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The club secretary

– the key to efficiency



The smooth running of the club depends on the efficiency with which you handle the records, correspondence and communications.

You may be a new secretary and 'feeling your way' or an experienced Secretary and want to review your role.

But experienced secretaries will tell you that their duties often expand beyond what is normally expected of the role. Secretarial jobs differ but there are many common aspects. This brochure lists many of the duties expected of a club secretary.

Internal administration

Correspondence

You should read and reply to correspondence promptly (even if only to acknowledge receiving it) and pass it onto the relevant person in the club. This includes letters and emails.

File carefully (preferably in hard and soft copy), preferably in categories to which you can easily refer. Electronic recording of information is now standard practice, and a back up of all electronic records should be held and up-dated on a regular basis. Online file sharing programs may aid in storing documents and communicating them with the committee or members.

As well as this file, some secretaries maintain a register of correspondence 'in' and 'out'.

Whatever system you use, you should try to achieve two things:

- Answer correspondence (letters and emails) quickly
- Be on top of all correspondence.

Failure to answer correspondence punctually and not knowing where to find correspondence are two of the major mistakes made by inexperienced secretaries. In some cases, these mistakes can cost your club its reputation and money.

Reports

Write the annual report and other reports as required. Encourage sub-committees to present brief, written reports at meetings and file these. Written reports will save time at meetings and make your job easier.

Records

Maintain a register of members, life members and sponsors (if required). Maintain all legal documents such as club rules, leases, titles and common seal. This means recording changes and alerting the committee when renewals fall due or when a legal deadline must be met.

The *Associations Incorporation Act 2015* commenced on 1 July 2016. The Act provides a framework of regulation for not-for-profit organisations such as sport and recreation clubs, societies and community groups in Western Australia leaving the internal management of associations largely to the members. Associations are still able to incorporate as a separate legal body and thereby limit the liability of its members for lawful activities.

Key features of the new law

Clubs must review and update their club rules as well as introduce a number of changes regarding:

- Financial reporting
- Governance
- Privacy
- The rules
- Membership of incorporated associations.

External liaison

These are some duties you may be called on to carry out:

With other agencies:

- Act as the public officer of your club, or in the absence of a formal public relations officer, project a favourable image and seek support from the public, business circles (sponsors) and the media.
- Liaise with officials, coaches, clubs, affiliated bodies, government agencies and committees.

With associations:

- Process transfer applications
- Enter teams in competitions (note: this task may be undertaken by the registrar)
- Represent your organisation at association meetings
- Obtain association sanction for club events
- Communicate information between association and club members, such as event or registration deadlines.

General affairs

- Keep a register of members' names and addresses
- Handle bookings and entries
- Supervise uniforms
- Respond to general duties as directed by the executive committee
- Maintain a register of sponsors.

Planner

Secretaries use various methods for planning their administrative year.

One method involves the secretary and president (and committee) developing an annual planner, which lists the key events and tasks that require action. This planner will help the committee keep abreast of a lot of administration, lighten the secretary's load and keep your members happy.

This planner can be posted and updated on the clubs website and other social media formats (for example Facebook) which will also ensure that members to be kept up to date with changes as they occur.

Characteristics of an efficient and effective secretary

An effective secretary will be the following:

Methodical

- A laptop or computer is now essential, as is some form of electronic back-up system. The secretary will require computing and computing software knowledge and expertise.
- Although much of the paperwork is now electronic, hard copy records are still required, so get a filing cabinet or chest of drawers. Buy a box of manilla folders, one for every project/topic. It'll be money well spent!
- Draw up an annual calendar/chart and mark in all key dates; meetings, carnivals, association deadlines, and holidays. This will give you an overview of what is coming up. Ideally there will be an electronic and hard-copy version of this.

Persistent

The good secretary knows who is doing what and by when.

At times you will need to remind people what they have agreed to do, and the art is in how you do this. A constructive, collaborative approach is likely to be more successful than an authoritarian, harsh method.

At meetings, look for the chance to delegate tasks. Get hold of a copy of Booklet 8 of this Sport and Recreation (WA) series, *Delegation – help for the overworked committee member*.

Impartial

If you're committed to serving the members and the club, stay impartial and wherever possible stay out of the power plays and politics.

Club rules alert

Like all committee members, you must be thoroughly alert to your club rules and the legal obligations of your club. You should have your copy of your club rules on hand to ensure that your committee is always acting appropriately.

It's also important to have your annual chart or planner drawn up. It will help you to identify legal and/or financial deadlines and ensure that your committee meets its legal obligations.

The secretary's duties

Model Rules (Associations) 2015 came into play in Western Australia on 1 July 2016, and prescribes the following duties for the secretary.

The secretary has the following duties:

1. Dealing with the association's correspondence
2. Consulting with the chairperson (president) regarding the business to be conducted at each committee meeting and general meeting
3. Preparing the notices required for meetings and for the business to be conducted at meetings (this is referring to developing an agenda)
4. Unless another member is authorised by the committee to do so, maintaining on behalf of the association the register of members, and recording in the register any changes in the membership,

as required under section 53(1) of the Act

5. Maintaining on behalf of the association an up-to-date copy of these rules, as required under section 35(1) of the Act
6. Unless another member is authorised by the committee to do so, maintaining on behalf of the association a record of committee members and other persons authorised to act on behalf of the association, as required under section 58(2) of the Act
7. Ensuring the safe custody of the books of the association, other than the financial records, financial statements and financial reports, as applicable to the association (this is referring to the appropriate storage of club records financial and non-financial)
8. Maintaining full and accurate minutes of committee meetings and general meetings
9. Carrying out any other duty given to the secretary under these rules or by the committee.

Duties for meetings

Notice of meetings must be sent in accordance with your club rules. If no rules exist related to meetings then your notification must ensure that all members know about the meeting. The secretary will be expected to provide information on the clubs proper meeting protocols according to its rules.

If all those entitled to be at the meeting aren't given proper notice, there's a risk that the decisions of a meeting could be invalid. Even those who say they are not able to attend should receive official notice.

The notice must include the following:

- Time
- Date
- Place of intended meeting
- Nature of business
- Whether it is an ordinary or extraordinary meeting.

Club rules may prescribe that notices sent out by the secretary contain notice of certain resolutions.

The secretary must observe the length of time governing the sending out of notices. If there is not a club or group rule on length of notice, then reasonable notice must be given. The secretary should also check whether rules oblige the organisation to advertise meetings in advance.

The secretary should arrange the meeting place and admission to the meeting, prepare an agenda, record minutes and keep the chairperson informed of any matter which may assist or invalidate proceedings.

The agenda

The president and/or chairperson and secretary should be familiar with the agenda. Even better, they should plan it together.

The minutes

It is essential to have a correct record of the proceedings of a meeting, which is why minutes are kept. These serve a varied role – they are both a general record and an attendance record and, in case of later doubt or dispute, they're a legally acceptable reference and guide.

The minute book

The minute book is a legal record of a committee's decisions. You must maintain the minutes written (or pasted) in the book, which should have serially numbered pages.

It's essential when writing minutes that the secretary uses clear, simple language accurately and without ambiguity. The minutes should be dictated or written up quickly before the memory fades. But just in case, keep notes made at the time until the minutes have been confirmed at the next meeting.

Use the past tense when writing minutes and define points of agreement and disagreement. Try to reflect a logical sequence when reporting the series of events that might have surrounded discussion on a topic or led to a motion about it.

Motions

A motion is a formal recommendation put by a member to a meeting for discussion/debate and consideration/voting.

Important motions should include the names of both the mover and seconder. For minor motions, use a simple statement such as: "It was resolved that ...", "It was agreed that ...", or "Committee resolved to ...".

Avoid recording expressions of a general nature that will bind future meetings and ensure when recording motions, particularly difficult ones, that you understand them fully.

If you don't understand a motion, quickly ask the chairperson to have the motion repeated.

Actions

It is essential that your minutes record the actions that are to be undertaken and the names of those responsible for following up the committee's decision. The secretary should also write letters as the meeting has instructed they should be written.

You, as secretary, may have to push this point at meetings – otherwise you may be expected to do everything! But don't let decisions pass without linking them to a person.

Numbering

Some secretaries number each resolution and maintain a register of resolutions. This is an effective way of ensuring that the committee keeps on top of its decisions and is seen to be efficient and reliable.

Circulating the minutes

Where possible, the minutes should be circulated before the meeting.

Try to avoid reading the minutes in full to the meeting. It kills the meeting right at the start and you will lose people's interest!

If you can't circulate the minutes beforehand, read only the essential parts (i.e. the decisions), unless the member's request they be read in full.

Confirming the minutes

If you have circulated the minutes before the meeting, the members vote: "That the minutes as circulated be taken as read and confirmed as a true record". This gives the members the chance to discuss the accuracy of the minutes as a record. If they are not satisfied, they can agree to amend them and the change should be clearly written in.

The members must not, at this time, reopen discussion on the decisions taken at the previous meeting. They are voting only on the accuracy of the record. If the decisions taken were inappropriate (even silly!), they must stay on record and be rescinded, or amended, at the proper time in the meeting.

The secretary has should enlist the help of the chairperson to prevent the 'meeting nitpicker' from wasting time looking for trivialities in the minutes. A good meeting is kept on task and the chairperson has to help make this happen!

It doesn't matter if they're only hand-written but it's a guaranteed way of being businesslike and saving time. In this respect, you and the president may have to lead from the front.

The 10 secretarial commandments

1. Thou shalt prepare an agenda, with your chairperson, for every meeting
2. Thou shalt make sure committee members are aware of the time and place of the meeting and ensure the chairperson starts on time
3. Thou shalt not read the minutes of the last meeting in full (unless members require it)
4. Thou shalt not attempt to take detailed notes of discussions
5. Thou shalt record all resolutions taken exactly as passed by the members and ask the chairperson to repeat the words of the motion if you are unsure
6. Thou shalt ensure that you record the names of the people responsible for following up a resolution, since failure to do so will result in you, the secretary, doing everything!
7. Thou shalt not volunteer. Nominate committee members to assist. That's what they're there for.
8. Thou shalt not become too involved in debated discussion. If you feel you want to have close involvement in a topic, ask for someone else to take the minutes for that item.
9. Thou shalt encourage members to put in written (even hand-written) reports to cut the waffle and help you in your duties
10. Thou shalt remember that all committee members, especially the secretary, must help the chairperson run a friendly, fair and effective meeting.

Other resources

This resource is part of a series which provides assistance to Western Australian sport and recreation clubs and organisations to become better managed, more sustainable and to provide good quality services to members and participants.

Other resources in the series include:

1. Starting a new club
2. Planning for your club – the future is in your hands
3. Taking the lead! A guide for club presidents
4. The club secretary – the key to efficiency
5. Show me the money – a guide for the club treasurer
6. Effective club meetings – a guide for the chairperson
7. Making meetings effective – a short guide
8. Delegation – help for the overworked committee member
9. Problem solving – a guide for clubs
10. Promoting your club
11. Seeking and servicing a sponsor
12. Establishing your club rules
13. Risky business – a club guide to risk management
14. Clubs' guide to volunteer management
15. Member protection for clubs
16. How to be an inclusive club
17. Passport into schools – linking sports with schools
18. Youth sport – junior sport policy
19. Long-term involvement – junior sport policy
20. Physical growth and maturation – junior sport policy
21. Sport pathways – junior sport policy
22. Forming links – junior sport policy
23. People making it happen – junior sport policy
24. Quality coaching – junior sport policy
25. Making sport safe – junior sport policy
26. The law and sport – junior sport policy
27. Top 20 tips for officials
28. Top 20 tips for successful coaching

You will find the full series of the booklets on Sport and Recreation (WA)'s website:

www.dsr.wa.gov.au/clubs