

2.7 Running a Scout Fellowship Business Meeting



We all know how to run a meeting – don't we?

For some members of the Scout Fellowship it may be the first time we've ever had to lead a meeting. For others, our planning or management skills may need sharpening in order to do this successfully.

Planning for a successful meeting

A successful meeting starts with the planning and this is largely down to the Secretary of the Scout Fellowship. The Secretary should ensure that:

- everyone knows where and when the meeting is
- invited guests or speakers are actually invited!
- everyone knows what the meeting is about.

This last point is usually achieved by preparing an agenda which may be circulated before the meeting or tabled at the start of the meeting. The Secretary should always check with other members of the Executive Committee to see if they have anything for inclusion on the agenda.

The wider membership should also know that if they have anything to raise at the meeting they should let the Secretary know in advance so that it can be included on the agenda. Otherwise, they will need to raise it under 'any other business', which may or may not get discussed at the meeting, depending on time available.

A typical agenda would include:

- Welcome and apologies
- Notification of any other business
- Minutes of the last meeting
- Matters arising or carried forward from the last meeting
- New items
- Any other business
- Date/time/location of the next meeting.

Before circulating or tabling the agenda it is always a good idea to check it with the Chairman who may choose to defer some items to a later meeting. This is not meant as a form of censorship, but as a way of keeping meetings to a manageable length.

Before the meeting starts the Secretary should ensure that any necessary equipment is available and working (microphones, overhead projectors, computers etc) and that any speakers are briefed in the use of any equipment they are unfamiliar with.

Who plays what role?

There are really four main roles to play in any meeting and these are Chairman, Secretary, Facilitator and 'Others'.

The Chairman

It is the Chairman's job to ensure that the meeting runs smoothly and that the objectives of the meetings are met. Many Chairmen achieve this by rigorously enforcing time constraints, by controlling who can speak and when, and by drawing discussions to a 'timely close'.

Although strictly following 'Roberts Rules' (a recognised way to run meetings) may ensure that the objectives are met, these types of meeting aren't much fun to attend and won't entice many of the members to come along the next time.

On the other hand some Chairmen seem unable to take control of a meeting, allowing people to ramble on at length or lead the discussions astray, for arguments to openly develop and for no conclusions to be made by the end of the meeting.

In the business world, the Chairman (usually 'the boss') gets their own way by means of their explicit or implicit authority (i.e. 'do what I say or you're fired!'). This doesn't work in Scouting as everyone is a volunteer and so the Chairman has to think carefully about how he/she can get the best from their team.

When chairing a meeting, the following tips may be useful:

- Decide at the start of the meeting what time you would like to finish and what is the latest time you will allow the meeting to run to. Announcing this focuses everyone's mind on the clock. Something along the lines of "I'd like us to finish by 9 o'clock, but will run to 9.30 if we have to..." sets an expectation in people's minds, without forcing an absolute deadline.
- Allow the Secretary to read the minutes of the last meeting. This gives people a rest from your voice, and the Secretary is much more likely to be able to read their own minutes (if they're not typed)!
- Announce beforehand if you'll be taking any other business (AOB). You may choose to only take items for AOB that you're advised of at the start of the meeting, or you may allow any one to chip in once the rest of the business is finished. This often needs careful thought, because squeezing in too many items at the end of a meeting means that they aren't always given sufficient time and people often leave 'bomb-shells' to the last minute. Never be afraid to say "That's an important point, which we haven't really got time to discuss properly now, we'll put it at the top of the agenda for our next meeting."
- Allow people to fully explore an issue. Keep an eye out for people who want to speak but who may be drowned out by the more vocal members. Ask another member of the Committee to watch for people who are not able to get their views into the discussion, and to bring that person to your attention. Make a point of going back to them and bringing them into the discussion.
- Remember that the Secretary is a member of the Scout Fellowship too. Allow them an opportunity to put across their own view, and then a moment to catch up with the minutes. If the Secretary needs a moment at any other time, always be prepared to call a brief halt to the proceedings.
- Be careful when expressing an opinion. Your job as Chairman is to ensure that all of the membership is represented. Sometimes this means putting forward a controversial viewpoint or even one that is not your own. Always make it clear when you are expressing a personal opinion or preference so that the members are not unduly influenced.

- Don't allow people to go too far off track. Explore an issue fully, giving everyone who wants to a chance to speak but don't allow the same points to be raised again. Don't be afraid to bring people back to the subject in hand when they wander off at a tangent.
- Remember any new members. If necessary, explain any 'Scouting jargon' without appearing to patronise the new member. It may also be useful to ask an existing member (a 'mentor' or a 'buddy') to quietly explain things to new members as the meeting progresses.
- Look for win-win situations where everyone can come out of a discussion with something they were looking for. If it's impossible to compromise it's sometimes better not to force an issue if it will lead to bad feeling.
- If a decision has to be made, take a vote once the issue is fully explored and make sure that the vote closes the issue. If you have a constitution that defines who may and may not propose resolutions and who is and who isn't allowed to vote, make sure that you know who's allowed to vote and who isn't. (Visitors usually don't vote and people whose subscriptions are in arrears may not be allowed to vote either.) Finally, remember that in Scouting, the Chairman does NOT have a casting vote and in the event of a tied vote the motion is deemed not to have been carried.
- Above all, keep the meeting moving and the mood friendly. Allow the odd joke without allowing things to get too out of hand. If you can allow the odd reminiscence or funny story whilst keeping half an eye on the clock, you'll be doing a good job.

The Secretary

The role of Secretary may appear simple, but keeping accurate records of a fast moving meeting is not an easy task.

As well as ensuring that the agenda is properly prepared and circulated (see above) the key task of the Secretary is to ensure that a proper record of the meeting is kept. This doesn't mean attempting to record every word verbatim, nor does it mean that only the major decisions are recorded.

The minutes should provide a summary of all pertinent sides to a debate (including who voiced what viewpoint), should record all factual matters and should record the outcome of any formal decision or vote.

The key to keeping accurate minutes is to:

- Work (and write) at a pace you are comfortable with. If you know shorthand, all well and good - but this is increasingly unlikely. It is more likely that handwritten notes will be taken, and you should be able to record sufficient detail without feeling stressed by the speed of note taking.
- Learn to listen and write at the same time! Very often, taking notes requires a sentence to be completed whilst a new speaker has started to talk. Although this sounds difficult, it can be achieved and it's useful to record each speaker as they finish speaking. This allows their points to be summarised without attempting to record word-for-word what they've been saying. All too often a lengthy speech can be summarised with a single sentence or a few bullet points.
- Make sure you know who is at the meeting and get to know them, as being able to recognise people by their voice alone is a great asset!
- Keep track of the context and direction of the debate. It's much easier to summarise a topic that you understand and have followed.
- Ask people to repeat something if you're unsure of what was said (or who said it).

- Read back key points, including factual items (dates, times, places, costs, names, etc.). This ensures that the minutes are accurate, gives other people a chance to make notes in their diaries, and ensures that their opinions or ideas are recorded properly. It also provides a useful summary for the rest of the members.

After the meeting these handwritten notes may then be prepared for distribution, either by re-writing them neatly, or by the use of a word-processor (or typewriter). Once these have been approved by the members as true and accurate, they can be signed by the Chairman for the record (usually at the next meeting).

Another key role of the Secretary is to accurately record the outcome of any decision or vote. Many Scout Fellowships have rules regarding who is and isn't allowed to vote at a meeting (see above) and the Secretary needs to understand what these rules are and who falls into which category. If in doubt, the advice of the Chairman should be sought, preferably before an important vote is taken.

The Facilitator

Anyone may play the role of 'facilitator' and there may be more than one at a meeting.

This is not a formal role and anyone may choose to consciously fulfil this role, although members of the Executive Committee often fall into this role.

A facilitator is a person who understands how a meeting is run and who consciously helps it to run smoothly.

They may:

- point out to the Chairman anyone who wants to speak but who has been missed
- usefully summarise the two sides of an argument when a discussion is ready to be closed
- raise pertinent issues
- help ensure balance in discussions by speaking up for less able or less vocal members.

Others

Everyone else attending a meeting also has a role to play in ensuring that the meeting is productive and enjoyable. However, not everyone automatically understands how to behave in a meeting and it may be useful to remind the members that they should:

- Seek the Chairman's attention when they wish to speak. This can simply be by raising a hand or by saying briefly "I'd like to address this issue in a moment". The Chairman should then acknowledge this with something like a simple nod or an "okay", to confirm that the would-be speaker will get a chance to speak in turn.
- Speak 'through the Chair', i.e. only speak when invited to do so by the Chairman. Although this role is seldom applied rigorously it is useful if everyone recognises the principle so that the Chairman can properly allow people to speak in turn when a debate is in flow.
- Try not to raise in detail points which have already been expressed. It's easy enough to simply state "I agree with Bob on this" or to nod – people will get the point.
- Try to be as concise as possible. Long, rambling speeches may help someone to get something off their chest, but are seldom appreciated by the wider membership.
- Be understanding of others. Some people may feel uncomfortable commenting in a meeting and need help and support to put a point across. Try not to cut people short whilst the main point of their argument remains unstated. If it will help (and not offend), try and help people by restating or summarising their main points.

- Be polite at all times. There is never any need to shout in a meeting or to resort to abusive language. If this happens, the meeting, as well as the individual, is already 'out of order'.
- Be prepared to compromise at times, and to always accept the outcome of a fair vote.

By following these simple rules everyone can help ensure that meetings are productive and even fun! There's no reason why some 'banter' shouldn't be part of every meeting and 'business' should always be conducted in a friendly, enjoyable manner.

You can find out where to get more help on Administrator roles is given in the "Resources" section.