**How to Know If There Are Too Many People in Your Meeting**

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or Who to Invite to Your Meeting

When setting up a meeting, the people you invite are just as important as what you need to get done. Including too many people — or too few — can be a waste of time for everyone involved. The following excerpt from the book [*Running Meetings*](https://hbr.org/product/running-meetings-20-minute-manager-series/17003E-KND-ENG) will help you decide who should be in the room to make your meeting most effective.

It may be easy to default to inviting a crowd of people to a meeting — that way, you don’t really have to identify the most critical participants, you’ll avoid any rufﬂed feathers, you’ll have everyone involved on hand for a decision, and you won’t have to repeat your communications separately afterward. Or maybe your tendency is to want to keep things small: You may be tempted to invite just a small group of people whose opinions you most value.

But for a meeting to be useful, you have to have the right people — and only the right people — in the room. With too many attendees, you may have trouble focusing everyone’s time and attention and accomplishing anything; with too few, you might not have the right decision makers or information providers in the room.

Firstly, determine the purpose for the meeting. You should always know the purpose of the meeting, and what you hope to accomplish. Is it Brainstorming, Problem Solving, Decision Making, Giving out Information, Getting Permission or Authority?

As you plan your attendee list, consider who will help you to accomplish your meeting’s goal and those who will be most affected by its outcome. Most likely this is a combination of people who will offer a variety of perspectives. Take the time to methodically list the individuals in each of these categories to make sure you include the right people. Depending on the purpose for meeting, your invitees should meet at least one of these criteria:

* The key **decision makers** for the issues involved, whose decisions are binding.
* The group leaders or **designates** who speak for the group
* The ones with **information, knowledge, expertise** about the topics under discussion
* People who have a **commitment to or a stake in** the issues
* Those who **need to know** about the information you have to report in order to do their jobs
* Anyone who will be required to **implement decisions** made

Feel free to consult with other stakeholders, to make sure you’ve made the right list. Often another key stakeholder can remind you of a perspective you forgot to bring into the room.

Just because someone’s name is on your list, however, doesn’t mean he or she must be at the meeting. How many people should you actually invite? There are no hard and fast rules, but in principle, a small meeting is best to actually decide or accomplish something; a medium-sized meeting is ideal for brainstorming; and for communicating and rallying, you can go large. Some people use what is known as the 8-18-1800 rule as a rough guideline:

* If you have to solve a problem or make a decision, invite no more than 8 people. If you have more participants, you may receive so much conﬂicting input that it’s difﬁcult to deal with the problem or make the decision at hand.
* If you want to brainstorm, then you can go as high as 18 people.
* If the purpose of the meeting is for you to provide updates, invite however many people need to receive the updates. However, if everyone attending the meeting will be providing updates, limit the number of participants to no more than 18.
* If the purpose of the meeting is for you to rally the troops, go for 1,800 — or more

If you decide not to invite individuals you listed as likely to be affected by the meeting’s outcome, have a plan to communicate the substance of the meeting to them afterward.