BUILDING AGENDAS USING THE SCIENCE OF THE POSITIVE PROCESS

When leaders use Spirit-Science-Action-Return Cycle to organize agendas, they create meetings with a natural, conversational flow that encourages engagement and collaboration and maximizes effectiveness.

Agendas often contain only Science and Action items; organizing meetings with the Spirit-Science-Action-Return Cycle creates opportunities for leaders to begin with Spirit elements that can align individuals from different organizations and promote teamwork, and close with Return elements that encourage meaningful discussion, reflection and evaluation.

Remember that order matters:

Spirit elements should be introduced first to establish the why behind the mission, meeting, or effort. Leaders model the tone that they want to set for the meeting, such as: being engaged, being eager to work across organizations and systems, being energized by the work and positive about the potential outcomes. Spirit agenda items could include:

- Introductions
- Ice-breaker discussions or activities
- Goal or mission statement sharing or development
- Articulating shared purpose of meeting
- Current events in the community that are concerning or hopeful
- Revisiting the 7 core principles of how you want to work together as an organization

Science elements should be discussed next. These focus on what we know and what we need to find out. Science agenda items could include:

- New information or data from the field
- Information, brainstorming, and idea gathering from the group
- Identifying information gaps and needs
- Research reports or findings
- Evaluation reporting

Necessary Action elements become clearer after first establishing spirit and science. Action items cover what we are doing and what we are planning. It is where we examine elements of being busy versus being effective by implementing best practices or evidence-based actions. Action agenda items could include:

- Committee reports and task assignments
- Communication, program, or other planning work
- Strategic planning
- Items in need of approval
Training opportunities

Return can allow time to reflect and evaluate, focusing on questions such as what have we accomplished and how did we do? Leaders will take time towards the end of the meeting to share a common laugh (as intentional team building) through a story, or to reflect on what energized the group most, and how this energy could be harnessed going forward. Return agenda items could include:

- Structured reflection activity
- Feedback from clients, others in the field, the media or the community at large
- Report on accomplishments since previous meeting
- Setting agenda items for next meeting
- Scheduling upcoming meeting dates

The words spirit, science, action, and return do not, of course, have to appear in the agenda itself (as they do in the example on the following page) but may serve in the background as an invisible structural framework.
SAMPLE SPIRIT–SCIENCE–ACTION–RETURN AGENDA

SPIRIT:
• Introductions: please say your name, organization, and what hopes you have for our work
• Purpose of meeting: What are our goals here today?

SCIENCE:
• Evaluate / summarize progress in achieving metrics since last meeting
• Discuss new data and implications for practice or projects
• Policy change update
• Review qualitative and quantitative measures of both change and transformation
• What new questions are emerging? (Capture these on white board for future discussion and analysis)

ACTION:
• Review timelines and project actions
• Assign tasks and responsibilities for next week’s meeting
• Finalize communication plan
• Hone communication strategies with key stakeholders
• Identify upcoming opportunities for collaboration across divisions and organizations

RETURN:
• Reflect on today’s meeting accomplishments
• Progress evaluation: what is working about these meetings? What could we do better?
• Select date for and purpose of next meeting.

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