



How to Tame an Unruly Meeting

ASSOCIA ONLINE



Let us know!
([http://search.google.c](http://search.google.com/placeid=ChIJ9UI1Xhef)
[placeid=ChIJ9UI1Xhef](http://search.google.com/placeid=ChIJ9UI1Xhef))

Board members and managers alike can all recall meetings that left them scratching their heads wondering how in the world things could have gotten so out of control. The supportive homeowners leave, while the rowdy ones stay and escalate the situation. The board members (and often the homeowners and the manager) feel beaten up and mistreated. While those situations are a learning experience for everyone, it might be helpful for both board members and managers to do a little advance training to achieve a better outcome the next time around.

Often, boards fall into the trap of thinking that homeowner involvement will be minimal and they don't invest in simple things that can help keep the meeting on track—they decide not to take the time to provide a meeting plan or prepare a PowerPoint presentation or they focus only on the expense of having their attorney or project consultant present, rather than considering the benefits. While the association's finances can't be ignored when budgeting for meetings, investing in some key items can go a long way to help the association present a professional image to community members. And, when you plan ahead, it's much easier to keep meeting's on track and under budget. Try these tips.

Tips for a Successful Meeting:

Choose an Appropriate Location - Standing-room only in a small clubhouse meeting room may just add to the heat of the topic. One out of control individual may create a threatening atmosphere for all others. It's also not advisable to hold meetings in someone's home. It is, however, important to have the meeting location near the community to allow for convenient attendance. For a potentially large meeting, it is possible to reserve a meeting room at a local hotel, library, nearby church, or school. A business-like environment creates the expectation for business-like behavior. Having a meeting in a public location also helps encourage the attendees to exhibit their public manners.

Provide Proper Notice – If the meeting is an official homeowner meeting, be sure to check your Bylaws or Declaration to comply with legal notice requirements. If it is an informational meeting only, provide 10-14 day notice, if possible, to allow owners time to arrange to attend. Send a reminder postcard or place a notice on the community bulletin board or on the community website, or all three.

Create an Agenda – If possible, include the speakers' names for each agenda topic. A timed agenda will allow the meeting chairperson to reference the agenda timeline and keep things moving along. Develop the agenda in a format to guide the attendees to the plan. For example, add a special agenda item for a question and answer period toward the end of the agenda. This sets the expectation that people are to wait to ask questions until the speakers have presented the information. This item can also be used by the chairperson to direct an interruptive attendee to a later time on the agenda.

Include Pertinent Information in Notice Packet – Provide the agenda and enough general information to tell the homeowners what the meeting will really be about. Information about the speakers, along with the agenda, will create the first step in presenting an organized business-like tone from the first time an owner hears of the meeting.

Determine Who Will Chair the Meeting – The selection of the meeting chairperson is one of the most important planning steps to a successful meeting. The board should have a frank discussion on this topic. Even if the president is great at running the monthly board meeting, speaking in front of a large group of homeowners on a possibly controversial topic is not the same. If your board does not have a "natural" for this job, or if you are expecting an unhappy group of homeowners, ask your attorney to chair the meeting. The attorney has practice dealing with adversarial situations and responding in a non-emotional manner. This decision alone may save your meeting from disaster.

Invite and Confirm Appropriate Speakers – Invite your engineering consultant, reserve study consultant, or expert on a relevant topic to speak and be available to answer owner questions. Consider speaker availability when setting your meeting date. Expert presence will underscore the board's credibility and affirm the board's due diligence. Asking others to speak prevents the board from feeling the pressure to become "experts" themselves. Expert help is especially beneficial if an increase in dues or a special assessment may be involved.

Let us know!
([http://search.google.c](http://search.google.com/maps/placeid=ChIJ9UI1Xhef)
[placeid=ChIJ9UI1Xhef](http://search.google.com/maps/placeid=ChIJ9UI1Xhef))

Develop Handouts and Presentation Materials – It is especially important that the factual information about the topic and any financial costs to be borne by the association or the homeowner be put in writing and made available to the members. This information will likely go from one neighbor to another after the meeting, and it is important that verbal misinformation does not become gossip within the community. Shingle samples, siding color samples, etc., or a PowerPoint slide show demonstrating actual common area components under discussion are a good way to help owners understand the board's plan.

Serve Refreshments, if possible – While this is optional, it always adds more of a sense of “community” to the meeting – as long as alcohol is not included.

Consider Precautions – It is unfortunate that this topic even needs to be considered. However, today's uncertain times make it an important issue. At the very least, consider the placement of the head table and seating for the audience to provide safe exit. Even if you are not specifically advised of homeowners who may get out of control, the presence of courtesy officers will ease the mind of the board in a contentious situation. With a little research, a uniformed or plain clothes person can be obtained for the meeting at a nominal fee. The board and courtesy officers should discuss the board's expectation for addressing ill-mannered, abusive individuals. It is amazing how quickly control can be regained by the officer simply rising from his or her chair.

A Dress Rehearsal for Tough Questions Will Help – The board and manager should develop a list of possible audience questions. If time is available, board members can informally test “the plan” on a friendly neighbor and ask the neighbor to provide questions and feedback. Written facts to address the tough questions will serve well when the emotions begin to escalate and the Board feels attacked. Even better, anticipate the questions and prepare handouts containing answers to distribute as owners enter the room. It's far better to address the issues before a hostile owner has the opportunity to demand a response.

Board Demeanor is Crucial – All board members must commit to professional and respectful behavior and speech at the meeting. This is not the place or time to become defensive and hot headed. This is often a “less is more” situation. Negative and disrespectful responses, even if they might seem warranted, do nothing to calm the situation. In addition, the Board will lose face and credibility. They may also lose the support of their respectful neighbors in the audience, if one or more of them “lose it” in front of the group. It may be best to say nothing, allowing the vocal individual to speak without your response. Behavior expectations should be set in board planning sessions prior to the meeting. If all else fails, the chairperson will need to ask the unruly board member to leave the meeting.

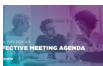
Take a Time Out – If things are beginning to get out of hand, the chairperson can declare a break in the meeting. This may work to get your original, well-planned approach back on track and restore the positive tone of the meeting. This is a good opportunity to suggest that everyone take a break for refreshments.

Let us know!
([http://search.google.c](http://search.google.com/maps/placeid=ChIJ9UI1Xhef)
[placeid=ChIJ9UI1Xhef](http://search.google.com/maps/placeid=ChIJ9UI1Xhef))

Bring the Chaos to an End – If all else fails and there is one or a group of individuals who will not follow the rules of conduct, are threatening or abusive, do not make the mistake of believing that you can save the day. If ejecting the individual(s) from the meeting is possible, then order might be restored. If not, accept reality — five more minutes will not convince them of your position, nor will it control them. Provide one warning to the group that the meeting will disband if order cannot be maintained. And then, the President, with all the authority given to the position, should simply adjourn the meeting if order is not restored. Board members should leave the meeting room as quickly as possible.

Meetings are a major part of the governance process of a community association. Providing a professional and respectful meeting environment is key to receiving respect from community members. Neighbors will want to get involved if they know that meetings will be peaceful and efficient. A meeting that is well planned and presents an informative view of the issues at hand will result in the members' support. Following the above suggestions will greatly improve the results of your community association meetings.

Let us know!
 (http://search.google.c
 placeid=ChIJ9UI1Xhef

[PREVIOUS ARTICLE \(https://hub.associaonline.com/blog/quick-tips-for-an-effective-meeting-agenda\)](https://hub.associaonline.com/blog/quick-tips-for-an-effective-meeting-agenda)


Quick Tips for an Effective Meeti...
 It's no secret that some Board meetings can ru...

[NEXT ARTICLE \(https://hub.associaonline.com/blog/4-fruitful-seeds-to-plant-in-your-garden\)](https://hub.associaonline.com/blog/4-fruitful-seeds-to-plant-in-your-garden)


Partner Post: 4 Fruitful Seeds to ...
 Harvesting your own vegetables from a backy...

MOST RECENT ARTICLES

[!\[\]\(b29945fa2a6be561a89902fe3bc1eee0_img.jpg\)](https://hub.associaonline.com/blog/5-ways-your-hoa-can-save-money-this-year)

5 Ways Your HOA Can Save Money This Year

[!\[\]\(7a0fb7023d4295beb26eef39822a5ef1_img.jpg\)](https://www.cominghomemag.com/features/10-winter-maintenance-to-dos-for-your-home)

Partner Post: 10 Winter Maintenance To-Dos for Your Home

[!\[\]\(1fa906618d33c0f586cba67e92c6c1a9_img.jpg\)](https://hub.associaonline.com/blog/five-new-year-resolutions-to-make-in-your-community)

Five New Year's Resolutions to Make in Your Community

[!\[\]\(6997cd530bd98b4e51582d2c15bc2f8e_img.jpg\)](https://hub.associaonline.com/blog/partner-post-the-benefits-of-being-involved-in-an-hoa)

Partner Post: The Benefits of Being Involved in an HOA

[Return to Home \(https://hub.associaonline.com/\)](https://hub.associaonline.com/)

OUR COMPANY	COMMUNITY TYPES	ASSOCIA NETWORK	BETTER BUSINESS BUREAU
About Associa (https://associaonline.com/about)	Single-Family & Master-Planned (https://associaonline.com/communities/single-family-master-planned)	Associa Advantage (http://www.associaadvantage.com/)	We're proud to be an ...
History (https://associaonline.com/about/history)	Mixed Use (https://associaonline.com/communities/mixed-use)	Associa OnCall (https://www.associaonline.com/maintenance-services)	bu 'dallas/business-
Leadership (https://associaonline.com/about/leadership)	Luxury High-Rises & Condos (https://associaonline.com/communities/luxury-high-rises-condos)	Associations Insurance Agency, Inc. (AIAI) (http://www.associationsinsuranceagency.com/)	a-
Advocacy (https://associaonline.com/about/advocacy)	Active Adult (https://associaonline.com/communities/active-adult)	Community Archives (http://www.communityarchives.com/)	)
Corporate Responsibility (https://associaonline.com/about/corporate-responsibility)	Golf & Club (https://associaonline.com/communities/golf-club)	First National Bank of Kemp (https://www.fnbkemp.com/)	S
Careers (https://associaonline.com/about/careers)	Municipal Utility Districts (https://associaonline.com/communities/municipal-utility-districts)	HOA Collection Services (HCS) (http://hoacollectionservices.com/)	Let us know! (http://search.google.com/maps/placeid=ChIJ9UI1Xhef)
News (https://associaonline.com/about/news)	Condos, Lofts & Townhomes (https://associaonline.com/communities/condos-lofts-townhomes)	LHR Construction & Restoration (http://www.lincoln-hancock.com/)	(ht
Contact (https://associaonline.com/locations/contact)	Investment Properties (https://associaonline.com/communities/investment-properties)	Platinum Title Services (http://www.platinumtitlepartners.com/)	(ht
		SOLUTIONS FOR Management Firm Sellers (https://www.associaonline.com/solutions-for/management-firm-sellers)	(ht