

Voluntary Action-**Leeds** Meetings: Agendas and Minutes

Stringer House, 34 Lupton Street, Hunslet, Leeds LS10 2QW

MEETINGS: AGENDAS AND MINUTES

Your organisation will hold a number of meetings, with paid staff and volunteers, with members in annual and other general meetings, and with the management committee. For a meeting to go well, it is a good idea to plan what needs to be discussed and keep a record of what happened. The plan is often in the form of an agenda and the record is usually made through a set of minutes. This factsheet looks at what agendas and minutes are for, and how to make these tools work effectively for your organisation.

WHAT IS AN AGENDA?

The agenda for a meeting:

- is circulated in advance and tells people what will be discussed so that they can prepare
- reminds people during the meeting so that nothing is left out
- helps the chair to manage the timing of the meeting
- helps the minute taker to structure their notes and write up minutes afterwards

WHAT GOES ON AN AGENDA?

The agenda usually has the following information at the top:

- name of organisation
- name of the particular meeting or group
- date, time and venue of the meeting

Almost all meetings begin with:

- Apologies: who cannot attend the meeting
- Minutes of the previous meeting: for approval and amendment
- Matters arising: things that were discussed at the previous meeting, which may need to be talked about further or have a progress report. It is a good idea to list what these items are.

Many committees have one or two items that are always on the agenda. For example:

- Reports from subgroups
- Financial update

STRUCTURING AN AGENDA

Items on the agenda should have a brief description and a clear purpose, so that committee members can prepare for them. For example:

Health and safety

The implications of recent minibus legislation

for discussion

Purposes for having an item on the agenda are:

- For information
- For discussion
- For decision
- For approval
- For the record

You could also add approximate timings to the agenda, and who will be presenting the item. For example:

Agenda item	Purpose	Person presenting	Approx time
1. Apologies for absence	Record		2 minutes
2. Minutes of previous meeting	Approval	Chair	5 minutes
3. Matters arising a) User complaint b) Council leaflets	Information	Chair/staff member	10 minutes
4. Correspondence a) Police letter	Information	Secretary	5 minutes
5. Report on planning fundraising social	Discussion & decision	Jake Goodman	15 minutes
6. Finance	Information & decision	Shamim Money lady	15 minutes
7. Any other business			5 minutes
8. Date and time of next meeting	Record		5 minutes

The agenda is usually drawn up by the secretary and/or the chair. Some committees give this task to a paid staff member, who consults with the chair and/or secretary. Other committee members and staff can submit items for inclusion by an agreed date.

WHAT ARE MINUTES OF A MEETING?

Minutes are the official record of a meeting and they need to be kept in a special place that is accessible. They are extremely important and they must record any decisions taken. If there are disputes about decisions or about financial matters, people will always “refer to the minutes” and therefore it is important that they are an accurate record.

Minutes should:

- have numbers by the items
- make clear when a decision has been taken and record who is to take what action
- make sense and be informative without being long-winded! People rely on minutes to remind them what they have to do and to tell them what happened at the meeting if they were not there.

WHAT GOES INTO MINUTES?

In addition to the three points above, minutes should record:

- the name of the organisation and the meeting
- the date and place of the meeting
- who was present and who gave apologies

Minutes should avoid being too detailed and descriptive. For example, if two members did not receive copies of minutes, you don't need to say this. The minute taker can write a note to themselves, or the minutes can say “action: check circulation lists for minutes”. You also do not record what every person said or every single point that was made. If the meeting has a detailed discussion about something, you need simply to list the most important points.

The secretary is usually responsible for the minutes, although sometimes the task is given to a staff member.

EXAMPLE OF MINUTE

Minutes should record what was discussed, what was decided and any action to be taken. For example:

7. Proposal to cut Council grant

The meeting discussed rumours of a possible cut to the council grant for next year. In a detailed discussion, the meeting considered the likely effects on other funding areas. Members expressed disappointment that the Council appeared to change funding priorities without consultation and at short notice.

Decision: *It was agreed to lobby the Council over the proposed cut to the grant. Our main point would be that having just paid for*


the extension to our building, it would be inconsistent of the Council to deny us the funds to operate it


Action: Jake Goodman and Shamim Money lady to write a letter to the local Councillors and our grants officer by 24 June, and to arrange a follow-up meeting with them.

Minutes are often part of the way an organisation is accountable – to its users, its members, its funders, its staff, or others in the community (“stakeholders”). Sometimes minutes not only record decisions that were taken, but why and how they were made. In this way, an organisation can explain the reasons and processes behind its actions.

Further Help

Voluntary Action-Leeds


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Voluntary Action-Leeds offers training in a variety of subject areas, including minute-taking. For more information contact the Training Co-ordinator at the number above.

Further Reading

 Lee Comer and Paul Ticher *The Minute Taker's Handbook* (DSC, London, 2002) ISBN 1 900360 99 3

Voluntary Action-Leeds

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