

Meeting Lingo

Well planned meetings are the secret of a successful committee. The ability to engage the committee ensure that their valuable time is well utilised, is a skill only achieved by considerable planning.

Not all first-time Board members will be familiar with all the terms that are used during Board meetings. The following is provided to help the uninitiated make some sense of it all.

The Agenda

The Agenda is the list of things that will be discussed during the meeting. It is usually sent to Board members well in advance of the meeting to ensure everyone has a chance to read and digest it before the meeting starts.

Some more sophisticated agendas go further than a simple list, also providing supporting information (explanations, related documents, etc.), as well as details about who will address each item, recommendations for action and how much time each item is expected to take up.

The Minutes

The Minutes are the official record of the actions and decisions of the Board. They are taken every meeting and approved the next time the Board meets. Generally, meeting minutes will include:

- The date and time of the meeting (including start and finishing times).
- Attendees (including absences and apologies – and noting when people have left and re-entered the meeting).
- A summary of the main points made during the discussion of each item.
- The result of each item discussed (decisions made or deferred, sometimes also including the number of votes for and against).

The minutes are sometimes approved without much thought, or even having not been read by Board members. This is a dangerous practice indeed. The minutes show who voted for what and what action the Board has committed itself to – and they may be referred to as the official record days and weeks and even years after a decision has been made. They should therefore not be treated lightly.

Quorum

The word "quorum" refers the minimum number of Board members who have to present for the Board to legally transact business. Your organisation's constitution should spell out what numbers are required for meetings to take place.

Motions and Resolutions

A "motion" is a proposal for action. "Moving" a motion merely means putting the proposal forward to be voted on. Sometimes motions are amended or reworded before being put to the vote.

A motion is needed whenever the committee is:

- deciding to spend significant money in a particular way
- adopting a policy about the way it will deal with a topic or issue

- making a decision of a lasting nature

The motion must be proposed and seconded and then discussed by the committee. A vote is carried out to decide if the motion is accepted or defeated.

If the motion is approved by the Board, it is referred to as a "resolution" (i.e. the Board's decision), which can be legally binding.

The Role of the Chair

Board meetings cannot take place without a Board Chair. The role of the Chair is to ensure the meeting is conducted efficiently and that meeting rules are adhered to. The Chair should facilitate discussions, keep members on track and the meeting on time. When a topic has been fully discussed, the Chair will often summarise the points and put the motion to the Board for a decision or vote.

Between Meetings

Board members should not think that their role begins when the Board meeting starts and ends when it closes. Before meetings, members should make a careful reading of the agenda and ensure they clarify any points that are unclear. After meetings, members should review the minutes as soon as they are circulated (while they are fresh in their minds) and make note of any amendments they think are needed. Members should also carry out any tasks they have been assigned and keep track of their progress for reporting purposes at the next meeting.

Annual General Meeting (AGM)

The AGM is a meeting for all club/association members and is normally held every 12 months. The aim of the meeting is to report on the activities of the club during that period and to elect office bearers for the forthcoming 12 months.

Elections

The term of committee members is defined in the committee constitution. The election process is usually tied into the AGM process where committee members step down from their positions and there is a call for nominations. Many committee constitutions will define where the membership is to be drawn from and committees may choose to "head hunt" new members where specialist skills are required.

Special meetings

The purpose of a special meeting other than the AGM is to address a pressing issue, which requires committee action prior to the next scheduled meeting.