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Meeting Procedures

This booklet explains why formal meetings are held, how they are run and what is expected of the chair, secretary and other members who participate.



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Meetings: how they work and what they are for

The purpose of meetings is to enable groups of people to discuss issues and make decisions on what to do about them. The meeting may be very formal with strict rules, very informal with no obvious rules, or somewhere in between.

The formal rules have evolved to enable issues on which people have different opinions to be discussed without personal criticism and acrimony. The rules ensure that issues are discussed, not people, and that the will of the majority of the meeting is clearly stated.

The rules of the meeting may seem intimidating to those people who have not studied and used them but, once mastered, they do allow orderly decision making. Anyone is capable of learning meeting procedure and becoming an effective chairperson.

Participants in meetings

Chair, chairperson, chairwoman and chairman

These terms are all used currently and it is up to the officeholder to choose his/her title.

The chairperson is the impartial servant of the meeting, i.e. is guided by the meeting, but has the responsibility to get the business done as efficiently as possible.

The chairperson must know the rules of procedure and must be in charge of the meeting, ruling firmly but not tyrannically.

The chairperson should not make speeches or pronouncements on issues. If she/he wishes to participate in debate, she/he must ask someone else to chair the meeting for the debate.

The chairperson orders the agenda, opens the meeting, guides discussion, makes a speaking list, takes votes on issues and closes the meeting. The meeting may disagree with a chairperson's ruling by formal procedures (see meeting rules).

The chairing of less formal meetings is often more difficult than formal ones because the rules are not as clear. Skill is needed to manage discussion, to judge when decisions should be made and to stop individuals dominating the group.

Secretary

This person's responsibility is to keep a record of the meeting including the exact words of all decisions made by the meeting and, for a formal meeting, the names of proposers and seconders, the outcome of voting and perhaps who is to carry out the decisions. This written record must then be made available to those who attended the meeting and is confirmed as a true and accurate record at the next meeting. Amendments may be made to the minutes if they are inaccurate. The secretary usually writes any letters that are required to carry out meeting decisions.

Members of a meeting

Everyone at a meeting should:

- keep to the point.
- respect the chair.
- attack the issue, not the person.
- consider the views of others.
- seek clarification when necessary.
- remember time constraints.
- remember the need for an outcome.

Meeting rules

Agenda

Literally, agenda means things to be done; a list of matters to be dealt with by the meeting.

Minutes

The minutes are a record of the meeting. They should state who was present and what decisions were made. Sometimes a summary of discussion is included.

Motions

A motion is a proposal for action or a statement of position.

It is good practice for serious matters to be put to the meeting in the form of a motion even in an informal meeting. The wording of a decision is then agreed on by everyone.

What makes a good motion:

- i) It begins with “That”.
- ii) It is clear, is not open to more than one interpretation, makes sense and is grammatically correct.
- iii) It should be aiming to bring about change, i.e. lead to an action, or state a clear position. For example,

“That the Cook Strait College branch of PPTA informs the board of trustees that members will not continue to teach if the temperature falls below 10°C”.

“That the Cook Strait College branch of PPTA states its strong opposition to the proposal that teachers must be accessible directly to students by email.”

A motion should be given to the chairperson or secretary before the meeting or during the meeting if it arises from the meeting, legibly written on paper with the names of the mover and seconder. Explanatory notes may be given when a motion is circulated before the meeting. A motion should not try to include a long explanation.

A motion must have a proposer and seconder. They speak to the motion first. A seconder may reserve her/his right to speak until later in the debate.

The proposer has a right of reply to points raised in the debate before the vote is taken.

Amendment

This is a change to the original wording of a motion but may not negate its meaning. The chairperson rules whether or not it is acceptable. An amendment must have a proposer and seconder. There is no right of reply at the end of discussion.

An amendment must be voted on before the original motion is put because, if passed, it will change the motion.

There can be no more than one amendment to a motion under discussion at a time. They must be taken in order of lodging with the chairperson. A proposed amendment may be accepted by the mover and seconder of the substantive or original motion if the meeting agrees to allow this.

Procedural motions

The purpose of procedural motions is to expedite the business of the meeting. They must have movers and seconders. They do not generally have discussion but may have their significance

explained by the chairperson. The following are examples of procedural motions:

i) *“That this matter lie upon the table.”*

This delays decision on a matter. It is put aside until a motion is put to lift it from the table; this could be at a later meeting.

ii) *“That the motion now be put.”*

This puts an end to debate and forces the vote on the motion under discussion.

iii) *“That the ruling of the chairperson be disagreed with.”*

This gives the meeting power to disagree with the chairperson.

iv) *“That the meeting proceed to next business.”*

This means the matter under discussion will not be voted on and cannot be returned to.

NB: There is no such thing as a “point of information”. If a member of the meeting wants information or explanation of the meaning of the motion, she/he asks for that in a speech. The mover of the motion gives the answer in her/his right of reply or other speakers may give it in the debate.

Voting

The vote is taken when the chairperson puts a motion, or amendment to a motion, to the vote by the meeting either:

i) after a procedural motion that a motion or amendment be put is passed, or

ii) after the chairperson has decided that there has been enough debate and states he/she is going to put the amendment or the motion to the vote.

Note: the mover of a motion has a right of reply before a vote is taken.

How a vote is taken

The meeting rules (standing orders) being used for a particular meeting will state how votes are taken. Generally, the chairperson will say, “All those in favour, say ‘aye’”, and those in favour will speak, then, “All those against, say ‘no’”, and those against will speak.

If there is doubt about the result, the chairperson or any member may call for a “show of hands” and an exact count of votes taken.

The chairperson declares the result by declaring the motion either “carried” or “not carried”.

If no vote against a motion is made, the chairperson may call for abstentions to determine whether a vote in favour may be declared unanimous.

A member of the meeting may request that his/her vote or abstention is recorded in the minutes.

Guidelines for efficient meetings

Establish from the group the most suitable time to have a meeting.

Provide an agenda before the meeting. Provide good notice of the meeting.

Set time limits for the meeting and tell the meeting. Only let the meeting go longer if the meeting votes for an extension of time.

Ensure the meeting place is suitable (if that is possible). Arrange seating so that the chairperson is visible to all and so she/he can see everyone.

Explain the purpose of the meeting and how you intend to conduct it, e.g. time limits for speakers, method of indicating to the chair a participant’s wish to speak.

The meeting should begin with apologies, and approve the minutes of the previous meeting. As the meeting progresses, watch the passage of time to ensure the agenda can be covered.

The meeting should conclude with a decision, or with actions to be carried out. It should be clear who is to carry out the actions.

Minutes of the meeting should be provided to the branch.

Problems and solutions

Problems	Solutions
Talking across the meeting	Speakers to speak to the chair only
Long rambling speeches	Set time limits for speakers
People interrupting each other or getting impatient while waiting to speak	Write down a speaking list - occasionally tell the meeting what it is
Repetitive speeches	After 2-3 speeches one way, ask for speakers the other way. If none, put the motion
Speakers off the topic	Chair interrupts speaker and tells him/her if he/she is off the topic
Personal attacks	Chair stops speaker, explains this is not allowed
Motion which is not clear	Ask mover to clarify
Two ideas contained in a motion	Break into two motions and take one at a time
Unsure how to take a vote	Clearly indicate - "I will now put the vote" - and explain how voting is to be done
Confusion over result of vote	State the result clearly. A voice vote may be challenged by calling for a handvote
Confusion over procedural motions	Chair has checked procedural motions before meeting - knows which are valid. No debate on procedural motions

Checklist for speakers

- Can they see me?
- Am I looking at them?
- Can they hear me?
- Can they understand what I am saying?
- Am I interesting to listen to?
- Is my point of view clear?
- Am I engaging the audience?
- Does my speech end on a strong note?
- What overall impression am I leaving with the audience?
- What will I try to improve for next time?

Advice and guidance

For further advice consult your local PPTA field office.

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