

PHSA Office of Environmental Sustainability

PAPERLESS MEETINGS TOOLKIT

OBJECTIVE:

A paperless meeting is characterized by the absence of paper copies of the agenda, minutes, presentations or other documents. The goal is to decrease paper use by eliminating the practice of printing documents to hand out at meetings.

WHY PAPERLESS MEETINGS

A paperless meeting eliminates paper and its related expenses. Required documents are distributed digitally ahead of time so people can review them or project them onto a screen. When a paper version is required, stop and think about how many copies you actually need: can people share or can they read on a laptop or from a projector? Paperless meetings can also assist your department in eliminating the risk associated with printing confidential information. If you can use virtual meetings, this further reduces expenses related to travel and employee impacts. All of these efforts support PHSA's environmental sustainability goals. Everyone can make a difference.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

For the base year of 2007, PHSA used 88,009 packages or 44,004,500 sheets of paper. Using the Environmental Defense Fund's Paper Calculator, the estimated full life-cycle environmental impact of PHSA's paper use is:¹

- 809 tons of wood, the equivalent of about 5,664 trees
- 6,597 million BTU's of net energy, the equivalent used in about 72 homes in a year
- 587,861 kg of CO₂e, the equivalent of about 118 cars in a year
- 18,508,100 liters of water, the equivalent of about 7 Olympic swimming pools
- 190,844kg of solid waste, the equivalent of about 15 garbage trucks.

BENEFITS:

- Saving paper = saving money and saving the environment.
- Less paper = less chance that confidential information is left lying around after a meeting.
- People can spend more time discussing or listening to a presentation instead of reading.
- Less paper = more space in your work area and less clutter.
- Less paper = reduced fire hazard and easier cleaning and infection control.

BARRIERS:

A lack of understanding about the importance of reducing paper stands in the way of making positive changes in the amount of paper consumed.

The perceived cost (financial and environmental) of printing a single sheet is minimal. However, for the entire organization costs are huge. Many small steps in reducing paper consumption result in large savings.

There is a social norm that everyone at a meeting should have a paper copy of all of the documents relating to the meeting and that the chair should provide those documents.

Your department may not have all of the electronic tools necessary to support a totally paperless meeting. Try to go as paperless as you can.

¹ Environmental impact estimates were made using the Environmental Defense Fund Paper Calculator. For more information visit <http://www.papercalculator.org>.

STEPS:

Step 1

Discuss holding paperless meetings with your manager or supervisor and highlight the benefits. Discuss the best way to approach the idea of paperless meetings with your department, either through an email or at a staff meeting.

If your department does not have all of the electronic tools necessary to support a totally paperless meeting, go as paperless as you can. Even not printing out agendas, minutes and copies of presentations will save a lot of paper every year.

Step 2

Either ask your department head to send the following email to all staff, or raise the content at a staff meeting.

Subject: Moving towards paperless meetings

Each year PHSA uses over 44 million sheets of paper. As part of our department's effort to waste less paper, we'd like to make the commitment to hold paperless meetings. A paperless meeting is characterized by not having paper copies of the agenda, minutes, presentations or other documents. Most of that paper is looked at once (if at all) and then thrown away.

How to hold a paperless meeting:

Email or put on a teamsite the agenda, minutes and any other documents for the meeting in advance so people can review them. Note that meeting organizers will not be providing paper copies. The agenda will be written on the *[whiteboard/flipchart]* so everyone can see it. If you really want a paper copy of something print it out for yourself.

If there are documents that need to be reviewed during the meeting the chair will either project them onto the screen, bring limited paper copies so people can share, or ask people to bring laptops to review documents on their own screens.

If someone is giving a presentation we will not print out copies of the slides.

All of these actions will help us waste less paper and make our department more sustainable. If you have any ideas for how to improve our paperless meetings, please let me know. Remember: less paper makes for better meetings!

Thanks,

Step 3

Prior to the next few meetings speak with the meeting chair and anyone who is presenting during the meeting to remind them of the new paperless meeting policy. Offer to help them make the meeting paperless if they are unsure how to proceed.

You will need to help out at the first few meetings until everyone in your department gets used to the new practice of paperless meetings.

EVALUATION

Prior to initiating use of the tool, try to determine how much paper your department is using. This information can be found from purchasing data (how much paper is your department buying). Try also to get a general sense of how much paper is used during meetings. If necessary, count the number of sheets used at a couple of typical meetings to use as a baseline.

In December, review paper usage and quantify what improvements have been made. How much less paper is being used at meetings? As well, try to get a qualitative indication of the tool. What are people's personal reactions to paperless meetings? Are there any issues with paperless meetings? How do they like the tool? What can be improved in the future?