

Running effective meetings

We should never underestimate the importance of conducting a good meeting. When you join a community group and especially when you join a committee, a great deal of time and energy is expended in meetings. These are critical times for making decisions, undertaking plans, considering proposals and discussing the next steps and direction of your community groups.

A good meeting is one where the purpose and desired outcomes are known and shared by all participants and where participants are provided reports and information well in advance. A good meeting has a strong chair who will ensure that everyone's contributions are heard and valued and that only matters relevant to the meeting's purpose are discussed. A good meeting is supported by a clear agenda and documented minutes which record prescribed actions and decisions made. A good meeting is focussed, timely and leaves participants with a sense of having achieved something and a clear understanding of what next steps are required.

Purpose of meeting

Participants need to acquaint themselves with the main purpose of their meetings and what it is they are trying to achieve. Meetings allow all participants to share their opinions on agenda items. Consequently, meeting agendas should only contain items that require meaningful input.

Leadership

A skilful chair is able to facilitate the meeting so that participants enjoy themselves and still achieve significant outcomes. A chairperson should be sensitive to interpersonal dynamics and ensure discussion remains focussed and constructive. Issues which may arise between individuals should be addressed outside a committee meeting.

Meeting preparation

Background papers need to be circulated well before the meeting to allow people to read and reflect on their positions on the presented issues. The papers need to include any reports and the agenda, which clearly states the purpose of the meeting and the expected outcomes of each agenda item.

The agenda

The Agenda is a tool that provides a structure for the work that the organisation needs to attend to at any particular meeting. The Agenda is a crucial part of the process for your organisation to get things done.

Items for discussion are given a priority and a time allowance to allow for the group to 'Introduce, Discuss and Decide' on general business of the organisation and issues of importance. The Agenda is usually set by the Chair in collaboration with the Secretary and sent out to committee members at least one week prior to the meeting.

Meeting checklist

1. Every meeting requires a specific purpose and outcome.
2. All people involved with a meeting agree that the meeting is necessary.
3. People whose attendance is necessary for the meeting's success must be available.
4. The purpose, venue, time to start and finish, procedure and desired outcomes should be circulated before the meeting.
5. All information relevant to the purpose of the meeting should be made available in time to be read before the meeting begins.
6. The agenda should be read out and agreed to and the duration of the meeting confirmed at the start of the meeting.
7. A chairperson and minute taker need to be appointed.
8. When a decision is made, it needs to be minuted clearly and read back to the meeting.
9. Each decision ideally includes actions required, person responsible for each action, timeline for actions, how and when a report back to the group will occur.

