

# Meeting Ground Rules

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Ground rules are an agreed-upon set of written or articulated behavioral guidelines intended to support successful group process.

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The meeting content will dictate the kind of ground rules necessary to support the objectives. If the content is sensitive or controversial, more time will likely be required to determine the rules needed. The culture(s) represented at the meeting will also influence the selection of ground rules. Giving the group significant authority in establishing ground rules will both support adherence to the guidelines selected, and ensure that they are responsive to the culture(s) represented. The facilitator should take a couple of moments at the beginning of the meeting to have the group brainstorm and choose the ground rules that will support the success of that particular meeting.

Examples of ground rules include:

- Individuals will be acknowledged in order except for a point of clarification or point of process
- Be respectful and polite
- Be present; Give speaker your full attention
- Refrain from side-bar conversation; bring your ideas to the group
- Challenge issues not people

After ground rules are established, they are reviewed and clarified. Participants will be asked to state 'Yes' or 'No' to running the meeting with these ground rules.



# Overcoming Meeting Roadblocks

*(Inspired by Effective Facilitation, Grove Consultants International)*

Once the process is underway, the agenda will serve as your map. As we know, “the map is not the territory” and conditions will change and move as the meeting unfolds. The following are a few techniques that can be employed to smooth the way as unforeseen needs arise in the meeting. These techniques can be applied through front- or back-of-the-room facilitation.

- Summarize:** When a group reaches a natural transition, or when it seems that the clarity of the discussion has been momentarily lost, it is useful to summarize where the group is in the process, and what has been accomplished and what remains.
- Celebrate Small Successes:** When a group appears frustrated or when milestone moments have been reached, it is cause for a mini celebration. This can also help with individual members who might be impatient with the process.
- Offer a Metaphor or Story:** At times it is useful for the facilitator to introduce a metaphor or story for the group upon which to hang the conversation, such as a journey, a natural process like the growth of a tree or transformation of an insect, an object such as a vehicle or a tool. These can help the group to mentally organize the information in the room.
- Naming Challenges:** If tension appears in the room, it is often useful to attempt to name it prior to it devolving into conflict. Even if the attempt is off the mark, it can help the group to hit the mark through the ensuing discussion.
- Reinforce Goals:** If the group seems to have lost sight of the purpose of the meeting, reviewing the goals can regain focus and energy to move forward.



- Equalize Influence:** Power and influence are present in every process. Techniques such as asking more quiet individuals or groups within the larger group for their input, using the term “we” to reinforce the collective interests, checking in with members who seem to hold a balanced perspective, can all help to level the field.
- Uncover Underlying Interests:** Often when the process seems to stall or lock it is related to underlying or unexpressed interests driving behavior. Attempting to raise these interests in a positive, non-threatening light could help to move the dialogue and will often speed the later parts of the process.
- The Third Way:** When members of the group are locked in an “either/or” conflict, calling for the “third way” to emerge that bridges, blends or evolves the opposing perspectives.
- Reframe:** Reframing, or providing another perspective through which to view a dialogue or debate can often help individuals to step off of a particular position to encourage forward movement.
- The Last Straw:** If all else fails and the group remains locked in its immobility, the facilitator can ask the group if it really wants the support of facilitation. This can at times shake up the group enough to own its resistance. Apply this technique with extreme caution.

