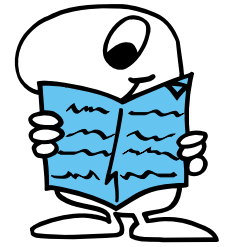


Initiative for Sub-District Support



Kwik-Skwiz #28

Meetings and Minutes Making them more effective

About this Kwik-Skwiz

This Guide provides tips to improve:

- preparation for meetings
- participation by the members
- chairing of meetings
- minute-taking and minutes

File for quick reference

Implementation of the District Health System is dependent upon close collaboration among a variety of groups and individuals. The key element in such collaboration is effective communication and follow-up. Meetings and their minutes are a foundation for success.

Well-run meetings promote full participation in decision-making, drawing on the group's accumulated experience and expertise. Active participation in turn enhances the success of meetings. Effective meetings can strengthen the team through promoting group "ownership" of decisions and improving communication. Poor meetings, on the other hand, are frustrating and can be destructive.

The minutes (records) of meetings are vital management tools. They are the official record of proceedings, serving also as the legal record, and provide reference material for all. Clear and correct minutes, distributed on time, are thus as important as the meetings themselves!

The need for a guide for Chairpersons, minute takers and meeting participants arose from work done in a number of health districts.

This Guide is intended as a contribution to making meetings as effective and efficient as possible and ensuring high quality minutes.

What can be done to prepare for meetings?

WE CAN: *ensure that the appropriate people are invited with adequate notice, and that all conditions are conducive to productivity*

- Clearly identify the purpose of the meeting
- Identify the Chairperson beforehand
- Identify and invite the participants who can add most value
- Decide on the best date and time – checking with the participants if possible
- Decide on the duration of the meeting (starting and stopping times)
- Identify and book the most appropriate venue
- Communicate all this information to members in good time (i.e. early enough to ensure all can attend) and have them acknowledge receipt thereof
- Set the agenda and circulate timeously – at least 4-5 days before the meeting. (Avoid distributing a standardised agenda with the previous minutes – it limits adequate preparation for the meeting.)

WHY DO WE HOLD MEETINGS?

- For giving and receiving information
- For deciding what to do
- For deciding how to do it
- For getting support for making and changing policies

BUT, MEETINGS MUST LEAD TO ACTION

- Circulate pre-meeting reading with the agenda
- Identify a minute taker/scribe
- Arrange, *in advance*, logistic requirements – paper / pens / flipchart and paper / overhead projector / name labels / sufficient chairs / fans / heaters / refreshments (if available)
- Take a stand and state your opinions on issues – do not “sit on the fence”, it is unhelpful to progress
- Share opinions on matters under discussion in a clear, relevant way without repetition and undue length
- Express agreement with points made without repeating the whole point

What can participants do to improve meetings?

WE CAN: *contribute to achieving the objectives of the meeting*

- Submit, for distribution with the agenda, details of agenda points that require careful consideration and/or important decisions
- Submit a written report, for distribution with the agenda, if you were assigned a task but are unable to attend the meeting
- Read relevant documents (the minutes, the agenda, documented agenda items) beforehand
- Check your mandate if you are representing others
- Be on time – it is highly disrespectful to the others to arrive late
- Respect the Chairperson and always speak / respond through the Chair
- Encourage and support a culture of crisp, business-like meetings
- Present proposals or amendments to proposals – avoid just talking
- Listen to and respect the opinions of others, even if there is disagreement – disagree without being disagreeable
- Accept defeat if your point is not accepted by the majority
- Avoid personalizing issues – discuss the topic, not the individuals
- Be constructive and positive
- When discussing sensitive or emotive issues, strive to remain calm and rational
- Respect confidential information and discussions
- Ensure that all appropriate information is passed to those whom you are representing

What is the role of the Chairperson?

S/HE MUST: *ensure that the objectives of the meeting are achieved by covering the agenda items, while promoting participation of the members and staying within the allotted time*

Prior to the meeting

- Ensure timely circulation of the agenda to allow preparation for the meeting
- Ensure that the agenda specifies the date, starting and ending times, venue and purpose of the meeting

OVERVIEW OF A HEALTH DISTRICT “MEETINGS” WORKSHOP

A recent workshop on “Making Meetings Meaningful” left the Health District participants enthusiastic and determined to make a difference. They too had experienced the difficulties of attending frequent meetings but often wondering about their value. The workshop facilitators found however that the participants knew many, if not most, of the basic rules about making meetings meaningful, yet they were struggling to put these rules into practice.

The workshop participants decided to concentrate on four aspects, namely

- adequate preparation for the meetings;
- developing a good ‘meetings culture’, i.e. the accepted rules, the discipline, the behaviour, to ensure business-like productive meetings;
- strengthening their meeting management skills; and
- monitoring and evaluating their meetings so as to identify areas for improvement.

They also agreed that each one of them had a personal role and responsibility in bringing about change

- Ensure that the agenda, with all supporting and relevant documents, is circulated timeously
- Arrange agenda topics in priority order (not necessarily according to previous minutes) and indicate proposed time allocation for each topic

During the meeting

- Start and end on time – avoid summarising the proceedings for latecomers
- Introduce new participants
- Define the rules under which the meeting will be conducted
- Emphasize the objective(s) of the meeting
- Seek approval for the agenda – adding by consensus any “late but urgent” items
- Seek approval for the previous minutes – corrections being minuted where agreed
- Ensure that report-backs under “Matters Arising” are only whether a task is or is not completed, giving a new completion date if not – new developments should be discussed as new agenda points
- Introduce each agenda item with any background information (arguments for and against, and any previous discussions)
- Allow participation one by one with discussion through the chair - avoid one or two participants dominating any deliberations
- Encourage the quiet ones to contribute to the discussions
- Keep speakers to the topic under discussion – discourage jargon and keep control of strong non-verbal communication.
- Postpone to the next meeting items that are inadequately prepared and presented or that require lengthy discussion exceeding the available time – possibly even calling a special meeting for such issues
- Summarise discussions and emphasize the decisions, thereby keeping the process moving and guiding the minute-taker
- Decide on the point at which a decision must be taken and lead discussion on the options – but avoid forcing adoption of your own preferred option
- Reach agreement on action to be taken – what activity, by whom, where, by when and how – noting the type of feedback required

- If there is a need for further meetings, decide when (if not already scheduled)
- Evaluate the meeting at the end by inviting comments on: -
 - Were objectives achieved?
 - Was optimum participation achieved?
 - Were the correct people present? (omit some / add others?)
 - What could have been done differently to make the meeting more productive?
- End on time

After the meeting

- Ensure that those not present at the meeting are aware of tasks assigned to them
- Check the draft minutes and improve where necessary
- Ensure minutes are distributed promptly (preferably within one week)

What helps in writing good minutes?

MINUTES SHOULD: *keep an accurate record of the meeting – serving as a tool to monitor progress on action required by the meeting, as a reminder of process and decisions, as a record for those unable to be present, and as an historical and legal record*

- List separately those present, those apologizing and those absent without apology
- Record the names of the Chairperson and the minute-taker
- Record the meeting date, the venue and times of starting and ending, noting late arrivals and early departures
- Summarise **discussions** – unless agreed that these are confidential – and record **decisions** for each of the agenda items
- Do not record the name of each speaker in the minutes – resolutions are those of the meeting, not of individuals
- Abstentions from voting can, however, be recorded by name if they request it

- Number the resolutions sequentially – for example, in monthly meetings use year/month/resolution number
- Record clearly the action to be taken, noting by whom and by when – ways of presenting the action can include an ‘action column’, a box, in bold and/or underlined, placed on the right hand side, or a mixture of these
- Ensure that the minutes are understandable to someone not present at the meeting
- Pass a draft copy of the minutes to the meeting Chairperson to check and amend where necessary
- Circulate the final copy promptly – preferably within one week.

In Closing

Effective meetings should: -

- Support people
- Build teams
- Share information
- Take decisions which lead to action

REMEMBER

Meetings are expensive processes, especially when all the salaries are considered. Invest sufficient time in the preparations and run every meeting in a business-like way. Effective and efficient meetings can contribute much to successful service delivery.

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Please feel free to contact us and to visit our website at www.hst.org.za

**The Initiative for Sub-District Support welcomes comments on this publication.
Any further queries could be forwarded to**

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