



## ACLU-NC Activist Toolkit: Running an Effective Meeting

Whether you are an experienced activist or someone taking action for the first time, the [ACLU of Northern California](http://www.aclunc.org) is here to help every step of the way. Visit our Web site at [www.aclunc.org](http://www.aclunc.org).

The [ACLU-NC Action Center](http://www.aclunc.org/action/activist_toolkit) contains many resources for activists, including this Activist Toolkit with detailed instructions on everything an activist needs. Download instructions and tips on these topics from [www.aclunc.org/action/activist\\_toolkit](http://www.aclunc.org/action/activist_toolkit):

- Running an effective meeting
- Tabling at community events
- Writing an advocacy letter
- Hosting an event for your friends and neighbors
- Publicizing an event
- Planning a campaign

This part of the toolkit will teach you how to run an effective meeting, with pointers on subjects like these.

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Have a Purpose          | 2 |
| Arrange Your Logistics  | 2 |
| Send Your Announcements | 2 |
| Establish Ground Rules  | 3 |
| Minutes                 | 3 |
| Follow-up               | 3 |
| The Best Meetings       | 4 |
| A Sample Agenda         | 4 |

The accomplishments of any activist group are dependent upon focused planning and implementation meetings. For new activists who become interested in contributing to the organization, their introduction is often attendance at a board or subcommittee meeting. For longtime activists, one's sense of achievement and satisfaction can be influenced by the efficiency and effectiveness with which meetings are run. For these and many more reasons, the ability to run an effective meeting is a crucial tool in the activists' kit.

## Have a Purpose

Never meet just for the sake of meeting. Do you need to have a strategy session, plan an event, provide education/training, fulfill governance requirements (for example, voting for officers)? Whatever the reason, you should *prepare an agenda in advance and stick to it* as closely as possible.

## Prioritize

Order the issues to be discussed, ensuring that pressing business is not left to the end. In even the best-run meetings, items can occasionally require more time than budgeted. You want to ensure that necessary business has been handled with the attention it deserves.

## Consult

Discuss the agenda with other members and any executive or other committees before finalizing it. This will ensure there is group consensus to keep the meeting, and discussions of each agenda item, on track.

Once the agenda is finalized, distribute it in advance of the meeting. Include any necessary supporting information (e.g., explanatory materials regarding a new item of business).

## Arrange Your Logistics

- Who needs to be at the meeting?
- What sort of space will you need?
- Do you need any equipment?
- Is the location suitable, i.e., is it large enough, wheelchair accessible, reachable by public transit, sufficient parking, and comfortable temperature?

It's always a good idea to arrive early to set up furniture, AV equipment, distribute photocopies, prepare presentations, and set out refreshments. Other helpful preparation can include nametags and directional signs posted in key spots at the facility (both in the building and from parking or access areas).

## Send Your Announcements

Although most members will have the meeting calendared, it is **essential** to send announcements both a few weeks and a few days before the meeting. These reminders can include a draft agenda and notice of special guests, speakers, or presentations. If minutes from the last minute have not previously been sent, they could be included with the announcement.

## **Establish Ground Rules**

- Who will facilitate the meeting and how will it be run?
- Will you use a system like Robert's Rules of Order?
- If not, how will you make decisions?
- Under what procedures will each attendee have the opportunity to speak?

Make sure these rules are *clear*, agreeable, and known by all attendees before the meeting begins. (In the midst of a dispute is never a good time to establish such rules.)

## **Facilitator**

The chair or facilitator “conducts” the meeting, ensuring flow and forward direction. Some meetings may have both a chairperson and a facilitator. Choose a facilitator before the meeting begins.

A facilitator may note the attitude and body language of each attendee, ideally creating each attendee personally as they enter. Three minutes of personal chat one-on-one before a meeting can save 20 minutes of everyone's time during a meeting. Judicious use of humor and short breaks are important tools for a skilled facilitator.

## **Courtesy**

No matter which system of rules or procedures are used to run the meeting, courtesy from the chair and between attendees must always be honored. The chair sets the tone. Courtesy includes starting and ending on time, and actively engaging all attendees in the business of the meeting.

Members should always feel free to express their opinions. Just as important, the facilitator should never state a person is “wrong.” Instead, ask for other comments. The free flow of ideas leads to creative solutions.

## **Minutes**

Minutes of both decisions made and the discussion preceding them will often be required at later meetings when questions arise as to how or why a decision was made and what action was agreed to. Minutes also keep those who cannot attend a specific meeting up to date. Often, minutes will be the only formal records of important committee and subcommittee business.

## **Follow-up**

Effective meetings result in specific resolutions and action plans. This includes a summary of the main points, what tasks will be accomplished and by when and who. A quick run-down at the end of a meeting of the “action items” to be accomplished by each person is very useful.

A status report on those actions should always be one of the first items of business at the next meeting, including assessment of progress, and whether or not additional resources, such as the assistance of more members, are required.

Always announce the **next meeting** before concluding.

### **The Best Meetings**

- Stay on subject
- Are thoroughly pre-planned
- Follow an agenda
- Result in specific decisions and action plans
- Have attendees who listen to one another and share ideas
- Start and end on time
- Have minutes summarizing important discussions, decisions, and action items
- Plan for specific follow-up on action items

### **A Sample Agenda**

- 8:00 – 8:05 Welcome
- 8:05 – 8:10 Minutes: brief review and approval
- 8:10 – 8:20 Announcements: short and non-controversial (e.g., upcoming events)
- 8:20 – 8:30 Follow-up: status of progress on prior meeting's action items
- 8:30 – 8:40 Easy action item(s): gets the meeting off to a good start
- 8:40 – 9:05 Hardest item: scheduled in the middle once all attendees have arrived and are focused on the meeting
- 9:05 – 9:20 Items for discussion only: can be the introduction to a challenging item that will require a vote in the future
- 9:20 – 9:30 Easiest items: always finish on a positive note, laying the groundwork for the next meeting

With these simple pointers, your meetings will allow you to be effective activists.