

# ***Tools and Tactics for successful youth-led organizing***

By Mariame Kaba (with the Rogers Park Young Women's Action Team)

[www.youngwomensactionteam.org](http://www.youngwomensactionteam.org)

## **TECHNIQUES FOR RUNNING AN EFFECTIVE MEETING**

The way that meetings are run will affect how members get and stay involved in your organization. Remember, meetings are the place where people develop impressions about the group: whether it is well-organized, whether things get accomplished, whether people respect one another. When meetings are run well – when people's opinions are respected and the agenda is followed – members will feel more willing to participate in other activities of the organization. On the other hand, if people interrupt each other at meetings and nothing gets decided or accomplished, people will become frustrated and start to drop out. The material in this section explains the steps for preparing for a meeting and some of the skills that a meeting leader/facilitator needs to develop in order to run an effective meeting.

1. *Get agreement on the agenda before the meeting begins:*
  - Ask for additions and changes.
  - People will feel more of a stake in how the meeting goes because *their* ideas are included.
2. *Get agreement on a set of rules for the meeting:*
  - The rules make clear what is acceptable behavior and what is not.
  - Increases people's commitment to making the meeting run smoothly because they made or approved the rules.
  - Examples include: one mike or no interrupting, respect for each other's ideas, use "I" statements
3. *Keep the discussion moving and focused:*
  - If a person is talking for too long, gently interrupt them by saying: "we want to give everyone a chance to participate. Please finish your point so that we can continue."
  - If someone is going off on another topic, gently ask: "could you please make the connection to the subject clearer?"
  - Repetition and going off the subject will lead to boredom and frustration for others in the meeting.

- Use the agenda as a tool to keep the discussion focused on a particular subject within the time limits agreed to by everyone at the beginning of the meeting.

4. *Tune in to the group:*

- Look around the room periodically to see how people are feeling. Are they bored? Attentive? Involved? Wandering? Is the room uncomfortable for any reason?
- Check verbally and by looking at people to see if the meeting is progressing well and that work is getting done.
- Depending on whether people seem tired and bored or attentive, you may have to change the pace of the meeting.
- If some people are talking a lot and others are not speaking at all, try to bring them into the discussion by asking “does anyone else have something to say on this subject?”
- Is there tension in the room? Are disagreements not being voiced? Deal with this directly. “There seems to be disagreement on this point.”

5. *Be organized:*

- Keep track of the time. If the time limit for a particular item on the agenda is approaching and discussion is still going on, let people know and ask them if they want to continue.
- Keep track of the people who want to speak. If it is a large meeting, write on a pad of paper the names of people who want to speak and the order in which they raised their hands so that no one is forgotten.

6. *Summarize and reflect what you see and hear in the meeting:*

- At the end of a discussion, you might summarize by saying that, “It seems that we agree that...” or “We seem to be having trouble resolving this matter. What do you think we should do?”
- If you see people starting to leave or eyelids getting heavy, you might say, “People seem to be getting tired. Should we move on?”
- This behavior brings the group together and can effectively bring a discussion or meeting to positive conclusion.

7. *Don't be defensive:*

- If someone is critical of the meeting or of your leadership/facilitation, take a mental step backwards and ask if they have a suggestion on how to do things differently.
- If that doesn't solve the conflict, ask the other participants how they want to proceed.

8. *A sense of humor:*

- Can help to relieve tension.
- Can bring a sense of fun to the meeting.
- Should not distract from the work that needs to get done, not should a joke be at someone else's expense.

9. *Try rotating the responsibility for chairing a meeting among the members:*

- Allows a number of people to develop this important skill and helps to strengthen the leadership group.
- Helps to prevent one person from assuming too much responsibility and power.

10. *Be supportive and appreciative of people's input:*

- When people who have been quiet participate in the discussion, show appreciation that they have shared their thoughts with the group.
- Don't be critical of people when they come up with new or different ideas. Every organization needs new ideas, and supporting member initiative is key to keeping people involved.

11. *Use open-ended questions:*

- For example, "How do you think we should proceed with our strategy?"
- This will encourage open and full discussion.
- Members will feel that the chairperson really wants to hear their ideas.

12. *The meeting facilitator should not abuse the power of their position:*

- The facilitator should not speak all of the time.
- The facilitator should not cut someone off because they don't like what they are saying.

- The facilitator should always strive to be respectful and polite.

## KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER ABOUT MEETINGS

1. Have your agenda prepared before the meeting. Send it out to anyone that should attend so they can come prepared. Use it as an outreach tool to hook new people in around specific topics.
2. Have a regular meeting cycle people can depend on: for example, a general membership meeting once a month. If you've created a regular cycle, you must stick to it! Once you've created expectations, follow through!
3. Have a definite starting and ending time written into your agenda and stick to it! The shorter the better. (Meetings should rarely last more than 1 to 1 ½ hours for general meetings. Committee meetings may go longer, depending on how much work needs to be done.)
4. A meeting place should have enough room for those attending to sit comfortably, and should not be too hot or too cold. Meetings should be held in a place considered safe and neutral. Meeting places can often be found for free through local churches, union halls, libraries, community centers, senior centers, schools, neighborhood storefronts, banks (yes, they have rooms), community gardens (when it's warm out) and local agencies. People won't come if the meeting is too far away, so keep close to your block, in your building lobby, or in a centrally located place.
5. Don't hold a meeting for a meeting's sake. If there are no decisions that the group has to make or no real reason to call everyone together, your newsletter can convey the information. Send information out instead of wasting people's time