



Governance Tips

Helping you stay on track

Keys to effective meetings

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Meetings may be defined as the coming together of two or more people to achieve a pre-agreed outcome or fulfill a legal requirement. They may be used to solve problems, reach agreements, give and receive information, share decision making and responsibility, monitor activities, resolve conflicts. The best meetings are those where everyone feels they have had the opportunity to make a valuable contribution, business is dealt with effectively and clear procedures are followed.

Types of meetings

Committee (management and specific subcommittee) meetings – held regularly according to constitutional or organizational requirements. These meetings are attended by those elected to the position of committee member and occasionally other invited guests. In early childhood services a staff member will usually attend management meetings to present a report and discuss any issues related to the daily program.

General meetings – There are two types of general meetings; the Annual General Meeting and the Special Meeting. These meetings are attended by members or shareholders of the organization and the format for both is laid down in the Constitution/Rules, Incorporations Act or Standing Orders.

Meeting processes

Formal/informal: The structure of a meeting will depend largely on the purpose of the meeting and those involved. Sub committee meetings and many early childhood management meetings tend to be fairly informal however Annual General Meetings and General Meetings will follow a more formal format.

Attendance: AGMs and SGMs are attended by all members of the association. Only the elected members of the committee are required to attend committee meetings. Staff or a staff representative will often attend committee meetings to present a report and provide support to the committee however they are not generally required to attend for the whole meeting. It is not appropriate for these meetings to be 'open' meetings because there may

be confidential and sensitive issues which need to be discussed by the committee. With the committee's permission, a member of the association may attend for an agreed time (usually at the commencement of the meeting) regarding an issue or a question that they may want to ask. Sometimes the committee may invite someone with specialist skills/knowledge to assist them.

'Quorum': This is the minimum number of members that must be present to enable decisions to be made. The constitution will define the quorum for the different meetings of your organization.

Decision making: The entire committee is elected to manage the organization and is therefore responsible for decision making. Committees may choose to delegate some responsibility to a group such as the executive but the authorization must be clearly documented and recorded in the minutes. A general agreement or consensus is often the outcome of discussions however there will be times when a more formal approach to a decision is required such as the expenditure of a large amount of money or a change to programs. This process requires a motion to be put forward which is seconded, discussion takes place and a vote is called for (this may be by a secret ballot or by show of hands) the decision is recorded as carried or lost. Motions may also be amended before being voted on.

Time keeping: It is important to start and finish on time. Develop a culture of starting at the appointed time regardless of who is present and people will soon get the message to be on time. Stick to the agenda and agreed finishing time which may need some negotiation if an issue is taking longer than expected to resolve. People's attention spans are relatively short especially at night; in meetings which go on for a long time people are less able to make informed and effective decisions.

Confidentiality: There are often issues discussed in meetings that are of a confidential nature. These may include employee information, personal information about children and families and complaints. It is important for members of the committee not discuss any confidential information outside the committee and to act responsibly and

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comply with the service's privacy policy and privacy legislation. KPV suggests that all committee members sign a confidentiality agreement at the first meeting.

Meeting tools

Agendas list the items to be raised at the meeting and in what order issues will be dealt with. They may also include proposed actions and allocation of time for each item. They are most effective if they are made available before the meeting and are usually developed by the secretary in consultation with the President and other committee members.

Minutes are an official record of the actions and decisions of the committee. They should include the date and time of the meeting, attendees and apologies, main points of discussion and results of any decision or action to be followed. They should be clear enough to enable someone who was not present at the meeting to get a clear picture of what took place and they must be approved as accurate as they can be used as evidence in a court of law.

Meeting papers: It is useful to have relevant background or supporting information for important or complex items on the agenda distributed before the meeting. This will provide members with the opportunity to further explore issues and be prepared to discuss and make a final decision at the meeting. Remember that any information provided should be relevant and not overwhelming for members of the committee to read.

Reports: The reports which will be provided will depend on the purpose of the meeting. The **AGM** is an opportunity for the committee to report to members of the association about the activities for the previous 12 months and therefore written reports should be presented by the president, treasurer (auditor's report), teachers and staff. To enable committees to fulfill their responsibilities they will require reports from the treasurer, teacher/s, administrator where relevant and any subcommittees that are operating, for example fundraising at their meetings.

Action sheets: Action sheets are very useful tool to use for delegating tasks as well as assisting with keeping records of the decisions made throughout the meeting and the actions that need to be taken. It requires someone to record on the action sheet, the task, the person that the task is delegated to and the timeframe that is required to complete the task.

Meeting Etiquette

- Ensure everyone knows when and where the meeting is to be held.
- Prepare a meeting agenda in advance and provide all participants with a copy.
- Punctuality is a must. Keeping people waiting is considered the height of poor etiquette.
- Meetings that start on time and finish on time and cover adequately all business outlined on the agenda will be appreciated by all and increase the chance of efficient meetings in the future.
- All mobile phones should be switched off at the start of the meeting unless one is waiting for a possible urgent call eg a wife requiring transport to hospital for the delivery of a new baby.
- Always come prepared. Always bring something to write on for example paper and pen. If presenting a report or information always ensure that you have everything you need with you to the meeting.
- "Any other business" should be listed at the start of the meeting, prioritised and a time limit, if necessary, put on each item.
- The chair should ensure that meetings stay with the agenda and are kept as short and effective as possible.
- Minutes/ a record of the meeting should be kept documenting major decisions and action points and who is responsible for each action.
- When speaking committee members should be brief and ensure that what they say is relevant
- Never interrupt anyone. If you disagree, wait till they are finished and ask the chair's permission to provide a counter argument. The exception to this is the chair person who has placed a time limit on the speaker.
- With contentious issues a time limit may need to be placed on all who wish to speak.

Meetings should be a good experience. When everything works, congratulate people on their participation, celebrate your wins, and find reasons to meet socially to allow people to get to know each other better. If you are doing it right, people will want to be part of your team.

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