

Effective Activism: How to Structure Productive Meetings

Once you have recruited a general membership, your campus FMLA should meet once every week or two depending on how many actions the FMLA chooses to take, alternating between two kinds of meetings: *executive committee meetings* and *program meetings*. For example, you might advertise executive committee meetings on the first and/or third Thursday of every month and program meetings on the second and/or fourth.

What is an executive committee meeting?

Executive committee meetings are primarily organizational. During this time, executive committee members should be present and prepared to talk about ideas for upcoming programs, tasks that need to be assigned, the budget, etc... All members are welcome and should be encouraged to attend these sessions. Even if an individual is not an elected chair, he or she can undertake responsibilities and vote on decisions.

What is a program meeting?

Program meetings are based around an event, action, or issue and should attract your entire general membership and new people. The more the better! While you can address business, the focus of these meetings should be centered on deepening members' understanding of and experiences with feminism. Biweekly programs could be on anything: a forum on international reproductive rights, a lecture by a feminist professor, a speak-out in the student center, a letter-writing session, or a visit with a famous feminist. Be creative and think big!

Getting Started

Start with an executive committee meeting to brainstorm program ideas. Allow for lots of ideas with different issues and types of programming (action, lecture, forum, etc...) Decide how you will use program meetings throughout the semester, noting which ones might require more planning than others. Try to adhere to this schedule, but stay flexible! Campus, local, national, and international policies may change or events may occur that change the direction of your year's plan.

Next, vote on actions to take on during the year. Plan on 1-2 major actions each semester. Choose working dates for the actions, keeping in mind your school's calendar, already scheduled events, and midterms and finals scheduling. Ideally, you would have a timeline for planning each major action, including deadlines for publicity, confirming speakers and guests, etc... But also try to maintain some flexibility. If a major issue surfaces on campus, in the state legislature, or nationally, you should be able to mobilize your group to respond.

Using Committees

- Committees are key to getting tasks accomplished and involving more members. Using committees allows more people to take leadership roles in the group and distributes the work more evenly, enabling your group to accomplish more.
- Committees can be in charge of specific tasks, such as media, fundraising, events, or programs. Committees can also be event-specific, such as a March 8, International Women's Day committee
- Chairs of committees can be active members of the group or executive committee officers, however executive committee members should give non-executive committee members a chance at leadership by encouraging them to be committee chairs. Committee chairs are ultimately responsible for ensuring that the committee's work is completed.

Using an Agenda

- Develop and work from an agenda at each meeting. To ensure that everyone can contribute to planning the meeting, make sure that the first agenda item is “additions, corrections, or reordering the agenda.”
- During the executive committee meeting, officers should put together the agenda and program for the next general body meeting. Be sure to involve all executive committee members in the process of developing the agenda.
- Develop a method by which members can add business to the agenda prior to the meeting, for example, by using your e-mail list serve. Be sure to inform new members!

Facilitating Your Meetings

- Agree on a protocol for meetings. Allow suggestions for how meetings may run. You may want to use an appropriately adapted version of “Robert’s Rules” (see attachment) as a basic guideline.
- Use your agenda to keep the meeting moving smoothly.
- Allocate time for each officer’s report, committee chair reports, general business, and/or discussion of timely feminist issues.
- Finalize plans for your next program or upcoming event. Make it interesting, informative, and appealing to your members. Use programs to attract new members and engage and involve your general membership.
- Ensure that group members have time to ask questions and make announcements and contributions during the meeting.
- Aim to have the executive committee meet outside of the general body meeting each week. Try meeting directly before or after the general body meeting. This will help keep your group organized and effective!
- Remember to plan social events periodically throughout the semester and to debrief as a group at the end of every semester. Celebrate your accomplishments and set goals for the next semester!

Logistics for Meetings

- Hold them in a public, accessible space on campus. Ensure that there is enough space for everyone to sit comfortably, but still fill the room. Consider whether you will need access to a chalkboard, a computer, the internet, etc. . .
- Always invite your faculty advisors. They may not always be able to attend, but seek out their insight and advice.
- Provide food or refreshments.