

Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association

Career Center Tips: **Building a Team or Wasting Time?**



Trouble Signs Your Meeting Isn't Productive

Anyone who has worked in a park and recreation office environment knows that meetings are inevitable. They also know that many of these gatherings seem to serve no purpose. In fact, many experts indicate that nearly 30% of meetings can be a waste of time.

Often, you'll be the person in charge of leading a meeting, so it's important to be able to distinguish between a gathering that's necessary and one that's taking time out of everyone's day. Here are a few signs that your meeting could be a time-waster -- and suggestions for how to correct that:

1. You've left nothing uncovered.

While it's a good idea to have a meeting agenda, it shouldn't start to look like a follow-up to "War and Peace." The onus is on you, as the organizer, to determine what must be covered and what can be left out. Ask yourself if each employee who's attending has a stake in the majority of items on the agenda. If not, then you either need to trim the list of invitees or revise the plan. Also, just because you've set aside a certain period of time for the get-together, that doesn't mean you need to fill every minute. Look through the agenda for repetitive items, which can be combined, or topics that can be left for another meeting.

2. You invite everyone whether they are needed or not!

Look through your list of attendees to determine if everyone must be included in the discussion. Often, people are invited as a courtesy instead of out of necessity. A lengthy participant list also may indicate that you are trying to accomplish too much in a single meeting. For instance, say you've been tasked with scheduling a meeting about your park and recreation department's Web site redesign. You decide to invite a representative from every division, your board and commission members, etc. The problem is the technical jargon may go over the heads of those on the editorial team, while the discussion on types of content and article lengths won't be relevant to the IT group. In that instance, it's best to plan two separate, shorter meetings, both of which will be much more targeted.

3. The meeting runs over an hour.

Time is a precious commodity, especially in a recession, when everyone is being asked to take on more work. So having people sit in a meeting for longer than an hour is asking a lot. Plus, it's likely that attendees will start to lose focus as the gathering runs on. If you must schedule more time, try to get people to interact, offer them snacks or vary the speakers to help everyone remain engaged. For very long meetings, schedule a break so people can stretch their legs and check their messages.

4. You use too many visuals.

Visuals, such as PowerPoint slides, can be effective for simplifying more complex ideas or reinforcing information. But they can also bog down the discussion. Instead, distribute the visual elements to attendees before the get-together, so everyone has time to review them. Because participants will be familiar with the information when they get to the meeting, you can simply highlight the most important parts, and move through the agenda more quickly.

5. Meetings are simply a scheduling habit.

If you have regularly scheduled meetings, you may want to step back and determine if it's necessary to continue doing so. For instance, if you're having a difficult time coming up with enough agenda items for each gathering, or the meetings are getting progressively shorter, you may need to adjust the frequency.

By paying attention to the various dynamics of the gatherings you schedule and making adjustments as necessary, you'll know that the get-togethers you organize are successful and that the participants will find them valuable as well.