



Fact Sheet 4: 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”

They are held for very different purposes and need to be managed in different ways. This can even change the way people speak to each other (formally or informally) or how the meetings are recorded (jotted notes or formal minutes).

1: The Management Committee Meeting

Ensure all the relevant papers have been circulated in advance. 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 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 and it is recommended that only the outcomes of any agenda item be recorded. Minutes must be impartial and factual and it is difficult to be objective in recording Minutes when subjective judgements are made regarding content.

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

The Timing

Day or evening, weekday or weekend.

Publicity

There is no point 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 the audited accounts, if 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 may need to send an annual return to the Charity Commission.
- If you are a company limited by guarantee, you must send your accounts to Companies House.

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. If the meeting is not quorate, 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 attend meetings then).
- 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**.

VASA can provide a personalised service to assist you with matters relating to meetings and meeting locations. Please contact Dominic Momcilovic for advice on 01789 298102 or by email dominic.momcilovic@vasa.org.uk