The Agenda

Quick and easy guide to preparing an agenda

An agenda is simply a list of the things you want to discuss in your meeting. It is useful because:

- It helps you plan the meeting.
- It helps you to get through the business of the meeting efficiently.
- It helps people at the meeting follow what is going on.
- It gives people the opportunity to think about the meeting in advance.

It is formally the chair's job to prepare the agenda. However, in a lot of groups the secretary and the chair work together to produce the agenda. This can make life a lot easier.

Some very small and informal groups simply work out the agenda together at the start of the meeting. This is fine if you don't need a lot of structure or advance planning for the meeting.

A basic agenda

An agenda can be very simple. Here is an example:

1. Apologies for absence
2. Item 1
3. Item 2
4. Any other business
5. Date of next meeting

See also the sample agenda at the end of this information sheet. This gives a guide to a longer and more detailed agenda

Who decides what's on the agenda?

Often agenda items are just decided by the chair and the secretary. However, if you can it is useful to find ways of giving your members the opportunity to contribute. Some ways of doing this are:

- Put up a suggestion sheet on a notice board.
- At the meeting, ask for items for the next meeting.
- When you send out the notice of the meeting, ask for suggestions for the agenda. Remember to put a contact address and the date you need them by.

Items for your agenda

♦ The bulk of your agenda will simply be the items you need to discuss. Make each important matter a separate item.

♦ Look through the minutes of your last meeting. Are there any things to report back on? Are there items that need to be discussed again? Put each issue down as a separate item.

♦ Have you received any information – for example about meetings or other events – you need to tell everyone about?

♦ Some groups always include an item 'minutes of the last meeting'. The purpose of this is to agree that the minutes of the last meeting are accurate and reflect what happened. If your group is very small and informal you may decide you don't need to do this.

♦ Some groups have 'standing items' on their agendas. These are items that are always on the agenda at every meeting. They are usually reports from officers such as the Treasurer, or reports from sub-groups.

♦ 'Any Other Business' is a regular item at the end of most agendas. It allows people to raise issues that aren't already on the agenda.

♦ Try to avoid 'Any Other Business' taking up the majority of the meeting. If you can, it's better to find out beforehand what people want on the agenda. This allows you to organise the meeting more efficiently.

How long will each item take?

♦ It is useful for the Chair and Secretary to look at the agenda before the meeting, and work out how long they think each item is going to take. This can really help with the chairing and general smooth running of the meeting.

♦ Try to make sure the important discussions get all the time they need, and the minor issues don't expand to take over the whole meeting.

♦ It's hard to estimate exact times, but you can get a rough idea. For example, if you have 6 items to discuss in an hour's meeting you could give each item 10 minutes, or one important item 35 minutes and the rest 5 minutes each.

♦ If this looks impossible you need to have fewer items on the agenda, or a longer meeting!

What order do items go in?

♦ It is general practice to put the short, easy to deal with items at the start of the agenda. You get them out of the way quickly, and can concentrate on the important issues.

♦ There are no hard and fast rules about this. It depends on what you think will work best at any particular meeting.

When do you prepare the agenda?

♦ The crucial thing is to think about the agenda in advance. It's a tool to help you plan the meeting.

♦ The agenda for a large public meeting will need careful advance planning and thought, while a small committee meeting can be prepared the day before.

♦ If you are having speakers at the meeting, or need background papers or information, remember to prepare the agenda enough in advance to give yourself time to organise these.

♦ Think about whether you want to mail the agenda out in advance, or give it to people at the meeting.

Annual General Meeting

The agenda for your Annual General Meeting will have to include specific items such as elections and yearly reports. Check your constitution to see what these are.

See the Resource Centre information sheet *AGM Checklist*.

Some other things to think about

♦ Think about whether an item needs an introduction and if so who will do this. It doesn't necessarily have to be the Chair.

♦ Make sure you have background papers prepared in advance if an item needs them and distribute them to the group if necessary.

♦ Be informative: describe each item in sufficient detail so that members come prepared and interested.

♦ Make sure you have a good idea what each item is about; you may need to refer to past minutes or discussions.

The Resource Centre also produces information sheets on

♦ *Chairing a meeting*

♦ *Taking minutes*

♦ *The Secretary's role*

Sample agenda

Agenda for Merrydale Tenants Association meeting Thursday 28th February 2002, 7-9pm

7 – 7.10 (10 mins)

1. **Apologies for absence**:

2. **Agree minutes of the last meeting**

3. **Announcement of tenant conference**:
   Wed 13th March at the Quality Hotel, 10 – 4pm

4. **Announcement of Internet workshop at the Resource Centre**:
   Mon 4th March at 10am

7.10 – 7.20 (10 mins)

5. **Treasurer's Report**:
   Report on our current financial situation from Jan Curtis

7.20 – 7.30 (10 mins)

6. **New benches & noticeboards**:
   Report from Chair

7.30 – 8.00 (30 mins)

7. **Double glazing programme**:
   Report on new work from Rob Price, Housing Officer

8.00 – 8.15 (15 mins)

8. **Vandalism in Hargreave Close**:
   Report from the Chair on problems in this area

8.15 – 8.35 (20 mins)

9. **Summer Funday**:
   Discussion on possibility of organising a Funday

8.35 – 8.50 (15 mins)

10. **Problems with rubbish collection**:
    Report from Chair on complaints received about rubbish collection

8.50 – 9.00 (10 mins)

11. **Any Other Business**:

12. **Date of next meeting**:
    Thursday 28th March 2002

End of sample agenda