Running Effective Meetings

Meeting /ˈmiːtɪŋ/   noun: meeting; plural noun: meetings

1. an assembly of people for a particular purpose, especially for formal discussion.
synonyms: gathering, assembly, conference, congregation, convention, summit, forum, convocation, conclave, council of war; caucus; informal get-together; informal confab

Christian Church: a gathering of people, especially Quakers, for worship.

An organized event at which a number of races or other sporting contests are held.
synonyms: event, meet, rally, competition, match, game, contest

2. a situation when two or more people meet, by chance or arrangement.
synonyms: consultation, audience, interview

Meetings are unavoidable in our daily work lives as well as in other areas of life. They offer a setting in which to get together to discuss and decide upon issues that affect how we work.

There are many reasons for holding a meeting: information giving, discussion, decision making, planning, generating ideas, consulting, crisis management, team building etc. The type of meeting you hold should be suited to the reason. For example, a decision-making board meeting cannot be held as a one-to-one, likewise a supervision meeting would not work in a large group setting.

An effective meeting is to the point, makes decisions, identifies action points and provides everyone with an opportunity to participate.

Unfortunately, too many meetings go on for too long, do not make decisions, are meetings about future meetings, and/or are dominated by one or a few loud voices etc.

So how can you make sure your meetings are as effective and as enjoyable as possible?

"40% of the success of a meeting lies in the preparation, 20% in the meeting itself, and 40% in the follow through."

'Meeting Together' by Lois Graessle & George Gawlinski

Preparation

There are a number of actions and measures you can take prior to a meeting to ensure that it runs effectively and smoothly.

Some participants will have more to do than others at each stage:

Confirm the administrative arrangements:
- Book and check the venue
- Order refreshments and/or lunch
- Confirm refreshments
- Check what equipment is needed and what is available
- Send out an agenda to all members
- Send relevant papers including minutes of last meeting
- Collate apologies
- Prepare minute template

Do some personal preparation:
- Read minutes of previous meeting
- Read papers
- Check you know where and when the meeting is
- Check if you are presenting and if so prepare

> **Top Tip**
> It is a good idea to have a number of meeting dates set in advance with a timetable for agenda items.

Writing an agenda

An agenda should provide participants with everything they need to know about what will happen at the meeting and what they need to do beforehand. It is not just a list of items.

An agenda should contain:
- What will be discussed at the meeting
- What information participants should bring with them e.g. papers, opinions etc.
- The type of decision they will be expected to make
- Timings

It is important to consult all participants in the meeting regarding any items they may wish to put on the agenda.

The order and contents of the agenda will differ slightly depending upon the type of group and the type of meeting. However, the format should be logical, flexible, show an order of priority and be easy to follow.

You can use sub-headings to provide extra information and allow for space to give the initials of the speaker, paper numbers, whether it is for discussion only or for decision.

Some headings may be:

- ✓ Name of the group
- ✓ The date
- ✓ The time of the meeting
- ✓ The place of the meeting
- ✓ Apologies for absence
- ✓ Conflicts of Interest
- ✓ Committee Business (i.e. resignations, changes in office, changes to the way the committee works etc.)
- ✓ Minutes of the previous meeting (approve or make changes to previous minutes)
- ✓ Matters arising (report back on action points from previous meeting)
- ✓ Reports (i.e. if the Finance manager or Health & Safety Manger for example needs to report back on recent work.)
- ✓ Main Agenda Items
- ✓ Any other business
- ✓ Date, time and place of next meeting

> **Top Tip**
> Put subheading on the agenda of the action point from the previous minutes and the initials of the person who was to take action

Remember to dispatch the agenda with plenty of time, to allow participants to prepare.

Try to avoid sending out revised agendas instead add any items that came in after the cut-off point to 'Any other business'.

The Meeting

> "Meetings are effective because the written word only carries 7% of the true meaning and feeling. Meetings are better than telephone conferences because only 38% of the meaning and feeling is carried in the way that things are said. The other 55% of the meaning and feeling is carried in facial expression and non-verbal signals. That's why meetings are so useful." (Statistics from research by Dr Albert Mehrabian.)
>
> www.businessballs.com

Meetings are only partly successful based on content. Often peoples comfort level will dictate how the meeting runs. Therefore, even if you know everyone, think about who might not know the others in the room, a simple exercise or quick introductions at the beginning can help people to feel more comfortable.

As well as having name cards, a seating plan on which the chair fills in who sat where can be a good aide memoire for the minute taker as well as being useful for newer participants to get to know everyone.

Whilst in the meeting, look at people who are talking, try to sit upright and avoid slouching and doodling and try to get fresh air during breaks as this will help keep your concentration levels up.

Remember to actively listen to each person, and allow everyone to have an opinion.

The minute taker should sit next to the chair. Minutes are essential for managing meeting actions and outcomes and are a key part of running any group or organisation. A minute template will help make writing them easier.

Try to keep action points SMART (Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic, Timebound), and crucially make sure there is a lead person to ensure each action point is followed up on.

What are my personal responsibilities?

You should always:
- arrive on time;
- give apologies if you can't attend and pass on any relevant information to the 'committee';
- work as part of a team and take an active part in meetings;
- keep to the point in discussions;
- support each other, listen to others and try not to interrupt;
- be prepared to share responsibilities and information;
- ask if you don't understand something or need more information;
- carry out what you have agreed to do;
- make sure that decisions are made in a democratic way and abide by the decisions made;
- remember, if you are representing the organisation at a meeting or event, that you are speaking on behalf of the committee not yourself;
- be non-discriminatory and promote equal opportunities.

I should NOT…

- be disruptive or aggressive;
- use bad or offensive language;
- talk too much;
- interrupt or shout;
- keep information to yourself;
- try to dominate the meeting or other committee members;
- make others feel inadequate or stupid;
- waste people's time;
- develop conflicts of interest;
- undermine staff and fellow trustees;
- come unprepared to meetings;
- use the organisation to satisfy personal needs.
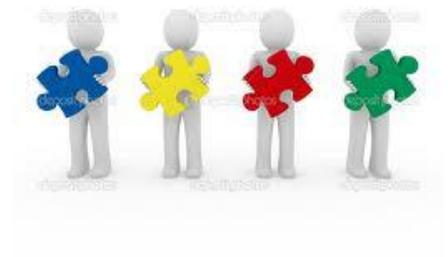
Specific Roles

Most meetings will have specified roles to help organise the meeting and for it to run smoothly:
- The chairperson, who plans and runs meetings;
- The secretary, who helps with the smooth running of meetings, deals with minutes and correspondence, etc.;

- The Minute Taker – this may be the secretary or for smaller meetings may just be a nominated person;
- The treasurer, who oversees the organisations'/groups finances.

Chair

The role of the chairperson is to:
- ❖ Request the meeting
- ❖ Identify participants
- ❖ Arrange the minute taker
- ❖ Set the agenda
- ❖ Approve the agenda
- ❖ Approve the minutes, make amendments and sign them off
- ❖ Keep the meeting running to time and to the agenda
- ❖ Ensure all members of the meeting have the opportunity to input
- ❖ Ensure that no-one dominates the meeting
- ❖ Summarise key points and clarify action points.

Secretary / Minute Taker

The role of the secretary/ minute taker is to:
- ❖ Manage all administration of the meeting such as room bookings, equipment and refreshments
- ❖ Receive items for the agenda and prepare it
- ❖ Send out the agenda, minutes of previous meeting, any relevant papers
- ❖ Take minutes
- ❖ Type the minutes and get chair's approval
- ❖ Send out approved minutes

To help make minute taking easier:
- Listen out for main ideas, themes and word cues
- Write the important bits, not every word
- Use who, what, when for recording action points
- Be consistent in your use of abbreviations and symbols
- Be objective
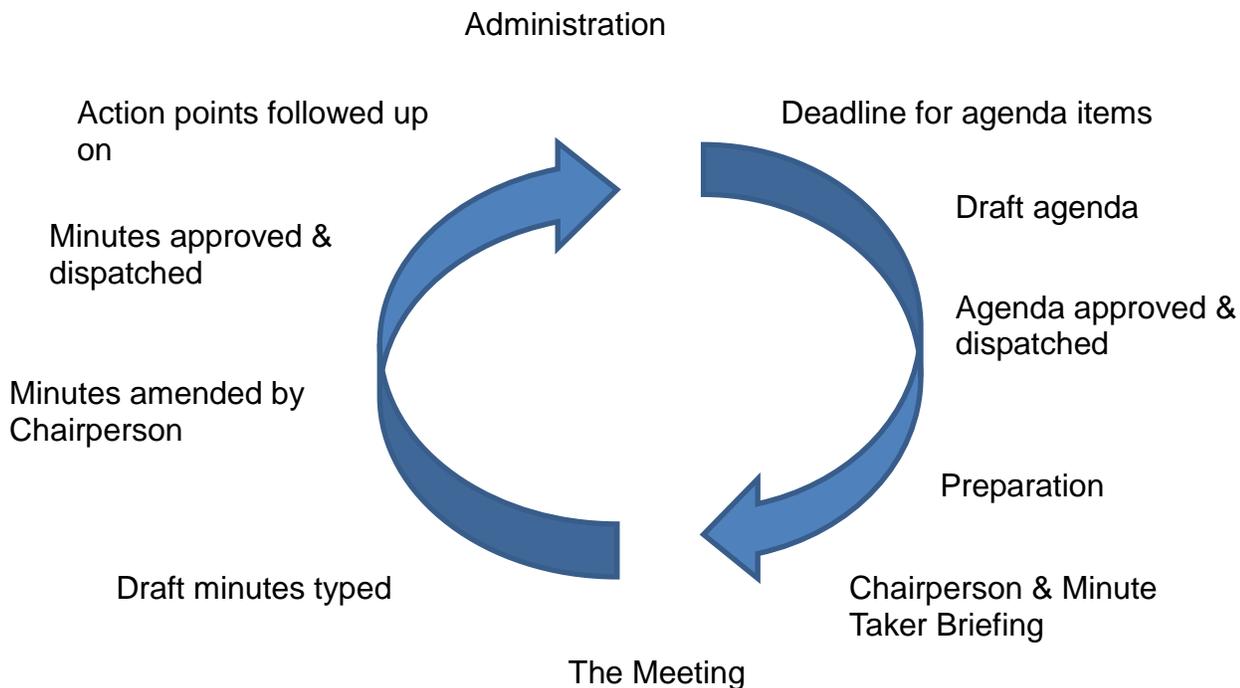- Ask for clarification

Treasurer

There will not necessarily be a treasurer at your meeting. This will depend upon what type of meeting it is and whether or not any money will be dealt with.

The role of the treasurer is to:
- ❖ Oversee the finances
- ❖ Report back to the board or whole group regarding the finances
- ❖ May be a part of a finance sub-committee
- ❖ Likely to be a signatory

For more on the role of a treasurer please see the Trustee Handbook.

The Meeting Cycle

Administration

Action points followed up on

Deadline for agenda items

Draft agenda

Minutes approved & dispatched

Agenda approved & dispatched

Minutes amended by Chairperson

Preparation

Draft minutes typed

Chairperson & Minute Taker Briefing

The Meeting

Resources

- Planet Training – Minute Taking course material: www.planttraining.co.uk
- 'Meeting Together: How to transform your meetings, conferences and other gatherings.' By Lois Graessle and George Gawlinski (2006)
- '5 Simple Steps To More Efficient, Effective Meetings' By Victor Lipman, Forbes Contributor: http://www.forbes.com/sites/victorlipman/2013/03/01/5-simple-steps-to-more-efficient-effective-meetings/
- 'Running Meetings' http://www.businessballs.com/meetings.htm
- The Russell-Cooke Voluntary Sector Legal Handbook, Third Edition (2009)
- The Charity Commission www.charitycommission.gov.uk/
- Good Governance: A code for the voluntary and community sector http://www.governancecode.org/
- The Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators (ICSA) https://www.icsa.org.uk/

Support

If you would like any support with running meetings or any other issues facing your organisation, please contact the Development Team at Community Southwark: development@communitysouthwark.org.uk or 020 7358 7020.