

Tips to Prepare a Successful Agenda

You've just been elected chair of your neighborhood association and all of a sudden your email box is filled with requests from City bureaus, neighbors and developers wanting to come and share their issue, proposal, ideas and concerns with your members. How do you sort through all of the requests and decide on the agenda for this month's meeting? How do you make sure that there's enough time to fully discuss an issue, especially when people don't agree?

Always Prepare

Plan out your agenda at least two weeks in advance, asking board members for agenda items and sorting through any requests for time on the agenda that you may have had. Review minutes from the previous meeting to see if there are any items that were tabled or left unresolved. Were tasks assigned that must be reported? Be reasonable about the time that will be needed for each agenda item and discussion that will follow. Be sure to note the time for each agenda item and any action that will be needed. Also, set a predetermined ending time for the meeting.

If possible, send the final agenda out in advance. This will both help your presenters mentally prepare for the time allotted for their item and generate interest from the public to attend your meeting.

Points to consider when preparing an agenda:

- Honor everyone's time! Keep the agenda as short as possible. People begin to get tired and may leave the meeting after about 90 minutes. It's a great idea to appoint a timekeeper to stay on time and assist the chair with interrupting or directing someone to wrap up a comment or presentation.
- When drawing up the agenda, you must first determine the time needed for each topic. You likely will know which topics will need more time than others. Be sure to take into consideration the time that will be needed for discussion and any action needed. Place "time allocated" right next to each agenda item.
- Mix it up! Plan the agenda so that important items, big decisions and votes are mixed in with informational presentations and other elements. Don't save big decisions until the end of the meeting, as people will likely be tired or have left the meeting.
- Never let the same person present two topics in a row. Presenters will likely extend the time allocated and your audience may lose interest.
- Ask for additions at the opening of the meeting, before the agenda is approved.