CREATING A CULTURE OF INQUIRY

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In each issue of JSD, Robert J. Garmston writes about how to create collaborative work environments that result in improved student learning. His columns can be found at www.nsdc.org.
Meeting outcomes:

Identify the outcome(s) of the meeting. An agenda with several topics may have several outcomes. Reviewing outcomes with participants at the beginning of the meeting helps to “start with the end in mind.” Good outcomes describe a product, not a process. They record the desired result and offer evidence that the group has achieved its outcomes. To draft a team goal is a product. To discuss data about reading scores describes what members will do in pursuit of an outcome, but does not describe an outcome.

Topics:

Think about the sequence of meeting topics. Topics launch the group into action and need to be aligned with meeting outcomes and guiding questions. Which topic makes sense to discuss first? What issues need to be addressed at the beginning because information is required that will help a group get from the starting point to its outcome? Handle issues that may involve disagreements early so the group can come together before members depart.

Plan an opening that sets the tone and enables participants to understand outcomes and processes. Activate prior knowledge about the first topic to get minds and voices, as well as bodies, in the room. Allow for a closing topic that ensures clarity on group decisions and next steps. Put on the agenda who is to do what by when to guarantee the meeting will end with closure.

Purpose:

Label the purpose of each topic. The purpose may be to dialogue (understand); inform (announcements); recommend (to another decision-making body); or decide (discussion leading to a decision). Thinking through purposes clarifies the group’s role and contributes to trust as members become clear about their roles and what is expected of them in decision making. Keep information items to a minimum or eliminate them. Much information can be communicated more efficiently in other ways, such as through e-mail.

Guiding questions:

Construct engaging questions that encourage group members to probe topics at a deeper level before group work. Think through questions group members need to address and in what sequence.

Background/process:

Summarize information that participants need before they respond to the guiding questions. What is the history that led up to the task? Define unfamiliar terms.

Describe any processes the group will use to accomplish each task. Will the group be using a protocol? Making a decision using a consensus process? Analyzing cause/effect of data with a fishbone diagram?

Person/time:

Identify the person responsible for each task to alert the individual to the need to prepare.

Include an estimate of time needed for each item on the agenda. Estimating time helps ensure that the agenda has been thoughtfully constructed and the tasks are not too ambitious for the time allotted. Topics that have processes, such as a protocol, need extra time for explanation and modeling.

If we want to improve student learning in our schools, we must improve our professional practices. Being effective and efficient with our collaborative time is essential. An agenda template can be a powerful device for advancing our work so that we can focus on our core purpose — student learning.

REFERENCES


### MEETING AGENDA

**Meeting outcome:** Revise and finalize the rubric for the common assessment  
**Name of team/group:**  
**Facilitator:**  
**Recorder:**  
**Other participants:**  
**Starting/ending times:**  
**Purposes:** Understanding, Informing, Recommending, Deciding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
<th>GUIDING QUESTIONS</th>
<th>BACKGROUND/PROCESSES</th>
<th>PERSON/ TIME</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome and overview of meeting outcomes and topics.</td>
<td>Informing</td>
<td>What do we hope to accomplish at this meeting?</td>
<td>Ann will review what has been done since the last meeting and explain the outcomes and topics for this meeting.</td>
<td>Ann 3 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion activity to get voices in the room and to celebrate learning.</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>What learning can we celebrate this week?</td>
<td>We’ll go round-robin to share a learning success with a student or an activity/strategy that worked.</td>
<td>Ann 7 min.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Rubric for the common assessment. | Deciding | -Does the rubric help students focus on the critical benchmarks for the unit? Are the rubric’s criteria the right criteria?  
-Does the rubric adequately discriminate among degrees of understanding and proficiency? | We tried the writing rubric for the first time for the common assessment. At this meeting we will:  
• Look once again at the unit’s benchmarks and determine whether the criteria are the right criteria  
• Share observations about using the rubric to determine levels of understanding and proficiency. In order to do this, please bring student papers that you scored at standard, as well as above and below and any observations you made while scoring.  
• Make adjustments to the rubric based upon our observations. | Sandy 60 min. |