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Effective club meetings

– a guide for the chairperson



If you are inexperienced in chairing formal meetings, such as the club Annual General Meeting or the monthly club meetings, this resource provides some helpful hints.

The chairperson and/or president's role is to control the meetings, accept motions and amendments, rule on points of order and see that the wishes of the meeting are carried out correctly and expediently. In this document, the president is referred to as the chairperson.

Meetings do not have to be run formally all the time. It is up to the chairperson to decide how formally each meeting will be run. There are times when you, as leader, must know the essential rules in order to:

- Give everyone a fair go
- Cut out 'waffle'
- Reach decisions.

Overview

Meetings are necessary for:

- Decision making
- Reporting and accountability
- Reviewing and analysis
- Problem solving
- Discussion.

Running purposeful and participative meetings can be challenging. Common experiences include:

- Long discussions with no conclusion or decision
- Decision making based on inadequate or incorrect information
- Low attendance
- Uneven participation
- Uncertainty or an unwillingness to ask questions.

These issues are not always easy to address, but meetings can be more effective if they are well planned with a clear purpose, effectively chaired and focused on decision-making.

Agenda

The agenda is the basis of any meeting and provides direction, structure and purpose. The agenda should be drawn up jointly by the chairperson and secretary and should be followed in order, unless the meeting directs otherwise. The agenda and any relevant information should be circulated prior to the meeting so that members may attend the meeting prepared to make a well-informed contribution.

1. Call the meeting to order at least several minutes before the opening. Starting on time is essential.

The club rules should specify a quorum – a specified minimum number of eligible members who must be present at a meeting to make the proceedings valid at the specified starting time.

If necessary, the chairperson may use his or her power to delay the appointed starting time to give every opportunity for the necessary number to be present. Upon being satisfied that a quorum is present, the meeting should be formally declared open.

If the numbers at the meeting fall below the quorum at any stage during proceedings of the meeting, no further decisions should be made. Club rules may allow partial attendance at meetings and therefore the meeting can continue.

2. Open the meeting at the arranged time

- Declare the meeting officially open. This is important as the business of the meeting is recorded from this point on.
- Identify the meeting by quoting the specific title and class of it, e.g. make the opening a firm statement – “I declare this regular (monthly) meeting of (South City Youth Club) open”.

3. Attendance and apologies

- Record all members present
- Introduce any visitors or special guests and formally welcome them to the meeting
- Call for apologies. Ask for a formal motion that apologies be accepted.

4. Minutes

It is the chairperson's duty to ask for any corrections to the minutes of the previous meeting (amend if necessary) and then call for the motion – “it is the wish of the meeting that I sign these minutes (as corrected, if they were amended) as a true and accurate record of the previous (monthly) meeting held on (date)”.

The sole purpose of confirming or adopting minutes is to ensure their accuracy. Reading lengthy minutes in detail is unnecessary, boring and destructive to a meeting.

5. Matters arising from the minutes

- List matters to be decided on the agenda
- Discussion should be confined strictly to matters in the minutes that will not be covered in reports
- Matters arising from the minutes are usually confined to specific questions or actions someone was appointed to take.

6. Correspondence

- The chairperson should ask the secretary to present a list of inward and outward correspondence, in chronological order, and put it to the meeting
- The chairperson should request a formal motion – “that all inward correspondence be received” and “that outward correspondence be approved”
- No discussion should be allowed before the motion is presented
- The secretary should read to the club/group the date, meaningful contents of the letter and the signatory
- Any member may request that the whole context of the letter be read to the meeting.

7. Reports

a). The treasurer:

- The chairperson calls on the treasurer for the regular financial report
- The chairperson asks for any discussion arising from the report – “the report is now open for discussion”
- A formal motion is needed of a list of all accounts for payment to be paid as it is a legal requirement
- A formal motion is needed to adopt the report – “that the report be received”.

b). Committee:

- These reports should be brief
- The committee chairperson should present them beforehand (in writing) and during the meeting, so that they can be incorporated into the minutes

c). If you can insist on written reports, you will speed up your meetings.

A simple formula for reports:

- What?
- Why?
- Who?
- Where?
- When?
- How?
- How much?
- Recommendations.

This format keeps reports to the point. The recommendations (when appropriate) are similar to a ‘motion’ to give the executive something definite to discuss.

- Discussion and action may follow each report
- Each report must be adopted after presentation and discussion – “that the report be received”. No seconder is required
- These should be brief and deal with specific topics.

8. Discussion on motions.

- The club rules should lay down how much notice to give the chairperson of business to be discussed at a meeting
- These motions must be placed on the agenda
- Any motions proposed without sufficient notice may be rejected by the chairperson but are accepted as notices of motion for the next meeting.

Motions and amendments

All items of business requiring a decision must come before the meeting by way of a motion and if passed, becomes a resolution. A motion should be proposed before the chairperson allows any debate or discussion on the topic. This promotes an orderly discussion. Once a motion has been moved the Chairperson should make sure discussion does not depart from the point.

Moving a motion

The mover, standing and addressing the chair, introduces the motion – “I move that...”. This introduces an item of business for the meeting’s scrutiny and has the floor when there is no other motion before the meeting.

The mover must state their case to the meeting on that motion only and may not be interrupted by the chairperson unless the motion is frivolous or ridiculous and is unlikely to be seconded.

The motion should be clear, concise and unambiguous and not be introduced to the meeting until it is clear. The mover is granted right of reply at the end of the debate.

The seconder

This implies there is support for the motion. The speaker must introduce his/her support with, “I second that motion”. The seconder, who has no right of reply, may speak when he or she seconds the motion or reserve a speech until after further debate.

If there is no seconder the motion lapses.

Immediately after a motion has been proposed and seconded the chairperson can save time and cut out repetition by declaring, “Does anyone wish to speak against the motion?” If no, the motion may be put to the vote.

If yes, the order of debate should be speaker against, then for (i.e. alternately), with no speaker (except the seconder’s reserved speech and mover’s right of reply, point of order, or personal explanation, e.g. correcting a misquote) speaking more than once.

Amendments

- Are introduced by Mr./Madam Chairperson – “I recommend an amendment that ...”
- Must be clear and precise
- An amendment must not negate the motion
- A competent amendment may:
 - Add to the motion
 - Subtract from the motion
 - Substitute words within the motion
 - Alter the wording of the motion.
- Neither the mover nor the seconder to the original motion or prior amendments may move or second an amendment
- Amendments should be placed before the meeting one at a time (taken in the order in which they affect the terms of the original motion)
- When an amendment is raised, all that have spoken previously may speak again
- Before any vote is taken, the chairperson should make sure those at the meeting understand the points for and against and the actual wording of the amendment

- When an amendment is carried, it is incorporated in the motion, which can then be further discussed or amended
- If an amendment is lost, the original or previously amended motion again has the floor and the latest amendment is not incorporated into the motion.

Advice on amendments

- Restrict the number of amendments to two for each original motion
- To avoid confusion, amendments to amendments are not advised
- Each amendment must be relevant
- Insist that amendments be handed in writing to the secretary before voting
- Before members are asked to vote, the amendment is read to the meeting
- Amendments should be discussed and ratified one at a time.

Closure of debate

- The chairperson should decide when the vote is to be put
- The mover of the original motion should then be offered their right of reply
- The motion or amendment to be ratified must be read out to the members, so that all clearly understand the motion or amendment
- The chairperson could also summarise the arguments for and against.

Formal motions

- These are new items of business
- All need seconders
- May be introduced when either a motion or amendment is under discussion. Further discussion must be suspended until the chairperson accepts or rejects the formal motion at his/her discretion.
- May not be moved or seconded by a person who has:
 - moved the original motion;
 - seconded the original motion; or
 - spoken on the motion or amendment being discussed prior to the formal motion being moved.
- All formal motions suspend debate on amendments and motions, except for “the previous question” which only covers motions, not amendments.
- Examples of formal motions:
 - “The question be left to lie on the table”
 - “Proceed to the next business”
 - “The previous question be voted upon”
 - “Discussion be closed”.

Voting

At the end of a debate, the chairperson puts the motion to the vote. Different forms of voting are by:

- voices
- show of hands
- members standing
- secret ballot
- a division.

Unless specified otherwise in the club rules, a simple majority vote by voices is often enough to cause the chairperson to declare the result. If there is any doubt on the voice vote, the chairperson may call, or be called upon by a member, for a show of hands. The club rules should nominate the necessary majority needed to ensure motions are resolved.

Unless someone demands a ballot or division immediately after the voice or show of hands vote had been declared, the decision of the chairperson is binding. If there is an equal number of votes for and against on the first and second show of hands and after a ballot, the proposal is rejected.

The club rules should provide for voting power of the chairperson who may have:

- a deliberate vote only;
- a casting vote only;
- a deliberate and casting vote; or
- no vote.

If the motion (as amended) is lost, the meeting proceeds to the next item of business.

Points of order

- This is introduced by, “I rise to a point of order ...”
- It covers a breach of rules or decorum
- The point of order must be made when the breach occurs
- No seconder is required
- The speaker may be interrupted
- The point of order is not open to debate, not subject to amendment
- It is subject to the chairperson’s ruling.

9. General business

- The chairperson can decide whether a point should be discussed, although only relatively minor points can be brought up
- Notice of motion for the next meeting may be brought up with a written copy of the motion, signed and dated, being handed to the secretary
- The chairperson should restrict discussion to the interest of the meeting.

10. Next meeting

- Discuss the time, date and venue for the next meeting to ensure everyone knows the details.

11. Closure

- This is the signal to say that no further business is being conducted at the meeting
- The time for winding up proceedings is up to the chairperson
- The chairperson should close the meeting when there is no further business or when continuing would serve no worthwhile purpose
- The normal way of closing is for the chairperson to rise, thank members for their cooperation, thank visitors, wait for silence and announce, "I declare this (monthly) meeting of the (South City Youth Club) closed"
- The chairperson should emphasise that the meeting is over by leaving the chair as soon as possible whilst declaring that further discussion is unofficial and leaderless.

The chairperson — essential tasks

A person in the chair leads but does not direct. Although he/she controls procedure and conduct, that person oversees the meeting, which is conducted for the benefit of the members.

Before the meeting

- Planning is essential. Before the meeting discuss the agenda with the secretary to determine what should be accomplished.
- Know the club rules and standing orders for the conduct of meetings. Departure from any special rules of procedure could make the business of the meeting invalid.
- Act as host – meet and greet your members. You are responsible for making them feel welcome and wanted.

At the meeting

- Don't sit in the chair until you are ready to start the meeting
- Follow the agenda strictly, unless directed otherwise by the meeting
- Know the order of the agenda
- Keep the meeting moving in the desired direction. Be firm but tactful when members deviate from the issue under discussion.
- Try to be impartial – be there for the benefit of the meeting
- Listen attentively and keep a concise summary of proceedings
- Attempt to get all members to contribute to the meeting. Ensure that there is fair discussion on each issue and that all points are expressed before the meeting is called upon to vote.
- Direct the order of speaking – mover first, then others, alternating between speakers for and against a motion
- Rule on points of order
- Be enthusiastic. Zest instils enthusiasm into the members
- Attempt to keep the meeting moving, don't have any awkward breaks
- Arise and leave the chair at the end of the meeting or the beginning of any recess.

A chairperson should have the following phrases on the tip of his or her tongue:

- "Will someone please move a motion?"
- "A seconder for the motion, please?"
- "Will members please vote?"
- "All in favour please say 'aye'"
- "All against please say 'no'"
- "I think the 'ayes' have it"
- "I think the 'no's' have it"
- "Members, what is your wish?"
- "I suggest ..." (here suggest a motion, amendment or course of action).
- "I rule the amendment out of order" (or such other ruling as is necessary)
- "Thank you, members."

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