



Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania Inc

A Guide to Preparing Management Committee Minutes

Why make a record of Management Committee meetings?

There are important reasons to record what has been discussed and agreed at a meeting of the Management Committee. Recording or, as it is referred to, keeping minutes of the meeting:

- Shows that people have been listened to and really heard.
- Provides a historical record that can be used at future meetings for verification of decisions, and as a reminder of past events and actions.
- Provides important information to people who were not invited to or able to attend the meeting.
- Helps keep everyone on track. If everything is written down, the Management Committee is more likely to stick to the agenda, or to pull itself back onto it.

Generally, minutes should follow and parallel the items on the meeting agenda (and there should always be an agenda!). Having a clear, complete record of the meeting's events, helps ensure that the decisions of the meeting won't just be forgotten when you turn out the lights and lock the door.

Minutes are considered legal documents by auditors, the tax office and courts, and they represent the actions of the Management Committee. While there is no standardised level of content and format for Management Committee minutes, they should always show not only what was decided but also that your decisions were reasonable. Therefore, sufficient information should be included to describe how Management Committee members reasonably came to reasonable decisions.

Deciding what to record

Now, we've come to the real "meat" of taking minutes. What is important to write down, and what isn't? In general, the minute taker will write down what is said and what is decided. What the minute taker writes will end up being most of what is remembered from this meeting. So it's up to them, with the Committee help, to decide what's important.

You shouldn't be intimidated by the term "minutes" since it's actually a little misleading. After all, the committee doesn't want or need a word for word record of its meeting proceedings minute by minute! But it is important to capture the essence of the meeting and focus word for word recording on the details of motions and decisions. And just what is that? Well, it depends on the meeting, but can often include:

- Questions asked
- Answers given
- Information provided
- Concerns expressed
- Feedback given
- Ideas from brainstorming sessions
- Decisions made
- Tasks allocated

The minutes will usually include:

- The name of the group that is meeting
- The date
- The time the meeting commenced and place it was held
- The names of those present
- The names of those not present, including any apologies for non-attendance
- The key points made for each agenda item
- Any declared conflicts of interest
- Specific decisions that were made and who is responsible for acting on those decisions.
- In more formal meetings, the minutes also note any motions made, with the name of the mover and seconder, and the results of any votes taken on those motions, including any abstentions from voting.
- New business (if any)
- The date, time and place of the next meeting
- The time the meeting ended

As a general guideline, record a comment if:

- It states an opinion, with reasons, on an agenda item before the group
- It is a specific suggestion made by a group member
- It is stated several times, and/or with obvious emotion
- The speaker directly requests that a point get written down, "for the record"
- It introduces a new idea, or gives new information, not previously stated
- It relates to how money has been, is going to be, or should be spent
- It's a decision made by the Committee
- It's an action or task that is to be done

If in doubt, it's perfectly fine to ask something like, "Should I be writing that down?" or, "How should I be writing that down?" or, "How can I best capture that on paper?" The idea is to work with the group to help you decide what to record.

How to record most effectively

Before the meeting starts, you can note the attendees as they enter the room if you know them. If not, have people introduce themselves at the start of the meeting or circulate an attendance list they can write down their names for you.

Some things to keep in mind:

- *The importance of listening.* The minute taker has to be in the "here and now." The role of the minute taker may be quiet, but it is anything but passive. He or she needs to listen carefully at all times, to make sure quiet comments don't go unheard, and that points briefly made don't go unnoticed.
- *Remain neutral.* Generally, the minute taker doesn't interject their opinions into the conversation. When the minute taker wants to participate in the discussion, another person can be asked to take notes for that time.
- *Ask the group to repeat or slow down, as necessary.* Don't be shy here. If the group is going too fast to write everything down, or the minute taker is unclear about what someone has said, it's perfectly all right for them to say, "Excuse me. I didn't quite catch that." Or, you can say what you think you heard, and ask, "Is that right?" If the minute taker didn't understand something, or didn't have time to write everything down, it's a good bet other members of the Committee are a few steps behind as well.
- *Accept corrections graciously.* The minute taker may have heard something wrong, or made a spelling mistake that someone feels compelled to point out. The minute

taker shouldn't lose their cool. Simply thank the person and go on. No one is perfect, but being perfectly poised when corrected is certainly impressive, and will contribute to a smooth meeting.

- *Work with the chair.* The chair and minute taker working in tandem can result in a much better meeting. The chair can repeat or check the speaker's statement before the minute taker writes it down. Not only does that clarify what has been said for the minute taker; the rest of the meeting is now sure to have heard the statement as well.

The following tips can help make the job easier and the work more clear:

- Don't try to write every word; your hand will just cramp, and you'll never keep up. Paraphrase what's been said. If you have changed the speaker's words considerably, check to be sure you have captured the idea correctly.
- Write large, legibly, and fast. This isn't the time to worry about saving paper; comprehension should be most important.
- Don't worry about spelling. You'll still get the point across.
- Leave out words like "the" and "a".
- Label and number your sheets. This will help make your job a lot easier if you have a lot of pages to condense at the end of the meeting!
- Use a template to keep you on track. An example is provided at the end of this guide.

Having an outline (or template) based on the agenda makes it easy for you to simply jot down notes, decisions, etc. under each item as you go along. If you are taking notes by hand, consider including space below each item on your outline for your hand-written notes.

After the meeting

Write the minutes as soon as possible while everything is fresh in your mind.

Before the next meeting, distribute the minutes to those who were present at the meeting, along with an agenda for the next meeting. Ideally, this should be done one to two weeks before the meeting so that members can review the minutes and get ready for that meeting. Usually, meetings start with review and approval of the previous meeting's minutes; so it's not good practice to hand out the minutes right at the next meeting.

After the minutes are distributed and approved, they should be filed, but not forgotten. They are there to be referred to and used. They are part of your House's "group memory." More than that, at some point someone (funders, lawyers, auditors, new Committee members) may want to see them. So keep them readily available, up-to-date, and in good shape.

In general, the preparation and timely distribution of accurate minutes can add professionalism to your Management Committee, provide a historical record, serve as a source for fact-checking, increase the fairness of its proceedings, and perhaps also lead to better decisions, as well as more effective follow-up to those decisions.

And again, it's important that action be taken on the basis of the notes and decisions made. Handing out such minutes serves as a not-so-subtle reminder for Management Committee members to follow through on what they agreed to do. *Much of the point of recording in the first place is to help ensure that clearer and better decisions do get made and implemented.* In the end, that's probably the best sign of all that your meetings, and your Management Committee, are effective.

Example Template

For

Management Committee Minutes



[Name of House]

Minutes of Management Committee Meeting

Date of Meeting:

Meeting Held at:

Meeting Opened at:

Attendance

Management Committee:

Staff:

Apologies:

Others present:

Confirmation of minutes of previous meeting

Motion: The Minutes of the [Name of House] Management Committee Meeting of **[Date]** be accepted as a true and correct record of the meeting.

Moved:

Seconded:

CARRIED

Matters arising from previous minutes

Action or Issue	Update Information	Person Responsible

President's Report	
Motion (if any):	
Moved:	Seconded:

Treasurer's Report	
Motion (if any):	
Moved:	Seconded:

Co-ordinator's Report

Motion (if any):

Moved:

Seconded:

Action (if any):

Person Responsible:

Due date:

Correspondence

Date	From/To	Details	Action

Agenda Items

Agenda Item: *(Topic)*

Discussion:

Motion (if any):

Moved:

Seconded:

Action (if any):

Person Responsible:

Due date:

Agenda Item: *(Topic)*

Discussion:

Motion (if any):

Moved:

Seconded:

Action (if any):

Person Responsible:

Due date:

Agenda Item: *(Topic)*

Discussion:

Motion (if any):

Moved:

Seconded:

Action (if any):

Person Responsible:

Due date:

Other Business**Agenda Item: *(Topic)***

Discussion:

Motion (if any):

Moved:

Seconded:

Action (if any):

Person Responsible:

Due date:

Next Meeting

Date of Meeting:

Time of Meeting:

Place of Meeting:

Meeting Close

Meeting closed at:

Minutes Confirmed

These minutes were confirmed at the Management Committee meeting held on **[Date]**

Signed: Position: