

Resources for **small groups**

Conducting committee meetings

Committees need to hold regular meetings to discuss the work of the group, decide on future actions and identify and deal with problems. It is important that discussion at these meetings is relevant and constructive, that necessary decisions are taken and not ducked and that a clear record is kept of what was agreed at the meeting.

This page covers three key areas connected with committee meetings:

- **the agenda**, which sets out what issues are to be considered;
- **the role of the chair** in ensuring the meeting runs smoothly and keeping the meeting on track; and
- **the minutes**, which will provide a permanent record of the meeting.

The agenda

An agenda is necessary to ensure that everyone knows beforehand what is to be discussed and to make sure nothing gets missed. It is important that there is broad consensus about how the agenda is set and that all members are able to submit items for inclusion. It also helps if the agenda, minutes of the previous meeting and any background papers are prepared and circulated some time in advance of the meeting. Background papers are especially useful to enable members to make informed decisions at the meetings. It is up to you how you set out your agenda, but the following may be useful as a basic model for groups.

1. Opening: apologies for absence given and any new people introduced.
2. Minutes of the previous meeting: those who attended the meeting are asked to confirm that the minutes are an accurate record of that meeting. If agreed, the chair signs a copy.
3. Matters arising: an update on any issues raised or actions decided at the previous meeting. This should be brief and only items not on the agenda elsewhere.
4. Officers/ staff report(s): an opportunity for specific people, e.g. Treasurer, paid worker, Chair etc. to provide relevant information to the rest of the group.
5. Reports from sub-committees (if any set up): to hear about and vote on any recommendations put forward at sub-committee meetings.
6. Business item(s): any specific issues which the committee need to discuss and come to decisions on.
7. Discussion item(s): having dealt with the main business, it can often be useful for the committee to have a discussion around a specific aspect of the work, or issue affecting the group.
8. Any other business: members can raise important issues which have not been covered elsewhere on the agenda. They should be quick and urgent.
9. Arrangements for next meeting: confirmation or setting of the date, time and venue for the next meeting. Try to set well in advance (e.g. for the whole year), rather than from one meeting to the next.

Chairing the meeting

Chairing meetings is a matter of style and different people will tend to chair meetings in different ways. However, the basic tasks of the chair during the meeting centre around the following:

- listening to all the views expressed and ensuring everyone has a chance to speak who wants to do so and that no-one unduly dominates;
- ensuring that a decision is reached, and making sure that everyone knows what has been decided;
- keeping order and keeping everyone to the agenda; and
- trying to finish the meeting on time.

Chairing a meeting is often a delicate balance between having sufficient authority to keep the meeting on track, whilst avoiding dominating the meeting or curtailing necessary discussion.

Taking minutes

Minutes are there to provide those who attended (and those who didn't) with a clear, concise and accurate record of what happened at the meeting and what decisions were taken. There is no hard and fast way of writing minutes but here are a few tips:

- Start with the key information about the meeting: Date, time, venue and who attended.
- Use the numbered agenda headings and under each item clearly record the key points of any discussion and any action that was agreed and who was to carry out the action. In most cases, capture a flavour of the discussion leading to the decision. It should not be necessary to record everything that everyone said. If, during the meeting, you are unclear on a particular point, ask for it to be repeated, or ask how it should be recorded in the minutes.
- Try and keep the language unambiguous and the minutes concise.
- Try and write the minutes up from your notes whilst it is still fresh in your mind.

A few more tips on conducting meetings

- Try and agree on when and where the meetings should be held. If people prefer different times of the day, it may be necessary to vary the times of meetings to suit everyone.
- Choose a venue that is accessible for everyone. Try and set the room out beforehand, especially if you have particular equipment you need for the meeting (e.g. induction loop).
- Make sure refreshments are available for the meeting.
- Set the length of the meeting beforehand and try not to over-run. A sensible maximum length for a committee meeting might be around 1½ hours. Any longer than 2 hours and concentration becomes more difficult.

