

High level meetings with a clear purpose

Make the time around the table count. Prepare the agenda, the argument and the follow up for an institutional or G2G meeting, with a sample delegation brief.

Turn an agenda into a working meeting

A high level meeting needs both substantive preparation and operational precision. The briefing should distinguish the desired discussion from what participants are actually authorised to agree. For delegations, maintain one version of the programme with a named owner for changes.

Briefing → Coordination → Meeting → Action record

Before

Remits, objectives, biographies and a short evidence pack

Confirm interpretation, protocol, access and public communication permissions

During

Agenda owner, timekeeping and agreed note taker

Record decisions, open questions and commitments precisely

After

Action register with owner and due date

Confirm the record before circulating an external summary

Application checklist

- Keep confidential briefing material separate from media material.
- Prepare a contingency contact and alternative timing for programme changes.
- Assign follow up to a person rather than an unnamed organisation.

High level meetings with a clear purpose

Working checklist

- 1** Define the decision or next step. Specify what the meeting should clarify, assess or enable. A useful objective may be agreement to exchange technical information or appoint working contacts. Keep it within the participants' actual responsibilities and distinguish it from a hoped for long term agreement.

- 2** Map responsibilities before titles. Identify who sets direction, who provides technical assessment, who controls implementation and who needs to be consulted. Verify the current remit of each institution. Senior attendance does not automatically bring authority over every item on the agenda.

- 3** Establish the shared relevance. Document each side's publicly stated priorities, practical constraints and existing activity. Mark assumptions as questions to explore. Explain how the proposed discussion relates to both sides without attributing motives that have not been established.

- 4** Build the meeting brief. Use a concise document covering purpose, participants and responsibilities, relevant background, three discussion points, supporting evidence and the proposed next step. Separate information cleared for sharing from internal preparation notes.

- 5** Prepare the substance and the logistics together. Confirm the agenda, languages, interpretation, duration, room arrangements and each participant's role. Agree how notes and any public communication will be handled. Build enough time into a delegation programme for travel and preparation between meetings.

High level meetings with a clear purpose

Notes, owners and next actions.

- 6** Facilitate towards a concrete conclusion. Open with the agreed purpose, allow both sides to explain their position and distinguish questions from commitments. Before closing, restate what was agreed, what remains subject to review and which contacts will carry the work forward.

- 7** Confirm the record and ownership. Circulate a concise account through the agreed channel. Record actions, owners, dependencies and proposed dates. Seek correction where the interpretation is uncertain. A discussion of a possible initiative should not be reported as an approved partnership.

- 8** Assess progress beyond attendance. Track whether evidence was exchanged, responsibilities clarified or a defined next stage authorised. A completed meeting is an activity, not proof of a policy or commercial outcome. If follow up stalls, identify the missing decision, information or accountable owner before requesting another meeting.

High level meetings with a clear purpose

Worked example: a digital services delegation

Illustrative G2G scenario. It is not an account of a named ministry or One9Six project.

The brief

Two public bodies are exploring an exchange of experience in digital services. Neither has approved a joint programme. The first meeting should establish whether their needs and responsibilities are sufficiently aligned to justify technical follow up.

An achievable meeting objective

Agree one area for further exploration and identify the appropriate technical contacts. Confirm which information each side can share and propose a date for a working level discussion, subject to each institution's approval process.

A 30 minute agenda

5 minutes: purpose and responsibilities. 10 minutes: needs and existing approaches. 10 minutes: possible area of exchange and constraints. 5 minutes: agreed actions, contacts and confirmation process. Adapt the timing to protocol and the participants.

The follow up record

For each action, record: agreed wording. Responsible institution and contact. Required information. Dependency or approval. Proposed date. Current status. Report only confirmed agreements publicly and retain exploratory points as such.

Further reading:

OECD / Institutional stakeholder engagement