

## VOLUME THREE – BEING AN EFFECTIVE OFFICER IN A CLUB OR SOCIETY

### SESSION 4 Meeting skills

#### Skills Covered

- Communication (oral)

#### Aim of the Session

This session aims to get participants to consider how they can ensure the meetings they hold or attend are as productive as possible.

#### Learning objectives

By the end of this session participants will be able to:

- identify the purposes of meetings
- compare and contrast different types of meetings
- list helpful behaviour in meetings
- identify the skills of chairing meetings

#### Method

The exercise will involve a short introduction in plenary, a brainstorm, some small group work, a debrief in plenary and a trainer talk. It is **A** rated.

#### Resources required

- Flipchart & pens
- Worksheet 1
- One trainer per 16 participants

#### Suggested timings

- Introduction and explanation of exercise 5 mins
- Brainstorm 5 mins
- Small group work 20 mins
- Debrief/discussion in plenary 25 mins
- Trainer talk 10 mins
- Summary 5 mins
- **TOTAL RUNNING TIME 1 hour 10 mins**

#### Running the session

- 1 Start by outlining the aims and learning objectives of the exercise. Explain how the session will run, ie the methods you will use and what skills you will be developing.
- 2 Introduce the topic as follows:  
*“Regular meetings are important for all clubs and societies. A meeting which goes well can be enjoyable and proactive; a bad meeting can be frustrating, dull and a waste of time. This session aims to develop your meetings skills – something which will aide you in the year ahead and in almost any job you go into.”*
- 3 Run a brainstorm on ‘*Why do we have meetings/what are their purposes?*’
- 4 Ask the participants to shout out their ideas and write them on the flipchart.

The list generated may include:

- To agree decisions/action to take
- To pass on information
- To discuss ideas
- To check on the progress of a project/plan
- To evaluate the success (or failure) of an event
- For creative purposes – to generate ideas

This list is not exhaustive. At the end of the brainstorm check that the group has come up with '*To pass on information*'. If they have, ask the group "*What are the advantages of a meeting rather than a poster or letter in passing on information.*"

Answer:

- You're able to pass on more information
- The audience can ask for clarification
- Word of mouth is generally a more effective manner of passing on information

Then ask, "*What are the disadvantages?*"

Answer:

- Constrained by time/place – not everyone will be able to attend.
- If the meeting is purely passing on information it may well be a bit dull. There will be no debate and it may be largely one or two people talking.

If the group hasn't come up with '*To pass on information*' then suggest it, check they agree, and then go through the advantages/disadvantages.

End by making the following points:

- Meetings can have many different uses and purposes.
- The best meetings generally serve a variety of purposes, but are clearly focused on what they are aiming to achieve.

- 5 Explain that participants will now be working in small groups to tackle various questions on work sheet 1.
- 6 Hand out the work sheet 1.
- 7 Allow participants a few minutes to read them.
- 8 Split the group into three sub-groups, and announce that you would like each sub-group to start at a different part of the exercise.
  - Group 1 should start with section A, then tackle section B and finally section C.
  - Group 2 should start with section B, then tackle section C and finally section A.
  - Group 3 should start with section C, then tackle section A and finally section B.

Stress to the groups that it does not matter if they don't have time to look at their final section, but that they should aim to tackle their first two.

Emphasise that each group will need a reporter to give feedback on the group's ideas for their first section. Ensure groups have flipchart paper and pens, tell them where they will working and that they have 20 minutes for the task.

- 9 Allow the groups a few minutes to get settled then visit to check that they are underway. Before the end of the group work revisit the groups to remind them to choose someone to give feedback and to ensure they return to the plenary on time.

## **Debrief/Discussion**

Ask each group to give feedback on their allocated section on the exercise sheet. Then ask the other groups to agree/disagree and if they have suggestions to add. Try to pull the ideas/answers together from the discussion and conclude by emphasising any key points before moving on to the next section.

When asking questions of a group, always make sure you have some form of answer.

Below are suggestions of how the groups may respond in order that you can formulate your own ideas to generate discussion.

## **Section A**

### **i Advantages/benefits**

- Businesslike atmosphere
- Can help large groups
- Can help avoid conflict (as rules are clear)

### **Disadvantages/potential problems**

- Inflexible
- Can stifle creativity
- Can slow down a group
- Can remove any element of fun!

### **ii Advantages/benefits**

- Meeting can be more fun and friendly
- Meeting may be more creative
- More flexible

### **Disadvantages/potential problems**

- May avoid taking 'difficult' decisions
- Could become a social chat, with no actions agreed
- Participants may take decisions less seriously

### **iii Advantages/benefits**

- Reach agreement more quickly
- More opportunity to speak
- Easy to arrange/organise

### **Disadvantages/potential problems**

- Less creative than a medium sized group
- May agree too quickly and fail to see flaws in a plan/proposal
- May mean most of the work is done by a small number of people

### **iv Advantages/benefits**

- Allows a good mix of individuals without the problems a large group can product
- Should be creative and spot potential problems in a plan/proposal
- Work can be spread among group

### **Disadvantages/potential problems**

- In theory, very few!
- However, group dynamics are very important and the skill of the chair is crucial.

**v Advantages/benefits**

- Involves more people therefore agreements reached should be more acceptable to wider membership.

**Disadvantages/potential problems**

- May be slower
- Can be less creative
- Needs a strong chair
- Needs more organising to arrange

Further comments of the size of the meeting.

While medium sized groups are generally best for meetings there is no ideal size or number. Much will depend on: the purpose of the meeting (is it to bounce around new ideas, to agree action or to inform etc), the group dynamics (how well do people know each other, how long have they worked as a group, do they have very different beliefs/agendas etc) and on the style and skill of the chair.

**vi Advantages/benefits**

- Helps people think about issues prior to meeting
- Prevents going off on a tangent and keeps the meeting focused
- Helps the chair with time-keeping

**Disadvantages/potential problems**

- Virtually none!
- Could be argued to stifle creativity, but can always have Any Other Business

**vii Advantages/benefits**

- Could be used to encourage free flow of ideas

**Disadvantages/potential problems**

- Difficult to minute
- Can easily go off on a tangent
- Could be a pointless meeting with no purpose to it.

**viii Advantages/benefits**

- Enables you to keep track of what has been agreed and who is doing what
- Can prevent 're-inventing the wheel' if passed on to the next year's group

**Disadvantages/potential problems**

- No one wants to do them! (suggest alternating the minute taker)

**ix Advantages/benefit**

- Virtually none!
- May be useful if something needs to remain secret

**Disadvantages/potential problems**

- What has been agreed?
- Who said they would do?

- No record for the future

## Section B

### Before

#### I Ask the following questions:

- What is the purpose of this meeting?
- Roughly how many will attend?
- Have people been reminded where, and when it's happening?
- Is the venue we're meeting in suitable?

#### ii Actions to take:

- Prepare an agenda and circulate beforehand if possible
- Try and provide some refreshments (preferably tea, coffee and biscuits) especially if the meeting is likely to be longer than an hour
- Prepare copies of the minutes of the previous meeting

### During

- Turn up punctually, and start on time
- Ensure you have a chair, and that everyone is clear how the meeting will proceed
- Ensure anyone turning up for the first time is properly welcomed and introduced to the others attending  
(see also list of helpful behaviour (section C))

### After

- Ensure minutes are produced, checked by the chair and circulated ASAP
- Carry out any action required and if necessary report back

## Section C

### Helpful behaviour

- Keep your contributions short
- Avoid interrupting others and do not let others interrupt you
- Remain alert and listen actively to what others say; ask for clarification if at all unsure on a point
- Agree with someone (if you do!) and build upon their contribution

Participants may also come up with helpful behaviour for a chair to demonstrate. Encourage this if there is time, as it will link into the trainer talk at the end.

### Unhelpful behaviour

- Long, rambling speeches
- Going off on a tangent
- Cracking jokes while others are talking
- Attacking individuals rather than being specific about why you disagree with their idea (eg "You always seem to come up with hare-brained, half-baked ideas, Paul" rather than, "I really don't think that will be practical, as we don't have the necessary equipment.")
- Being unwilling to change or compromise in any way

None of these lists is exhaustive. You should have a little bit of time to facilitate a brief discussion on chairing. Try and find out how many in the group chair meetings and what they believe the most important attribute of a good chair is.

There is no 'perfect/ideal' answer, but key to it should be: remaining impartial, a good listener, a good organiser.

Finish the debrief by re-stating any key points.

### **Trainer talk**

11 Tell the group you are going to finish this session by talking about the skills of chairing meetings.

If you have not discussed the attributes of a good chair already then start with a quick brainstorm on to flipchart.

Ensure they have got '*remaining impartial, a good listener*' and '*a good organiser*'.

Thank the group and after the brainstorm conduct the short talk on the role of the chair and the skills of chairing.

You may wish to create and use overhead slides for your talk, or alternatively you can pre-prepare the key points on flipchart paper.

### **Information for the talk**

Chairing a meeting well requires sensitivity and skill, and can be extremely difficult. A good chair will often receive little or no recognition as people assume the meeting went well/smoothly naturally. A poorly chaired meeting is quickly identified – people will get frustrated, side-tracked or even angry.

### **Key points**

- **Sticking to the agenda**  
The chair needs to be conscious of the amount of time available and ensure time is spent wisely. Control the pace of the meeting, ensure it doesn't get bogged down on minor points.
- **Keeping order**  
Generally, it is easier to start a meeting fairly formally (eg all must raise hands before speaking and be selected by the chair) and then relax a little as the meeting progresses.
- **Keep participants on the topic**  
Let people know when discussions have drifted. Occasionally repeat the topic under discussion.
- **Summarise the discussion**  
Don't forget early contributions! Go back to anyone who didn't finish developing an idea.
- **State problems in a constructive way**  
State the problem as though it is a problem, not as though someone is at fault. Give problems and questions to the group, not answers. Try and break large problems into workable pieces and deal with them separately.
- **Remain neutral**  
If there is a subject you feel passionately about then see if someone else will chair the discussion.
- **Summarise what has been agreed**  
End a meeting by reminding all what has been agreed and who will be doing what, and by when.
- **Prevent one or two people dominating**  
Ensure everyone gets a chance to speak. Ask "*Is there anyone who hasn't spoken who'd like to*" and ensure you pause long enough.
- **Liaise with the secretary – before, during and after**  
Make sure the minutes are clear, that the secretary has got the key actions noted and that minutes are produced as soon as possible after a meeting.

- **Clarity in voting**  
Ensure everyone is aware of the exact matter to be voted on. Check your constitution to see if the chair has a vote and a casting vote.

12 Ask if there are any questions.

Take five minutes at the end to recap on the main points of the session. You may also wish to highlight session 10 (on correspondence and minute taking) if you have a date when it will be run.

### **Close the Session**

**SESSION 4** Meeting skills

**WORKSHEET 1** Section A

**SECTION A**

What are the advantages/benefits and the disadvantages/potential problems with the following types of meeting?

ADVANTAGES/BENEFITS

DISADVANTAGES/PROBLEMS

very formal/structured

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informal

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Small (ie 3 or 4)

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Medium (ie 6 – 12)

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ADVANTAGES/BENEFITS

DISADVANTAGES/PROBLEMS

**Large (ie 20+)**

**with prepared agenda**

**with no agenda**

**with minutes**

**with no minutes kept**

**SESSION 4** Meeting skills

**WORKSHEET 1** Sections B and C

**SECTION B**

Prepare a list of actions to take/things to do before, during and after a club or society committee meeting.



**SECTION C**

Think about meetings you have attended – what behaviour have you seen or heard that has been particularly helpful?

What have you seen or heard that has been unhelpful or disruptive?

Write these on your flipchart paper provided.

