



Taking notes in a meeting

Board meetings should run smoothly, with no side conversations, only orderly discussions. Let's face it, that rarely happens. People volunteer to serve on boards because they are passionate about the cause, which leads to some interesting meetings.

The role of the secretary is critical to any board. The secretary must be organized, able to take good notes, and recall the facts from previous meetings. The problem, for the Secretary, is that taking accurate notes requires concentration, which often results in the Secretary not having a voice. As they focus on taking notes and answering questions, they are unable to process what is said, and consequently, are often unable to participate in the discussions.

All board meetings should be run by Robert's Rules. If a standard structure to meetings can be created, the role of the secretary will become much more efficient. Below are some tips to help organize meetings and allow the secretary to join the conversations.

1. Minutes are legal documents and as much as possible should be correct. As a nonprofit, anyone has the right to request minutes and read them. The minutes should present an accurate reflection of what happened at the meeting with enough detail to understand the breadth of the conversation, but not be a novel.
2. Minutes are easier to read when they are done as bullet points. Remember, this is a document which not only chronicles what happened, it is also the work plan for the coming month. Creating a template that is user friendly to both the secretary and reader is vital.
3. In most cases the devil is in the detail, but not so in minutes. Minutes should give a comprehensive overview of what was discussed, any questions, and the result. They should also note who made a motion, and who seconded, followed by the vote.
4. When taking notes, work off of the agenda. A well written agenda, with even a few more details can greatly assist the secretary.
5. The executive committee must learn, understand, and enforce Roberts Rules. This will allow the secretary time to take the notes as needed.
6. Using name plates in front of board members, having a sign in sheet, and barring any conversations not applicable to the meeting will further assist the secretary.
7. Meetings can be recorded, but it is important to note that if a meeting goes into Executive Sessions, while minutes are kept of this portion of the meeting, the public does not have access to these notes.
8. A five-minute conversation between the board chair/president and the secretary will give the secretary the opportunity to ask any clarifying questions prior to the meeting.



Recommendations

1. Use a sign in sheet or create a roster of board members the secretary can easily check off as people come in.
2. Set the agenda to follow the meeting and use Robert's Rules. For example:
 - a. Agenda for the X Meeting
 - b. Held on XX/XX/XXXX, at _____
 - c. Time Meeting called to order: _____
 - d. The board chair/president establishes there is a quorum
 - e. Motion to begin meeting
 - f. Review of Minutes
 - i. First
 - ii. Second
 - iii. All in favor aye/nay
 - g. Old Business
 - i. List each item separately
 - ii. List any updates. Having all notes in one place, easily referenced will make the meeting progress more smoothly
 - h. New Business
 - i. List each item separately
 - ii. List any details or important notes about each item
 - i. Motion to close meeting
3. When taking notes use the following recommendation
 - a. List the number from the agenda and an abbreviated name
 - b. Write just the highlights. Your goal is to present an accurate summary of what the decision is. You do not need to capture the conversation. More often than not there is a plethora of conversation which in hindsight will serve little to no purpose.
 - c. Focus on writing the motion, if there is a date or deadline, who made the motion and who seconded. Little more is needed.
 - d. For financials, focus on writing any discrepancies noted in the reports, any commitments made, and who made the motion. Place a copy of the balance sheet and income statement with the minutes. This will keep you from having to take copious notes in this area.
 - e. Often times, old business can use less notes. Over time, the entire story will play out in the minutes. If this is just a quick refresher for the board, use the notes from the previous minutes.
4. When you type the minutes, simply update the previous month's minutes. This will help jog your memory and ensure you remember all the details. You may even be able to create a template to assist.