



Information Sheet 3.1

Running Effective Meetings

An effective meeting is one which achieves the meeting's objectives, takes up the minimum amount of time, and leave participants feeling that something has been accomplished.

There are different types of meetings that will require different approaches - for example, a public AGM as opposed to an internal steering meeting, but this Information Sheet outlines some advice and guidelines that can be applied to committee and a range of other meetings.

Planning: Before the meeting

Know your objectives

Make sure you know why the meeting is happening and what needs to be achieved by holding it. The objectives will largely depend on the purpose of a meeting, for example:

- Does a decision need to be made?
- Do you want to generate ideas? If so, how will they be captured and executed?
- Is this meeting being held so that something can be communicated?
- Are you making plans?
- Are you gathering views from attendees or the public?

To help determine what your meeting objective is, it may help to complete the following sentence:
By the close of this meeting, we need to...

This will help to clearly define the end result, which means you can plan the contents of the meeting, information gathering, who needs to attend and what any follow-up actions may be.

Set the time and location

Again, based on the nature of the meeting, ensure that the location:

- is fully accessible
- can be easily reached on public transport and/or has parking facilities
- is large enough to comfortably fit all attendees
- has any facilities you may need (catering, equipment, projector, IT)

If the meeting is regular, for example a monthly committee meeting, try and keep the day, time and location the same to ensure continuity, and to set dates in advance.

If you are holding a public meeting, take in to account what days of the week and times of the day are most suitable for your target attendees.

There are tools (such as Doodle - www.doodle.com) to help you assess which date and time suits the majority but this must be done well in advance of the meeting and only if numbers are manageable.

In all instances, ensure that the date, time and location of the meeting are clearly communicated in advance of the meeting.

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Set the agenda

An agenda helps to keep the meeting on track in terms of time and ensuring that all relevant points are covered. When setting the agenda:

- Ensure that all of the items that need to be covered are listed
- Set a time limit for each item, if appropriate
- Identify the lead of the item (if not the chair)
- Don't forget to include Any Other Business to ensure any items that arise during the meeting can be discussed and to set the date and time of the next meeting, if applicable.

It is good practice to circulate the agenda to participants at least a week ahead of the meeting, along with any other relevant papers, such as previous minutes and reports that are referred to. You may also want to offer attendees the chance to add items to the agenda in advance.

It is the Chair's role (see below and Information Sheet 2.4: The Role of the Chairperson) to ensure that the agenda is adhered to and that all points are covered.

Invite or review attendees

Ensure that all relevant attendees are invited to the meeting and that the time and location is suitable for any additional needs they may have. Use the attendees list as a signing in sheet at the meeting.

The purpose of meetings is to make decisions and get work done, therefore think carefully about who needs to be invited and to limit the number of people attending the meeting where possible.

If you plan a regular meeting, ensure your contact names and addresses are kept up to date and reviewed regularly. You may find it useful to create an attendee mailing list or email contact group to share papers.

A quorum

For the meeting of an incorporated governing body or an annual general meeting to be official, there must be enough members present to make it legal. This is referred to as a quorum. The number of people needed differs from one organisation to the next and is usually set out in an organisation's constitution and rules. The quorum must be present during the whole meeting. If a quorum is lost during the meeting, then decisions cannot be made.

Chairing a meeting

It is the role of the chair of a meeting to:

- Start on time and try to keep to time throughout the meeting
- Ask for apologies from absent members
- Welcome any new or guest attendees and to instigate introductions
- Sign the minutes of the last meeting as a true record

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- Ensure all items on the agenda are covered
- Allow everyone to have their say whilst ensuring that the meeting moves on according to the schedule
- Manage any conflicts that may arise
- Make sure that any decision reached is allowed by the group's constitution (if appropriate)
- Make sure it is clear who is taking responsibility for an action on and when it is to be done by
- At the end, thank people for coming, agree on a date and time for the next meeting and declare the meeting closed

Taking Minutes or Notes

Your minutes are the written record of the discussions, decisions, recommendations and actions proposed at your meeting. It is often the role of a group or organisation's Secretary to record the minutes of a meeting - see Information Sheet 2.5: The Role of the Secretary.

An incorporated governing body must keep minutes of all its meetings - it's the law. It is also a good idea for any informal community organisation to keep a written record of its collective decisions.

Meeting minutes don't need to be long and wordy. The best minutes are:

- an accurate record of the meeting, summarising the main points of discussions
- a record of all decisions passed and abstentions
- about the agenda issues, and not about individual personalities
- objective, and not contain offensive comments or inappropriate discussion
- consistent in format so people become familiar with them
- readable and clearly laid out (use visual tools so that members can understand them)
- properly filed and available during subsequent meetings

VODA can provide Minute Taking training - contact us for more information or see Information Sheet 2.5: The Role of the Secretary.

Follow up on the meeting

Ensure that the minutes or any relevant papers are circulated after the meeting to all attendees.

If action points have been attributed, ensure they are recorded in the minutes and reiterate the date and time of the next meeting if appropriate.

VODA can provide training on the roles and responsibilities of Chairperson and Secretary, Minute Taking and Facilitation Skills - please contact us with your requirements.

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