one dominates. The meeting moves along. Things get done. None of this happens by chance. A good agenda and a skilled facilitator are key.

Agenda Tips

- *Send ahead.* Give notice to members about the topics to be discussed. This gives members:
 - Opportunity to prepare for discussion instead of being surprised by topics on site;
 - More time for doing PTA business at the meeting rather than spend meeting time reading;
 - A chance to be there if they care about the topics. Don't be surprised by greater attendance.
- *Be specific.* The agenda should clearly state what decisions will be made.
 - Ask committee chairs and officers for motions in advance of the meeting. "Will you bring any motions which require action?"
 - Plan the agenda so it is not overcrowded and there are no surprises.
- *Set ground rules.* Do this with your board so all have input on the rules. You will have an easier time presiding because all have a stake in the rules keeping people on track and preventing meeting hijacking. For ground rules, consider:
 - Timed agenda. Clear beginning and end tells members you value their time. Be reasonable in the amounts of time allowed for discussion and make sure members know they can extend debate if the other meeting attendees approve.
 - Motion first before comment. Motions create the parameters for discussion. They can be amended or voted down if another option arises during debate. Motions prevent talking in circles and endless meetings.
 - Everyone gets to speak once before anyone speaks again. No one dominates. Anyone with a comment has opportunity to make it. Have the VP or secretary keep a list as hands go up.
 - Two-minutes to speak. This focuses conversation and allows time for many to speak. Have the VP or secretary help with timing. If more needs to be said, members can wait their turn and speak again.
 - Stick to the agenda. Set guidelines about how and when a new item can be added to the agenda during the meeting.
 - Treat each other with respect. Speak to the topic, not about a person. No idea is stupid.
 - Speak to the facilitator. No cross discussions, all comments are addressed to the chair. This prevents arguments and meeting hijack.



- Begin and end on time. Agree that everyone's time is valuable and you will treat everyone with respect by showing you value their time.
- *Begin and end on a positive tone.*
 - Open with a welcome, thank members for attending, provide an overview of the agenda and ground rules, and let people know how to ask a question if they need more info.
 - End with a summary of what was accomplished, tell members the PTA could not have done it without them, and thank them again for helping PTA do its work.

Facilitation Tips

Picture a conductor. The PTA meeting is the symphony. The agenda is the score. The musicians are the attendees. The attendees know their parts and how they fit into the entire piece. The President is the conductor. The President knows the score and helps attendees move through the piece together.

Prepare participants. Send out the agenda and pertinent documents with ample time for review. Encourage members to be ready for discussion. Start the meeting with an overview, remind members of rules, make sure all know they can ask questions if they are unsure how to participate.

Prepare yourself. Think about the flow of the meeting, anticipate obstacles and questions, and bring with you all necessary information so you are ready. Develop knowledge of parliamentary procedure, and help your members understand the basics so they can effectively participate in the meeting. You are strongly encouraged to take the National PTA Parliamentary Procedure e-learning course.

Be calm. If you lose it, so will others in the group. You are the voice of reason and the one protecting members from ugliness. You may need to remind participants of the ground rules or suggest a short break. Or you may need to say something to remind members why they are there, such as "This appears to be an emotional/hot topic. Remember we are all here to do what is best for children. This PTA encourages a fair exchange of ideas. Let's use respect as we discuss the motion on the floor."

Stay neutral. Do not participate in debate. While hard to do, impartiality is imperative for the group to see you as fair and to feel safe voicing opinions. Good PTAs encourage and hear all sides before making a decision. An opinionated president stops debate. This isn't your PTA—it belongs to the members.

Keep track of time. Show you respect members' time and include them in your attempt to move the meeting along. "We have 30 minutes left and a lot to cover. Is there more discussion on this item or are you ready for a vote?" "It's now 8:45PM and we still have three items to discuss. Are you all able to stay or would someone like to make a motion to postpone one of the action items to the next meeting?"



Be graceful. “I know you have more to say, but you have used your two minutes and others have their hands up. Let’s give others a chance to speak and I’ll come back to you if there is time left” is more gracious than “Sit down and be quiet.” “Time is running out. Are you ready for a vote,” is more gracious than” or “someone please call the question.” “Thank you. Anyone else perhaps have a different view?” is a nice way of saying, “wow, that was way too forceful and now no one else will raise their hand.”

Help participants. Does it appear that they are ready for a vote? That someone wants to amend the motion on the floor? That the group is ready to vote? That people are lost? Ask and assist.

Picture an orchestra. A good presider “conducts” the PTA meeting orchestra; minimizes discordant notes; helps participants blend in their parts; sets tone and rhythm; and guides all to complete the score/meeting in order to make beautiful, satisfying music together.