



**BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS  
OF AMERICA**

# PROMISING PRACTICES FOR MANAGING CLUB STAFF

A bulletin series designed for Club managers to help improve the Club Experience.

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### FACILITATING STAFF COMMUNICATION

Day after day and week after week, Club staff welcome youth and offer them a variety of fun, engaging activities that change with the seasons to meet their interests and needs. To provide this inviting and exciting environment, Club staff must stay apprised of the changing program activities and special events that occur on any given day, and work together well as a team to ensure effective delivery.

Two critical practices support this goal: staff meetings and effective team communication.

Staff meetings serve a basic purpose by gathering staff to inform them of current events and important news. Effective staff meetings, however, can do much more: they can help to build and sustain a strong team. This bulletin explores how managers of high-quality Clubs utilize staff meetings to build facilitation skills, inspire discussion through questions, and enhance learning.

Strong team communication supports creation of a high-quality Club Experience. Supportive communication by and between staff members sets a positive tone. This connectedness among staff – to each other and to the youth served – also helps ensure the safety and well-being of Club members.

This issue examines how collaborative problem solving, open communication and team-building activities can strengthen communication for Boys & Girls Club staff teams to improve program quality. ❖



# EFFECTIVE STAFF MEETINGS

Staff meetings serve a critical purpose for Boys & Girls Clubs. Managers should seek to set agendas that balance information sharing and learning. These meetings keep all staff members knowledgeable about current events, essential policies and upcoming program needs. They also provide opportunities for staff to share and learn about key challenges facing the Club or individual Club members.

Most Club directors host staff meetings every week or every other week, and use the time to model leadership, respect and trust to staff. By modeling such behavior, managers demonstrate how staff should interact with youth. Review of staff meeting implementation at sites where a majority of members indicated they routinely have a high-quality Club Experience reveals key insights. Namely, these Clubs used staff meetings to intentionally share facilitation, encourage questions, and incorporate learning.

## EMPOWER STAFF TO LEAD

To provide leadership opportunities, Club staff meetings often feature several presenters. At the McKinney Branch of Boys & Girls Clubs of Collin County in Texas, the assistant director facilitates staff meetings, and each program area lead provides an update (i.e., teens, athletics, education). After these brief program updates, staff can request assistance if needed, such as extra help for special events or program celebrations.

Ensuring that all staff feel welcome to voice their concerns helps to drive critical conversation that may not be on the agenda. For example, asking staff to share highlights and struggles for their program area can reveal previously unrecognized Club-wide strengths and challenges. Whether discussing program evaluation or concerns regarding members, when a variety of staff lead conversation, everyone can gain a greater perspective on Club operations.

## ENCOURAGE STAFF TO ASK QUESTIONS

Managers who lead excellent Clubs welcome questions from staff. Many encourage questions at any time during the meeting; others include a question-and-answer session as an agenda item. By doing so, managers convey the message that staff challenges, concerns and requests for assistance are appropriate and important.

This practice of encouraging questions sets an important tone with staff. Whether discussing a special event or revisiting a policy, asking for questions communicates that a manager is open to feedback. Indeed, conversations that stem from such questions may be what makes staff meetings most effective. Club Director Christopher Kerns of the Canton Unit of Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Mississippi explains, “I want staff to have whatever they need to do what I’m requiring them to do.” If you do not ask, you may not know what is needed!

## FOCUS ON LEARNING

Many managers of excellent Clubs use a portion of their staff meetings to build staff knowledge. From a new program overview to scenario-based mini-trainings, effective staff meetings encourage learning. At the Dana Middle School site of Boys & Girls Clubs of the Los Angeles Harbor in California, seasonal in-service trainings enrich staff meetings. At the beginning of the school year, for example, staff meetings included refreshers on key processes, such as how to complete an incident report. Brief reflections at the end of staff meetings help reinforce learning.

Discussing individual member needs during staff meetings can also provide learning opportunities for staff. These conversations can help staff better understand how to meet the unique needs of individual Club members, based on their history or personality. Many Club managers noted that these Club member discussions help staff better support members, as well as gain appreciation for their team’s collective knowledge.

Looking for additional ways to make your staff meetings more effective? The Tools You Can Use section of this bulletin offers a staff meeting agenda template and practical tips for making meetings engaging and productive. ❖

# Club Spotlight

## NEWTOWN ESTATES REC CENTER, SARASOTA, FLA.



The Newtown Estates Rec Center Unit of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Sarasota in Florida, has housed a Boys & Girls Club for two years.

The Newtown Estates Club already meets capacity, averaging 150 youth each day. Club Director Barbara Bane energizes her staff through meetings every other week. These meetings foster creative use of limited program space, reinforce mutual respect, and help staff enhance their work as a team.

Each staff meeting begins with a small treat in **appreciation for staff contributions**.

Using a written agenda, she and her program director **co-facilitate the meeting**. Every meeting includes a brief **overview of the Club's program schedule** and highlights upcoming events. To **promote learning**, meetings recently included role playing (one staff role, one member role) to observe how staff approach certain situations. This role playing also helped identify new ideas for programming and program facilitation, including staff working collaboratively to share limited space while still delivering well-rounded, high-quality programming. Staff meetings always **include time for staff to suggest improvements, share problems and ask for help**, if needed. Every meeting ends with a **note of gratitude**.

On a daily basis, Bane develops team communication by pulling staff together before program time for a **group huddle** to discuss that day's program and any relevant issues. She also emphasizes her role as a team member by **modeling ideal staff behavior** (e.g., refraining from cell phone use during program time). "I am always willing to do anything that I ask my staff to do." ❖



## TEAM COMMUNICATION

To foster positive relationships among youth, staff must model these relationships themselves. Positive and dependable team communication among staff, therefore, plays a key role in creating a high-quality Club Experience for youth.

To intentionally support excellent team communication, managers create regular opportunities for staff to collaborate with each other to share ideas, information, tips and skills. They recognize the power of diversity. For instance, they may acknowledge the wisdom seasoned staff members bring to discussions, as well as the new ideas and knowledge of current trends that younger staff contribute.

If managers work to make staff feel included and appreciated, staff will, in turn, create a Club environment in which youth feel physically and emotionally safe and welcome. To promote effective communication among their staff teams, managers of high-quality Clubs recommend solving problems collaboratively, keeping communication lines open and dedicating time for intentional team-building activities.

### COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

Problems can occur on any given day at a Boys & Girls Club, requiring all staff to be proficient problem solvers. Many Clubs that enjoy strong school partnerships often receive advanced notice of issues during the school day that may affect the after-school hours. Staff discussion before members arrive can help resolve any problems before they start. Excellent managers recognize that when staff depend on their team – and its collective knowledge and experience – problem solving can be easier and more effective. To teach this team reliance, managers can solicit opinions from staff with relevant experience or knowledge. Managers should also intentionally acknowledge when such team sharing leads to collective problem solving. Scenario-based questioning can also reinforce team-based problem solving, such as asking staff how working together as a team during staff shortages can help ensure safety.

Collaborative problem solving can also reveal the diverse backgrounds, philosophies and approaches individual staff members bring to their team. For instance, when a new staff member notices a Club member struggling with his parents' divorce, bringing the concern to the entire team can bring expertise to the solution. Seasoned staff members' experience can provide a practical, tested approach for best supporting that member. As teams work together to solve bigger problems, staff often grow to appreciate these unique skills and experiences, and overall team communication improves.

### KEEPING LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN

Many managers of high-quality Clubs cite the practice of keeping an open door as one key to their team's effective communication. Whether through an actual open door to an office, or by simply setting the right

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tone with staff, this practice of welcoming conversation models to staff how they should interact with youth. To keep discussion flowing regardless of when the Club is open, some Club managers welcome texts or phone calls during non-Club hours regarding questions, requests for assistance, or to solicit feedback on new program ideas. Amy Oulette, director of the Hill Country Elementary Unit of Boys & Girls Clubs of Bandera County in Texas, explains how to set this tone with staff. “Position yourself so if someone needs help quickly you can jump in and help. I lead by example. I am constantly asking, ‘Do you need help?’ or ‘Tell me about your program.’”

This practice of encouraging and sparking discussion with staff members helps promote effective team communication even amidst turnover. At the Ira Samuelson Unit of Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Memphis, Tenn., Club Director Gwendolyn Woods recognizes that the natural conversation and brainstorming that occur daily among existing staff set a welcoming tone for new team members. “When new staff see the environment, that it’s fun and safe, conversation flows easily, and they don’t miss a beat.”

## INTENTIONAL TEAM BUILDING

Successful teams know that they can count on their fellow team members. Managers can use team-building activities to instill this sense of trust and foster good communication among their staff members. Many staff meetings begin with an icebreaker to foster team spirit and reinforce the Club notion of fun with a purpose. This interactive experience can also provide staff with a new game to use with youth during program time. For fun, creative icebreaker and team-building activities to use with staff and youth, you can download BGCA’s **Youth Development Toolbox app** for free from your preferred app store.

Other intentional team building to encourage communication occurs outside of staff meetings. From holiday gift exchanges to birthday celebrations, managers of high-quality Clubs recognize that staff need to have fun experiences with their coworkers to foster good team interactions. Some managers also schedule staff meals to encourage easy, relaxed conversation, helping to strengthen relationships and effective communication. ❖



## WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

The following insights were culled from a 2017 professional literature review focused on the management practices found in high-quality out-of-school time programs.

### Staff Meetings: Essential for Team Success

A brief on supervision policies in place at Beacons Centers identified five training topics that boost supervisor competencies, including a module on effective staff meetings.<sup>1</sup> To run effective staff meetings, a supervisor must: balance collective learning and housekeeping, lead reflection, manage a learning community, and engage staff in program development. In addition, this resource notes that the group aspect of staff meetings is considered essential, as they enable peer mentoring and feedback at all levels. Meeting time provides a sense of shared strategy and purpose, allows for sharing of program progress, and reinforces an organization’s positive youth development approach.

### Questioning as a Relationship-Building Tool

A manual for coaching youth development professionals cites questioning as a powerful strategy for building productive relationships.<sup>2</sup> Effective questions that build

on a solid foundation of mutual trust can stimulate deep thinking, encourage genuine partnership and inspire renewed engagement in youth development work. For questioning to have significant impact, use a mix of divergent (open-ended) and convergent (close-ended) questions. Balance questions with dialogue and model active listening when a question is posed. Restate the person’s answers and their wording, as appropriate, to ensure understanding. ❖

<sup>1</sup> Wilson-Ahlstrom, A.; Yohalem, N. and Craig, D. (2010). *Shining a Light on Supervision: Lessons from the Beacons* (Washington, D.C.: Forum for Youth Investment, Out-of-School Time Policy Commentary series), <http://forumfyi.org/files/OSTPC16.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Akiva, T. (2007). *Quality Coaching* (Ypsilanti, Mich.: High/Scope Educational Research Foundation). The David P. Weikart Center offers quality coaching training and materials, such as this publication, for managers of youth programs as part of its Youth Program Quality Intervention model. For more information, visit [http://www.cypq.org/products\\_and\\_services/training/QC](http://www.cypq.org/products_and_services/training/QC).



# TOOLS YOU CAN USE

Clubs should review their own policies and procedures, as well as all applicable state laws, before adopting any new tool to ensure full compliance.

## Staff Meeting Agenda Template

[insert your organization's logo]

### STAFF MEETING AGENDA

[Month, Date, Year]

[Time]

*Use the following agenda topics as a guide to develop your regular staff meetings. Select the topics that best fit your meeting, and remember to delegate facilitation as appropriate.*

#### Welcome

#### Icebreaker

#### Old Business

- Summary of previous meeting

#### Celebrations

- Acknowledgement of birthdays, anniversaries, etc
- Recognition of recent achievements (e.g., high ADA, successful field trip, positive gains in member feedback)

#### New Business

- Upcoming Visitors (e.g., program guest speaker, new board member tour)
- New Programs
- Special Events
- Hot Topics (e.g., cell phone use, safety policy reminders)

#### Program Updates

- Shared facilitation by program leads
- Scheduling needs

#### Mini-Training/Learning Opportunity

#### Questions and Feedback

#### Brief Reflection to Reinforce Learning

#### Closing

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## Practical Tips for Effective Staff Meetings<sup>3</sup>

An effective staff meeting protocol allows you to model professionalism and encourage staff ownership. Engaging staff in identifying and evaluating strategies makes them more likely to use those strategies in their practice.

### PURPOSES OF STAFF MEETINGS

Staff meetings can serve as many as four primary purposes:

- **Building the team:** Staff learn about and build trust with one another. Regular rituals can create a strong sense of community. You might bring snacks, celebrate individual and group accomplishments at every meeting, or rotate the responsibility for leading warm-up activities.
- **Sharing information:** Staff receive knowledge from a leader or peer. Meeting attendees might review and discuss policy revisions or learn about a new resource.
- **Addressing tasks:** Staff members deal with a specific concrete topic. They might discuss preparations for an upcoming event or talk about how to address a specific behavior issue.
- **Fostering professional development:** Staff learn together to improve their practice. Staff members might view a video clip from an observation, rate the activity shown, and share their assessment with a partner. In a short period of time, staff will benefit from the perspectives of peers and gain confidence in their ability to contribute to program improvement.

### ENSURING STAFF MEETINGS ARE PRODUCTIVE

Here's how to create a productive environment for staff meetings:

- Distribute an agenda in advance.
- Start on time.
- Share leadership – let staff members take responsibility for some meeting segments.
- Identify next steps and timeline for any action to be completed before the next meeting.
- Build in time for reflection and evaluation at the end of the meeting.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted with permission from Gredler, M.; Gannett, E. and Gallagher, J. (2012). *Strong Directors, Skilled Staff: Guide to Using the Core Competencies for Youth Work Professionals and Supervisors*, pages 28-29 (Boston, Mass.: National Institute on Out-of-School Time, [www.niost.org](http://www.niost.org), for New York City Department of Youth & Community Development), [https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/Strong\\_Directors\\_Skilled\\_Staff-Guide\\_to\\_Using\\_the\\_Core\\_Competencies.pdf](https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/Strong_Directors_Skilled_Staff-Guide_to_Using_the_Core_Competencies.pdf)