



FACTSHEET 4

Effective Meetings

Planning and Holding Meetings

Voluntary and community organisations generally hold meetings for the following reasons:

- To discuss
- To inform
- To consult
- To make decisions

The types of meetings usually held by voluntary and community organisations include:

- Management Committee meetings
- Staff meetings
- Annual General Meetings
- Extraordinary General Meetings, and
- Public meetings

All these different types of meetings are held for very different purposes and would therefore be managed in different ways. This can even change the way people speak to each other (formally or informally) or the way that meetings are recorded (jotted notes or formal minutes).

Running Effective Management Committee Meetings

Ensure all the relevant papers (such as minutes of the last meeting, agenda for the coming meeting) have been circulated. This is especially important when there are complex issues to discuss. People need to have had time to read and understand the information before making a decision based on it. The chair must keep control of the meeting, allowing equal participation

by everyone and avoiding a situation where one person takes over.

Having an agenda means that you'll cover all the issues, and manage the time better. Although some committee members like talking for hours, most just want to get the work done!

Taking minutes is no-one's favourite job, but a clear record of decisions taken is vital. Before you start the meeting, the minute taker needs to be clear about the level of detail needed - should all discussion be recorded or just the outcomes of the discussion? Should comments be attributed to named individuals or not? Remember minutes must be impartial and factual.

For each item on the agenda, the minutes should include any decision/s reached, action/s required, who will take the action/s and a deadline.

You should keep a Minutes Book as a log of all meetings. Checking and agreeing minutes at the beginning of the next meeting is therefore vital in order to avoid later disagreements.

Running Effective Public Meetings

Public meetings are held for many reasons, usually either to inform or consult (or both). For example a public meeting may be held to:

- ask local people what they think about plans for a community building
- gauging opinion on the setting up of a new community association

Effective Meetings

When holding public meetings it is important to ensure that the meetings are well publicised, inclusive and accessible. You need to think carefully about:

The Venue

It is important to find a venue that people know well and are comfortable visiting (and that you can hopefully, get for free). You need to think about whether the venue is fully accessible e.g. is there an accessible toilet, disabled access to the building, a hearing loop system if required etc.

The Timing

It is also important to think about the best time to hold a meeting. Some people who work during the daytime may wish to attend the meeting and may not be able to do so if the meeting is held during the day. In some cases holding meetings at weekends and evenings may be appropriate.

Publicity

There is no point in having a meeting if no-one knows about it in advance. Use local shops, libraries, local newspapers, the Post Office, your local community centre to put up posters and distribute leaflets. Word of mouth is also a good way of spreading the word.

During the meeting

Take the names and addresses of those attending. When you take notes of the main points, make sure these are distributed to all those present.

Any kind of meeting should have an outcome and a public meeting is no different. At the end of the meeting, it should be made clear to everyone participating what the next steps are.

Running Effective Annual General Meeting

If you're worried about organising an AGM, here are a few tips to guide you.

Legal stuff

The first step is to consult your constitution. This will help you sort out the timing, framework and business of your AGM.

Timing

Your constitution probably says something like:

“The organisation will hold the first AGM within 18 months of setting up and then

once in each calendar year, with no more than 15 months between AGMs.”

The constitution should also tell you the notice period that must be given to members of the AGM e.g. 21 days notice.

Business

The usual business of an AGM will include:

- A financial report for the year (or receiving of the audited accounts, if this is appropriate)
- A report of the activities in the year
- The election of management committee and officers (chair, secretary and treasurer)
- Appointment of auditors for the next year

Please note that if you are a registered charity you must send an annual return to the Charity Commission. If your income is over £250,000 you must send your audited accounts to the Charity Commission within 10 months of the end of the financial year - but its usually best to do it once they've been passed at the AGM, so you know it's out of the way.

If you are a company limited by guarantee, you must send your accounts to Companies House.

If you are not sure what you are, then you really must have a look at your constitution!

Quorum

This is the number of voting members that have to be present to make a decision. Again, this should be defined in your constitution. Remember that it was defined for a reason, so to act against it (e.g. voting things through without a quorum) is breaking **your** own rules. If the meeting is inquorate, there should be a clause in your constitution to tell you what should happen in this circumstance - usually a postponement of the AGM.

If this happens to your organisation, you should ask yourselves what went wrong with the planning and publicity of the AGM.

Remember your members are not just the people on your committee. The committee should be voted from amongst your members.

Fun stuff at your AGM

Some groups just want to get the job done in order to fulfill the legal requirements. In which

case it can all be over in less than half an hour. However you could use your AGM as an awareness raising opportunity to:

- Get more people involved in your organisation
- Highlight the fantastic achievements during the year
- Celebrate a significant anniversary in the organisation's history
- Make a photo exhibition, which is an excellent way of giving a snapshot of the work your organisation does.
- Holding an awards ceremony
- Hosting a party after the formal AGM business

Other Considerations at your AGM

- Consider the timing of the meeting - what will suit your members best? Morning, lunchtime, afternoon, evening, weekday or weekend?
- Consider peoples childcare arrangements, religion and culture (Friday is an important day for Muslims and Jewish people and they may not wish to participate in meetings on Fridays).
- Aim to have your AGM in an accessible venue. Get advice on induction loops to enable hearing impaired people to hear.

Other considerations about running effective meetings

Whatever meeting you are holding it is important to provide the right atmosphere and make everyone feel welcome and feel that they are able to contribute to the meeting. It is good practice to think about:

Room layout

Think about the most appropriate room layout for the meeting. If you are holding a public meeting it may be best to either lay out the room in theatre style or in small groups. For a management committee it may be best for members to sit around one large table.

Enabling people to have a say

Some people may feel uncomfortable about speaking out to a large number of people a meeting. In fact some people may feel so uncomfortable that they will leave the meeting without contributing anything. Therefore, it is

important to ensure that you are providing a variety of different ways for people to give their comments and views. These could include: small group discussions or asking participants to write down their views.

FURTHER HELP

Dudley Council for Voluntary Service
7 Albion Street
Brierley Hill
West Midlands
DY5 3EE

 01384 573381

www.dudleycvs.org.uk