

Meeting Guidelines

To trade successfully in a low-margins industry we keep operational and back-office costs (particularly labour in the form of admin & meeting time) to a minimum. Meetings need to be run efficiently to be an effective use of collective time.

General Meetings

General Meetings of the full co-op are used for making consensus decisions on co-op policy, large spends and strategy. All meetings are informed by the consensus decision-making procedure and our Principles of Purpose. (See Consensus Guide)

Our annually-elected Chair and Co-Chair are tasked with planning and facilitating our General Meetings. Their role is to support participation, clarifying issues and positions of various parties before moving to test for consensus.

As the co-op has grown we have developed various methods for encouraging participation, including:

- Turn and talk - an opportunity to share thoughts with one or two others prior to the Chair opening inviting questions and comments
- Small group discussions - usually five to seven people, who select a group member to provide feedback to the meeting to summarise the views expressed
- World cafe - in small groups, members move around a series of tables to contribute questions, ideas and feedback to a range of issues
- Temperature checks - coloured cards allowing Chairs and participants to get a sense of the membership's position on any given issue:
 - Green - generally in favour
 - Yellow - undecided
 - Red - generally not in favour
 - Question mark - I need to clarify something before stating a position

Participants

We ask all members to help General Meetings run smoothly by ensuring they:

- Attend on time and arrive prepared, having read the agenda and proposals in advance
- Try to ask 'information' questions before a meeting
- Listen attentively
- Raise their hand when they wish to speak and address comments to the Chair - this keeps the meeting on track and avoids back-and-forth side conversations taking over

The Agenda

Agendas set out what is going to be discussed. It helps people to arrive prepared, having had time to think and ask questions, and be ready to make a decision or express their point of view. (See Agenda template appendix). Agendas should:

- Be accessible so all members can contribute with a clear deadline for additions
- Include the date/time of meeting
- Agenda items should include the name of the person bringing the item

The Minutes

General Meeting minutes are taken by our annually-elected Secretary or Co-Secretary. A copy of the agenda and last meeting minutes on hand will help. Good minutes serve as a legal record, a communication tool for good decision making, and prompt to ensure actions are done and decisions are implemented. Minutes should:

- Include the full date and list of those present
- Clearly record any decisions

- Provide a named individual and date/timeline for all actions
- Be distributed to all participants and approved at the following meeting

Smaller Meetings

Smaller meetings (circle meetings, team meetings, Forum, workshops) require different levels of formality, but the goals are largely the same:

- Communication
- Decision making
- Keeping members connected to one another and to the business

Sociocratic Agendas

Since 2019 our smaller meetings have been run using sociocratic meeting processes, including intentional agendas which state the desired outcome for each item coming to the meeting along with a time estimate. (See Agenda appendix). Meeting items are marked as:

- Report - desired outcome, everyone understands
- Explore - desired outcome, everyone understands and gives their feedback
- Decide - desired outcome, everyone understands, gives their feedback and a decision is made

Facilitation

Facilitation ideally rotates at intervals, but not so frequently as to lose continuity. The facilitator should be prepared in advance for their duties, and have the agenda and last meeting minutes on hand in order to effectively run the meeting. Our circles generally elect a facilitator for a year at a time. Facilitators hold responsibility for:

- Holding space in the meeting - encouraging participation by using rounds to ensure people speak in turn and stay on topic
- Ensuring all agenda items are addressed appropriately (Report, Explore, Decide)
- Keeping to time
- Allocating tasks - ensuring actions are clear, recorded and named

Online Blended and Hybrid Meetings

During the pandemic we learned how to run meetings fully and partially online, and manage asynchronous consensus decision making. Online meetings require appropriate video conferencing tech. They allow opportunities for small group discussion in breakout rooms, screen sharing of proposals, and polls to temperature check the spread of opinions.

A blended meeting is a meeting in which not everyone is able to physically meet at the same time to make a decision, in which case a written resolution is required for asynchronous decision making usually over the period of a week to 10 days. Hybrid meetings take decisions during the meeting itself, with some participants attending remotely while others take part in person.

Blended Meeting Consensus

Blended meetings use an intranet site to host proposals, question and comment forms, and consensus test forms. Consensus forms comprise three pages:

- 1) An invitation to share a comment on the proposal
- 2) A summary of the four consensus options and what constitutes a valid block
- 3) A page to register your consensus position and any declaration of interest

Members may amend their chosen consensus option until the deadline (this allows an opportunity for discussion and evolution of thought via Q&A and comments documents).

Good Process

The difference between a productive and an unproductive meeting is mainly process, not content. The tips above should help improve the process.

What makes for an unproductive meeting?

- Lack of preparation
- Low attendance
- Few decisions, much carried forward
- Non participation by majority
- Lack of clarity over the decision-making process
- Too much talking by a few
- Lots of repetition in discussion
- Too much on the agenda
- Bad physical setting - overcrowded, stuffy

What makes for a productive meeting?

- Participation - lots of it, in different formats (plenary and small group discussion, verbal and written input, non-verbal communication e.g. temperature checks)
- Sense of collective direction
- Enough time, focused agenda
- Many decisions and specific actions reached
- Responsibilities named and target dates set
- Appropriate physical setting - room to move around, airflow, refreshments available