

EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

The one thing that all organisations have in common is the need for regular meetings where decisions can be made. They are the backbone of all voluntary groups, so why are they sometimes so awful? There are lots of common gripes—they start too late, decisions are left unmade, decisions made aren't acted on and sometimes they can just be a complete headache.

This does not have to be the case.

Meetings are the forum for Committee Members to make crucial choices about the organisation, and this can be challenging! However if the meetings are well planned they can be useful, informative and even exciting.

Why have meetings?

All members who attend meetings should understand and agree on the answer to this question.

Purposes for meetings could be:

- * Information;
- * Business and decision making;
- * Consultation;
- * Legal requirements;
- * Training; and
- * Support

Reasons for meetings are different—however they do regularly overlap. Some meetings, like training, may only take place every now and then, whilst Management Committee meetings incorporate a number of these purposes and take place regularly.

MEETING FORMATS

The formats of meetings vary depending on the dynamics of the individual group. For example some groups work better with an informal approach whilst others have strict routines. Discuss meeting formats with the group members and do not be afraid to have different formats if you think it will improve your Committee's work.

AGENDAS

Before any meeting of a group it is the Secretary's responsibility, along with the Chairperson to write the agenda and circulate it to the other Committee Members in advance. The first three and last two items on the agenda will always be the same.

These are:

- * Welcome
- * Apologies for Absence
- * Minutes of last Meeting
- * Any other Business
- * Date of Next Meeting

Placed between these set items are the other subjects that require the Committee's attention. Each item should be numbered, and then after the meeting should be referred to when writing the minutes. Some Committees also find it useful to put time allocations next to the subjects, eg. 20 minutes. This can make the meeting more structured and ensure that all topics are covered.

WRITING MINUTES

Minutes are a record of what is said at meetings.

Minutes should cover four basic things:

- * Where and when the meeting took place;
- * Who was there and who was not;
- * What has been decided for the group; and
- * Who has agreed to do what.

Without minutes:

- * Nobody can be exactly sure what has been decided at meetings;
- * Nobody can be sure about the various actions of Committee Members;
- * Nobody can be sure who did or did not attend meetings;
- * The group is at the mercy of more organised bodies who take the

trouble to record decisions very carefully; and

- * The group is vulnerable to take-over by any member of the group who wants to take it over.

Good minutes should:

- * Be accurate and fair;
- * Be short and to the point;
- * Show decisions clearly marked "agreed" by the Committee Members;
- * Follow the agenda headings so that they are easily understood.

Effective minute writing will ensure that your group will have a detailed record of all decisions and therefore be easily accountable to members.

MEETINGS CHECKLIST

This is a basic checklist for practical issues associated with meetings.

VENUE

- * Is the venue accessible both in terms of distance/location, and for people with mobility problems?
- * Fire exists and safety of the venue
- * Are there creche facilities?
- * Cost
- * Is it conducive to the work you want to achieve, ie. Enough space, no interruptions
- * Seating arrangements
- * Space, how many people do you expect?
- * Toilets
- * Refreshments
- * Smoking/Non-Smoking

ORGANISATIONAL

- * Purpose of meeting
- * Notification
- * Agenda/Minutes
- * Points of Action achieved
- * Speakers/Guests

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EFFECTIVE MEETINGS, AGENDAS AND WRITING MINUTES

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