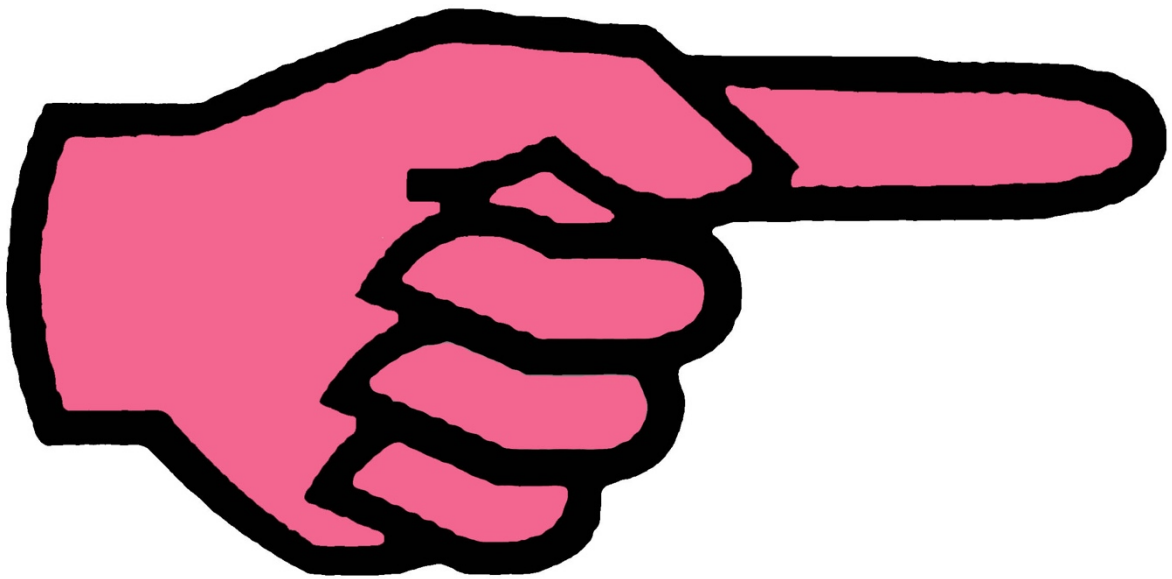




Meeting procedures in NGOs



Meeting procedures in NGOs

Meetings within the organisation

In an association or NGO, many different meetings are arranged: board meetings, member meetings, association meetings and other meetings. The very first meeting held in an NGO or association, when the organisation is founded, is the constituent meeting.

Annual meetings are often called in the NGO's with various names, including an annual general meeting, general assembly, spring and autumn meetings, election meeting or something else. Some meetings are open to all members. Such are Annual General Meetings/General Assemblies, Extraordinary Annual General Meetings and member meetings. Only board members attend board meetings, possibly inviting experts to join when needed.

The statutes of the association states during which meetings the members can exercise their decision-making power. Decision-making takes place at annual meetings and extraordinary annual meetings.

At the association's annual meeting, the guidelines for how the board is to arrange the association's activities are established. The board is the executive body of the association and must carefully handle the association's affairs and property.

The board of the association should familiarise themselves with the association law of country where the organisation is registered. Furthermore, they should refer to the organisation's statutes regarding what direction it gives for the organisation's meetings and their purpose.

Board meetings

The board meetings agenda and materials should be shared with the team well in advance to allow time to read through materials and prepare for the agenda points. Well-prepared meetings mean the decisions will be well-informed and thorough preparations also speed up the meeting. The importance of preparation and reading through materials beforehand is highlighted with online meetings, where time for discussion is more limited than at physical meetings. The board members have the right but also a responsibility to learn about the topic at hand and ask questions if anything is left unclear. At the end of each board meeting it is good practice to discuss and even agree when and where the next board meeting will take place.

The board should consider which topics are to be discussed at regular board meetings and what type of questions require more development-focused approach, where a facilitated workshop can be a more appropriate platform to allow deeper discussions and thinking. Active participation and diversity of opinion should be encouraged and welcomed in the organisation's meetings and each board member is responsible for contributing towards efficient and productive leadership at the organisation with clear focus on the organisation's mission and vision.

Proper recording of a board meeting is very important and this is usually done through writing minutes. If a member of staff is present, they often take the responsibility of writing meeting

minutes. A follow up section in the minutes can be used to tell the future course of action i.e. who needs to do what and the deadline of each task. When writing the minutes do not use figurative language. Stick to the facts and steer away from judgements or opinions.

Preparing for Annual meetings

In order to inform the members that a meeting will be held, a meeting notice will be sent out well in advance of the meeting. How this is to be done is stated in the association's statutes. Along with it, you can also send the agenda.

In the case of an annual meeting, the matters must always be mentioned in the notice of the meeting. Alternatively, you can have a reference to the association's statutes. If significant issues arise during the meeting, which are not on the agenda, they can be discussed. A decision cannot be made if the matter is so significant that it may affect the members' presence.

The chairperson of the meeting needs all documents regarding the meeting, the association law and the association's statutes. The organisation may have rules of procedure for the annual meetings, including rules for voting and elections and the chairperson should be familiar with these and have the rules at hand if needed during the meeting.

The matters dealt with at the association meeting vary depending on whether the association has one or two association meetings per year. Answers to questions regarding procedures within the NGO and meetings are in the statutes and at a higher level in the association law of the country in question.

Rights and roles at the annual meeting

The members of an association have the right to attend an Annual meeting. It is good practice to offer the possibility to attend the meeting remotely. The fact that a member has the right to attend does not mean that the member always has the right to vote and the organisation's statutes define the right to vote. Those who have the right to attend the meeting have the right to express themselves, unless otherwise stated in the statutes. The right to speak is based on membership and not on the right to vote. All members who have the right to speak at the meeting have the right to ask questions.

The chairperson and secretary have a central role in the meeting. The secretary assists the chairperson with practical matters before the meeting, shares the meeting documents and handles the information and documentation after the meeting. The secretary of the meeting writes the minutes, but the chairperson is responsible for it and signs it first. In addition to the secretary, there may be persons who handle the technical side of the meeting at an online or a hybrid meeting, hand out materials and ballot papers. Vote counters and minutes adjusters may also be needed.

The chairperson of the meeting does not have to be the same person as the chairperson of the organisation (=the board). The chairperson and the board are responsible for the convening and preparations for the meeting. The board also prepares any motions for annual meetings and other matters to be dealt with. In addition, an agenda is also needed, which is usually governed by the organisation's statutes. The practical arrangements can be taken care of by the Secretariat.

During the meeting, the chairperson leads the meeting. When there is a vote or an election is held, the chairperson leads these and tells about the results. One of the most common tasks is to ensure that all speakers stick to the point and to limit the discussion if necessary. Their role is also to ensure that everyone is given an equal chance to express their opinion, regardless of whether they are talkative or quiet, leaders or young members. In addition, it is up to the chairperson to summarise the discussion and note the decision proposals. After the meeting, the chairperson and the board sign the minutes.

Questions to reflect on:

- What kind of meetings are held in your organisation? What is the purpose of these meetings?
- How does your team prepare for board meetings? Are there ways to develop the process to promote thorough preparations and well-informed decision making?
- How do you make sure online meetings encourage active participation?

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