

Conducting Effective Meetings

One of the best ways to involve people in a community is to encourage them to participate in community meetings. Knowing how to set up and conduct meetings is an important tool. How **YOU** act before, during and after the meeting will determine how successful you are at maximizing citizen participation. Here are some points to keep in mind:

- **Before the Meeting**

- ___ Establish a time, date and place which you feel would be most convenient to as many of the people as possible. Keep in mind such things as parking, air conditioning, other community activities scheduled for the same night, etc.
- ___ If the participants don't know each other, provide name tags or make introductions.
- ___ Start on time!
- ___ State the purpose of the meeting as briefly as possible. Use a large sheet of paper or a blackboard to list some of the points to be covered in the meeting.
- ___ Speak confidently, but don't be too formal; try to help others feel at ease.
- ___ The best way to stimulate discussion is to ask questions, not make statements. Remember, people prefer to be asked, not told!
- ___ Sometimes it's helpful to have a "coffee break" during the meeting. It gives people time to visit informally about what is being discussed. This is especially true before important decisions are going to be made, five or ten minutes will usually get it.
- ___ At the end of the meeting, try to summarize briefly what's been talked about. Get some idea from the participants about what to do next and where to go from here.
- ___ Remember, the success of a community meeting is everybody's responsibility. If you are the discussion leader or chairman, your job is to help create the environment for interaction and stimulate discussion rather than dominate the discussion.

- **After the Meeting**

The follow-up that's done after a committee meeting is very important.

- ___ Visit informally with some of the committee members a few days after the meeting. Get their impressions of what happened during the meeting.
- ___ You might try sending out a follow-up report to those attending the meeting, simply "putting to paper" what was discussed during the meeting.

Source: Take Charge: Economic Development in Small Communities, North Central Regional Center for Rural Development