How to Take Meeting Minutes

Samples of Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

Meeting minutes are a record of what happened at a meeting. Find out how to write good meeting minutes with these tips and sample template.

Taking minutes at a meeting is not always a popular activity, but it is an important one. The meeting minutes serve as a record of what action the board of directors has taken. In the eyes of the IRS, courts, and auditors board meeting minutes are legal documents. Nonetheless, there is no single format to take minutes. You can do what makes sense for you and your group. However, following these tips can help make writing meeting minutes easier:

- Remember that meeting minutes are for future and outside readers as much as they are for the people present. Make sure whatever you write down will be clear to people coming into the process at a later time.
- Typing meeting minutes on a laptop can make the process quicker and easier; however, a pen and paper work well, too, and might keep you from writing down too much information.
- Make a note of who is present. If necessary, pass around a sign-in sheet.
- Use the meeting agenda sample provided below as an outline for the minutes.
- Details do not belong in meeting minutes. Do write down any motions and decisions made and the key findings of any committee reports.
- Use bullet points to make the minutes easier to read. Each bullet statement should represent a different finding, discussion, or decision. Use nested bullets (bulleted statements within a bullet) if appropriate.
- Make a note of issues that were tabled until future meetings; this will serve as an important reminder to the board of things that still need to be done.
- Transcribe or review minutes as soon as possible after the meeting, while your memory of what happened is still fresh.
- Before you submit the meeting minutes, proofread for typos and omissions.

Follow the format of the sample meeting minute template below to help you record meeting minutes.

Name of Organization

Board Meeting Minutes: Month Day, Year

Time and location

Present: Name board members in attendance

Absent: Name absent board members. You may want to subdivide this category into people with and without proxies.
Others Present: List any organizational staff and guests and their affiliations here

Proceedings:

- Meeting called to order at (time) by (person, usually chair)
- Minutes from (prior meeting date) amended and approved.
- Subcommittee Reports – (highlights of information presented and discussions had)
- Any action taken. For instance, MOTION to (do action); seconded and passed.
- Meeting adjourned at (time)

Future Business:

Here is a place to remind people of:

- conversations that were tabled until next time,
- possible agendas for upcoming meetings,
- assignments that board members have taken on

Sample Meeting Agenda

Meeting Agenda Purpose and Template

A good meeting agenda will serve as a guide to participants, making the meeting more efficient and productive. This article provides a sample agenda and explanation.

An effective meeting agenda, which states what activities will take place during the meeting, serves various important functions:

- It forces the meeting leader or group to think out what needs to be accomplished
- Provided ahead of time (as it should be), the agenda lets people know what to expect and allows them to prepare as necessary
- It provides a blueprint or path for the meeting to follow
- It reminds people of what there is left to cover if time gets to be an issue

Public agendas are typically binding – meaning the meeting participants cannot stray from the items they said they would cover. However, agendas for private organizations are often flexible (depending on your stated bylaws)

- Organization Name
- Group Meeting Agenda
- Location
- Date
- Starting and Ending Time
The **body** of the agenda lists the actual items to be covered during the meeting. When possible, use actionable words such as *approve, discuss, adopt, announce* to let participants know what is expected of them. At the end of each item is a suggested time allotted (adding up to an hour and a half long meeting), but in reality time allotted will depend on your group’s particular circumstances.

- Welcome/Introductions/Warm up Activities – Doing one of these is particularly helpful for groups that don’t get together often. It is also a good way of getting the meeting started while not making late-comers miss anything substantive. (10 min)
- Approve/adopt previous meeting minutes – Obviously, only necessary if minutes are kept. (5 min)
- Discuss the topics at hand. This will usually be broken up into several parts, and will take up the bulk of the meeting. This is where you would include items like “Review annual budget” or “Brainstorm fundraising ideas” or “Hear report from Finance Committee”. (60 min total)
- Announcements – This is often kept to the end of the meeting, but because new information can sometimes change the focus of a meeting, it may be useful to have announcements early on. (10 min)
- Decide on time and agenda for next meeting. (5 min).

As you can see from this sample, a good meeting agenda is short and simple. Good luck!

**Some Thoughts on Warm up Activities or Ice Breakers**

Ice breakers are a great way for nonprofits to start meetings or training sessions. This article will show you how to pick the best ice breaker ideas for your group.

There are literally hundreds, if not thousands, of possible ice breakers you can use at your next nonprofit meeting. But they are not all equally appropriate under every circumstance. The best ice breaker idea will fit your group’s needs and agenda. Before choosing an ice breaker, here are four factors to keep in mind.

**Function of Ice Breakers**

There are many reasons to use ice breakers, other than simply because they are one way to kickoff a meeting. Clearly, ice breakers are useful when groups are getting together for the first time. But they can also be valuable for groups that meet again and again. For instance, if there is an association with a fluid membership, ice breakers can help introduce new members to the old guard and vice versa. Or if it’s particularly important for a group to trust each other and work together well, but they only meet once a month or less (as in the case of most nonprofit boards), then having an ice breaker each time can help increase the group’s cohesiveness. Just remember to alter the ice breaker used to match the situation. Below are some general guidelines about what ice breaker ideas to try when:

- Learning group member’s names: Consider name games
• Meeting other group members: Consider activities that separate people into pairs or small
groups
• Sharing and getting to know each other: Consider round-robin, thought-provoking
questions
• Diffusing negative energy (tension, nervousness, stress): Consider more irreverent
questions or an activity requiring movement
• Energizing the group: Consider a fun game that requires movement
• Affirming commitment: Consider some sort of ritual (a song, a prayer, reciting the
company values)

Time Considerations

A good, fun ice breaker can be incredibly time consuming. If the purpose of your meeting is
team-building, then all you might need the entire time are ice-breaker-type games and questions.
Likewise, if you are conducting a day-long training session, you can afford to have a nice, long
ice breaker (or perhaps several short exercises dispersed throughout the day) But if you only
have ninety minutes to have a board meeting or staff orientation, even going around the room
having people introduce themselves can be time-consuming, and a longer ice breaker would
certainly take away from your accomplishing the meeting objectives. Carefully consider how
much time you have and what information/action you need to get through. Then choose an ice
breaker that will work with your schedule.

Physical Considerations

Some of the most fun ice breakers require people to walk around conducting scavenger hunts,
disentangling themselves from each other, miming a word, or something equally active. Though
fun, these ice breakers are often not appropriate, because

• there isn’t enough space or materials to carry them out,
• they require a high level of physical comfort that the group does not have,
• they exclude people with physical limitations, or
• they simply take up too much time

Emotional Considerations

Many ice breaker ideas that seem interesting on the surface require strangers to disclose more
about themselves than they are comfortable doing. Even people who know each other can feel
embarrassed interacting at a different level than they are used to. Ideally, you should keep
participation in the ice breaker optional. But also consider to what degree an ice breaker requires
participants to take an emotional risk. If possible, choose a question or activity that will keep
discomfort to a minimum. If the meeting or training is about an emotional subject, as is often the
case with nonprofit groups, then put guidelines in place that will make participants feel more
comfortable in disclosing information about themselves or taking emotional risks.