

# Meeting Management and Engagement Tools



THE ASSOCIATED'S  
CENTER FOR COMMUNITY   
ENGAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP

**ACHARN**  
THE SHOSHANA S. CARDIN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE



## I. OVERVIEW

There are good meetings and there are meetings with challenges.

### **Ingredients for a good meeting:**

- Strong attendance
- People arrive prepared because information has been distributed ahead of time
- Participation
- Clear objectives that are met
- Strong sense that a sensible process has been followed
- Minimum amount of time
- Decisions/recommendations are made

People feel good about being part of a meeting that is well facilitated, interactive, and results-oriented. None of this happens by accident, but is the result of thoughtful, intentional planning by the chair and professional coordinating the meeting.

### **Ingredients for a bad meeting:**

- Drone on forever
- Never seem to get to the point
- Discourage participation
- Include members spending more time checking their phones than engaging in the meeting
- Leave you wondering why you bothered to come

**In order to create the ideal meeting, three areas must be addressed.**

- Pre-work
- Meeting management
- Post meeting follow-up

## II. PRE-WORK

### **Why are we meeting?**

Meetings serve many purposes including information sharing, decision making, status checks, and brain storming.

The decision about who is invited to attend a meeting depends on what you want to accomplish. This may seem obvious, but it's important to ask yourself-who needs to be part of this conversation? When deciding who to invite to your meeting, determine what you will consider a "good outcome".

- Will the entire board/committee need to be involved?
- Do the people in the room know each other?
- Is this a discussion more appropriate for a small group?
- What topics will be discussed?
- Do you want a decision?

You should be able to define the purpose of the meeting in one or two sentences at the most. "This meeting is to plan the new campaign strategy" or "The purpose is to discuss succession planning" are examples.

To help you determine the objective of your meeting, complete this sentence:

*At the close of the meeting, I want the group to ...*

### **Do you really need a meeting?**

Once you've outlined your goals, make sure that a meeting is the vehicle to meet these goals.

Never plan a meeting whose goals can be met with an email!

This seems a simple statement, but often meetings become a series of committee reports with no time for discussion. These types of reports can be emailed in advance.

If you want people to read what you send in advance, do not read again at the meeting! Instead, use the meeting time for discussion, with the assumption that people already know the material that is being discussed. It won't take long for people to realize reading in advance is necessary for active participation.

### **What do people need to know before the meeting?**

Most of us can think of a time when we had no idea why we were invited to a meeting. Meeting organizers should consider the following when preparing participants:

- What will be covered?
- What is the length of the meeting?
- What do participants need to know in advance?

- What roles do we want people to serve in the meeting?

For example, if the purpose of the meeting is to solve a problem, ask the participants to consider solutions in advance. If you are meeting to discuss an ongoing project, ask people to summarize their progress and circulate in advance.

### **How do I prepare an agenda?**

Consider the following factors:

- Preparation—what needs to be done before the meeting to make it robust?
- Participation--which stakeholders need to be included?
- Priorities—what absolutely must be covered?
- Results—what do we need to accomplish at the meeting?
- Sequence—in what order will we cover the topics?
- Timing—how much time will we spend on each topic?
- Date and time—when will the meeting take place?
- Decisions—what vote has to be taken?
- Framing of meeting-how do we infuse meetings with Judaism, board development, inspiration and meaning?

## PRE-WORK: Jewish Values & Learning

Jewish values and learning should be fundamental to all meetings. Some suggestions for incorporating Judaism are as follows:

- Ask yourself-what makes this a Jewish meeting? Where does this meeting fall in the Jewish calendar? Is a holiday coming up? Does something special need to happen at the meeting (ex. apples and honey around Rosh Hashanah, *mishloach manot* around Purim, donuts around Chanukah)?
- Frame your discussion in the context of Jewish values (see *Panim* Jewish Values Matrix on [www.associated.org/](http://www.associated.org/) appendix)
- Share the Blessings of Sight document as a way to cultivate an attitude of gratitude. You may choose to present this document or have your group discuss this in pairs. ([www.associated.org/](http://www.associated.org/) appendix)

Ask people to share what resonates with them. Some ideas from the "Blessings of Sight" document to share are the following:

- These blessings make the mundane sacred
- Help individuals stop what they usually overlook and notice the incredible world around them
- Levels the playing field
- Allows people to take on a new frame of reference

Share Standards of Leadership document and read headers and italics. Ask board members for their reactions and thoughts. Do they adhere to these standards? Are there others that they would like to adapt? ([www.associated.org/](http://www.associated.org/) appendix)

Ask someone to prepare *dvar torah*. The *dvar torah* does not need to connect to the weekly Torah portion. It can focus on anything that speaks to the individual giving the *dvar torah*. This does not need to be delivered at the beginning of the meeting, but at a point where it would be most relevant. It is important to ask the speaker to relate the message that they are sharing back to the work of the board and organization (see online appendix for link to a document on how to prepare a *dvar torah*).

## PRE-WORK: Board/Committee Development

### **Board/Committee Development**

It is crucial to have a board/committee development component at each meeting which can be presented in diverse ways. It could be a 5-10 minute discussion around a leadership skill or important issue facing the local Jewish community. You might choose to share a case study or program highlight from your organization or a personal story that describes the impact your organization is making in the community.

## **Inspiration**

Suggested activity to conduct with your board/committee -- facilitator opens a discussion with the following:

### **Questions and Points for Participants to Consider:**

- As a volunteer, we each bring unique strengths, talents to the table.
- Ask participants to think about why they were personally asked to serve on the xxx board/committee?
- Ask participants to write down and time permitting share the following with someone in the room who they don't know well.
- Think about a time when you felt inspired. What was the situation? What types of feelings did the inspiration evoke?
- Think of someone who you consider to be a highly effective leader. What makes this person effective? What traits does he/she possess?
- Based on your discussion, come up with a definition of Inspirational Leadership. Ask the group members to share their definitions.

One example: The ability to inspire people to reach great heights of performance and success is a skill that leaders need. Passion, purpose, listening and meaning help make a leader inspirational. The ability to communicate that passion, purpose and meaning to others helps establish the inspirational culture of your organization.

- Now think about our volunteer work – any volunteer work you have done, whether serving on a board or committee, doing hands-on work, being PTA classroom parent, etc. Do we generally feel inspired when volunteering? Do we feel we are inspiring leaders? Think about why you are here. Why are you volunteering? Why are you volunteering in the Jewish community? Why are you volunteering with xxx board?
- What can we do to inspire others at this organization? How can we add inspiration to our board meetings and in our overall work with this organization? Our goal is to identify specific ways that we can add inspiration to our work.

### **Ideas for How to Inspire**

Facilitator should share a story of inspiration to demonstrate the power of story-telling.

### Bringing inspiration to our board and committees

#### **Next steps**

- Brainstorm ideas
- Ask each board member to write down his/her individual next step (not to share) about how he/she can become more inspiring and inspired!

### III. MEETING MANAGEMENT

By now you have done all of the pre-work and planning that should pave the way for an effective meeting. But there are still some areas that you need to be aware of as you facilitate the meeting:

- Rules of Engagement
- Technology
- Timing
- Participation

#### **Rules of Engagement**

It is important to have access to your organization's mission, vision and values overview at a meeting.

It pays to have a few basic rules of engagement that can be used for your meetings. Establishing these up front help make the meeting run more smoothly and make people accountable for their behavior. It is helpful to conduct an exercise with your board to establish rules of engagement so they feel ownership (For sample rules of engagement, see Appendix).

#### **Creating & Enforcing Meeting Rules of Engagement**

Ask your board/committee members to split up in groups of 2-4 and go through the following steps:

- Pick 5 rules of engagement that would make your next meeting have greater impact and meaning:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

- Narrow it to 3 from the 5 you picked.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

- Narrow it to 1 from the 3 you picked:

- 1.

Ask the members to share their rules of engagement and as a board decide on the top 3-5 that you would like to adopt. Have the rules of engagement posted at every meeting to remind board/committee members of the rules they developed together.

**Sample rules of engagement might be:**

- Have all phones/ electronic devices away and off the table
- Expectation that everyone is present for the meeting's stated parameters (on time, stay the duration, maintain focus)
- Emphasize the importance of mutual *kavod*/respect

(For more sample rules of engagement, see Appendix)

**TECHNOLOGY**

Poor meeting etiquette tends to be the culprit behind inconclusive meetings or meetings that run over-time. One of the most common meeting etiquette offenses remains the abuse of technology in meetings. That is not to say that technology cannot be a powerful tool in the boardroom setting; however, its misuses are often most distracting and wholly detrimental to meetings' success.

**Misuses of Technology and Avoiding Them**

- To start, all cell phones/ Blackberries/ pagers/ iPhones must be turned off or away on silent during meetings (a buzzing phone is just as distracting as a ringing phone!).
- Too many people take calls or send text messages or emails during meetings due to their "urgency." More discretion must be used in what constitutes an "urgent" call.

(**Urgent:** School nurse, issue with a child, family emergency. **Not Urgent:** Chatting, family news, minor home issues).

Let board/committee members know that if they need to pick up an important call, take it OUTSIDE.

If a phone is on, even if it is on silent, it may create a disturbance when someone receives text messages/ emails/ other notifications.

**Benefits of Technology**

- Conference calls or skype-in meetings enable international communication and the virtual presence of those who cannot physically attend.
- Opportunities to take advantage of meeting "apps" on iPhones, iPads, etc.
- Utilize PowerPoint and other forms of technology to make your meetings interesting and helpful to those who are visual learners.

**TIMING**

As the facilitator, insist that everyone respects the time allotted. Reward those who are punctual by starting on time.

Do not recap for latecomers.

One of the biggest tasks is time management. Time often runs out before the tasks are complete. Use your agenda as your time guide. When you notice time is running out, you may need to defer a decision or assign it to a sub-committee.

**A couple of strategies to help keep the agenda on track are:**

- Asking attendees to help keep track of the time
- Getting feedback from the group if it is clear that the entire agenda will not be completed what should be cut and what should remain.

## **PARTICIPATION**

### **1. Effective Meeting Facilitation**

An effective facilitator is not only a keeper of the ground rules, but also sets a positive, productive tone for interaction among the members. The facilitator helps the group stay focused and productive.

In many ways, a meeting is like a juggling act—a good leader keeps the balls in the air, stays focused, makes it a little entertaining, and ends with a big finish.

Remember, everyone wants somebody to lead.

Take up the role, accept it, grow with it, and you will have people coming back to your meetings.

### **2. Use the pre-work in the meeting**

Use the pre work and other information supplied prior to the meeting during the meeting. This will reinforce the need for participants to prepare. Assigning a particular topic of discussion to various people is another great way to increase involvement and interest.

### **3. Open debate and conflict**

Every group has various personalities that show up for meetings. You have both quiet members and those who try to dominate every platform. Whether facilitating or attending the meeting, you need to involve each attendee in the accomplishment of meeting goals.

While many people shy away from the idea of "conflict," there is a unique Jewish lens through which this idea can be viewed. Every page of the Talmud is a debate where people fight with people from different centuries and places from across the world! Conflict is inherent in creating a robust community. We need to value what conflict means and what it brings to the Jewish community.

While positive, healthy conflict helps promote discussion before decision-making, meeting leaders must beware of negative, personal attacks that poison the atmosphere and impede progress.

- Make it safe to disagree so that participants debate the issues on their merits.
- Don't allow the discussion to get personal.

To manage negative conflict, identify common goals, build on agreements, avoid placing blame, and have zero tolerance for personal attacks.

Consensus helps ensure that people act on decisions. It does not imply the absence of conflict, but rather the resolution of conflict in a manner acceptable to the majority. One technique for this is to pair up two people for a listening exercise (For listening exercise, see Appendix).

When voting, the following statements should be agreed by all board/committee members to ensure candor and honesty in regards to the process:

- I felt comfortable voicing my position.
- I am confident that my fellow board/committee members comprehend my position.
- I am confident that I comprehend my fellow board/committee members' positions.
- Regardless if I agree with this decision or not, I accede with it because it is in the best interest of the board/committee and organization in whole.

A leader's role here is to define the issue, manage participants, encourage brainstorming, synthesize the conversation, narrow the options, and then call for a decision.

Make sure you have a running "parking lot" list where participants can place items so you can circle back to them at a later date or later in the meeting if there is time.

#### **IV. AVOIDING OBSTACLES THAT GET IN THE WAY OF THE MEETING**

Once in the meeting, there are several things to keep in mind to ensure participant satisfaction:

- If someone is dominating the conversation, make a point of asking others for their ideas. If an individual is dominating or disruptive consistently, it may be necessary to speak privately with the individual.
- Note items that will need further discussion either at the end of the meeting if there is time or at a later date. Some leaders refer to this as the short-term parking lot and long-term parking lot.
- Watch body language of the participants and make adjustments if necessary. Maybe people need to move around or take a break from the discussion.
- Ensure that the meeting stays on topic.
- At the close of the meeting, quickly summarize next steps and inform everyone that you will be sending out a meeting summary.

#### **CREATE A VOLUNTEER CONTRACT**

It is crucial to develop this tool so that everyone is clear about the expectations. It also allows the chair or professional to meet with a board/committee member who has not performed his/her duties and suggest corrective steps (For sample contracts, see [www.associated.org/meetingmanagement/appendix](http://www.associated.org/meetingmanagement/appendix)).

#### **Encourage Participation**

Top leaders place a high value on discussion because it taps collective knowledge. Encourage people to raise objections by noticing who is quiet and then asking their opinions. You have to confront the silence so that those who disagree will not undermine you. This practice prevents the negative “parking lot” meetings that take place after the real meeting.

Make it safe for everyone to get involved by stimulating discussion. Ask open ended questions like, “What’s your reaction?” or “How do you think we could...?”

There are different ways to make sure that the conversation is open and purposeful (For World Café model for discussion, see Appendix).

#### **Manage Difficult People**

People who argue with you or talk amongst themselves can take a meeting off track in a hurry. While debate is usually healthy, some people will test the limits by arguing miniscule points or refusing to see others’ views. The trick here is direct intervention. Have a one-on-one private conversation with the disruptive person:

#### **During meetings**

- Allow them to speak, but limit the time.
- Seat the person next to the facilitator.

### **After the meeting**

- Acknowledge an issue and let the person vent or discuss.
- Point out the behaviors that you appreciate and the ones that don't work.

### **Don't Tolerate Side Meetings**

This particular disruption occurs only because we allow it to occur. When people are bored or restless, they start to whisper and are unaware of being rude or of how others view them.

Handle these side conversations by gradually escalating your intervention. First, look at the side talkers until you catch their eyes. If they don't get the message, call on them. Pull them aside after the meeting to make it clear that this behavior does not help the team.

## **V. EVALUATION, ACTION STEPS, MINUTES AND FOLLOW UP**

It is amazing how often people will complain about a meeting being a complete waste of time—but they only say so after the meeting. Get their feedback during the meeting when you can improve the meeting process right away. Feedback right after an action is an integral part of Judaism as is evident in the creation of the world in Genesis. In the days of creation, there is an order by which items are created: word, action, evaluation. The phrase "vayar Elokim ki tov" (and G-d saw that it was good) is repeated after each item was created. After each species or group that G-d created, G-d saw "that it was good." There is a great lesson to be understood from G-d's actions regarding the importance of taking a step back after each meeting and encounter to take a moment for feedback.

Take continuous improvement to another level by debriefing.

Future meetings should reflect this evaluation.

Leave 5-10 minutes at the end of the meeting to evaluate the meeting or ask for written feedback. Don't skip this important process.

### **Minutes and Action Steps**

The minutes should record who attended, what was discussed, any decisions that were made, and any action items assigned. Each organization has its own model regarding the level of detail in the minutes.

Soon after the meeting, action steps and minutes of the meeting should be distributed to all members of the committee, whether or not they attended.

People will most effectively contribute to results if they get started on action items immediately. A delay in the distribution of minutes may dampen the post-meeting enthusiasm.

Your actions following the meeting are as important as your pre-work.

### **Effective Meeting Follow Up**

Respecting deadlines will help achieve results from your meetings. The chair and professional should follow up with each person who has an action step midway between meetings.

#### **Be sure to ask probing questions such as:**

- What can I do to be helpful in meeting the deadline?
- Is there anything holding you back from being successful?
- Are there areas that I can help you prioritize?
- Is there any other resource that you need to accomplish the task?

Simply asking, "How is it going?" is not offering much opportunity for a person to share his/her concerns. Be specific in your check-ins.

## **APPENDIX**

### **Important Questions to Ponder**

- How would you rate the level of inclusiveness amongst the group?
- How easy do you find it to express your ideas or opinions with fellow board/committee members and the executive team?
- How comfortable to you feel in receiving constructive criticism or participating in debates against opposing views of and from your fellow board/committee members?
- Are you provided with the appropriate information or guidelines prior to meetings with relevant background information in order to engage in appropriate discussion or decision making?
- Does the configuration of your meetings vary, i.e., break-out sessions, guest speakers, etc.?
- Is outside non-affiliated information (such as articles or news journals) used to help provide additional points or information related to the topic(s) of your meetings?
- Is the information discussed at the meetings coming from the lay leaders AND the professional staff of the organization?
- Do board/committee members hesitate to ask for additional information if needed?
- Does the Chair of the Board/Committee seek and value opinions and discussion from all members?
- How is it ensured that everybody is able to participate in the meetings?
- Do board/committee members feel praised if they ask good or relevant questions?
- How much time is spent in analyzing the pros and cons of decision before it is made?
- In making a decision through the board/committee, is “what’s best for the organization” a top priority over personal aspirations?
- What are the tools for assessment or self-evaluation to rate the overall performance of the board/committee?
- How does the board/committee handle making difficult and/or complicated decisions on issues that may be controversial?
- What are your suggestions to helping the board/committee augment the way you work together?

## **APPENDIX**

### **Robust Conversation: Sample Discussions to Ponder**

“I know that you believe you understand what you think I said, but I’m not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant.” – Robert McCloskey

### **Catalytic Questions**

Thoughtful questions for dialogue that invite the board/committee to think more contextually and expansively about a given issue can be incorporated into regular meetings. Consider posing the kinds of catalytic questions offered by Richard P. Chait, William P. Ryan, and Barbara E. Taylor that invite creativity, exploration, and do not depend largely on data and logic to answer:

- What three adjectives or short phrases best characterize this organization?
- In five years, what will be most strikingly different about this organization?
- On what list, which you would create, would you like this organization to rank at the top?
- Five years from today, what will the organizations key constituents consider the most important legacy of the current board?
- What will be most different about the organization or how we govern in five years?
- How would we respond if a donor offered a \$50 million endowment to the one organization in our field that had the best idea for becoming a more valuable public asset?
- How would we look as a takeover target by a potential or actual competitor?
- If we could successfully takeover another organization, which one would we choose and why?
- What has a competitor done successfully that we would not choose to do as a matter of principle?
- What have we done that a competitor might not do as a matter of principle?
- What headline would we most/least like to see about this organization?
- What is the biggest gap between what the organization claims it is and what it actually is?

Source: Richard P. Chait, William P. Ryan, and Barbara E. Taylor, *Governance as Leadership: Reframing the Work of Nonprofit Boards* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2005).

## **APPENDIX**

### **Launch a Robust Discussion**

Associated with in-depth discussion is also the ability to allow the board to ask questions, find potential solutions and help define a problem or issue. It is important to encourage your board members to produce solutions based on analysis as opposed to personal aspirations. While each meeting is different in terms of issues and discussion, generative thinking is important when dealing with large issues in which a lot of decisions need to be made.

Robust discussions can be potentially stressful. People will express their ideas quickly and the discussions may become loud and noisy. While this may not have a direct impact on the solution, this process will only make the solution more powerful. Many points of view will be expressed ensuring the robust discussion and it is important to start the conversation slow. Useful techniques include one of the board/committee member's playing devil's advocate. This is a great way to ensure the validity of the decision that you are about to make.

The following are Mechanisms for Robust Discussions as presented by Chait, Ryan, and Taylor:

- ***Silent Starts***—Prior to the start of a major discussion, but with advance notice, set aside two minutes for each board/committee member to anonymously write on an index card the most important question the board/committee and management should consider relevant to the issue at hand. Collect and randomly redistribute the cards. Ask each person to read his or her card aloud, and then invite everyone with a card that has a similar question to do the same. Tally the numbers. Continue until all cards have been read aloud. Identify the question(s) most important to the group and any questions that, once raised, even if only by one person, the board/committee now recognizes as crucial.
- ***One-Minute Memos***—at the conclusion of a major discussion, reserve two to three minutes for board/committee members to write down, anonymously or not, what they would have said next had there been time to continue the discussion. Collect the cards for review by the chair and professional leading the group. No board/committee member suffers the pain of an undelivered remark or an unstated concern, and the organization's leadership no longer wonders what remained on everyone's minds.
- ***Future Perfect History***—in breakout groups, develop a narrative that explains in the future tense how the organization moved from its current state to an envisioned state. For example, five years from now the college will have achieved greater student and faculty diversity as a result of taking the following steps. Compare the storylines for common pathways as well as attractive, imaginative "detours."
- ***Counterpoints***—randomly designate two to three group members to make the most powerful counterarguments to initial recommendations or embryonic consensus. Or ask management to present the strongest case against (as well as for) a staff recommendation.

- **Role Plays**—Ask subsets of the board to assume the perspective of different constituent groups likely to be affected by the issue at hand. How would these stakeholders frame the issue and define a successful outcome? What would each group regard as a worst-case scenario?
- **Breakouts**—Small groups expand available “airtime.” Ease participation by reticent board/committee members, and counter “groupthink.” On topics of substantive, strategic, or symbolic significance, small groups, even within 30 minutes, can raise important considerations. Do we have the right questions? How else might the issue be framed? What values are at stake? What would constitute a successful outcome? In plenary session, the board/committee can search for consensus, conflicts, and a better understanding of the matter at hand.
- **Simulations**—Committee and board members can simulate some decisions, not to second-guess the decision, but to provoke discussion about the trade-offs that management faces. For example, trustees of an independent college or school could review the redacted applications of the next 20 students who would have been admitted last year if the institution opted for larger enrollments and additional revenues rather than greater selectivity and higher quality.
- **Surveys**—Administer an anonymous survey prior to discussion of a major issue. For instance:
  - What should be atop the board/committee’s agenda next year?
  - What are the most attractive, least attractive, most worrisome aspects of the proposed strategic plan?
  - What external factors will most affect the organization in the next year?
  - What are we overlooking at the organization’s peril?
  - What is the most valuable step we could take to be a better board/committee?

The answers would be collated for board/committee discussion. The discussion would not start in response to the first person to speak on an issue, but by an analysis of the collective responses.

Source: Richard P. Chait, William P. Ryan, and Barbara E. Taylor, *Governance as Leadership: Reframing the Work of Nonprofit Boards* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2005)

## **APPENDIX**

### **External Links (available via [www.associated.org/meetingengagement/appendix](http://www.associated.org/meetingengagement/appendix))**

Panim Jewish Values Matrix, click here: [http://panim.bbyo.org/educators/JEWISH\\_VALUES\\_MATRIX.pdf](http://panim.bbyo.org/educators/JEWISH_VALUES_MATRIX.pdf)

Blessings of Sight document, click here:

[http://www.associated.org/local\\_includes/downloads/57406.pdf](http://www.associated.org/local_includes/downloads/57406.pdf)

Standards of Leadership document, click here:

[http://www.associated.org/local\\_includes/downloads/45366.pdf](http://www.associated.org/local_includes/downloads/45366.pdf)

Sample Rules of Engagement (both pages), click here: <http://www.associated.org/page.aspx?id=255131>,

<http://www.associated.org/page.aspx?id=255130>

Video on leadership, click here:

[http://www.ted.com/talks/itay\\_talgam\\_lead\\_like\\_the\\_great\\_conductors.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/itay_talgam_lead_like_the_great_conductors.html)

Listening exercise, click here: <http://www.associated.org/page.aspx?id=255136>

Sample Contracts, click here: [http://www.associated.org/local\\_includes/downloads/57407.pdf](http://www.associated.org/local_includes/downloads/57407.pdf)

World Cafe, click here: <http://www.associated.org/page.aspx?id=255139>