

HEREFORDSHIRE VOLUNTARY ACTION

Effective Meetings

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
- a "brainstorm"

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).

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 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 means that you will 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 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.

2: The Public Meeting

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

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

You need to think carefully about:

The Venue

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

The Timing

Day or evening, weekday or weekend.

Publicity

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

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.

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.

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.

3: The 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
- Consider your legal requirements. 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 it's 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

Some groups just want to get the job done in order to fulfil 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
- 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.

Other Considerations

- Consider the timing of the meeting - what will suit your members best? Morning, lunchtime, afternoon, evening, weekday or weekend?
- Consider people's 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.

For more information on the role of the management committee as a whole, see **Factsheet 3: Management Committees.**

4: Further Help

Rosie Davidson
Herefordshire Voluntary Action
Chapel Yard, Burgess Street
Leominster HR6 8DE 078 55 784 804

Effective Meetings Checklists - Planning an Agenda

Be realistic – Keep items on the agenda to a minimum, no longer than 1^{1/2} hrs

Get your priorities clear – Short items first, more complex last and leave time for it

Think through each item in advance – Discuss if possible with V/Chair how these items will be handled and what is hoped to be achieved. Compare & contrast your previous Agenda & Meeting, in light of that are any changes needed.

On the day

Role of the Chairperson is to guide and control the meeting. To do this effectively you need to:-

Keep things moving – prioritise, try to reach key items rapidly, be tactful.

Stick to the Agenda – major issues not directly related, may be recorded on next Agenda & move on

Take the lead but don't dominate – Pull discussion together, focus key issues, not talk too much

Sum up what has been agreed at the end of each item – something should be achieved

Make sure decisions are agreed formally and recorded – repeat agreed actions for the record

Afterwards

Think over how things went – analyse it:- good, effective, decisions made, inclusive

What needs to be followed up – action points:- who, by when, does it need chasing?

Start thinking about the next meeting – Could the meeting improve in anyway, how ?

NB most committees have people who are unwilling to speak – how can you get them to play a more active part?

Making Sure Things Get Done

Decide not just what will be done but who will do it and how – try to share

Agree a time scale – eg by the next meeting.

Make it clear when you (Chair) will expect a progress report – at the next meeting, or set a date

Checklist For An Effective Management Committee

Committee Membership – have you got the right mix of people?

Responsibilities – is everyone clear about their roles and responsibilities?

Setting Up – have you followed your guidelines in your constitution?

Officers – what roles do you need Chair, Secretary Treasurer?

Committee Training – would anyone benefit from initial training?

Committee Meetings – are you clear about before, during and after?

Limits of Authority – is everyone clear who has the authority to do what?

Effectiveness – are you confident that your committee's decisions will be carried out?

Records – what records does your group keep and why?

Ref Source Material How to Run a Voluntary Group Chris Carling