

## Tip Sheet: Effective Planning Council/Body (PC/B) Meetings<sup>1</sup>

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- 1. Be sure members and staff understand the importance of effective meetings to Planning Council/Body (PC/B) success.** A PC/B's ability to carry out its responsibilities for needs assessment, planning, and other decision-making roles, while ensuring broad-based community input, depends heavily on its ability to hold effective meetings.

When meetings are effective, planning body and committee members are more likely to participate, feel involved, and choose to remain active. Effective meetings therefore contribute to member recruitment and retention as well as to the successful completion of planning body tasks.

- 2. Recognize the symptoms of ineffective meetings so that changes can be made.** They include the following:

- High levels of conflict
- Divisions among members
- Limited participation
- Low attendance
- Inability to complete scheduled tasks and decision making
- A feeling that time is being wasted
- A feeling that the PC/B is not making progress or making a difference

- 3. Plan the meeting carefully:**

- Establish meeting goals and use them to guide meeting planning and implementation
- Plan the meeting location and ensure full access to all members, including individuals with limited mobility. Remember that the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires “reasonable accommodations” for individuals with disabilities including limited mobility<sup>2</sup> in federal programs – and a PC/B needs to ensure that accessibility is never a barrier to participation by PC/B members or the public.
- Determine necessary attendance based on the agenda, and give as much advance notice as possible to needed individuals (anyone besides members and regularly attending PCS and recipient staff); this includes identifying whether a meeting would benefit greatly from community input, then actively urging the attendance of targeted groups

- 4. Develop an agenda that:**

- Starts with a core “standing” agenda that includes items that are almost always included
- Includes items identified for action at the Executive Committee meeting before the PC/B meeting
- States what must be accomplished by the end of the meeting
- Lists in order every activity or topic of discussion planned for the meeting

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<sup>1</sup> Refined from information from the *Training Guide: Preparing Planning Body Members*, HIV/AIDS Bureau, 2002. Developed by Mosaica; updated by EGM Consulting, LLC.

<sup>2</sup> See “Introduction to the ADA” (undated), at [https://www.ada.gov/ada\\_intro.htm](https://www.ada.gov/ada_intro.htm).

- Schedules the most critical items relatively early in the agenda, when attendance is highest, to assure adequate time for discussion and full participant attention
- Includes time frames (starting and ending times) for the entire meeting and for each item
- Specifies who will present information for each section (such as a committee chair)
- Clarifies which items involve action items and which are for discussion only
- References relevant materials, preferably available in order and numbered by agenda item
- Is finalized by the Chair, working with PC Support staff
- Is sent out and posted online as required by open meeting/Sunshine laws and PC/B policies and procedures

**5. Be sure all needed materials are provided:**

- Identify needed materials at the Executive Committee meeting
- Distribute materials in advance, including minutes of the last meeting and a timed agenda
- Be sure printed versions of materials are made available before and at meetings for those members who need them – do not assume that all members can print out materials or project them on a laptop or tablet during the meeting
- Make materials as concise as possible, write them in plain language, and present them in user-friendly formats
- Provide electronic or printed copies of PowerPoint presentations
- Be sure PCS staff or an officer has available copies of the Bylaws, policies and procedures, ground rules, and other relevant documents (such as the current integrated plan, list of service priorities, and current allocations by service category) in case they are needed during discussion

**6. Be sure meetings are open and accessible to the public.** In addition to following all local or state open meeting/sunshine law requirements, comply with Ryan White legislative requirements for well publicized open meetings, public access to materials disseminated at meetings, and access to minutes. Establish and carefully follow policies and procedures for public comment; this might include providing a public comment period at the beginning and/or end of each meeting, and in some cases allowing the public to comment on proposed actions – often at committee meetings.

**7. Establish and consistently follow and enforce “groundrules”** that are understood and agreed upon by everyone – and apply to both members and the public. Here are some commonly used groundrules; establish your own, project them or post a copy in your meeting room:

- Treat everyone with respect – as an intelligent person with a legitimate right to be a part of discussions and decision making
- Let every member or recognized speak, without interruptions
- Follow the direction of the Chair; for example, where necessary, observe limits set by the Chair on speaking time for individuals, and give each member an opportunity to speak before calling on members who have already spoken on the issue
- If you believe a proposed action or process is inconsistent with the Bylaws or policies

and procedures, immediately but politely bring that to the attention of the Chair, either directly or through the PCS staff

- Participate in decision making that follows the process established in the Bylaws or established for a specific issue prior to discussion
- Do not attack people or criticize them personally – focus on issues, not individuals
- Know when to be an advocate and when to be a planner – recognize your responsibility to present and consider the concerns of specific communities or PLWH subpopulations, and to make decisions that consider the needs of all PLWH
- Make decisions based on the best available data; do not urge actions based on your own narrow self-interest
- Help new members, and non-members understand the discussion by using plain language, avoiding use of abbreviations and complex terminology, and not assuming a knowledge of past actions
- When information is shared in confidence, maintain that confidence; do not share information on anyone’s HIV status, medical condition, or personal situation unless the individual indicates it can be shared publicly
- Accept and support decisions made by the PC/B in the agreed-upon manner, regardless of your personal position
- Speak positively about the PC/B and its members in public; address problems with the group, not outside it
- Take responsibility not only for following these groundrules, but also for speaking out to assure that other members follow them

**8. Provide informed meeting management and facilitation of the meeting,** by the Chair, with support as needed:

- Follow simplified *Robert’s Rules of Order* or other agreed-upon procedures
- Start and end on time
- Follow the established agenda unless the group approves an agenda revision (and meeting laws permit this)
- Keep track of policy decisions and action items during the meeting
- Use an agreed-upon decision-making process that is familiar to all participants
- Encourage active participation by all members
- Establish a balance between “doing business” and addressing other tasks, including maintaining a supportive relationship among members

**9. Assess and learn from experience,** by asking members and the public for advice and assistance in improving meetings.

- Try going around the table and asking everyone to comment on the positive and negative aspects of the meeting, and to offer suggestions for improving future meetings
- Periodically use a written assessment of meeting content, flow, management, use of member time, and productivity/results

**10. Complete minutes promptly,** and make them available for review by the Chair (and Secretary if there is one), approval at the next meeting, and posting on the PC/B website for use by the public within 6-8 weeks following the meeting.