



# Organising Successful Meetings

## Guide for Sustainable Neighbourhood Groups

**Whatever your group does, effective meetings are vital to working together well. Productive meetings result in a motivated and dynamic group of people who get things done.**

Meetings that work for everyone involved will make your group more effective and more fun. Below are some basic steps that you can take to make your meetings work well.

### Before the meeting

- **Be clear** about the purpose of the meeting. There may of course, be several reasons for having the meeting, eg: planning an action; attracting new members to the group and day-to-day tasks such as discussing finance.
- **When?** Try to find a time that suits most people. Think about patterns of daily activity, such as parenting, work, dinner time.
- **Find a suitable venue.** The venue needs to be big enough to accommodate everyone comfortably, but not too big. It can be very disempowering to sit with a small group of people in a huge hall. Ensure the venue for your meeting is accessible - can someone in a wheelchair, or with hearing difficulties participate as easily as possible? Does the venue itself put some people off (pubs and venues with religious affiliations can have this effect) and finally, have you put clear directions on your publicity?
- **Let people know about the meeting.** You will need to invite people to the meeting. Most groups will decide the time and place of the next meeting at the end of the current one, and record it on the minutes. Make sure the minutes are circulated as soon after the meeting as possible. It's good practice to remind group members about a week or few days before the next meeting. Don't rely totally on email to send out invitations unless you are certain that everyone has internet access and checks it regularly.
- **Planning the meeting.** Prepare an agenda in advance, and circulate along with the invitation / reminder. The [Meeting Agenda – Template](#) can assist with this. Let people know that they can add to the agenda at the meeting if necessary. This will help them feel more involved with the meeting.

communities working together



## During the meeting

- **Arrange seating** so that everyone can see and hear one another.
- **Welcome everyone** as they arrive and find out who they are. Introduce yourselves. Some groups designate a welcomer or 'doorkeeper' for newcomers. This ensures that everyone is greeted by a friendly face, knows where the toilets, refreshments, and fire exits are, as well as being brought up to speed with the meeting progress if they arrive late.
- **If there are new people**, start the meeting by asking everyone to introduce themselves, and perhaps say a bit about themselves and why they are here. New people may also need to be updated about the Sustainable Neighbourhood process, and how the group works.
- **Make sure people know how the meeting works** – what are the rules of the group: how are decisions made: by consensus or voting? What kind of behaviour is acceptable in this meeting and what is not?
- **Designate someone to take minutes.** Minutes should provide an accurate record of decisions made at the meeting, and remind people of what they said they'd do and by when. Minutes can help avoid having to go over the same ground again and again, and are important to inform people who were absent from the meeting. A [Meeting Minute – Template](#) is available if required.
- **Agree on the agenda, identify a finishing time, and when there will be breaks.** Have short breaks to revive people (for drinks, toilet) and for informal chatting, especially if the meeting lasts longer than 1½ hours.
- **Make sure everyone can see the agenda.** You can cross off points once they are dealt with as a visual reminder that the meeting is getting things done.
- **Take one point at a time, and try to avoid straying** from that point until it has been dealt with. Summarise regularly and make clear decisions with action points (don't forget to note who's doing what, and by when) to be carried out by a variety of people.
- **Don't let the same people take on all the work** - it can lead to tension and informal hierarchies within the group. Encourage everyone to feel able to volunteer for tasks and roles. It can help if the more experienced members of the group offer to share skills and experience.
- **Encourage participation** at all times so that everyone can get involved and contribute to the meeting. This can be helped by using tools such as brainstorming, go-rounds, and small group discussions.
- **Challenge put-downs** and discriminatory remarks.
- **Share the talking** - Don't let the same few people do all the talking or let everyone talk at the same time.
- **Try to keep discussions positive**, but don't ignore conflict - deal with it before it grows.

communities working together



## Ending the meeting

- **Make sure the meeting finishes on time**, or get everyone's agreement to continue.
- **Collect contact details** for any new people to keep in touch.
- **Decide on a date, time and venue** for the next meeting.
- You might also want to decide on points to be discussed at the next meeting.
- Remember to thank everyone for turning up and contributing.
- It can be nice to follow the meeting with an informal social activity like sharing a meal or going to a café. Think about any special needs and try to choose an inclusive venue or activity.

## After the meeting

- **Send minutes** to everyone who was at the meeting and don't forget those people who could not make it, but would like to be kept informed, including your Council staff contact. In the minutes be sure to include any action points as well as thank people for their contributions.
- **Evaluating your meetings** can help to improve them. It's a good idea to leave a few minutes at the end of every agenda and ask the group what went well and what needs to be improved. You could also get together afterwards with the other organisers to evaluate the meeting. Remember to celebrate what you have achieved!
- **Take action** – review the meeting minutes and make a start on any actions that are your responsibility. Look forward to reporting back on your achievements at the next meeting!

***All this might sound like a lot of work, but if you share out jobs and work jointly with someone else it will reduce stress levels. You'll probably be able to learn something from the other organisers and have fun too.***

Content for this guide has been adapted from resources available at:  
[www.seedsforchange.org.uk/free/resources](http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/free/resources).

Sustainable Neighbourhoods is an initiative of Lake Macquarie City Council



Communities working together

