

# SMART RECOVERY SAN DIEGO MEETING MANAGEMENT HOW-TOS

As a facilitator, especially a new one, it can seem daunting and it's easy to feel as though you have the group's "success" resting solely upon your shoulders. Luckily, this is SMART Recovery, and our supportive participants and community are invested to ensure everyone (facilitators included) has a successful experience.

No one has all the answers for all situations, and that's okay.

SMART is a self-empowered community, not therapy; SMART's philosophy is to help individuals help other individuals help themselves.

Do your best and your participants will appreciate your efforts and work with you in creating a safe and welcoming place to hold discussions.

Meetings are more productive and positive when they have a logical and predictable structure participants can anticipate.

Following these four main steps helps participants know what to expect, which leads to greater comfort and security where participants can speak from their hearts about their experiences and challenges.

Remember, the more you practice, the easier it will be, the smoother your meeting will flow, and the more your confidence will grow.

1. **Follow the Meeting Outline, read Topic Discussion Script, and associated script questions or decide upon a topic/question(s) from situations or concerns raised during the Check-In process.**
2. **Acknowledge participant contributions ("shares").**
3. **Ensure the meeting runs smoothly by encouraging interaction and administering the Meeting rules, as needed.**
4. **Wrap up the discussion and close the meeting.**

1. **Follow Meeting Outline, read Topic Discussion Script, and associated script questions or decide upon a topic/question(s) from situations or concerns raised during the Check-In process.**

The Meeting Outlines and Topic Discussion Scripts are located within the SMART Recovery San Diego Facilitator Information on our SMART Recovery San Diego website.

There are over 50 Meeting Topic Discussion Scripts available and each includes questions to spark ideas, encourage interactive dialogue, and stimulate participation within the group.

Discussion questions are not intended to elicit a right/wrong response but rather to encourage "thinking about our thinking" and how the topic may be helpful in relation to a participant's perception and recovery.

Check back as new Topic Discussion Scripts are added frequently to expand the topics available. (You may even wish to contribute to the Library yourself.)

## 2. Acknowledge participant contributions (“shares”)

Many contributions can be acknowledged by a simple “Thank you.”

Other acknowledgements (always brief) could be:

- Basic: “It’s good to have you here today.”
- Congratulate: “Congratulations, 3 months is great!”
- Show Compassion: “That’s bad news. I’m sorry to hear that.”
- Show Appreciation: “Even though it was a rough week, you came to this meeting and you’re telling us about it. I’m glad you’re here and I think we can all benefit from hearing about your experience.”
- Offer Good Wishes: “Good luck in that job interview!”

Other brief personal comments (if the participant is known to you):

- “It’s good to see you back.”
- “Your new hairstyle looks great on you”
- “It’s good to see you smiling again.” (This last option is the riskiest, and probably best avoided in your first meetings.)

## 3. Ensure the meeting runs smoothly by encouraging interaction and by administering the Meeting rules, as needed.

Administering/enforcing rules during a meeting is how group norms are established and maintained. It is vital that participants feel welcome and safe in their attendance, and with their contributions to the discussion. This is an important component of any cohesive community as participants feel more comfortable when they know what to expect of others and what others expect of them.

Some questions to consider about enforcing rules:

- Was it appropriate and necessary?
- Was I brief?
- Was I gentle?
- Was I accurate and straightforward?
- Did I speak confidently?

### **No one is required to participate beyond attendance.**

Participants should feel welcome, but not obligated, to respond to any questions. Occasionally, a participant wants to force another participant to say something. Simply repeat the rule. As we have no way of knowing the current situation of any participant. Perhaps they are drawing support from being part of the meeting/ community but are not in a space where they feel comfortable contributing more than attendance at that time.

### **No one gets to talk too much or too often.**

Even for long-standing facilitators this can be a challenging rule to enforce with flexibility, as someone who experienced a major trauma last week might get more time than someone who just wants to recount the events of the week.

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You may find there are some people who have to be reminded of this rule repeatedly. Consistency of this policy will help the entire group.

- “I’m interrupting you because we need to keep the conversation going. It’s time to move on to the next person.”

#### **We don’t give advice.**

- “I’m interrupting you because that sounds like advice. Would you like to restate what you are saying as a summary of your own experience using ‘I’ statements?”

A potential issue that falls under this rule is, while participants are free to tell their own stories with their own language and in their own way, other participants may not apply those same terms or labels to themselves or their experiences.

- Even though SMART participants typically do not use these terms, some participants may wish to use the terms “addict” or “alcoholic” or other traditional terms to describe themselves.
- While we want to be careful not to criticize anyone for the language they use to describe themselves and their own experiences, other participants may not view or define those labels in the same way and could be deeply upset by having those labels applied to them by others.

#### **We stay focused on making progress with addictive problems and building a better life.**

This rule also needs to be enforced flexibly. A 30-second digression about Valentine’s Day, or the Super Bowl, or a holiday party, or pickle-ball, or banana bread recipes, or recent national news, can be part of being together in community.

5-10 minute conversation about any of these topics would be too long. “I’m interrupting you because, as interesting as this subject is, it’s time to get back to our primary topic.”

- If a major event has impacted the SMART community, for example, the death of a participant, an extended discussion on that topic may be appropriate and helpful for participants.
- One specific off-topic subject that should be avoided entirely is *criticism* of other approaches to change, especially AA. “I’m interrupting you because you are entitled to your opinion about AA. However, in this meeting, we stay focused on ‘doing SMART Recovery.’ Perhaps you would like to transition your comments by telling us what you do like about SMART.”

#### **We encourage participation from each individual. Sometimes a talkative or oblivious participant can break the “too much, too often” rule and/or get off topic.**

It is the responsibility of the facilitator to address this, and to guide the group back to discussing progress and change, and ensure that the meeting is not being dominated or taken off course and is instead a collaborative effort where each participant feels welcome and confident to contribute.

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#### **How to interrupt a participant that is speaking too long or getting off topic:**

While non-verbal cues are most effective in person, they can also help direct the participant back on track during Zoom interactions.

- Shift your body position/lean forward.
- Use other gentle nonverbal cues like a hand moving forward to signal an interruption is coming.
- Begin nodding and agreeing “Uh huh”.
- Interrupt by using reflective listening to summarize what the participant has said then explain why you interrupted and what you are going to do next.

#### **How to manage a repetitively disruptive participant:**

It is possible that a participant is unable or unwilling to follow the rules even after they have been reminded using the suggestions listed earlier.

In this case, you may request that they just listen for the remainder of the meeting:

- “I’m interrupting you because it sounds like you are having some trouble following the meeting guidelines. You are welcome to stay if you are ok with just listening to others for the rest of today’s meeting.”

If you are facilitating a Zoom meeting, it is absolutely okay to mute or remove problematic participants.

#### **How to manage a participant that is under the influence:**

One scenario that often concerns facilitators is how to deal with a participant who is under the influence during a meeting. Unless the person is being disruptive, they are generally allowed to stay in the meeting as it may be supportive for them.

In the rare case that a participant is under the influence and disruptive, it is appropriate to manage them as any other repetitively disruptive participant up to and including removing them from a meeting.

#### **Additional issues:**

With experience you will develop your own style of maintaining rules and providing guidance to redirect, as needed.

Any challenges you have experienced in a meeting (whether you are facilitating or attending as a participant) are a great topic for our monthly community development meeting, as a discussion with your mentor, or to share with the Facilitator Training Committee.

There may be an occasion where you are unclear about what is happening, and you may have a sense that you have lost control of the meeting.

It is the responsibility of the facilitator to ensure that the meeting is not dominated or taken off-course by interjecting and guiding the group back to discussing progress and change.

The meeting should be a collaborative effort where each participant feels comfortable and that they have the space to contribute:

- “I’m interrupting because it seems as though we have gotten off track. Our primary job is to ‘do SMART Recovery’.”

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- “It is my sense we are no longer ‘doing SMART Recovery.’ So, let us move on with [the next person, question, section of the meeting, etc.]”
- “I’m interrupting because we have come up with a question that I don’t know the answer to. I will consult with the local organization and report back next time. For now, let us move on with [the next person, the next question, the next section of the meeting, etc.]”

If you do not have another approach to enforcing rules, a simple formula is:

- “I’m interrupting you because (state the rule)”
- “Let’s circle back to . . . ”
- “Who hasn’t spoken yet? What do you think about . . . ”

#### 4. Wrap up the discussion and close the meeting.

Part of being a facilitator is being mindful of the time the participants have allotted for the meeting. It is important to be respectful of participants’ time expectation by beginning and ending your meeting on time each week.

Please provide your email for verifications. If possible, include it in the Chat to increase accuracy and success.

Please remind participants that SMART Recovery San Diego is funded through donations.

Share any announcements or special upcoming events.

Move into the Check-Out process.

#### **For Zoom meetings, you may wish to consider copying/pasting the following into the Chat as you wrap up the discussion.**

Thank you for being here today.

For meeting verification please email [email address] immediately following the end of this meeting.

All facilitators are volunteers. Your donation to SMART Recovery SD goes directly to bottom-line costs and makes it possible for us to pay for our Zoom licenses (\$700+ each month) and rent for the Kearny Mesa Community Center.

Please help us help you help yourself by supporting us via our website or these links:

SmartrecoverySD.org

PayPal: <https://bit.ly/3E244si>

Venmo Business account: @SMARTRecoverySD (biz acct.)