Chapter 4

Getting to Peer Learning
Planning Meetings, Tours, and Workshops

“Tell me and I’ll forget.
Show me and I may not remember.
Involve me and I’ll understand.”
—Chinese Proverb

You’re ready to pull your group together and have your first gathering. Meetings can be loosely organized and conducted or tightly held to a formal agenda. A mix of both ends of the spectrum might be best.

Research shows that most adults learn best in informal settings where they can query deeper into the presented information and figure out how that new knowledge relates to their own life experience and what they already know. Presenting the material for different learning styles is also highly effective. Mix lectures and speakers with hands-on activities, informal discussions (for example, around a lunch table), and time for questions.

This chapter presents some formal aspects of meeting management and facilitation. Think of these as suggestions and guidelines, not hard-and-fast rules. Use whatever works for your group and helps you all keep up your energy and momentum.

Characteristics of a good meeting

Varied meeting times

Vary the meeting day and time so that more members have a chance to attend. Doing this helps attract people whose schedules may conflict. Consider weekends and weekdays, morning, afternoon, and evening. Mix it up so that a wide variety of participants may attend.

To attract a younger generation of women landowners, take into consideration their roles as caregivers. Vary meeting or workshop times so that at least some days and times will work for a family woman’s schedule.

Think about travel time to and from a meeting. Start later to give those who do not live on their forestland or close to the meeting place time to get there.
(For example, someone might want to attend a meeting in the county where their forest property is, but they live in a different county.) Also, consider ending before dark so that participants can get home safely.

**Fellowship**

Women are really good at talking to each other and establishing personal connections through sharing their stories. People must be comfortable with each other to be open and willing to try new ideas, and they must feel that others have their best interests at heart. Sharing helps create a safe environment where participants can learn together, build a feeling of fellowship, and create new understanding.

Researchers have noted that eating together allows people to make initial connections and build a feeling of fellowship. (Food is integral, especially homemade; bring recipes for sharing.) Make sure there is time in the meeting schedule for introductions, laughing, sharing a meal, and friendly conversation.

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**GETTING TO YOUR STORY**

All of us have a story to share. Whether you know it or not, your experiences will be as useful to someone else as others’ stories and experiences have been to you.

Stumped on what your story is? Try answering some or all of these questions to hone in on it.

- Tell a story from a time when you were on your land.
- How did you acquire your land?
- When was the first time you walked on your land? What went through your mind?
- What has been the most gratifying moment on your land? The most frustrating?
- Who has been the biggest influence on your management style? What lessons did they teach you?
- What are the most important lessons you’ve learned in land management?
- Are there any words of wisdom you’d like to pass along to others?
- How has your woodland experience been different from what you’d imagined?
- What are your dreams for your woodland? What will it look like in 50 years? Who will use it? What services will it provide (economic and non-economic)?
- Tell about a specific tree on your land that might be important or special to you.

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1 Richardson, 2000, p. 223
Building a meeting agenda

Set objectives before every meeting. Before planning an agenda, write down a phrase (or several) to complete the sentence, “By the end of the meeting/field tour/demonstration, participants will be able to...” Objectives should be simple, clear, and measurable or observable.

Develop objectives with key participants (or all participants) before a meeting. This both gives a group leader a chance to make adjustments to the agenda before the meeting, and builds commitment from participants who plan to attend.

The agenda lets participants know what the objectives are and how they will be accomplished. In this way, the agenda also helps avoid misunderstandings arising from unfounded expectations.

When building an agenda, be sure to set starting and ending times, and stick to them. Include time for breaks, travel (on foot or via vehicle depending on the site), and questions. Women are really good at asking questions. There’s no need to fill all the time with formal lecture and instruction; much of the learning occurs informally.

Other things to consider when creating your agenda:

- Who should be involved in developing objectives and building the agenda?
- What are the objectives of the meeting?
- List all tasks that you need to do in order to accomplish the objectives.
- Put tasks in order of sequence; what comes first, then second, etc.
- Decide how much time is needed for each task.
- How long should the meeting be? (How many items need to be addressed?)
- Decide how to handle each item on the agenda (for example, discussion, brainstorm, rank and order)
- Identify who is responsible for each agenda item.
- Identify any advance work that must be done.

Also see the Field Tour Planning template (pages 42–43). It can be a useful tool.

Facilitating an engaging program (being a good “guide on the side”)

Some of the most engaging events include a structured informational session (such as a lecture) and a hands-on learning opportunity (such as a demonstration). Each group is different and may be most successful if provided both formal and informal approaches to learning.

An engaging lecture

Sometimes you have to give a short lecture to effectively convey new information. You can present it in a way that intellectually engages and involves participants. Start
your lecture with some well-phrased questions that can help you learn about participants’ experiences or problems they wish to solve. Right from the beginning this helps participants apply your presentation directly to their own management issues.

Break the lecture at least once per session for an activity that lets participants work directly with the material. One way to do this is to offer information and then provide an opportunity for discussion (see “Discussion,” below). This can also help you determine whether the participants understand the information you provided.

Tips for an engaging lecture:

• Keep lectures to 30 minutes or less, with four or five major points. If you present more than that, you may lose people’s interest and attention.
• You won’t be able to teach everything about your topic in one lecture (and if you try, nobody will be able to remember it all!). Provide a list of books, articles, and Internet links that offer further explanation. Participants can continue learning when they get home and refresh the important topics they learned during your session.

Discussion

The key to a good peer-learning network is establishing meaningful ways for participants to interact. If you are a teacher, this doesn't mean that you have to give up your role; it might just mean tweaking your technique a bit. One of the ways to do this is to facilitate discussion. A facilitated discussion helps determine what participants already know and what they are curious about. It also engages participants, which will likely result in more interest throughout the meeting (or other event). By asking questions in response to questions, you can elicit thought and response from a group.

Some challenges with discussions are that they take some time, and some participants might want to participate more than others. It takes good facilitation skills to keep the discussion from “wandering in the weeds.”

Tips for facilitating discussion:

• Make sure your questions are worded clearly and are open-ended. Avoid questions that elicit “yes” or “no” answers. Use words like “what,” “when,” “where,” “how,” and “why.”
• Give people time to think after you ask a question.
• Be sure to allow adequate time on your meeting agenda for a potentially lengthy discussion. Or, set a time limit for each discussion, and come back to them later if time allows (see “Parking lot,” page 40).
• Never let a discussion end until everyone has correct information.
• Encourage everyone to participate! Recognize and thank participants.
• At the end of a discussion, summarize what you heard.
Case studies

A case study uses a personal story (either true or invented) and a set of questions to identify or solve a problem. Questions that follow the story should make participants think about the situation and lead them to the right conclusions.

Case studies are practical ways to start a discussion, especially if your group doesn’t know each other very well. They stimulate problem-solving thought and creative solutions. They also motivate participants to use personal experience to illustrate a point.

It can be hard sometimes to find or create appropriate case studies. Working with landowners or co-workers is a great way to create useful case studies. It can be equally challenging to ask the right questions. As always, it takes good facilitation skills to make sure that accurate information is provided and discussions don’t get too far off topic.

Tips for case studies:

• Make sure you use a case study that illustrates the points you want to make.
• Choose or develop a case study that is relevant to your participants.
• Ask questions that stimulate discussion (see “Discussion,” page 38).

Demonstrations

A well-planned, hands-on demonstration is the most effective educational tool ever developed.

It takes time to find a good location and acquire appropriate tools and safety gear for a demonstration that is relevant to local needs. Participants who get to observe and practice sound techniques and practices will be more confident and likely to apply these practices on their own land.

Tips for demonstrations:

• Effective demonstrations address problems in which people are already interested. Or, your demonstration must arouse their interest.
• Participants should understand what the demonstration is about, why it is being conducted, and what it intends to accomplish.
• A demonstration that teaches one practice at a time is likely to be more effective than a multiple-practice demonstration that involves a number of factors. Begin with the simple and gradually proceed to the more complex.
• A skill has neither been taught nor learned until a person can actually perform the task with his or her own hands.
• Psychologists tell us that habits are most easily formed when the performance of an act results in satisfaction. Therefore,
we can assume that demonstrations are most effective when they deal with real problems and present a solution which is possible, practical, and easy to apply.

**Group agreements**

Group agreements (also called ground rules) establish standards by which the group agrees to participate and the group leader agrees to facilitate the meeting. They function the same as traffic rules do on the highway.

Group agreements are important for all meetings, regardless of how “easy” you expect the group to be. Establish and agree to follow them at the beginning of a meeting. It is difficult or impossible to create new ground rules after a meeting has already begun. Some sample group agreements are:

- Respect schedules.
  - Start and end on time.
  - Call if you are arriving late, leaving early, or not attending.
- Honor the process.
  - No side talking or excessive humor.
  - Keep comments focused, brief, and concise.
  - Turn cell phones off or set on vibrate.
- Treat each other with respect.
  - Practice positive feedback.
  - Support opinions with facts or examples.

**“Parking lot”**

Sometimes new ideas or topics for inquiry come out as part of a discussion. Sometimes a topic gets contentious or there is a need to re-focus the group. A “parking lot” is a place to record those topics so they are not lost. (They can be subjects for future events.) Post-it notes or flip charts work well in this function.

It is important when closing the meeting to review the “parking lot” list and make a group decision about the disposition of each entry. Doing this keeps the integrity of this technique intact. (If you ignore the list, you’ll never be allowed to use this tool again.)

**Evaluating your meeting**

After each meeting (or other event), it serves the group well to understand what everyone got out of it, what they intend to put into practice, and what could be changed for the next time. To achieve this, plan to include an evaluation at the end of your meeting or event. (See Chapter 7 for more information on evaluations.)

If the next event has been planned, remind group members about when and where it will take place, and what will be covered. Encourage members to attend and bring someone else who might be interested. If no event has been planned, ask for volunteers who might be willing to host, or topics that participants are interested in, and set a date. Don’t lose momentum. Don’t be afraid to delegate, either. This will help more people take ownership of the group, and prevent you from burning out!
After each meeting, it is a courtesy to send thank-you notes to your hosts, presenters, or both. Building goodwill is always a good idea. Let the host or presenter know what the participants learned, appreciated hearing, or enjoyed seeing. If possible, take comments directly from the evaluations.

Send participants and the larger group a summary or report of what happened. If you provide a newsletter or other method for connecting the group, make sure it includes a write-up. It not only reminds participants of what they learned (and maybe sends a belated “thank you”), but it lets those who missed out glean information they would have learned if they had been there. Share resources that were part of the event with the larger network. New knowledge and learning should belong to all.

Always summarize and report your evaluations to group leadership, hosts, and presenters. Make sure that the information you report is constructive. Constructive criticism gives the recipient an opportunity to grow. Mean-spirited comments do no one any good. It’s best to remove them.

References

Getting ready for a field tour

On the following pages, you’ll find several checklists that can help you plan for a big event: a field tour. These comprehensive lists cover the advance work necessary to get ready for the tour, things to remember to bring or do, and what to do after the tour to ensure that momentum continues. They are:

- Field Tour Planning template (pages 42–43) and a filled-in sample (pages 44–45)
- Field Tour Planning Details checklist (pages 46–47)
- "Any Event" checklist (page 48)

Have your first-aid kit handy!
FIELD TOUR PLANNING

Program title: __________________________________________________________
Date: ________________________________________________________________
Start/end times: ______________________________________________________
Location(s): __________________________________________________________
Audience(s): _________________________________________________________

Tour learning and skill objectives
At the end of this tour, participants will:
1) _________________________________________________________________
2) _________________________________________________________________
3) _________________________________________________________________

Tour agenda items
Stop #1  Title: ______________________________________________________
          Location: _____________________________________________________
          Major points: ________________________________________________
          Speakers: ____________________________________________________
          Time allotted: _________________________________________________

Stop #2  Title: ______________________________________________________
          Location: _____________________________________________________
          Major points: ________________________________________________
          Speakers: ____________________________________________________
          Time allotted: _________________________________________________

Stop #3  Title: ______________________________________________________
          Location: _____________________________________________________
          Major points: ________________________________________________
          Speakers: ____________________________________________________
          Time allotted: _________________________________________________

Stop #4  Title: ______________________________________________________
          Location: _____________________________________________________
          Major points: ________________________________________________
          Speakers: ____________________________________________________
          Time allotted: _________________________________________________
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<th>Name</th>
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## Sample Field Tour Planning Form (Page 1)

### Field Tour Planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program title:</th>
<th>Act as Science of Forest Thinking</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>April 01, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start/end times:</td>
<td>9 AM - 4 PM, Optional brown bag lunch 12 PM - 1 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location(s):</td>
<td>Birds n Bees Tree Farm, 35 Tree Farm Lane, Tic, Oregon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience(s):</td>
<td>WOODOOT members &amp; other landowners?</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Tour learning and skill objectives

At the end of this tour, participants will: able to

1. "Read" a forest's history using site cues
2. Establish plots, measure tree height, DBH, trees/acre, density
3. Make thinning decisions based on #1 & 2 & landowner values

### Tour agenda items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stop</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Major points</th>
<th>Speakers</th>
<th>Time allotted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td><strong>Introductions</strong></td>
<td>Barn</td>
<td>Introduce everyone, review agenda, property history</td>
<td>Everyone, 4 property owners</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>Close young stand - PCT</td>
<td>Stand #1, down road from barn</td>
<td>Planting density, conducting a PCT</td>
<td>Steve Fitzgerald</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>Thinning older stands</td>
<td>Stand #2, 70-80 yrs old</td>
<td>Use clinometer, tape, core, calculations</td>
<td>Vince Strong &amp; Greg Andrews</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>Oak restoration site</td>
<td>Oak woodland stand #3</td>
<td>Keeping oaks by thinning out conifers, management replaces fire</td>
<td>Nicki Strong</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Final 01A = 15 minutes**
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<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Smith</td>
<td>SSS - SSS - SSSS</td>
<td><a href="mailto:BIRDS@DBNOS.COM">BIRDS@DBNOS.COM</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole Strong</td>
<td>SSS - SSS - 2469</td>
<td><a href="mailto:DAVE@STONE.COM">DAVE@STONE.COM</a></td>
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<td>Vans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Porta Potty</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
FIELD TOUR PLANNING DETAILS

Transportation...

— Map and directions are available
— Parking designated
— Signage placed if necessary
— Vans or trucks if too far to walk
— Road and parking prep done if needed

Event marketing or advertising...

— Flyers made, email sent, website updated, media contacted (newspapers, radio, TV, etc.)
— Someone who will take photos at the event
— Someone who is in charge of taking RSVP and contact information

Creature comforts...

— Plan your tour stops to show relevant practices in action. Going all the way into the woods just to stand and listen to someone talk is a waste of everyone’s time and the opportunity afforded by being out in the field. Set up a plot, have the group make a thinning plan, have participants try a piece of equipment. Make sure participants go home with new skills, experience, and knowledge.

— A portable PA system is often needed for groups larger than 20 to 25 and to accommodate hearing-challenged participants and certain event settings (for example, next to a stream or at an active logging site).

— Make sure you have plenty of water and snacks for a longer tour. If you do not plan to provide these, ask participants to bring their own.

— Some people might rather use a bathroom facility than Mother Nature. If there are no bathrooms at the field event, make sure you warn participants beforehand, at least before you leave the last place with a restroom; or, rent portable toilets for the event.

— Have a back-up plan in case of rain or other inconvenient weather. A barn or tool shed can sometimes be a great place to wrap up a conversation or carry out anything that doesn’t have to be in the woods.

— Make sure participants know how they need to dress (for example, sturdy boots, long pants) and what they might want to bring along (for example, sunscreen, insect repellent).
Safety for field events…

— Make sure your roads and trails are safe for driving and walking.
— Gather necessary safety equipment, a first-aid kit, and safety instructions, and make sure they are close at hand, either in a rig or otherwise handy.
— Have a plan to evacuate people if there is a medical emergency.

Other elements for a successful event…

— If you give handouts, be sure they are relevant to the program.
— Make tours as hands-on and practice-oriented as possible.
— Tours should be fun! It is hard to learn when you are suffering from the weather, are bored, or can’t hear or see.
THE “ANY EVENT” CHECKLIST

2 to 3 months prior
- Set date
- Reserve facility
- Recruit speakers
- Secure field sites

2 months prior
- Prepare agenda
- Prepare marketing materials
- Start advertising
- Secure food
- Secure lodging
- Send out press materials

1 month prior
- Collect teaching materials and supplies
- Scout location
- Secure transportation
- Confirm speakers

1 week prior
- Confirm attendance
- Confirm audio-visual equipment
  - Computer
  - Projector
  - Camera
- Confirm transportation
- Confirm facility
- Confirm field sites
- Confirm lodging

Make sure you take:
- Teaching materials and supplies
- Sign-up sheet
- Evaluation form
- AV equipment
- Name badges
- Camera

After the event
- Send thank-you notes to presenters.
- Share evaluation information with instructors and participants, if relevant.
- Deposit registration money, if collected.