

Chairman's meeting procedure sheet

Before the meeting

The members should have been given a copy of the previous minutes as soon as possible after the previous meeting, so they have a record of anything they said they'd do ('action items').

Ask group members to let you (or the secretary) know if they will not be coming. If only a small number are likely to come, consider postponing the meeting. Check the rules of the organisation ('the constitution') so you know how many people have to attend to ensure a quorum.

Ask group members for discussion items to go on the agenda, and send the agenda to group members so that everyone knows what is listed for discussion. This includes checking if the secretary or treasurer have reports to present.

1. The starting phase

This column shows the words you use for each part of the meeting.

Are there any apologies?

I move that the apologies be accepted. Does anyone second this motion? Anyone opposed? Motion accepted.

Would someone who was at the last meeting like to move that the minutes are accurate? Does anyone second the motion? Anyone opposed? Motion accepted.

Check you have a quorum: Check that there is a quorum present before starting. Without a quorum, no decisions can be made.

Find a minute taker: A minute taker should be decided prior to the meeting, but often this is the first point of discussion at a meeting. Watch the minute taker during the meeting to check that they are keeping up with the discussions, and stop discussion if they need more time.

Introductions: Start the meeting with a welcome and a chance for everyone to say their name and who they are representing. Record any 'apologies' (people who said they can't make it to the meeting).

Distribute minutes and agenda: The chair should have copies of the agenda and the previous meeting's minutes for all group members. Don't assume they will bring their own, even if you have sent everyone copies. Allow a last chance for everyone if they have anything extra to add to the agenda for discussion. This makes sure that they can all see what is on the list for discussion.

Confirm previous minutes: Ask for someone to confirm that the previous minutes are accurate. Allow a chance to change details if someone thinks they are not accurate.

2. The business phase

Business arising from the previous minutes: If there are any things that need to be followed up from the previous minutes, they are discussed now, unless they are already on the agenda for discussion later.

Standing items: Many groups add regular items to every meeting. This could be to discuss Occupational Health and Safety issues, financial reports or reports from subcommittees of the group. These are discussed here.

General Business: Go through each of the items listed in the agenda, one at a time. For every decision the group makes, follow the decision making process and make sure the minutes record this. If the decision involves the group doing something, make sure what needs to be done is clear as well as who will do it and when they will have done it.

3. The closing phase

End the meeting with a summary of all of the decisions made and tasks delegated and thank all members for their involvement.

Official record: Sign a copy of the previous minutes (along with another member who was there) and file the signed copy.

Decision making procedure: The examples shown assume that all group members agree with the decision. The full procedure is:

The issue is discussed. Once it looks like the group is agreeing, someone suggests a summary of the decision ('proposes a motion'). This needs to be stated carefully and clearly. The chair asks for a second person to support that decision (a 'second'). The issue can be discussed further, and group members may propose a slightly different wording (an 'amendment'). Voting can be formal, and members have the right to ask for a secret vote. Often, though, the chair asks all those in favour to say 'aye', and then all those opposed to say 'nay.' Some members might choose to abstain for ethical reasons. The chair works hard to make sure that everyone has a say and that the group all agrees on the decision but, if an agreement can't be made, the majority rules. The views and rights of the minority must be respected.

Glossary:

Quorum: The minimum number of people needed to make it a valid meeting. Usually, this means more than half of the group or Committee's members. (This stops two members getting together without anyone else being there and making major decisions the others might not have agreed on.) The group or organisation's constitution will say how many people are needed to make a quorum.

Agenda: The official work plan of the meeting.

Motion: A formal proposal for action, usually phrased as 'moving a motion' (eg 'I move a motion that we buy a new kitchen').

Chairman/ chair: The person in charge of the meeting, directing discussion, directing attention to people who have indicated they wish to speak, maintaining order etc. The chair tends to be the committee or group's president. In larger, more formalised meetings, the chair only facilitates the meeting and cannot express opinions.

Abstain – Give up one's vote when a vote has been called. People should abstain where it could look like they have reasons to vote other than the best interests of the group (eg: "I abstain from voting because the decision will affect my business" or "I abstain from voting because the kitchen maker is my father").

Amendment: An alteration to a motion, designed to improve the motion without contradicting it. (eg: "I propose an amendment to the motion, that we buy a new kitchen after we get the money from our grant'). Amendments could add, change or remove words from the original.

General business: Any matter not raised anywhere else during the meeting. Usually, the agenda has space for 'general business' to be discussed after everything else that needs to be discussed or has been requested to be added to the agenda.

Minutes: A written record of the committee meeting. This has nothing to do with how many minutes it all takes, although the minutes do record the start and end times of the meeting.

Point of Order: When a person officially draws the chair's attention to an alleged irregularity in the proceedings. ("Point of order, Mr Chairman. I don't think we can make a decision on this matter without a quorum present".)