

Better Meetings



I Have To Go To A Meeting!

The comedian John Cleese has produced a very entertaining and useful training video, and while it's aimed at the corporate sector, the sentiment is still the same 'Meetings Bloody Meetings!'

It can be downloaded for just under £500 a month...however I've prepared a few tips and ideas that might help your group...for free!



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cF39VOXEpk>

Good News!

All too often meetings are frustrating and time consuming and seem to go around in circles. But there is good news! The skills for running good meetings can be learned.



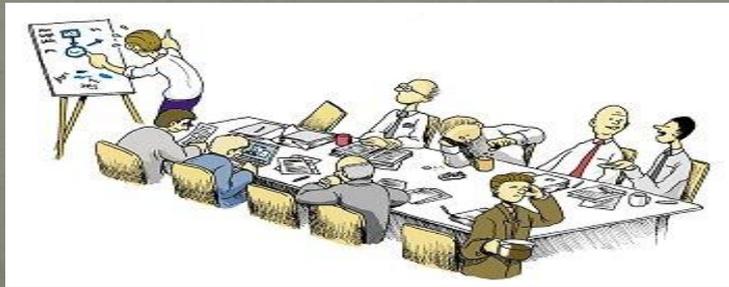
This e-book touches on some of the key principles and procedures to bring about more effective, participative and enjoyable meetings for community and voluntary organisations.

Better Meetings



Is This Familiar?

- Purpose of meeting not clear or no agenda
- Going off-track, not following agenda
- Too many voices at once
- Not enough information to make a decision
- Texting or taking a call
- Cliques, people chatting
- People cutting in
- Confusion and frustration
- Meeting running late



Fail to Prepare = Prepare to Fail



Preparation is an important first step to better meetings. This usually involves the chairperson, secretary and treasurer doing some planning in advance so that the agenda is thought through, and any copying etc is done.

Thinking about what needs to be done beforehand is half the battle. This will help you clarify the agenda and schedule of the meeting.

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The Agenda

The amount of preparation you do can depend on the level of secretarial support your organisation has. You might have use of an office worker or you might be fully voluntary.

Either way you need a written agenda.

Here are a few options:

- ✓ Post or hand deliver
- ✓ Use email or text
- ✓ Have a printed agenda for all at the start of the meeting
- ✓ Have the agenda written up on flipchart or whiteboard

The best advice is to send the agenda to all members in advance - keep things open and transparent.



No Monkey Business!

Trust is vital. It can take time to build up but can be damaged or lost in an instant. The agenda must be open and honest.

- ❖ Avoid surprises
- ❖ Don't put the most important item far down the agenda
- ❖ Encourage members to put items on the agenda in advance
- ❖ AOB should not be the time to raise important or controversial items.

A lot of difficulties can be avoided by following good habits and ensuring your agenda is prepared, honest and communicated.

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The Schedule

What should be on the agenda? Try to be consistent. Typically the agenda will include:

- Approve the minutes. Encourage members to read them in advance to avoid wasting time.
- Matters arising: keep it brief; don't get distracted; stick to the agenda.
- Note any apologies.
- Deal with key correspondence including important email items.
- Important items for discussion and decision - don't wait until the end!
- Reports & treasurer's report.
- Any other business. This should be brief, any major discussions should be carried forward to the next meeting.
- Confirm date of next meeting.

Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest is a situation when a member has a direct or indirect beneficial interest in a decision on the agenda.

If your organisation doesn't have a policy on this then do so!

This should be a written statement - discussed, agreed and properly minuted.

Then if there is a potential conflict of interest it is easier for the chairperson to deal with it in advance.

Basically, the individual concerned should absent them self while the item is being discussed. This should be recorded in the minutes too.

Your public image and reputation is at stake, so make sure you have a policy and that all members understand it

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Ground Rules

We don't automatically behave as we should at meetings unless some basic ground rules, or group contract is agreed.

For example:

- Turn off your phone
- Show respect
- One voice at a time
- Everyone is given the chance to give their opinion
- Start time, tea break and finish time
- Confidentiality

It's easy to do at a meeting, and only takes a few minutes.



A Word on Confidentiality

Unless you're a secret society you will want to communicate your decisions and plans to your wider members, community & stake holders.

Confidentiality in this regard means that who says what remains inside the meeting room. It is not to be discussed after in the street, over the phone, at the dinner table etc.



Committee members need to be able to give their views without fear of being repeated elsewhere.

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Keeping a Record - The Minutes

What did you agree at the last meeting or the meeting before that?

Do you rely on the collective memory of the group or do you keep good minutes?

- ✓ The date, attendance & apologies
- ✓ Minutes proposed, seconded and signed
- ✓ Discussion re matters arising
- ✓ Decisions proposed and seconded
- ✓ Brief note on discussion items
- ✓ Treasurer's report proposed, seconded and attached
- ✓ Any other reports noted and attached
- ✓ AOB and next date

Keep the minutes safe in a book or binder



The Money!

The treasurer's report should be a standard item at each meeting.

Many groups are anxious about distributing any financial matters in print and rely on a verbal report by the treasurer.

Openness and transparency should be your guiding principle.

If you have good financial records and good policies then you should have nothing to worry about as you will be able to deal with any query that arises.

If you don't address queries about money you run the risk of rumours spreading.



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Disruptive Behaviour

And now the challenging stuff! Sometimes despite your best preparation, policies etc you can have problems, you will need to deal with such behaviour issues.



- Remember, it is natural for groups to have problems
- Don't panic and don't avoid the issues, they don't go away!
- Try to focus on the behaviour, not the individual
- Consider getting help or advice



Dominant Voices

Some people are well able to talk, but everyone has something to contribute, even the quieter members.

- Politely interrupt a person who talks too long or too often.
- Thank them for their contribution and invite others to contribute.
 - Thank them too for their comments and ideas.
 - Value all members.
- Make this a habit, a part of how your group does its business.

Work towards consensus!

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More Participation

How might you get more participation, input and ownership of decisions and plans? Especially from the quieter members?

- Ask for ideas - brainstorm using a flipchart
- Go round the table and invite feedback
- Discuss an item in pairs or groups of three for 5 mins and then feedback

These methods require a little bit of preparation in advance, but the rewards are more thought, more involvement and hopefully more consensus.



And Finally - Endings

Finish on time. People don't like uncertainty over the finish time of a meeting. If you have to run over, then get agreement, eg on a further 15 mins

A good idea to finish an ordinary committee meeting is to summarise what has been decided.

This can include:

- What did we agree
- Who is going to do it and by when
- Clarity around any financial decisions
- What can be reported and what must remain confidential
- Acknowledge the work done by members

Have a cup of tea!