

Collaboration, Responsibility and Successful Projects

A successful project is a collaboration between members, staff, facilitator(s), consultants and affected stakeholder interest groups. Consensus-based processes and decisions, developed working with diverse stakeholder interests affected by the issue(s), takes time to educate members' on the range of issues and possible solutions. Members have different levels of expertise and knowledge on the issues and require different levels of preparation/education ("getting up to speed") before they are prepared to evaluate options and make decisions. This is especially relevant to consensus-based decisions that strive for unanimity, or at a minimum a 75% level of support. In consensus-based processes one is not dealing with a simple majority decision requirement, instead the full range of issues and options are evaluated with the goal of ensuring stakeholder interests are addressed to the extent possible, and at a minimum are fairly considered. The reality is that consensus decisions, once reached, are durable, efficacious, long-lasting, and will have achieved the support of most if not all of the stakeholder interests affected by the issue(s).

A project will be successful to the extent that staff, facilitator(s) and project consultants plan meetings and meeting objectives, ensure members receive relevant materials, and design and prepare agenda packets, worksheets, surveys, and summary reports sufficiently in advance of meetings.

A project will be successful to the extent that members' (committee/workgroup/commission, council, task force, etc.) review materials, study the issues, consult with constituent stakeholders (not other members) between meetings, complete pre and between meeting assignments, and prepare prior to the first meeting and between subsequent meetings. If there are documents and/or information members believe should be evaluated they should let staff/facilitator(s)/consultants know. Similarly, if there are meeting objectives and/or agenda items member's think should be added to the agenda, they should identify them during "Agenda Review" and during the "Next Steps" phase of each meeting where next meeting agenda items are requested.

There are also other factors affecting meetings, including but not limited to:

- How much time is allocated for the meeting. This is usually driven by limited resources (i.e., time, money, travel authorization).
- What the agreed upon objectives are for the meeting, again based on time, resources, and available relevant information.
- Staff and member crossover conflicts between different workgroups/committees.
- Different levels of expertise, experience and knowledge between the members.
- The need to bring all members up to speed sufficient to craft consensus recommendations that enjoy support across diverse stakeholder interests.

If a member, after letting staff/facilitator(s) know their perspective, still does not believe the agenda of a meeting (i.e., organizational meetings) is sufficiently substantive to justify travel costs and/or their time, they may consider sending an alternate who lives closer to the meeting location.

In summary, meeting success is a group effort requiring collaboration, cooperation, planning, commitment, time and resources. It is the responsibility of staff, facilitators, consultants, members, stakeholder groups, and the public to ensure meetings are productive and successful. In short, it is "our" responsibility.

Sincerely,



Jeff Blair