



How to Design an Agenda

Results Based Facilitation Guide

Creating an agenda ahead of times helps you clarify your goals, plan strategically for meaningful outcomes, and use your meeting time most effectively.

Use this guide any time you're creating an agenda to remind yourself of the steps and best practices for creating an effective results-based meeting agenda.

Step 1: Write your Results

Results drive effective meetings by giving the meeting a distinct purpose. When you have clear results, the facilitators and the participants know what needs to be accomplished and have a clear direction toward a productive meeting.

Before you write your formal results, spend some time brainstorming about the purpose of the meeting. Consider the following questions:

- Why are you bringing people together to meet?
- What do you hope people accomplish during this meeting?
- Are there specific tasks that must be completed during the meeting?

Results are:

➡ **Clear** = Every participant can easily understand what is expected of them

➡ **Specific** = The result is focused on one distinct task or outcome

➡ **Measurable** = Progress toward the result can be evaluated and assessed

➡ **Observable** = Progress toward result can be seen through actions, behaviors, or deliverables during the meeting

➡ **Attainable** = The result can realistically be accomplished with the time and resources available in the meeting

Step 1: Write your Results (Continued)

Results should start with a phrase along the lines of:

By the end of this meeting, participants will...

Your results should then explain what participants will have done by the end of the meeting.

Here are some verbs you might use to describe what participants will have done by the end of the meeting:

- | | | |
|----------|-------------|-------------|
| • Align | • Describe | • Identify |
| • Apply | • Design | • Organize |
| • Build | • Determine | • Plan |
| • Choose | • Develop | • Propose |
| • Create | • Evaluate | • Recommend |
| • Decide | • Explain | • Select |
| • Define | • Generate | • Summarize |

Here are some **examples** of effective results:

By the end of this meeting, participants will:

- Identify causes of conflict between parents and school staff
- Determine possible strategies for minimizing the identified conflicts between parents and staff
- Generate specific recommendations for what next steps the school board should take to reduce these identified conflicts

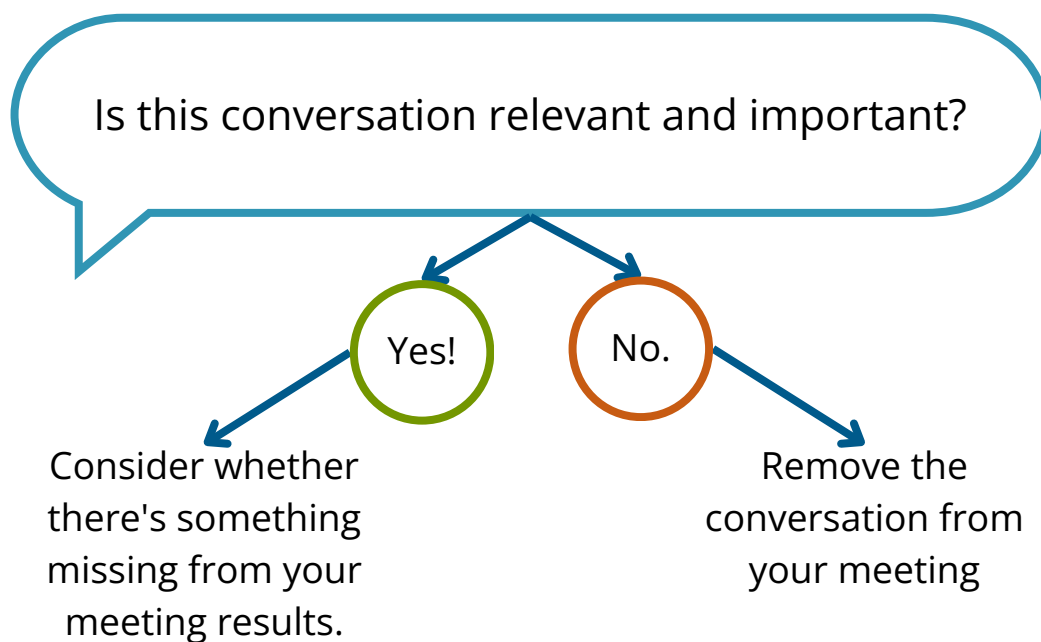
You can find more examples that can be used and adapted in *Results Based Facilitation Book 1: Foundation Skills* by Jolie Bain Pillsbury on page 127.

Step 2: Identify your Conversations

Based on the meeting results you've written, create an outline of your meeting by determining the main conversations you'll facilitate. In almost all cases, each result will be a separate conversation.

- If you find you need multiple different conversations to achieve a single result, ask yourself whether that result can be broken up into multiple more specific results.
- If you find multiple results apply to the same conversation topic, consider whether those results can be combined into one comprehensive result or whether the conversation topic can be broken down into smaller chunks.

Make sure that every result aligns with at least one conversation you'll have during the meeting. Every conversation should be directly connected to a meeting result. Otherwise, the conversation isn't moving the group toward their results. If you want to include a conversation that doesn't connect to one of your meeting results, ask yourself:



Step 3: Develop your First Conversation

Pick which conversation you want to develop first. You'll write the elements below for that conversation, and then repeat these steps for each conversation in your agenda.

Context Statement

A context statement provides participants with the information they need to have the conversation. This information ensures everyone is **having the same conversation at the same time**.

Your context statement should explain:

- Why participants are talking about that topic
- Why that topic matters
- Any background information necessary to understand the conversation

Context statements vary in length but should be succinct (usually 3-5 sentences).

Let's return to the example result from earlier:

Identify causes of conflict between parents and school staff

Here is an **example** of a context statement you might use:

Teachers and parents throughout the school district are feeling increasingly frustrated with one another. The school district's principals have reported a 45% increase in complaints by parents about school staff and a 16% increase in staff quitting as a result of conflicts with parents over the last 3 years. Kids' education benefits when parents and school staff work together effectively. The first step to improving these relationships is figuring out what is causing conflict.

Step 3: Develop your First Conversation (Continued)

Effective Questions

An effective question is a question that sparks productive participation and conversation toward an intended result.

Design your effective questions in a way that makes participants think about the topic more deeply.

Effective questions should be:



Open-ended: Participants shouldn't be able to answer the question with a simple "yes" or "no."

Inquisitive: Questions that start with "why" often put people on the defensive. Questions that start with "what" or "how" create a safer environment.



You-oriented: Participants should own the work, so ask questions such as, "how do *you* feel about..." or "what do *you* think about..."

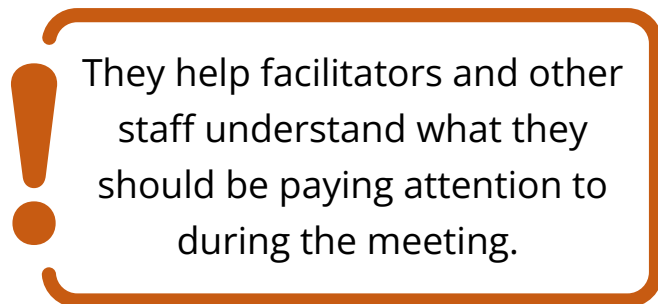
Here are **examples** of effective questions for the conversation about identifying causes of conflict between parents and school staff:

- What are the biggest challenges parents and school staff face in working together effectively?
- When are parents and school staff most in conflict with one another?
- What gets in the way of parents and school staff working together effectively?

Step 3: Develop your First Conversation (Continued)

Listen Fors

Listen fors outline what you want to pay attention to as people are answering your effective questions.



And listen fors help you know whether or not participants are understanding the conversation.

You don't always need to put these in your agenda. It's up to you whether you feel having listen fors in your agenda would be helpful.

Here are **examples** of listen fors for the conversation about identifying causes of conflict between parents and school staff:

- Specific barriers and challenges that cause conflict
- Growth areas for parents and school staff
- Key moments of the school year or issues that cause increased conflict
- Possible strategies for reducing conflict

Step 4: Develop your Remaining Conversations

Repeat step 3 for each of the conversations you have planned for the meeting. As you're developing conversations, don't hesitate to return to conversations you've already finished planning to make adjustments. Designing an agenda is an iterative process.



A Note on Collaboration



Whenever possible, collaborate with one or two colleagues when creating an agenda. Whether or not your colleagues will be helping you facilitate the meeting, they'll bring ideas, perspectives, and strengths to the agenda design process that will improve the outcome.

If you don't have any colleagues who can collaborate throughout the whole agenda design process, consider asking someone to just review the agenda and provide feedback once you have a draft.

Agenda Types

What you've just created is your **annotated agenda**. An annotated agenda is shared with facilitators and back-of-room. It contains detailed information about what will occur during the meeting.

You should also create a **public agenda**. A public agenda is shared with meetings participants. Ideally, the agenda should be emailed to participants a day or two before the meeting. It helps participants prepare for the meeting and know what to expect. A public agenda typically includes:

- Facilitator names and roles
- Participant information (names or general information about roles)
- Conversation titles
- Conversation time and length
- Conversation results

Make sure to include any planned breaks in the public agenda so participants know when they can expect breaks.

Participants should have access to the public agenda during the meeting even if you've already emailed them the public agenda. You can print out the public agenda, project the public agenda up on a screen, or write out a simplified version of the public agenda on a white board or flip chart.