

MEETING TIPS

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In this document, a number of practical tips have been outlined for all participants in meetings. The various tasks, roles and desired behaviour have also been outlined. The aim is to ensure that meetings are conducted as efficiently and effectively as possible and in a pleasant manner. This document is a supplement to the document, 'Meeting Structure', which is accessible via the participation portal.

Conducting meetings

Conducting meetings is necessary in order to make decisions, to coordinate tasks, to develop ideas, to establish platforms and to distribute and share information. Meetings can be stimulating and inspiring. Thereby, it is essential to employ the correct rules, such as utilising an agenda, taking turns to speak, as well as executing the action list. Surprisingly, such simple rules are often not, or only partially, practically employed. In addition to employing simple and correct rules, a great deal can be achieved through good preparation and discipline.

1. The Chairperson should prepare the agenda and ensure that the meeting participants receive details of the agenda and any related items well before the meeting in question is due to take place (see the document, 'Meeting Structure'). Other participants may also wish to add items to the agenda. The intended purpose/result of an agenda item must also be recorded in the agenda, i.e. for information purposes, for decision-making purposes, for advisory purposes, or for discussion.
2. It is wise to add a central question to each agenda item. Which question needs an answer so you can reach your goal?
3. If any participants are unable to attend a given meeting, they should submit any comments and/or remarks prior to the meeting taking place. Any participants who are unable to attend a given meeting must duly notify the Chairperson prior to the meeting taking place.
4. It is essential that the Chairperson, the Minutes Secretary and the other participants prepare for all meetings by, for example, reading through the agenda and any related items.
5. Meetings should always commence on time, even if all participants have not yet arrived. Do not reward latecomers!
6. The Chairperson must lead the meeting. If the Chairperson is unable to attend, one of the participants should be chosen, who can ensure that the meeting will run smoothly. During meetings, it is important to be brief, concise and to the point. In addition to the Chairperson, a Process Officer may also be appointed, who can ensure that any extended dialogue does not slide into an argument.
7. The Chairperson must ensure that everyone's attention remains focussed. Only one person should be speaking at any one time. It is important not to talk over each other and to avoid people repeating what another has already said.
8. The Chairperson must remind the meeting participants, who may have a tendency to wildly digress, that the clock is ticking and of the topic that is currently being discussed.
9. It is essential to designate a Minutes Secretary for all meetings. This task can be assigned to one individual for an entire term, or it may be decided that all participants should take turns during the course of a term. The Minutes Secretary is responsible for drafting the report after each meeting, as well as the action and decision lists.

10. If a decision needs to be made, the Chairperson must formulate a proposal, put this to a vote (if required) and conclude if a given proposal has been accepted or rejected.
11. The Minutes Secretary must submit the (drafted) minutes to the Chairperson. After the Chairperson has approved the minutes, the minutes, together with the action and decision lists must be distributed to all of the meeting participants as soon as possible. Upon acceptance of the drafted minutes at the next meeting, the drafted minutes will become definitive and can be published by way of, for example, the portal.

Meeting effectively

Prior to a meeting

Meetings must be prepared in a manner that provides each participant with the feeling that he/she will be attending a reception at which he/she must address the bride. This can be achieved by assigning 'ownership' of specific agenda items to specific participants. An agenda should always be prepared in advance of a meeting and should be issued to the intended meeting participants to allow them to prepare for the meeting in question. It is also important to try to follow an agenda closely during a meeting in order to prevent the meeting from going adrift.

Prior to a meeting taking place, the following tasks must be executed (see the document, 'Meeting Structure'):

- Submitting the substantial agenda items
- Conducting preliminary discussions with individuals and/or groups
- Preparing a purposeful meeting agenda
- Selecting and inviting the relevant meeting participants
- Delegating preparatory meeting tasks
- Preparing an appropriate meeting schedule
- Ensuring that an appropriate meeting location has been reserved

During a meeting

The chance of a meeting being successful may be greatly improved if all participants comply with the following, simple rules:

- Ensure a strong opening with a positive message
- Set an achievable schedule and manage the timing
- Ensure that discussions remain purposeful
- Cultivate decision-making skills
- Stimulate creativity
- Endeavour to keep participants alert and involved
- Evaluate and close positively

After the conclusion of a meeting

The success of a meeting is determined according to its resultant actions. Therefore, it is of extreme importance to create and distribute a purposeful report, in timely fashion.

A basis for the report should be established: the announcements, decision and action lists would be sufficient, unless there are good reasons for providing additional information. Extensive reports may be accepted as good parliamentary practice, but in normal working situations, these are not generally adequate. In normal working situations, a report is usually viewed as a set of working instructions. If it is known that a particular agenda item must be further discussed during a subsequent meeting, this may be a good reason to include a more extensive entry in the minutes.

If there are any participants who often tend to fail to honour agreements, it is important to investigate the causes of this behaviour and to discuss the problem with the participant(s) in question, in order to resolve such issues as soon as possible. For example, try to establish answers to the following questions:

- Is the agreement clear in terms of content, when action needs to be taken and who is responsible for the task in question?
- Was the action list made available in a timely fashion?
- Has responsibility been assigned to the right person?
- Does the person responsible for the action in question stand behind the agreement?
- Is it a question of time constraints, prioritisation and/or (a lack of) discipline?
- Are individuals responsible for particular actions confronted if they are negligent?

A meeting

A formal meeting is an ideal platform in which to exchange information and/or to make decisions in a structured manner. If all participants comply with a fixed procedure and a number of specific roles, the chance will be increased that a meeting will run smoothly and that all participants will be satisfied.

Agenda

An agenda roughly equates to a fixed list of points that are to be dealt with during a meeting. Under normal circumstances, it is the task of the Chairperson to prepare the agenda, but other participants may also submit items for the agenda. The more formal the meeting, the more the order of the agenda must be followed.

Agenda Items	Content
Opening	Formal opening and welcome
Announcements	- Absentee notifications - Other brief, business information of importance to the participants
Establishment of the agenda	- Confirmation of the order of the agenda items - Addition of any new agenda items
Minutes from the previous meeting	- Approval of the complete and correct minutes from the previous meeting - Questions and remarks regarding the execution of the action points
Items received and dispatched	- Report of received and dispatched items - Agreements regarding additional actions required
The variable agenda items	Generally, these form the core of the meeting. For further information, please see the section, 'The variable agenda items', below.
Any additional matters	- New (minor) agenda items - Any additional matters that cannot be postponed

Questions	Questions may be posed regarding any minor matters that have not yet been covered. Questions regarding any major matters must be postponed to the next meeting.
Close	- Formal close and thanks - Setting (if applicable) of the date for the next meeting

The variable agenda items

Under normal circumstances, it is the variable agenda items that take up the majority of the time in any meeting, whereby information is exchanged, opinions are formed and decisions are made. Per agenda item, the participants also run through a number of relatively fixed phases, as follows:

Phase	Content
1. Introduction (by the Chairperson)	- Purpose of the agenda item - Importance of the agenda item - Required background information - Approach method to be used
2. Formulating an idea	Exchange of information. For example, by way of a presentation given by an expert, or by way of a group discussion between the participants.
3. Formulating an opinion (if applicable)	Conduct a discussion for the purpose of reaching consensus.
4. Formulating a decision (if applicable)	Various formal decision making procedures are possible, as follows: Unanimity: Everyone is 'for' or 'against' Consensus: In principle, no-one is 'against' Voting: The majority decides Delegation: The decision is delegated to one or more person(s)

Roles

In a meeting, two roles are of particular importance, i.e. the role of the Chairperson and the role of the Minutes Secretary.

It is essential that these roles be designated to specific participants prior to a meeting taking place. Bear in mind that a good Chairperson will be someone impartial. Someone who wishes to defend particular interests during a particular meeting, should not take on the role of the Chairperson in that particular meeting. The Minutes Secretary is responsible for the preparation of the reporting associated with the meeting.

Tips for the Chairperson

Tasks	Tips
Distribution of invitations and meeting-related documentation	- Establish an appropriate time and an appropriate location

Prepare the agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - List the most important agenda items first - Group related agenda items together - Bear in mind the time available - State the agenda items clearly
Lead the meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deal with the formalities (i.e. the opening, conclusion, minutes, et cetera) - Monitor the agenda and the timing - Ensure that the purpose of the meeting remains clear - Prevent digression - Do not hesitate to call the participants to order - In advance, establish your standpoint regarding interruptions, i.e. will you allow them, or not? - Summarize every agenda item
Promote a good atmosphere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that the meeting will not be subject to disturbance (i.e. mobile telephones should be switched off and doors should be closed) - Ensure that everyone can see each other - If required, ensure that any audiovisual tools are available and in good working order - If required, ensure that refreshments are available

Tips for the Minutes Secretary

Be well prepared for a meeting to ensure that you are aware of what is to be discussed. Prior to a meeting taking place, determine the manner in which you intend to structure your notes, in accordance with the type of notes that you will be taking, as follows:

- Decision and/or action lists: only the results of the discussions
- Brief report: pro's, con's and the results of the discussions
- Extensive report: all substantial contributions made by the meeting participants

Ensure that you can sit in an appropriate position where you can clearly see all of the meeting participants (i.e. ideally, next to the Chairperson). If you have not clearly understood a participant's contribution, request that it be repeated. Ensure that you will not be distracted by having to perform any other tasks, such as pouring coffee.

Tips for the other participants

Of course, even as an 'ordinary' meeting participant, you will still be jointly responsible for the smooth running of a meeting.

Ensure that you are well prepared for a meeting by reading through any relevant documentation and by determining your initial standpoints. Help to ensure that a meeting runs smoothly by structuring your contributions clearly and by giving due attention to the contributions made by the other meeting participants.

After a meeting, ensure that you uphold any agreements made.