

Tips for a Successful Family Landowner Meeting

From Ginny and Allen Nipper, [Landowner Legacy Communication](#)

- **Always share your passion, vision and goals for your land with your family in every meeting.** Share the reasons why you own your land, the history of your land in your family and what you'd like the future to look like for your land.
- **Involve everyone.** Find a way to include all members of your family at some point in the meeting. Even the youngest child can have some role, perhaps by sharing a picture they made of the land or their favorite activities. However for the main part of the meeting, make sure that those participating are age appropriate for the topic and discussion. It might be good to have a teenager sit in to listen, learn and provide their input, but younger kids have more fun doing other things while the meeting is going on. So plan for logistics and child care to ensure that their parents can participate in the meeting without being interrupted.
- **Have a written agenda that is sent to all participants before the meeting.** The agenda should include your goals for the meeting, who is reporting on or sharing information during the meeting, and other topics that need to be addressed, including old and new business.
- **Keep meetings on a regular schedule at a neutral site.** These meetings are not a one-time thing but can become a regular activity for your family. A neutral site can be a nearby restaurant, a library meeting room, or even a vacation site.
- **Have ground rules that everyone agrees to follow.** Ground rules can help keep the meeting moving and ensure that everyone can participate and have their voice heard. These should be established as part of one of the first family meetings. Reminding everyone of these rules at the beginning of the meeting can help set a tone for respectful discussion. Examples of a few ground rules include:
 - In-laws participate in the meeting but don't get their own vote.
 - Use something to indicate when someone "has the floor" and it is their turn to talk. This can help minimize interruptions.
 - Use time outs, not walk outs if things get difficult.
 - Limit outside interruptions, i.e. no cell phones during the meeting.
 - How to call an "urgent" meeting.
 - Consider time limits for people when they are speaking, especially for family members who like to talk.
- **Have someone assigned to taking minutes for the meeting.** This person's primary job will be to document all topics of the meeting for future reference. When any decisions are made or tasks are assigned, be sure to identify who is assigned the task and what timeline was discussed for completing it.
- **Focus on opportunities and challenges, not personalities.** Many of the topics you will chose to discuss in your family meeting will not be easy to solve and might need discussions over many meetings. Avoid focusing on personality issues and try to keep discussion on the specific opportunities and challenges important to the family. Assign tasks that reflect the family member's interests/areas of expertise, highlighting their professional lives and personal interests. Help family members see each other as adults versus defaulting to childhood antics.

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- **Outlaw a culture of conflict.** Selecting a neutral location and sharing ground rules can help set the tone of respect for the meeting. Ensure that people are allowed to share their opinions about the agenda topics but not in a confrontational manner. If necessary, a meeting facilitator or mediator, outside to the family, can help run the first few meetings to help establish the right tone for your family meetings.
- **Use alternate means for attendance if necessary.** Sometime family members live far away, and it is not feasible for them to travel to every meeting. Consider having them call in or use a free video program like [Google Hangouts](#) or [Facetime](#) so they can be an active participant. Try to arrange meetings so those that used an alternate attendance method can physically attend at least once every three years.
- **Share and archive the minutes with all participants after the meeting.** These minutes can be a reminder of what was discussed and decided, without having to rely on people's memory of what occurred. They also can help ensure with accountability, documenting who is supposed to do what and when.
- **Have fun!** Plan an activity that is fun and builds memories, so meetings aren't all about work.

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