

Creating More Engaging SRC Meetings

In January the SRC Steering Committee discussed feedback from member phone conversations. Themes that emerged from this discussion included a desire to plan for more interactivity, safety, and a balance of opportunities that honor engagement styles for both introverts and extroverts. One of the resulting action items was to create a meeting template that can be used as a reference. Though there is no one-size-fits-all approach that will help us meet all of these principles, the following guidelines can serve as a useful reference in meeting planning and facilitation.

Meeting Preparation

Ideally all members would take the time they need to best prepare for meeting participation. But the reality is that many people won't have the time for this, despite best intentions. Each meeting will have content that is more pertinent than other content (for example, the state plan when a vote is needed). Consider highlighting one or two of the highest priority meeting agenda items. Remind people of what will be done with the item (*e.g.*, This is our change to pose questions, make recommendations, approve, etc.) and invite concrete ways they could prepare for the meeting. This can be as simple as, "As you travel in to the meeting tomorrow, reflect on one SRC accomplishment from the past year that you'd like to be highlighted in our annual report", to more complex such as, "We invite you to carve out 45 minutes to review the policy guidance. Jot down your questions and recommendations and bring them with you to the meeting".

Skype Participation

- Prioritize having all presentation and meeting materials available in advance. When this is not done it steals the opportunity to engage from phone participants.
- Have meeting chairs and any presenters sit in front of a microphone.
- Remind people to state their name before they speak.
- When possible, move microphones to be in front of speakers throughout the meeting.
- Request that people sitting in front of microphones keep distracting noises to a minimum (*i.e.*, typing, shuffling papers, etc.)
- Remember to periodically pause conversation and invite input from the phone as it is hard to jump in to conversations when not physically present in the room.

The suggestions above are compiled and modified from resources available from Global Learning Partners (www.globallearningpartners.com)

Guest Presenters

Below are recent examples of ways in which we've requested interactivity from presenters:

Based on recent member feedback, the SRC Steering Committee is making efforts to increase engagement for members during our meetings. As such, I invite you to think about ways you can enhance your presentation with member interaction within your 45 minute timeframe. For example:

Posing an open question at the start with time for reflection (solo or in partners)

- *"As you listen to the presentation, I invite you to reflect on the following question: How can this information help guide the work of the SRC in the year ahead"*
- *"What questions do you already have about dual enrollment? Take 2 silent minutes to jot them down before we begin"*
- *"As you listen to the presentation, think about the following question: How might the SRC and SILC partner in the year ahead? We will share ideas at the end of the presentation.*

Concluding with an individual, partner, or small group activity

- *"Take 5 minutes to discuss the presentation in pairs: What ideas did this provoke for you? What's one question you still have? We will take a few minutes to hear some of the responses in the large group"*
- *"In groups of three, take 5 minutes to discuss the following question: What ideas does this give you about your role as a member of the SRC in the year ahead? We will take a few minutes to hear from each group."*
- *"In pairs, take 3 minutes to debrief what you've just heard. What's one takeaway you have from the presentation? We will hear a few examples in the large group."*

Honoring Introverts

- Send people ideas and questions in advance of the meeting for them to ponder.
- Include solo work as well as pair and small group work. All of us get a boost out of solo work – even if we are the type who don't ask for it. Let participants surprise themselves by seeing what emerges when they take time for reflection.
- Let people choose how they want to take in, and process, new content. When a facilitator invites each learner to choose for him or herself – which break out group to work on, which question(s) to reflect on, whether to work in a group or solo – they are given an optimal environment in which to perform.
- Offer time and options for people to share their ideas. Be careful not to fall in a rut of always asking for everyone to speak, or always asking for people to share with a partner. Might it be enough for them to think it through for themselves?
- Wait at least 5 seconds after asking a question. This gives introverts time to think and encourages reflectiveness. People also soon learn that you will wait for them.

The suggestions above are compiled and modified from resources available from Global Learning Partners (www.globallearningpartners.com)

- Affirm everyone’s contributions wherever and however it is seen. Find opportunities to affirm the work of everyone – even those who may choose not to speak up or share in a fully group. This may mean citing their written contributions or chatting with them on-the-side.

Tips to Get People Talking

- **Partner/Pairs**
Dividing people in pairs means that everyone is talking and engaged. This also minimizes the problem of the same people “stealing the floor”.
- **Small Groups**
Dividing people in small groups also gets most people talking. People feel more comfortable and freer to talk when they are in a small group than in the whole group.
- **Open Questions**
Open questions have no set answer and invite dialogue. Since these questions cannot be answered with a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’, learners are encouraged to talk.
- **Gallery Walk**
A gallery walk is an invitation for a group to walk around the room and review a variety of things on display. These items to be examined could be on the wall, on tables, or on the floor. Often there is a request to discuss something at each station.
- **Choice**
When people are given a choice about how to do something or what to do, they will usually choose what they are most interested in and what energizes them.
- **Silence, Reflection, Journaling**
Often learners need time to think. Silence, reflection and journaling provide an opportunity for learners to talk with themselves.
- **Relevance**
When something is relevant to the learners’ lives or work they will want to talk about it. Engagement is high when people are learning something they want to learn about.
- **Walk and Talk**
Many people like to walk and talk. When the energy is low or you need to change spaces, giving clear instructions about something to talk about for a specific amount of time, can be very engaging.
- **Honoring Learning Preferences**
Present all content and information both visually and auditorily.
- **Engagement**
Engagement and talking feed each other: when I am engaged I want to talk about it, and when I am talking I am engaged. When content is presented, make sure that participants are invited to *do something* with the content.

The suggestions above are compiled and modified from resources available from Global Learning Partners (www.globallearningpartners.com)

- **Breaks**
Small pockets to recharge (even in a 90 minute meeting) help people to stay focused and engaged, provide introverts needed silence, and provide extroverts with time to connect with others. Even five minutes can make all the difference!

Safety

Most of the tips above will result in increased feelings of safety and decreased feelings of anxiety. In addition, here are a few more:

- Welcome people by name when they enter the room.
- Take the time to tell people goodbye and thank them for their participation at the conclusion of the meeting.
- Don't forget about the importance of open questions, built in time for silent reflection, and pair and small group work in increasing safety!

A Sample Meeting Agenda Template to Consider

Introductions

Provide an open question and two silent minutes for people to reflect before going around the room to introduce themselves and share their response. The goal of introductions is to serve as a warm-up for people to get to know one another, deepen relationships, and increase safety. The question might be seasonal ("It's a sunny day today. What's one thing that's brought you sunshine in the past week?"), or topical ("What's one thing that drives you in our collective work?")

Agenda Item Sequencing

When feasible, chunk out required routine agenda items with interactive agenda items. (For example, approval of agenda, approval of minutes, presentation, break, recommendations, updates, etc.) Managing the agenda in this manner and being mindful of when a break will be most useful helps manage energy in the room and this might include inserting breaks in the middle of agenda items.

Timing

Review agenda and determine how much interaction would be useful for each item and plan accordingly. For example, if the intent is to get as many recommendations as possible on policy guidance, share up front that we will have 45 minutes at the end of the presentation to share recommendations, with built in time for reflection/thought gathering.

Variety

When looking at the draft agenda note what variety is included and how more can be added. A balance of reflection, pair share, silence, small group tasks, listening to updates or presentations with a question in mind, etc. helps to ensure interaction and engagement.

The suggestions above are compiled and modified from resources available from Global Learning Partners (www.globallearningpartners.com)