

“Meeting in a Box”

What it is

“Meeting in a Box” is a public engagement technique designed for community groups, neighborhood associations, or friends to gather at a convenient time and location to share their opinions about a plan or project in their community. Participants are given a “Meeting in a Box” kit that contains everything they need to hold a meeting/discussion on their own, including instruction sheets for the host/facilitator, discussion questions, worksheets for participant responses, feedback questionnaires, and directions for recording and returning responses. These kits can be completely paper-based, downloadable, and posted on a project or agency website for any interested individual or organization to use. However, kits can also include other meeting materials such as project posters, post-its, stickers, and other engagement materials that are relevant to the specific meeting design of the kit. These are usually distributed in a limited number. Sponsoring agencies can also provide snacks or a small stipend for refreshments, depending on the scope and budget of the project.



American Meetings, Inc. offers a professionalized “Meeting in a Box” service that includes a kit that contains all of the materials an agency may require for a meeting. This can be especially helpful for an agency that is holding multiple meetings in different locations but wants all of the meetings to be con-

Why it Works

The “Meeting in a Box” concept is an effective engagement technique because it leverages social connections that already exist in a community. Residents are more likely to participate and engage

with a familiar organization or community member than an agency that might be perceived as an ‘outsider’ to the community.

When to Use It

“Meeting in a Box” is most effective when soliciting detailed, qualitative feedback from community members. Meeting in a Box encourages small group conversation and discussion, often associated with a deeper level of engagement. However, “Meeting in a Box” can also be used to distribute surveys and collect more quantitative data as well.

Audience

“Meeting in a Box” has broad appeal to a variety of audiences, but is most effective in areas with high civic participation rates.

Estimated Level of Effort

“Meeting in a Box” requires significant effort up front to develop the materials that will be included in the kit. Depending on the complexity of the specific project and the type of materials, upfront time investment could be anywhere from a couple of days to a few weeks. Some investment of time will also need to be made to publicize the meetings and recruit participants to run them on your behalf. This can be done via social media, through partner organizations, or even through earned media content. However, once the “Meeting in a Box” kits are distributed, there is almost no staff time required (aside from occasionally troubleshooting or responding to questions from participants). Bottom line: High upfront investment of time, but little ongoing time required.

Examples

[National MS Society](#)

[Ft. Lauderdale Meeting in a Box Facilitator Guide \(youtube video\)](#)

[Rails to Trails Toolkit](#)

[Minneapolis 2040](#)

Resource

[Meetings in a Box services from American Meetings](#)

Cost Considerations

Generally speaking, “Meeting in a Box” is a low cost engagement method. However, costs can vary depending on the types of meeting materials that are provided by the sponsoring organization. If materials are being custom printed or refreshments are being reimbursed (or stipend provided), then costs will be higher. A simple, downloadable packet is the lowest cost option for a “Meeting in a Box.”

