

Landcare Notes

Landcare Note 1.5
September 2010

Effective meetings

It's important your meetings are run with clarity and purpose so the group is able to function effectively, maintains enthusiasm and the key members don't suffer from burn-out. This Landcare Note should help you to ensure your meetings are run effectively.

What are effective meetings?

An effective meeting is well organised, has a clear purpose, is comfortable and relaxed, allows for people's viewpoints to be heard and is kept on time.

How to do it

All participants at your meetings should understand why they are there. They need enough notice of the timing so they can plan their attendance, and know what is to be discussed.

A successful meeting also involves having the right people in attendance as well as using an effective process.

This will be apparent when you are planning the meeting and working out what type of meeting is appropriate (see Landcare Note 1.4: *Meeting types*).

Organising effective meetings

At the start of every year, the group could plan a schedule of meetings, including the Annual General Meeting (AGM), so everyone knows well in advance and can plan accordingly. You could schedule committee meetings for monthly, bi-monthly or whatever works best for the group and its projects (see Landcare Note 1.4: *Meeting types*).

Depending on where you are based, you may need to consider outside activities such as farming operations or school holidays when you plan your schedule.

Occasionally you may need to hold extra meetings to tackle certain issues. When this happens, try to give the relevant people as much notice as possible.

The three stages

There are three stages to holding effective meetings:

1. Preparation before the meeting
2. At the meeting
3. Between meetings or after the meeting

Stage 1

Before the meeting, someone needs to ensure that the venue is suitable and booked, any audio-visual equipment is available, that the agenda and associated information has been circulated to members and the guest speakers (or other visitors) have been briefed.

There will also need to be someone responsible for inviting people and sending any relevant information for the meeting such as the agenda, documents, reports, minutes and other correspondence that might be discussed.

Hold your meetings at a time and place where members will be comfortable, no matter what the season. This includes such aspects as adequate seats, heating, access to facilities, and shade.

The Agenda

The secretary usually prepares the agenda with the president. This is then distributed before the meeting so everyone has a chance to prepare and make a meaningful contribution to the discussion and decision-making.

For any meeting, the purpose of the agenda is to list any items of business to ensure nothing is overlooked, establish the order of business and give members notice of what is being considered. When preparing the agenda try to allow adequate time for presentation of the topic as well as questions and discussion. By

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doing this it will be more likely you will run the meeting on time.

Your constitution normally specifies the timing for the agenda to be made available to members before the AGM and any special general meetings.

Stage 2

At the meeting- meeting procedures

The way a meeting is conducted will vary with the type of meeting (see Landcare Note 1.4: *Meeting types*).

During the meeting, the agenda should be followed as written unless the group agrees to adjust it during proceedings. The person running the meeting should allow enough time for discussion but still make sure the meeting is on time, as well as ensuring that any decisions made are clear to all present, particularly the minute taker. If a committee member has raised an item for the agenda, it is good practice for the president or secretary to check prior to the meeting what time the member might need.

Many committees will use an informal consensus method when making decisions, but it's important that the chair keeps control of proceedings and ensures everyone has a chance to take part. Formal motions should be passed for items involving money and any controversial issues.

Meetings should finish at a set time which is easier if you develop an agenda (including timing), and you stick to it. Occasionally you may have to extend the meeting time in order to complete any necessary business. Another option is to agree to set a special meeting to allow further discussion on that topic, or schedule the topic again for your next meeting. Those present should agree on what the best option is to allow the meeting to continue and not go too much over time.

Annual general meetings and general meetings are usually conducted more formally than committee meetings. The chair and committee

should be aware of any protocols before the meeting so it all runs smoothly.

Your constitution should set out the number of members needed for business to be conducted at any of your meetings and this number is called a 'quorum'.

Record of meetings- the minutes

The secretary or an appointed minute-taker must keep accurate notes (minutes) of what business takes place at general meetings and committee meetings. The minutes record who attended the meeting, what was discussed, what decisions were made and what actions might be needed. The minutes act as a formal record of your group's decisions, and provide a guide for the future actions needed.

Minutes must record all motions put to the meeting, including those that are not agreed to. You don't have to include a full transcript of the discussion but if there are opposing views, these views should be recorded as well as the final decision made.

Stage 3

Circulating the minutes and meeting outcomes

Try to make the minutes available to members as soon as possible rather than waiting for the next meeting. You will then avoid the need to read through them at the next meeting. Having the minutes circulated soon after the meeting, also means everyone has a record of action/activities needed before you come together again.

The minutes are usually formally confirmed at the next meeting as part of the agenda and any changes made as needed. Minutes of an AGM are confirmed at the following AGM.

Creating a checklist

At all stages of organising meetings it is useful to use a checklist.

For example:

Stage 1 - Preparation before the meeting

- Be clear on the purpose of the meeting

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- Book the venue
- Draft an agenda
- Allocate time to each of the agenda items
- Contact any outside people like guest speakers or experts that may be invited
- Confirm the date and time for the meeting
- Check the venue and organise any equipment needed
- Advise members of the meeting and circulate the agenda
- Copy any papers needed for the meeting.

Stage 2 - At the meeting

- Have relevant papers ready
- Arrange seating, tables and other equipment
- Prepare catering
- Follow the items on the agenda and stick to the timeframes
- Ensure you are clear on any actions and resolutions, and these are recorded
- Organise a date and time for the next meeting
- Thank everyone for attending.

Stage 3 – Between the meetings or after the meeting

- Complete the tasks assigned and keep in touch with members that also have jobs to do

- Meet with the executive committee (president, treasurer and secretary) if needed
- Circulate the minutes and relate key outcomes of the meeting to members.

A final note

Lastly you may want to vary your meetings throughout the year to keep your members interested in coming along. Inviting guest speakers, holding farm walks, visits to see what different groups are doing or seeing new enterprises in the area, video nights and inspections of the group's projects can all be considered.

Further references

Victorian Landcare Gateway – Resources for Groups, <http://www.landcarevic.net.au/>

Boards, Committees and Governance Centre: <http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/>

Related Landcare Notes

This Landcare Note is one of a series. These notes provide an excellent guide for the ongoing operation of your group.

Landcare Note 1.1: *Starting up a Landcare group*

Landcare Note 1.4: *Meeting types*

Landcare Note 8.1: *Effective leadership*



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