

## Planning and Conducting Effective Meetings

Ever sat through a meeting for hours only to come away thinking, what was the point in that or did we actually achieve anything? If you have, don't despair, not all meetings have to be a chore; a properly organised meeting can be quick, concise and productive, leaving you with a sense of achievement and feeling motivated.

There are some pretty obvious things make meetings happier places, but they are so obvious you could be forgiven for having forgotten about them, so here is a reminder!

- Read minutes or written reports before getting to the meeting so that it can be started in good time.
- Good time keeping can make all the difference to a meeting. Making sure that meetings start on time is very important, especially to those who made the effort to actually be there on time!
- If someone is late, don't recap what you've covered, it wastes everyone else's time.
- Let everyone have their say
- Stick to the agenda, stay focussed and keep to time

### Agendas

- Write an agenda and circulate it before a meeting, this way members can be invited to add to or amend the order of proceedings in advance and not waste valuable time at the beginning of the meeting.
- If your meetings are a little on the side of unorganised try using an action based agenda, where you can allocated timings
- Arrange the agenda in order of importance so that if you have to rush items at the end you won't skip the more important ones, again, action based agendas are great for this
- Don't just use the last meeting's agenda and change the date on the top, recycling agendas in this way often means that new and important items are simply added at the end of an existing agenda.

### Chairing a meeting

- A good Chairperson needs to actually lead a meeting.
- Stick to the agenda and be decisive about when the meeting needs to move on from an item.
- Ensure everyone feels that their thoughts and ideas are heard by guiding the meeting so that there is room for discussion but not so as any one individual is allowed to dominate.
- If one particular item is dominating the meeting and no clear resolution can be seen then it may be useful to stop the discussion, quickly summarise it and arrange for it to be dealt with by either a sub-committee or working group (see below).

### Sub-Committees & Working Groups

More of our Member organisations are leaning towards recruiting role based trustees and volunteers rather than boards of a generic nature. This means that each trustee can lead their own subcommittee or working group which takes the strain of general meeting. The idea is that the lead trustee will summarise the work and discussions of the sub group, which because it is smaller, can explore an issue in more depth.

- Improve productivity at meetings by create sub-committees or working groups where in depth discussions and topics can be thrashed out and presented to the committee at meetings.

- Sometimes a smaller group of people focused on one particular issue can be more effective.
- Utilises people's specific areas of skills or experience.

### Minutes

Minutes should be a summary of the key elements of a meeting. They need to be concise but don't attempt to transcribe discussions, no one will thank you. Reports from individual trustees, subcommittees and working groups should be submitted in advance and can be attached to the minutes. If you haven't already transitioned to Action Based Agendas – why not give it a go, we have more information on them along with templates available.

Key items minutes should highlight

- Who is there and who isn't
- A summary of key areas of discussion
- Any decisions made
- Any voting tallies
- Actions to be taken, who they are allocated to and when they are to be completed by (check out our action based minutes' template too!)
- Any Other Business
- Copies should be sent to all those involved before the next meeting

### Do's and Don'ts

#### Do

- Send out all paper work in advance and encourage everyone to read it BEFORE the meeting.
- Be prepared at the meeting, with the relevant documents
- Have a copy of the governing document and your policies and procedures ready in case they need to be referenced
- State a finish time for the meeting and don't over-run. Let everyone in the meeting know that this is a shared responsibility and that they can all help the meeting reach its goals.
- FOLLOW the agenda and don't let one person dominate and lead the discussions off on tangents.

#### Don't

- Rush people, although it's important to keep to time it's a negative way to conduct a meeting. If there are dominating forces within the meeting, try allocating time limits for everyone, action based agendas allow for this well.
- Gloss over certain agenda points because you're in a rush, if the meeting has been properly planned and the agenda item was deemed important enough to be included, there should be time!
- Allow people to go off Agenda. It's a slippery slope to losing control of the meeting and apart from anything the minute taker will not thank you.
- Roll your eyes! Or let other meeting attendee's commit similar actions without being addressed. Huffing, puffing and eye rolling is just as bad as talking over someone and will deter others from contributing.

### Finally

Don't leave a meeting, good or bad, without **assessing** what took place, recording any actions that need to be taken and making a plan to **improve** the next meeting.

Always try and leave a meeting on a positive note and arrange the date of the next one if possible!