

One-On-One Meetings

Relationship building is at the core of organizing – and happens in many different ways at different times. One core technique: the one-on-one.

Goals of One-On-Ones

The general purpose of the one-on-one is to build and strengthen a relationship. Other goals include:

- ▶ setting and modeling boundaries that enable civic and community relationships to flourish (e.g. it is not that you should not be friends with the people you organize with but the goal is not to create friends, it is to create a strong organization, a strong community, a strong movement);
- ▶ modeling the values of your organization (of generosity, honesty, resourcefulness, for example) – these should be lived throughout all your interactions with those you interact with;
- ▶ modeling self-care and respectful ways of listening and sharing to create healthy relationship amongst people as well as between people and the challenging work of changing the world.

The Set Up

The specific reason for why you request to meet with someone should be known and shared with the person you want to meet with. Like all requests the person can negotiate their response, they may say no, yes ("of course") or modify or ask questions that help strengthen the purpose of the meeting, and the relationship. It is important to be as clear with yourself as you can before making the request and to be open and respectful of the needs and time constraints of the person you hope to meet with.

Once you are clear about the purpose as well as your hoped-for outcomes of the meeting choose the most appropriate way to set up the meeting. This is often based on the relationship you already have with the person, are they someone that prefers setting things up in person, by phone, by email, through their social networking site? If your connection to the person is through a recommendation of someone else can the recommender introduce the two of you through email, or in person or by phone? Or ask the recommender how best to make the request based on their experience-would the person prefer a call or email, for example?

The request should be short and clear and should include how much time you expect the meeting to last. Most people are okay with a 30 minute to one hour meeting and some one on ones could take place by meeting for breakfast or lunch, it all depends on the relationship that exists. The same is true for where to meet, a suggestion is to meet where it is convenient for the person and for you. The key is to set and manage the expectations for what the meeting is all about, what will be discussed, etc. Make sure you have ways to contact each other in the event that something comes up and the plans need to change.

The Meeting

This is not a scripted meeting although you should come prepared to ask the questions that fit with the expected outcomes you have discussed with the person you are meeting with. There are often unexpected outcomes too, which can be very exciting. For example, the meeting may have been set up to find out information but you leave with the person stepping up their interest in the organization, perhaps they are clear that they want to become a leader and you schedule a time for them to come into the office to learn more, get trained, to do some work. It is better to get more out of a meeting than what is expected so set realistic expectations and be happy when you are surprised.

Here are some sample questions that can be useful at one-on-one meetings:

- ▶ How did you get involved in this issue?
- ▶ What do you hope to accomplish in the short term, long term?
- ▶ What organizations are you involved with, if any?
- ▶ What are ways you were hoping to be involved, what do you want to learn?
- ▶ Who else do you think I should talk with?
- ▶ What do you think it would take to win?
- ▶ What kind of support do you need to accomplish your goals?
- ▶ What are special interests or skills you could contribute?

There are an unlimited number of questions you can ask to get the conversation going and to keep it focused. In general, questions are best when they open up opportunities for learning, “how”, “what” questions for example open up opportunities for story-telling. Questions that can be answered with a yes or no are not bad questions but try to mix them in appropriately to gain clarity or start a new conversation. Always remember the purpose of the meeting which is to build a stronger relationship to advance the effort, so although focus is important so is staying relaxed, honest and present.

One of the primary outcomes of a one-on-one is you learning more about the people and groups that the person you are meeting with knows, and vice-versa. If there is time find out from the person who else they suggest you talk with. This should be reciprocated if the person is interested in making contacts with people and groups that you know.

Take notes or document the meeting in the way that is most comfortable and effective for you. If taking notes takes you away from being present than take some moment at the end of the meeting to review the discussion and write some things down. As you document your meeting, consider what do you need to remember months later? And how will you organize your notes so you can find them again, including their contact information?

Follow-up

Timely follow-up to one-on-ones is important and it is also where note-taking can be very helpful. Follow-up in the most appropriate manner and in the way that was agreed upon (if it was agreed upon) at the meeting. Follow-through on any tasks that you agreed to on your end as well. You have invested a lot of time in the one-on-one and the quality and timeliness of your follow-through will often determine whether or not it was worth it. Follow-ups also should include specific next steps and deadlines if any were agreed to and helpful reminders along the way.

By Jethro Heiko, Action Mill (actionmill.com)