

# ROLE OF SECRETARY

*Regardless of the role every meeting participant is responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the meetings content and the effectiveness of the group process. An efficient secretary is vital to assist that group process*

## WHO

### Key elements:

#### An organized person

- who can keep records
- who can record activities
- who can take action promptly

### Remember...

*More than 33% of time spent in meetings is unproductive.  
Only 64% of meetings achieve their intended outcomes*

*From a survey of 1000 American business leaders*

## HOW

- By being organized
- By having clear system
- By planning and maintaining systems and timetable

## WHO MAKES A GOOD SECRETARY?

- Ask
- Am I an organized person?
  - Am I reliable / punctual?
  - Am I able to keep records and retrieve these quickly?
  - Am I able to take accurate minutes of meetings ?
  - Am I able to respond to requests from the committee?
  - Am I able to cope with demands?
  - Am I able to cope with deadline?
  - Am I able to delegate and still maintain responsibilities?

## **WILL I HAVE TIME TO DEVOTE TO THIS JOB?**

Busy people often achieve the most but if you are already over committed do not take on another task as you may let people down.

## **WHAT ARE SOME OF THE KEY TASKS?**

General duties as set out by the group /committee.

- These may require you to clear and open mail.
- Record all incoming and outgoing correspondence.
- Keep comprehensive records
- Maintain membership lists
- Prepare funding applications in consultation with the committee and staff.
- Attend committee meetings.

## **INCOMING MAIL** -

All incoming mail must be recorded but keep the system simple e.g. date received, for whom and subject. It is a good idea to add a column stating action taken, e.g. passed to chairman, receipted and banked held till next meeting.

## **FILING SYSTEM** -

Set up, or familiarize yourself with the filing system. Keep it simple to enable quick access. Easy to follow explanatory notes are helpful for times when you are unavailable.

## **MEMBERSHIP LISTS**

If these are on a computerised database you may wish to co-opt someone with computer skills to update your mailing list regularly. Lists may be kept manually on file cards but whatever system is used confidentiality is important. An efficient organisation keeps accurate details.

## **PHONE CALLS** -

You may be the person who takes the calls. If this task is taking too much time, keep a log of all calls, and maybe you will be able to justify having someone help. Keep in mind today's technology e.g. "call diversion" or "call minder" may sound expensive but may prove to be a very efficient cost effective method of having incoming calls

answered. The charges for such services are often minimal compared with the increased efficiency.

## **PLANNING MEETINGS**

Sending out a notice of meetings, agenda and other relevant information. If possible, set regular meeting dates and times at the beginning of the year. Committee members should not, but often do require reminders of the meetings.

Prepare for the meetings, room, seating, paper, documents, previous minutes, correspondence etc.

Be ready to commence on time and avoid having to leave the meeting for forgotten items. Late comers will soon realize that they must be on time too!

## **MINUTES**

Take down minutes and rewrite later. Aim to complete these by the next day, to ensure you have an accurate record of the proceedings.

The chairperson will advise on format and how detailed the minutes need to be. (It is often wise to check with the members of the organisation if the minutes are clear.

Minutes are to record the decisions made at that meeting rather than individual contributions. Minutes must be kept on file and in a safe place as they are the official record.

Minutes can include a list of action points:

Action to be taken

By whom

By what date

which can then be easily followed up at the next meeting. This helps accountability – e.g. “Action - Price on new heaters required -Joe to obtain 3 prices by 4<sup>th</sup> May (next meeting).”

## **CORRESPONDENCE**

### **Incoming correspondence**

- Table correspondence if required by the group
- Decide who should see and action
- Act promptly
- File original
- File reply and action details
- Pass controversial matters on to the chairman and share the process of action.

### **Outgoing correspondence**

- Attend to it as soon as possible after the meeting
- File a copy of all correspondence
- Circulate a copy with the minutes if the matter is of importance
- Use a follow up file so that you are reminded if you have not received a reply and can ask for one.

**COMMITTEES** are often made up of a diverse groups, some may come with their own agenda and objectives. It is a good idea to use a code of conduct document to establish general expectations. This may be available from another committee group. An efficient secretary can, with planning, reduce meeting times and increase the productivity. So many good people stay away from meetings that are not well run.

## **POINTS TO REMEMBER**

- Open discussion is part of the rationale for the whole process of committees and meetings.
- Putting the lid on problems can be more explosive than dealing with them.
- Uninformed unstructured discussion is more likely to be destructive than informed discussion.
- A well thought out agenda can help the group to decision making. The secretary must be very clear whether an item needs a decision or is tabled as information.
- If a decision is expected are there factors to take into consideration such as recommendations of a sub-committee, staff member, independent reports or previous motions? If none of these exist is there any further information required before a decision can be reached?

## **FURTHER RESOURCES**

Chairing Meetings - John Milligan

Meetings made Easy - Malcolm Reid

Make Meetings Work - Malcolm Reid

How to run Committees and Meetings - Michael Locke

---

**If you would like a list of our other community resources, or to be put on our mailing list, contact us at:**



Phone (09) 486-4820

Fax (09) 486-4823



Visit North Shore Community and Social Services Inc.  
Mary Thomas Centre, 3 Gibbons Rd, Takapuna



Write P.O.Box 33 284, Takapuna, North Shore City



email [info@nscss.co.nz](mailto:info@nscss.co.nz)

© Copyright

While reproduction by non-profit charitable agencies is encouraged, this material is the copyright of the North Shore Community and Social Service Council Inc. It may not be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in whole or in part or by any means (electronic, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise) without prior written permission of the owner. Written permission will not be unduly withheld providing full acknowledgement of source is made.