



Safe Routes  
to School  
National  
Partnership

# Walking Meetings

## What Are They and How Do We Use Them?



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How often does a brilliant idea come to you when you're in the shower, riding your bike, or playing catch with your kids? Compare that to how often you think up novel ideas and solutions when you've been staring at your computer for five hours. For most people, those great ideas don't come after staring at a screen for hours on end. There's a reason the phrase "thinking on your feet" exists! Getting up and away from one's desks stimulates creativity and heightens focus.

While many jobs and workplaces require sitting at a desk for the majority of the day, there are ways to incorporate physical activity into the workday while maintaining productivity: walking meetings. Here is a guide to use walking meetings in your workplace to stimulate creativity, boost workplace morale, and provide easy opportunities for physical activity during the workday.

### What Are Walking Meetings?

Walking meetings are real meetings that take place while walking. Like regular meetings, they have a specific purpose and involve one or more people. Walking meetings are not a break. They are not a social gathering or time for chit-chat. They are an opportunity for employees to be physically active while completing work. Simply put, they are meetings conducted while walking.

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### What are the benefits of walking meetings?

- Walking meetings stimulate creativity.<sup>1</sup> Because they represent a break in our normal routine, they help our brains think differently, allowing us to problem solve and innovate.
- Walking meetings help increase productivity and presenteeism. What is presenteeism? It's the opposite of absenteeism, but it also refers to productive time at work. Your employees may be physically present, but not fully mentally present. Aerobic exercise can improve cognition and job performance.<sup>2</sup> Getting up for a walking meeting can help increase the time employees are mentally present and productive.
- Walking meetings can improve morale, through team-building and meetings that feel productive.
- Walking meetings can provide a much-needed surge of energy in the afternoon, and can serve as an alternative to afternoon coffee or a sugary snack.
- Walking meetings can be good for problem solving (thinking on your feet) and minimizing distractions (no phones, no email).
- In addition to all of these productivity and work-related benefits, walking meetings provide an opportunity for physical activity, which supports your employees in attaining or maintaining a healthy weight.<sup>3</sup> Maintaining a healthy weight helps prevent chronic diseases like diabetes, and is also correlated with decreased rates of breast and colon cancer, dementia and heart disease.<sup>4</sup>

## Best practices for effective walking meetings

- **Size matters.** A group of four or fewer is an ideal size for a walking meeting. Much larger than that, and it is hard to all hear one another and remain engaged in the same conversation. Something to consider when deciding the group size is the width of the path, sidewalk, or road that you will be walking on. If you can't walk more than two people abreast, the group will have a hard time staying engaged in one conversation.
- **Topics:** Some meeting topics lend themselves to walking meetings better than others. A litmus test is to apply to potential walking meetings is to ask yourself, "will this meeting be hindered if I am not in front of my computer or if I am unable to take detailed notes?" If the answer is "no," it could be a good candidate for a walking meeting. Brainstorming meetings, check-ins, professional networking, and conflict resolution meetings work better than meetings where participants need to be taking notes or collaborating on a visual or written product.
- **Time:** Walking meetings are most effective when kept to 30 minutes or less. If you walk for less than that, it may be tough to accomplish your meeting objectives, but with too much more time it's easy to stray from the topic at hand.
- **Pace:** Walking meetings are not a race. Adapt your pace to the slowest person in the group. Set your route according to the meeting length.
- **Start with a few people who you think can be champions of this and encourage them to conduct walking meetings with their colleagues.**
- **Dress code:** As an employer, permit your employees to wear sneakers or comfortable shoes during walking meetings.

- **Establish clear rules about the use of cell phones.** You may wish to ask those in your meeting to refrain from using cell phones in order to minimize distractions.
- **Where to walk:** You can have a destination or just walk around the block, campus, or parking lot. Some workplaces create [walking routes](#) and disseminate maps with distance and approximate duration. Avoid using walking meetings as a mechanism for reaching a destination where sugary drinks and treats are sold, which undermines the health benefits of the walking meeting.
- **Plan ahead:** Ensure that your employees know when a walking meeting will be taking place so that they can pack appropriate footwear and outerwear.
- **Institutionalize it.** Let your employees know that this is a valid option for conducting meetings and encourage them to try it.

## References

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