

Drawing up an Agenda

A guide to Drawing up an Agenda
for a small voluntary organisation

Drawing up on Agenda



The agenda for a Committee meeting is usually drawn up by the Secretary after consultation with the Chairperson. It is sent out to all committee members before the meeting, giving them sufficient time to read through the papers and do any preparatory work that needs done. How soon before a meeting the Agenda is sent out really depends upon how frequently meetings take place. For a committee meeting once a month, probably a week before is acceptable. For committees which meet more frequently, it may be a good idea to send out a reminder perhaps a month before the meeting saying that the Agenda will be arriving in two weeks time.

It is a question of balancing the needs of committee members to have time to consider their papers and the needs of the Secretary to give them up to date information.

What should be avoided if at all possible, is giving people an Agenda when they arrive for the meeting.

What goes on an Agenda



If at possible, use a single sheet of A4 paper. Begin at the top with the name of the committee, e.g.

Anywhere Community Association

It is a good idea to include details as to where and when the meeting is to take place, e.g. "There will be a meeting of the Community Association on (day, month, year) in (venue) at (time).

Then give details of what items are to appear on the Agenda. Almost all committees begin with:

Present

List all members present.

Apologies

Should be given to the secretary and recorded in the minutes.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

These are usually sent out with the agenda, although some organisations will send them out a day or two after the meeting.

At the meeting, record that the minutes have been “taken as read”, any amendments and the name of the people who proposed and seconded the motion the “the minutes should be approved”.

Matters Arising

Only items arising from previous minutes should be discussed here and only minor items at that. For instance, reporting that a certain action had been taken. An item that would involve major decisions or lengthy discussion should not be discussed here but have their own agenda heading. A reference to the previous minutes and the paragraph concerned may be helpful here.

For example:

Matters Arising

Letter to Orkney Islands Council re dog fouling (6.2)

Fundraising table top sale (3.5)

Estimates for laptop (2.1)

Correspondence

Correspondence should be read out by the secretary/manager/coordinator. Again, items of major importance should not be discussed here, but have their own agenda heading.

Financial report

This will usually be a standing item and should appear early on the agenda because other decisions may depend on the organisation’s financial position.

Main Business

These items will vary from organisation to organisation and from meeting to meeting, generally dealing with the most important ones first. There may be standing items that will appear each time, e.g. reports from project staff.

There should not be too many otherwise the meeting will go on for too long. Two hours is the maximum for effective decision making. If your meetings are frequently too long, think about holding meetings more often, or being ruthless about what can be included on the agenda. If you're always searching for items to discuss, hold meetings less often. However, remember that your constitution will dictate your meeting cycle.

AOB (Any Other Business)

Many committees close with this and only minor items should be discussed here. They could be items that have arisen after the Agenda has been circulated or that have been raised by members at the meeting. If at all possible, members should inform the Chairperson before the meeting that they wish to raise a matter here. If it is an item of major importance, it should be added to the Agenda at the beginning of the meeting (with the Committee's approval) or deferred to the next meeting. Chairs often put a deadline on notice of items and many organisations are dispensing with this item altogether. Do NOT spend a long time discussing items brought up under AOB. It can be very frustrating and time consuming to members to upset a carefully timed and planned meeting.

Sometimes the Secretary will put a time by each Agenda item to indicate when an issue will be discussed and for how long. This can be useful, but whoever is chairing the meeting should have a mental note as to how long each item could take. The overall length of the meeting is the Chair's responsibility and meetings that go on for too long will soon find people voting with their feet!

Action

Useful to note actions and who is responsible, from one meeting to check on their progress in the next. They can be listed in a table, with the date of the meeting in which they were identified and a note of who is responsible for following them through. Keeps everyone focused!

Date of the Next Meeting

It is a good idea to set or confirm the date of the next meeting so that changes can be made if necessary and to allow members to record the date in their diaries.