

Template for Taking Minutes

Purpose of Minutes

Minutes are the most immediate outputs of a meeting and serve many purposes, including the following:

- (a) provides continuity and structure for addressing issues and advancing the business of the group or entity holding discussions or meeting;
- (b) to serve as an official record of what took place during the meeting;
- (c) to provide a concise yet accurate record of decisions coming out of discussions, deliberations or meetings, details of who should follow-up on decisions taken and within what time frame is action expected to be complete;
- (d) to facilitate follow-up action by those responsible for implementing decisions taken at the meeting;
- (e) to facilitate review and monitoring of actions taken to implement decisions of the meeting

Style

The Chairperson plays a critical role in establishing and maintaining a style for the recording and presentation of minutes. Why? Participants may insist that their comments be reflected in the minutes as a record of their individual contribution to discussions. However, acceding to and creating a precedent for this can result in other participants demanding similar treatment, resulting in lengthy minutes filled with superfluous matters which detract from more important matters. Also, for various reasons, members may express the wish to change a view expressed at a previous meeting. Again, this should be resisted since minutes record what was actually said and not what was meant to be said. Also views that have changed in the interim between meetings cannot be accommodated as part of the process of confirming the minutes of a previous meeting. (See also **Taking Minutes**)

Minutes should not be a verbatim record or transcript of who said what but a summary of the main points and decisions of the meeting. At the same time, individual dissensions from majority decisions should be recorded together with the reasons, as part of the minutes.

Preparation

- Use the meeting agenda as a guide for recording issues to be discussed during the meeting.
- Some committees e.g. marketing, finance, etc. over the short-term, will meet to discuss a relatively fixed agenda of issues. A review of the status of outstanding issues is usually dealt with under "Matters Arising" on the agenda.



- Prior to the meeting, review and have minutes of recent previous meetings available together with any materials that are relevant to the issues to be discussed.
- Obtain an agenda from the Chair to get an idea of the topics to be discussed and their position on the agenda. This will also assist in formulating an outline for the minutes.
- Obtain a list of members invited and expected to attend the meeting. This will facilitate easier identification of who was present at the meeting and persons who were absent.
- If you are unfamiliar with persons attending the meeting, prepare a sign-in sheet for everyone attending. The sheet can either be passed around for sign-in after persons are seated or the sign-in process can be completed at the time of the attendees' arrival. Where the names of some attendees is unknown, the latter is recommended, since this allows some association of names and faces during the meeting and, therefore, greater ease of recalling speakers. However, managing the sign-in process may require the completion of other preparatory activities or having these taken care of by someone else.
- The sign-in sheet should request the following information: name, position, institution represented, mailing address, telephone number and email address.
- Have all the tools you will need available in working order with spares as necessary. These include, pens, pencils, tape recorder, lap top computer [see also **Tape Recorder** and **Laptop Computer**]. Where presentations are to be made at the meeting, have a projector with spare bulb, laptop computer with appropriate presentation software e.g. PowerPoint, screen, flip chart with paper and markers.

Tape recorder

A small tape recorder can be an unobtrusive tool that can assist as a back-up in the taking of minutes. However, proceedings of meetings should only be recorded where this has been previously agreed or accepted as part of the mechanism for recording minutes.

The verbatim record provided by tape recording allows for accuracy in reviewing and checking facts. However, it is inefficient requiring time for playback in order to select information for the written record. It is therefore recommended that even when meetings are recorded, written notes should be used as the basis for preparing minutes.

Laptop Computer

The efficiency of a computer is opposite to that of a tape recorder since it allows for real time preparation of minutes as the meeting progresses with just minimum editing required afterwards. Obviously, efficiency in the use of this tool will depend on the speed with which the user can accurately type relevant information.

Taking Minutes

The following can be recorded before the Chair calls the meeting to order:

- The kind of meeting e.g. Marketing/ Finance/ regular/ special and its purpose.
- Time, date and place of meeting.

Note: Start time is optional and may be appropriate and even useful in circumstances where there is usually a considerable difference between the announced and actual start time for meetings - a common Caribbean phenomenon. The data collected over time will enable members to monitor the efficiency with which they are attending to the committee's business, the time and cost resulting from lack of punctuality by members and may even prompt remedial action.

- Chair of meeting and names of persons attending and businesses/entities they represent.
- Names of committee members/invitees absent or excused.

At the start of the meeting take note of the following;

- Whether minutes of the previous meeting were approved, revised or not read.
- Any corrections or adjustments to the minutes of the previous meeting, as they are reviewed by the committee.

Note: The committee may require the submission of the corrected minutes for sign off before they become part of the official record).

- Names of persons moving (proposing) and seconding motions for action such as adoption of minutes, resolutions and votes.
- Minutes should be related to topics listed on the agenda and, in the most detailed form, should provide a summary of the main points of discussions, decisions taken, agreed follow-up action, by whom or what entity and within what timeframe.

Note: Depending on the style adopted, the committee may choose to exclude summary details of discussions from the minutes thereby making them more focused and action oriented.

- The time of adjournment of the meeting and place, time and date of the next meeting.



Timeliness

Minutes should be written up as soon as possible after the meeting is held, when recollection of discussions is fresh, clear and more likely to be recalled accurately. Submit draft minutes for the Chair's review and feedback before finalizing.

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