



Make the most of your meeting

This is one of a series of factsheets for voluntary and community groups issued by West Norfolk Voluntary and Community Action, WNVCA.

Meetings can be a nuisance and a waste of people's time or they can be well planned, and help the work of your group.

This factsheet gives you some pointers towards making meetings useful.

1. What is the meeting for?

The first question to ask is, why are we holding a meeting at all?

Could we do without a meeting? Could we achieve the same result by circulating information on paper or by email, or by holding one-to-one meetings with key people instead?

Some of the reasons why a meeting is needed could be:

- To collect or share information
- To discuss and gather different viewpoints
- To make decisions
- It is a legal requirement (e.g. holding an Annual General Meeting)
(See our Factsheet on Annual General Meetings)

Something to think about – social needs

Group members often want meetings to be social events. There is a difference between a social gathering and a meeting. A meeting has an agreed purpose. It also has to have (at least some) formality in the way it proceeds. It is a good idea to meet people's social needs, but keep this separate from the "business" of the meeting. You can do this by providing refreshments beforehand and a chance to chat, or a break in the middle for chat, and time for a comfort break.

People get disillusioned with meetings if nothing happens as a result. Your meeting should have a purpose. Make sure there is an agenda (a list of topics you need to discuss).

People also get fed up, if nothing ever happens. So make sure your meeting ends up with clear agreement about who is going to do what, and by when.

This is why it is important to keep notes, or minutes, or a record of action points – see 5 below.

2. The Agenda

The agenda tells people clearly what is being discussed. It should be sent out in advance.

A good example quoted in “Community Start Up” (available in WNVCA Library) is given below. Note the timings, which are a helpful addition.

North Minton Community Association
Fulshaw House, Minton Green, London
The next meeting of the Executive will be held on
24th April, 7.30 pm at Fulshaw House

Please note, Mr. Bradwell, Borough Council Architect, will be attending this meeting to discuss the plans for the new extension and obtaining tenders for the work. It is important, therefore, for everyone to try to attend this meeting.

7.30pm	1	Apologies for Absence
7.35	2	New Extension – Report from Mr. Bradwell, Borough Council Architect
8.05	3	Minutes of the last meeting held 25 th March, copy enclosed.
approx	4	Matters arising from the minutes excluding those mentioned elsewhere on this agenda.
	5	Arrangements for the AGM
	6	Report on outing to Southport
	7	Purchase of disco equipment
8.45	8	Treasurer’s Report
approx	9	Fund-raising Committee’s Report
	10	Any other business – members are asked to inform the Chair prior to the start of the meeting of any other items they wish to raise at this meeting.
	11	Date of next meeting

The meeting will close at 9.15-9.30 pm approx.

Something to think about – the practicalities

Make sure the timing of your meeting suits as many people as possible. Make sure the premises are accessible to everyone, and the meeting room is warm, comfortable, and big enough. Also consider whether you need to provide a creche.

3. Chairing the Meeting

This is a real skill. Most people learn it, and manage to combine leadership, fearlessness, and patient listening.

Some useful hints are:

- Involve new members from the start – introduce them and encourage them
- Begin with a short statement, about the purpose, and how the meeting will reach a decision or conclusion
- Try to separate fact from opinion
- Guide the meeting by summarising at regular intervals what has been said
- Ask questions to encourage participation

4. Being a good participant

Meetings are only as good as the people who go to them. Even if you are unsure of yourself, and new to meetings, you can do a lot to help.

- Find out about the things which are being discussed, before the meeting
- Listen at the meeting itself, and respect the other participants.
- Be clear what you want to say (write some notes for yourself perhaps), and say it clearly but not aggressively.
- Accept that you won't always get your way.

5. Minutes, or notes, or action points?

It doesn't matter too much what you call them, and they don't have to be too complicated. But they do need to record the important points:

- Decisions that have been taken, and
- Actions that need to happen.

Find your own style, which works for you.

A good example of a very informal approach (action points) is given at the end of this factsheet, from the Groundswell "Toolkit for Change" (available in WNVCA Library).

The secretary is the person who writes the minutes/notes/action points. This is a really important job. Here are some guidelines for the secretary.

A Minutes Checklist

- Keep brief notes in a rough notebook
- Prepare a rough draft as soon as possible after the meeting
- Keep minutes brief but accurate
- Record each decision that is reached and who is responsible for carrying out that decision
- Keep minutes in a hard-backed folder together with any papers which were presented to the meeting.

Something to think about - make it fun!

Remember, if you want people to come to your next meeting, and to keep on coming, and to bring new members with them, then keep the meeting relaxed and enjoyable. Make it friendly and fun.

This information has been produced by West Norfolk Voluntary and Community Action set up and owned by local groups to support, promote and develop local voluntary and community action.

We have taken all reasonable steps to make sure that this information is current and accurate. We cannot, however, guarantee its accuracy or completeness and therefore cannot accept liability for your acting, or failing to act, on the information given.

For resources, books, ideas and useful information please contact West Norfolk VCA or email info@westnorfolkvca.org.

Example of action points

Groundswell Team Meeting

Date: 28 August 2001
Present: Toby, Steve, Kara, Gill, Naomi

Cambridge Cyrenions

Informed them that we can't attend AGM, have asked for someone to visit 17 or 21 September.

Action Points – Kara to attend, speak to Brian and combine with meeting Hannah or Lee from PUSH.

31 January planning

PLA tools & techniques identified for possible use. Variation in type of publications – some focus on process others on techniques – all interesting.

Action Points – all to look at folder with techniques by Tuesday 4 (next team meeting) and discuss then.

SCSH conference

Waiting to hear from Tom about Groundswell's involvement.

Action Point – Kara to book travel arrangements.

BTCV away day

Gill's got a catalogue, agreed watercress day on 3 September (next Monday) or Chase (if other's not available) on 4 or 5.

Action Point – Gill to see what's available, email team and book places.

Self help manual

Need to begin planning now Travel Guide is completed. Planning meeting arranged 17 October, 11.30 am

Grant Award Scheme review

For newsletter – Kara's put together a telephone questionnaire to follow up one year on from grant (round 10, 9 groups). Also good change to get pictures from groups.

For GAS evaluation – Kara outlined process for discussion, next team meeting.

Action Point – Naomi to begin calling groups. Kara to re-send outline of evaluation process.

Newsletter issue 15

Editorial meeting held, action points written up.