# 2.7 Making Meetings Work Tip Sheet

This tip sheet can help planners maximize use of the participants’ time by anticipating potential concerns in the invitation stage and during the actual meeting.

The tip sheet is divided into two parts: **Before the Meeting** can be used to create actionable agendas. **Openings that Create Meaning** can be used to plan introductory activities to accelerate the development of working relationships.

## Before the Meeting

Invitees usually have predictable questions about a meeting. Customize the list below to meet specific needs. Use prompts that follow the questions to guide the development of your invitations, agenda, and background materials.

1. What’s the purpose of this meeting? State succinctly in the invitation and at the beginning of the meeting why the group has been convened and what will be accomplished.
2. Who’s in charge? Distinguish who’s in charge of organizing and facilitating meetings and who is responsible for decisions.
3. Who else will participate? Share the list of invitees prior to the meeting.
4. Will this be a good use of my time? Stick to a specific start and finish time. Plan to serve as a facilitator or ask someone skilled in facilitation to guide the meeting so that the discussion oves forward and the group doesn’t get sidetracked. (See Choosing a Facilitator on page 35.)
5. What’s the agenda? Participants appreciate when the agenda is distributed in advance and at the meeting. Clarify which agenda items are for information only, for discussion, and/or for action or decision. Provide background information before the meeting.
6. How do I know that what we do will make us move forward? Inform invitees that notes will be taken and meeting summaries will be available to all on a timely basis; consider hosting a shared space for documents online. Documentation reduces time spent covering old ground or revisiting decisions.
7. Will there be refreshments? Creature comforts matter! Plan to offer water or simple refreshments, such as soft drinks. Acts of hospitality mirror openness and receptivity. Do mention breaks, even if it’s only to tell people that they can excuse themselves as needed. Use the Meeting Accommodation Form to plan refreshments that all can enjoy.

## Openings that Create Meaning

Opening exercises can help participants quickly understand who each member is and the organizations represented. Exercises can also create common language and experience.

When you plan for openings, keep in mind:

1. **Relevance.** Make sure the exercise is closely related to the group’s purpose and will move the group forward in accomplishing its tasks.
2. **Time needed.** Estimate how much time an activity will require and account for that time in the agenda. Simple self-introductions (name, organization, position, and the transition to the next individual) can take 60-90 seconds per person. For additional open-ended questions, such as, “What do you hope to learn today?” count on another 60-90 seconds per person.
3. **Sensitivity.** Avoid exercises that require self-disclosure that might be uncomfortable or inappropriate for the setting. Give thought about how to facilitate the activity from non-judgmental stance. As an issue comes to the surface of people’s minds, leave it to them individually to assign importance or meaning.
4. **Focus.** Consider whether the activity may raise different questions or issues that will pull the group away from its primary purpose. Plan for how to capture the issues for later discussion or redirect the group back to the intended purpose.

### Opening A: Who has special needs?

**Purpose:** This exercise can expand participants’ thinking about vulnerable populations beyond those with mobility needs, sensory deficit, and medical special needs. These questions can also be used to introduce the National Response Framework’s definition of vulnerable populations.

**Process:** Allow for thought between each question. Ask participants to reflect silently or raise their hands; be mindful that some of these questions require people to consider their personal circumstances. Some participants may be reluctant to reveal their answers in an open forum.

**Questions:**

1. Have you ever had a broken leg or needed crutches and/or a cast for more than two weeks?
2. Do you have a family member under the age of 5 years? Someone over the age of 80? 90?
3. Do you know of any children between 5 and 12 years old who are frequently unsupervised even for short periods of time?
4. Have you or someone you know ever been without a car or easy access to public transportation for more than one or more weeks?
5. Have you or someone you know been unemployed or otherwise without steady income for a prolonged time?
6. Do you know anyone who speaks very limited English or is learning English as a second language?
7. Do you know anyone who is hard of hearing? Wears a hearing aid?
8. Do you know or have someone in your family who is reliant on medication? Medical devices?

**Wrap-up:**

***Option A:*** Share the National Response Framework definition of vulnerable populations (hand out and/or project the definition on a screen). The definition is provided in the Introduction, pages xx-xxi.

***Option B:*** Read a quote, such as the following from Alan Frazier, National Fire Protection Association: *“Disability is not about a specific group of people. Disability is about a specific time in the life of each and every one of us. For some, it may be temporary, for others, it may last much longer. As a society, we have mistakenly adopted a mindset that divides us into two groups, “able-bodied” and “disabled.” The fact is that we all will have special communication needs and/or be part of the disabled community for some time in our lives. If we act from the perspective of what we would want when, rather than if, we become disabled, we truly will be able to make great progress for all people.”*

***Final observation:*** We all spend time as a member of a vulnerable population at some point in our lives.

**Transition**: Plan how to use the above exercise to transition to the next item on the agenda.

### Opening B: Getting to know each other and our organizations

**Purpose:** Many networks may be composed of people and agencies that have previously worked together, currently work together, or have other interconnected working relationships. The following questions can be used to open several meetings to increase firsthand information and to encourage dialogue among participants about issues that affect their mutual tasks. This exercise is designed for the opening phases of organizing a network.

**Process:** Use one question per meeting. Pose the question then give participants 10 seconds to think about their response before opening up the floor. Indicate whether participants may take a “pass.” The chair or facilitator may opt to go around the room from one side to the other (“rolling thunder”) or allow people to volunteer (“popcorn”); if using the popcorn method, be prepared to keep track of who has spoken, providing opportunity for those who have not and respecting those who wish to pass. Listen carefully for issues that may merit discussion under another agenda item or at a later time. Also listen for areas of curiosity or inquiry that may yield a future opening question.

Prepare participants for the likelihood of hearing information or perspectives that do not match their individual experiences. Describe the gap between what they hear and what they have experienced as an opportunity to seek more information and a broader understanding of how their respective agencies work and think. Offer assistance in framing questions neutrally if individuals struggle with how to ask a clarifying question without it sounding like an attack or criticism.

**Example questions:**

* Meeting One: Describe your agency’s role. Participants are invited to describe the role their agency plays in communicating with vulnerable populations before, during, and after an emergency.
* Meeting Two: Say what you wish others understood. What do you wish other organizations understood more clearly about your agency’s communication responsibilities to vulnerable populations at any phase of an emergency?
* Meeting Three: Share what you learned about another agency. What did you hear about another agency’s role that surprised you?
* Follow-on Option #1: What does that mean for how your agency operates in a joint activity with that agency?
* Follow-on Option #2: What new questions does that information prompt?
* Meeting Four: Describe any gaps. As you think about the information you’ve heard and learned through the first three meetings, where do you see gaps in meeting the purpose(s) of the network?

For future meetings, develop appropriate questions and/or schedule a “check-in” for people to share successes or concerns.

**Transition:** For each meeting and question, listen for points of information or thoughts that link to the planned agenda. While the chair or facilitator cannot plan precisely for what is heard, experienced listeners are almost guaranteed to hear something upon which to build a bridge to the remaining agenda.

### Opening C: WIIFM exercise – “What’s in it for me?”

**Purpose:** Participants may have to explain repeatedly to their agency or co-workers the value of the time they are committing to the network. The following questions will encourage participants to reflect on the value they are obtaining through network participation as well as introduce them to different language and perspectives related to organizational value.

**Process:** Use the questions over a series of meetings. When posing a question, give the participants 10 seconds to think before soliciting responses. Indicate whether participants may take a “pass.” The chair or facilitator may opt to go around the room from one side to the other or allow people to volunteer. Be prepared to keep track of who has spoken; provide opportunity for those who have not and respect those who wish to pass. Listen carefully for issues that may merit discussion under another agenda items or at a later time.

**Example questions:**

* ***Meeting One: What you’ve learned.*** Name one thing you have learned so far while participating in this network.
* ***Meeting Two: An idea you’ve used.*** Describe an idea from the network that you took back to your agency and implemented.
* ***Meeting Three: Questions you’ve encountered.*** What’s the most common question you get from co-workers about this network and how do you answer?
* ***Meeting Four: Valuable connections you’ve made.*** What connections have you made through network that are helping you accomplish other agency/organization goals?

For future meetings, plan similar questions based on themes that arise during discussions.

**Transition:** For each meeting and question, listen for points of information or thoughts that link to the planned agenda. While the chair or facilitator cannot plan precisely for what will be heard, listen for ideas that tie to the remaining agenda.