

Holding Effective Meetings

Meetings

At an Annual General Meeting (AGM) members elect a committee to look after their interests for the rest of the year. The committee then meets on a regular basis (usually monthly) to manage the club's affairs. All members should attend the club's AGM.

Voting, motions and minutes are common to all committee meetings. Specific rules applying to these procedures are detailed in a club's constitution. To prevent decision-making falling into the hands of only a few, the rules should specify a quorum (minimum number of people required to make decisions on behalf of the club).

Motions

A motion is a formal recommendation put to a meeting for debate and consideration. All items of business that require a decision must be presented to the meeting as motions.

Motions should be proposed by the 'mover' in front of the chairperson and then supported (seconded) by another committee member before any discussion can take place on an item.

The chairperson asks the proposer to speak to the motion, other committee members can also add to the discussion. The motion is then put to the meeting for a decision. Members vote on whether they agree or disagree with the motion.

All motions carried or otherwise must be minuted. If the motion is passed it becomes a resolution.

Voting

The chairperson needs to have a clear understanding of the voting rights of members. There are different ways of voting at meetings, and the chairperson must decide which is the most appropriate. Examples are:

- a show of hands of all in favour, and then of all opposed;
- a verbal vote (all in favour say "Aye", followed by all against say "No"); and
- a ballot vote might be used when electing officers.

Chairing meetings

Before the meeting the chair should discuss with the secretary the agenda items and ensure that they are circulated in plenty of time for the meeting.

Throughout the meeting, the chairperson:

- notes who wishes to speak and indicates when a person may speak;
- is responsible for keeping the discussion to the subject;
- decides when discussion should be brought to an end;
- does not usually get involved in the discussion unless their opinion is sought;
- should summarise the issue under discussion, to aid in decision making;

- if a decision can not be made refer the issue to a working party for a report at the next meeting.

Formal meetings

The chairperson has the right to decide whether matters should be discussed. When chairing formal meetings the chairperson should ensure that:

- the meeting starts on time;
- the meeting is declared open;
- apologies are called for and read out, and a record of those present is kept;
- those present at the meeting confirm the accuracy of the previous meeting's minutes. This motion has to be moved and seconded;
- matters arising not on the agenda from the previous minutes are discussed. This should only relate to actions that have taken place since the last meeting, or to question related to specific items;
- correspondence inward and outward is tabled;
- financial statements are presented, which may include accounts for payment and a monthly statement of accounts. An indication of the club's financial position should be given. These reports require formal motions of acceptance;
- committee reports are circulated prior to the meeting. Discussion should be confined to recommendations and to those matters requiring approval for further action;
- other reports dealing with specific topics are then tabled;
- minor items are raised during General Business; and
- the meeting is formally closed after the arrangements for the next meeting have been made.

Informal meetings

When chairing informal meetings or discussions the chairperson should:

- reach agreement with the group on the aims of the meeting;
- check that everyone understands the topic to be discussed;
- ensure everyone listens to each other carefully and is not judgmental;
- ensure only one person speaks at a time encourage everyone to be objective and keep discussion focused on the issue at hand; and
- examine each option individually and objectively and reach a conclusion for that option (which should be recorded for later reference).

A brainstorm meeting is used when a club is trying to come up with ideas, for example projects, events or promotion strategies.

The role of the Secretary in meetings

The Secretary:

- makes arrangements for the meeting place, admission to the building, use of services (coffee, chairs, etc.); and
- sends adequate notice to committee members of the meeting. Include the venue, time, date, and an agenda. Minutes of the previous meeting should be included if not already circulated.

At the Annual General Meeting, additional secretarial duties could include:

- collecting reports from club officers;
- advising members of the meeting within a specified time (this could include advertising the AGM in your local paper two weeks prior to it being held);
- calling for and receiving nominations for club positions;
- arranging for printing of the completed annual report;
- arranging for guest speakers; and
- arranging hospitality, venue, date and times.

The rules of all societies (constitution) will set out how notice of the annual general meeting is to be given to members. As the secretary you should be aware of your particular rules and adhere to them strictly. A meeting can be declared invalid if incorrect notice is given or if a quorum is not present.

Recording the minutes of the meeting:

- list those present along with apologies given;
- follow the order of the agenda. This can be varied to suit a particular situation;
- state the main issues, points of view put forward, and decisions made (don't take sides);
- make sure the full texts of motions are recorded;
- list accounts for payment approved, reports received, main points of answers required for correspondence, etc;
- be alert to take extra notes that may be needed by the chairperson;
- write up the minutes as soon as possible after the meeting;
- circulate the minutes to all committee personnel as soon as possible (ideally within a week to inform those who are absent and to remind those who have to complete particular tasks arising from the meeting);
- note points of action from the minutes that need to be followed up. An 'action by' column down the side of the page can be useful; and
- make sure that all important arrangements are confirmed in writing with copies made and filed.

Suggested format for a Meeting Agenda

Title: Meeting of _____ Club Committee at *place*, on *date*, at *time*.

1. Welcome
2. Apologies
3. Confirmation of previous minutes (or minutes of the last meeting)
Minutes are signed as a true and correct record
4. Matters arising not on the agenda
5. Inward and outward correspondence
6. President or Chairperson's report
7. Financial report accounts for payment, income received
8. Committee reports in order of need for discussion
9. Special projects
10. General Business
11. Closure and date of next meeting

The sound structure of any committee is integral to the overall success of a club. By identifying the various tasks that need to be completed by committee members and assigning those tasks to the people with the appropriate skills, you will have a stable and well-run club.

Checklist for Meetings

Before the meeting

Have you:

- given notice of the meeting to all Committee members?
- circulated the previous minutes?
- formed an agenda and circulated it?
- arranged the meeting place, admission to the building, obtained keys?
- arranged coffee, tea, enough chairs, note paper and a pen?
- collected copies of inward and outward correspondence?

During the meeting

- take minutes;
- assist the Chair to keep discussions focussed on the agenda items; and
- ensure arrangements are made for the next meeting.

After the meeting

- ensure typed copies of the minutes are circulated to members as soon as possible.

Tips to help your meeting succeed

Ten steps that make effective meetings...

1. There is plenty of discussion but it is mainly to the point. If the discussion strays, someone (not necessarily the Chair) brings it back quickly.
2. The members understand their task clearly. They may have had to spend some time working this out, but they are then committed to it.
3. The members actively listen to each other. They don't just keep silent, and they give each idea a fair hearing.
4. The group does not evade disagreement. When there is a disagreement the group uses its energy to focus on the problem, not the person.
5. Individuals are encouraged to reveal their opposition and not 'bottle it up' until after the meeting (a common fault in weak groups).
6. There is no personal attack either openly or by veiled suggestion. Members are inclined to give positive respect and recognition. They focus on overcoming obstacles.
7. The leader does not dominate. 'Leadership' shifts from time to time. The group uses different leaders for their specific abilities.
8. There is little evidence of power struggles and no posturing or point scoring. Control is not an issue – it's the job and the sense of teamwork that is important.
9. The members are conscious about their effectiveness as a team. They are very aware of their clients and are not self-serving as a group.
10. The group is capable of analysing a weakness in its performance and fixing it fast.

...and six that lead to ruin.

1. Allowing one or two people to dominate a discussion.
2. No one makes an effort to keep discussions on track.
3. Members not understanding their common purpose.
4. People ignoring other ideas while they prepare their own submission.
5. Allowing disagreements to become personal attacks.
6. Allowing only a simple majority vote – which can mean a substantial number may be dissatisfied.

*Reference: Ministry of Sport & Recreation, Western Australia
"Take the in out of ineffective – a guide to running successful meetings".*