

Voluntary Action-Leeds Meetings: Planning

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

PLANNING AND HOLDING MEETINGS

Think about all the different kinds of meetings you have been to or heard about. These might include:

- a management committee meeting
- an Annual General Meeting
- a public meeting
- an informal discussion

These are held for very different purposes and would therefore be managed in different ways. How a meeting is run changes the way people speak to each other (formally or informally) or the way that meetings are recorded (jotted notes or formal minutes).

1: The Management Committee Meeting

- 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 time to read and understand the information before making a decision
- 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 means that you will manage the time better. Although some committee members like talking for hours, most just want to get the work done! For more details, on structuring an agenda see the Factsheet called *Meetings: Minutes and Agendas*
- 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. Remember minutes must be impartial and factual. For each item on the agenda, the minutes should include any decision reached, action required, who will take the action 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. For more details on minute taking, see the Factsheet called *Meetings: Minutes and Agendas*

2: The Public Meeting

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

- Ask local people what they think about plans for a community building
- Gauge opinion on the setting up of a new community association
- Help you to collect information about the needs of your users

Some things you need to think carefully about would include:

The Venue

Somewhere that people know well and are comfortable visiting (and that you can get for free or as cheaply as possible).

The Timing

Day or evening, weekday or weekend. Think about when your audience might be available. It may be appropriate to have an all day event with a number of mini-meetings going on during the day. Remember that a lot of people who may want to get involved work full-time, so you will probably have to do some meetings in the evening or at weekends.

Publicity

There is no point in having a meeting if no-one knows about it in advance. Use local shops, libraries, newspapers, Post Office, community centres, etc. to put up posters and distribute leaflets.

Access

Where possible, consider access issues. This may involve getting a translator or a sign language interpreter. Ensure the venue is accessible for wheelchairs, and consider hiring an induction loop so people with hearing impairments aren't excluded. Also the time and day that you hold your meeting may be important in terms of access. Consider people's childcare arrangements and cultural considerations. For example Friday is an important day for Muslims and Jewish people and they may not wish to participate in meetings on Fridays.

Follow up

Take the names and addresses (if appropriate) of those attending. When you take notes of the main points, make sure the notes are distributed to all those who attended. 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.

3: The Annual General Meeting

If you're worried about organising an Annual General Meeting (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 Annual General Meeting.

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 for the Annual General Meeting that must be given to members, e.g. 21 days notice.

Business

The usual business of an Annual General Meeting 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 (annual report, to be agreed at the AGM)
- The election of management committee and officers (chair, secretary and treasurer)
- Appointment of auditors for the next year (if appropriate)


4: Quorum


This is the number of voting members of any group that have to be present at a meeting of the group for decisions to be taken, e.g. the minimum number of Management Committee members needed to take decisions at a Management Committee meeting. Again this should be defined in your constitution.

Remember that it was defined for a reason so to ignore it (i.e. make a decision without a quorum) is breaking your own rules. If any problem was to occur as a result of, or related to, decisions taken at an inquorate meeting, the fact that it was made outside of the constitutional rules will be important and could have negative effects on the members that made the decision. If a meeting is inquorate then there should be a clause in your constitution telling you what should happen – usually a postponement of the meeting. If this is the case, particularly with a general or public meeting, then you should be asking yourselves what went wrong with the publicity for the meeting and how you can improve on turnout next time.

5: Further Help

Voluntary Action-**Leeds**

 0113 297 7920

 0113 297 7921

 info@val.org.uk

6: Further Reading

 Charity Commission Publication CC48 Charities and Meetings

Voluntary Action-Leeds****

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Registered Office: Stringer House, 34 Lupton Street, Hunslet, Leeds LS10 2QW