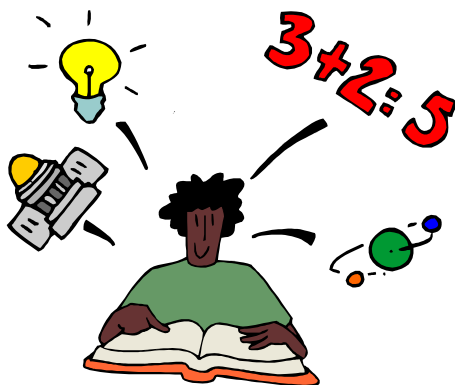


## **THE ROLE OF A CHAIRPERSON**



**Published by North Shore Community and Social Service Inc.,  
PO Box 33 284, Takapuna Auckland  
Phone/fax (09) 486 4820 email [admin@nscss.org.nz](mailto:admin@nscss.org.nz)**

**A Community Resource 2000**

**ISBN**

**0-9582044-7-0**

## CONTENTS

<b>The Role of the Chairperson</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The Chairperson's Responsibilities</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>A Simple Guide to Conducting Meetings</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Formal Meeting Procedure</b>	<b>6-10</b>
<b>Points of Explanation</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Challenging the Chairperson</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Diversity of Committee Members</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>How to Get the Most out of Meetings</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Appraising the Performance of Committees</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Team Building</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Things to Think About</b>	<b>14</b>

# THE ROLE OF THE CHAIRPERSON

## WHO IS THE CHAIRPERSON

The Chairman is a leader, who has a clear direction for the group, has vision, and can “take the committee along the pathway to success.” The primary role is to listen to the consumers of the service, maximise the skills of the committee, delegate the tasks according to their skills, and to ensure responsibility for the goals.

## DETERMINE “WHY ARE WE HERE?”

Meetings are to share information, make decisions allocate tasks, develop policies, strategies and plans. It is easy to assume you know what needs to be achieved, and fire ahead without the necessary consultation. Many chairman dominate rather than facilitate and the “I know best” philosophy alienates members.

- The Chairman must have a sound knowledge of the organisation, their goals and direction.
- The chairman must have an understanding of the rules/constitution, and be able to refer to these at any time during a meeting.
- The Chairman must have some understanding of the rules for running a meeting. Be aware of cultural needs of the committee and group.

Meetings are often a huge waste of time. Take a hard look at the number of meetings held, the meeting time, and the reason. A meeting must have a purpose and an outcome. Each meeting must be planned and the planning may take more time than the meeting, but will enhance the group image greatly.

- Have a clear picture of the desired outcome.
- Have a clear agenda that can be dealt with in the time allowed.
- Be prepared for other points of view, and lively debate.
- Be a good loser, you will not win each round, but that is democracy.
- Establish a good working relationship with your secretary, who will have all the papers, minutes, and other relevant items. You both need to be involved in the planning of the meeting, so every aspect is fully covered.

In formal meetings the chairperson is the key participant, setting the tone of the meeting and having a major effect on the outcome. Because this role is so vital, certain qualities are needed. Good humour, patience and tolerance are important. A chairperson must also know how to be both firm and fair, provide leadership, and guarantee that the meeting runs democratically.

A knowledge of the organisation is important, so that its rules, objectives and past decisions can be taken into account. It is also vital that a chairperson be impartial and able to listen to all points of view. All those who wish to speak should be encouraged to do so, but a chairperson may have to rule on the order of speakers.

It is important to create an atmosphere in which all relevant views can be expressed. If everyone is encouraged to participate there is less chance of misunderstandings

later when decisions are put into practice. Irrelevant contributions waste time and confuse issues and must be politely discouraged.

A good chairperson will be able to 'feel' when a meeting is ready to make a decision. At this point the chairperson should briefly review the discussion, present the options to the meeting, and make sure everyone is clear about issues before a decision is made.

## **THE CHAIRPERSON'S RESPONSIBILITIES**

Before the meeting starts, the chairperson must be thoroughly prepared. If you are going to chair a meeting, these are the things you are responsible for:

### **Before the meeting**

- Make sure you are clear about the purpose of the meeting; what do you hope to achieve?
- Make sure you have allowed enough time for all the topics to be dealt with.
- Allocate time so that important items get fullest discussion.
- Check that all those entitled to attend have a chance to do so.
- Do some groundwork on subjects you expect to be reconsidered.
- Think about what the conflicting points of view might be and how you might handle them.
- Check that the practical preparations have been carried out.
- Brush up on your meeting procedures; take copies of this book and your constitution and/or standing orders to the meeting.

### **During the meeting**

- Make sure the meeting has been properly called and that there is a 'quorum'
- Start on time; keep to time
- Outline the purpose(s)
- Encourage participation
- Control discussion
- safeguard the rights of members by ensuring proper observance of the rules
- Help the meeting to make decisions
- Make sure arrangements are made to translate decision into action
- Maintain a spirit of democracy and solidarity.

## **PREPARATIONS**

If a permanent record is needed, have a book for it.

For recording during a meeting, and to aid discussion, you need something like a whiteboard, or large sheets of newsprint fastened up with masking tape and written on in thick felt pen, so that everyone can see.

## **SETTING THE SCENE**

The room should be made as comfortable and welcoming as possible, seating as near to a circle as possible, no "top table" where power concentrates, everyone able to see the board/newsprint.

Everyone individually welcomed as they arrive.

## **IMMEDIATE ISSUES**

- Who will be the recorder? (The recorder should note in the book no more than: date, place and time of meeting, those present, the agenda, decisions made, who will carry out the decisions, and a space for noting at the next meeting what action was taken).
- Do members want to fix a time for ending? If so, agree on the time and appoint a timekeeper to remind the group at half-time and at 15 minutes before the end.

Identify the ground rules, discussion procedures and methods of decision-making if necessary.

## **ANNUAL MEETINGS**

These stand apart from regular meetings and their purpose is usually for:

### **Election of officers**

The meetings is run by those who held office during he year.

Newly elected officers take up their positions after the annual meeting. The chairperson should ensure the election procedures of the organisation are followed and the business of a annual meeting is as laid out in the agenda. It is the same as an ordinary meeting. The minutes read are those of the pervious annual meeting.

## **INFORMAL MEETINGS**

These may be held from time to time, as well as the regular meeting. Brainstorming or general discussion may be in an informal place, and be less serious. This is a good way to look into the future, decide where you are heading, and may involve the consumers of your service. As the regular chairperson, you may feel that to be more involved in the discussion, a facilitator should run the meeting, good planning for these meetings is equally important.

It is important to keep focused on the reason for the meeting, and make this known to those attending. This way you will be less likely to stray from the point. A lot of ideas are shared during and after the meeting, therefore it may be a good idea to have a follow up meeting soon after, when everyone has had time to formulate their thoughts.

## **A SIMPLE GUIDE TO CONDUCTING A MEETING**

- Declare the meeting open and welcome everyone
- Check there is quorum (refer to your rules)
- Make sure everyone has a copy of the agenda
- Ask for apologies and the secretary should note these and list attendees.
- Secretary reads minutes of last meeting, if these have been circulated prior to meeting
- With the Approval of the committee sign the minutes as true and correct record of that meeting
- Matters arising from the minutes. Discuss only those which do not appear on the agenda as specific topics
- Correspondence. Secretary reads relevant correspondence, and discussion and decisions can be made as you go. The file of mail should be available for the committee to peruse

- Financial reports. Call on the Treasurer to present the accounts, and to answer questions. Accounts to be “received”, and accounts for payments approved
- Other reports, to be read or tabled, discussed and approved
- Other business, these are items that are brought up for the first time, or a matter that has been previously discussed. If you consider that (a) there is insufficient time or (2) insufficient information, suggest that the item be placed on the agenda and that particular details become action points, for the next meeting.

As Chairperson, you have the control, and are expected to finish the meeting on time. It is your duty to close the meeting in an appropriate manner.

## **CLOSURE AND FAREWELLS**

However you do these, they are important.

## **FORMAL MEETING PROCEDURE**

### **RULES OF DEBATE AND PROCEDURE**

While formal meetings are usually considered in a similar way, most organisation have their own ‘standing orders’ These set out the way the group applies the general rules outlined here. Before setting out to chair a meeting you should be familiar with relevant standing orders as well as the procedures.

### **BEFORE YOU BEGIN**

There must be an agenda and a quorum. An agenda is a list of the matters which will be discussed, a quorum is the minimum number of members/people who must be present before your meeting can start. This number is set out in your constitution.

#### **Typically an agenda includes:**

- Apologies
- Minutes of last meeting
- Business arising from those minutes
- Correspondence
- Financial and other reports, and
- General business.

The agenda is normally prepared in advance, often by the secretary. At the beginning of the meeting the chairperson often presents the agenda to the meeting for approval and to give members a chance to make addition or alterations.

A quorum is the number of people who need to be present before the meeting can make valid decisions. The standing orders of your organisation will set out how many people are needed to form a quorum.

## **MOTIONS**

A motion is a formal proposal for consideration by a meeting.

It should be short and to the point.

Motions begin with the word ‘that’ and propose some change or action. The issue concerned should be stated and the change of action outlined, along with who is

proposing it. For example a motion might be “I move that the staffroom be painted next week and nominate the maintenance committee to purchase the paint and employ someone to do the job. The maintenance committee to oversee the work and report back to the next meeting.”

If one other person at the meeting considers the proposal is worth considering they will ‘second’ it. The matters outline in the motion and nothing else are then the subject of discussion.

This system allows the meeting to concentrate on one subject at a time, to draw out the knowledge and options of the people present, and makes speedy decision-making possible.

### **MOVE IT**

When someone proposes a ‘motion’ to the meeting they are said to begin ‘moving it.’ A person who wishes to put forward a proposal in this way must first get the chairperson’s attention.

In a small group it may be possible to do this, for example, by body language, raising a hand, or eye contact. But in many situations, including larger meetings, it is most effective to stand and say ‘Ms/Mr Chair.’ Once the chairperson’s attention is gained, the speaker waits for a signal, or ‘call to speak.’ If several people want to speak at once the chairperson decides the order they will speak in.

When signalled, or ‘called’ to speak, the person proposing the motion says “I move that . . . . . (the proposal).’ Generally the mover can then explain briefly why they are making this specific proposal. Discussion of a motion is called ‘speaking to’ it. The chairperson may judge whether it is necessary for a mover to speak to their motion.

### **IN OR OUT OF ORDER**

Sometimes a motion is challenged. When a member of the meeting argues that a proposal is ‘out of order,’ the chairperson must decide if the motion is acceptable or not. Generally speaking, if the motion is on a subject which is within the scope of the meeting, and does not conflict with the rules of the organisation, it is in order and should be accepted by the chairperson.

### **SECONDEES**

Before it can be discussed by the meeting, a motion must be ‘seconded.’ When a motion has been moved, another person may say ‘I second that.’ That means they agree with the motion and wish to see it considered. If no-one speaks up, the chairperson will ask if there is a seconder for the motion. A motion must be seconded before it can be discussed.

### **DISCUSSION**

The person who moves the motion is usually able to ‘speak to it’ first, and has the last say, or right of reply, before the motion is put to the vote.

In between these two presentations, the chairperson calls on members to put their views to the meeting. The seconder may speak first, or later in the discussion.

In formal meetings it is usual to allow one speech per person on any one motion.

If several speakers in a row argue the same side of a case, it is good practice for the chairperson to call for speakers who disagree. This can balance the debate, or if it is obvious that the meeting is in agreement on the issue, it can be settled quickly as further discussion would not alter the vote.

### **NOTICE OF MOTION**

When a matter needs time for consideration before it is discussed, the person proposing it may submit a 'notice of motion' asking for the proposal to be included on a future agenda. Standing orders may lay down which matters require notices of motion, or the chairperson may make a ruling after listening to the views of the meeting. Notices of motion should be given in writing, clearly showing the wording of the motion, and should have a special place on the agenda.

### **AMENDMENTS**

Sometimes the meeting will not accept a motion exactly as it was originally put forward, but will agree to a slightly altered one.

- An amendment is a proposal to change, add or take away some of the words of the original motion, it cannot radically alter the meaning or intention of the motion, and amendments which do that should be ruled 'out of order' by the chairperson. After an amendment has been proposed it may be discussed by the meeting.
- Then a vote should be taken.
- If the majority agrees with the amendment the chairperson says, 'I declare the amendment carried, The amendment now becomes the substantive motion.'
- This amended version then become the proposal under discussion.
- More than one amendment should not be discussed at once.
- If other amendments are proposed, the chairperson should take note and return to them when the first one has been voted on.

### **VOTING Who may vote?**

Generally each member present is entitled to one vote on each issue. Sometimes organisation have rules which allow a person more than one vote. Union affiliates may hold votes according to the total membership they represent. This is known as a 'card vote.' If rules allow it, absent members can ask someone to vote for them. This is a 'proxy vote.' Shareholders may have voting power according to the number of shares they own in a company.

### **PROCEDURES**

Before a vote is taken the chairperson should read out the motion or amendment concerned, to make sure those present understanding exactly what they are voting on.

Voting can be:

- by voice ('those in favour say aye, those against say no')
- by a show of hands
- by ballot

Vote by voice is often sufficient, but if the outcome is not clear, the chairperson may ask for a show of hands, first for, then against, and have them counted.

Secret ballot can be requested by a majority of those eligible to vote, or the chairperson may rule that such a ballot be held. Most standing orders lay down procedures to be followed in conducting a secret ballot. These usually involve the election or appointment of a returning officer to run the ballot, and may require that scrutineers are appointed to check the result.

Which ever method of voting is used the chairperson must always declare the result 'carried' or 'lost.' People who abstain from voting or who vote against the majority can ask to have their action recorded in the minutes.

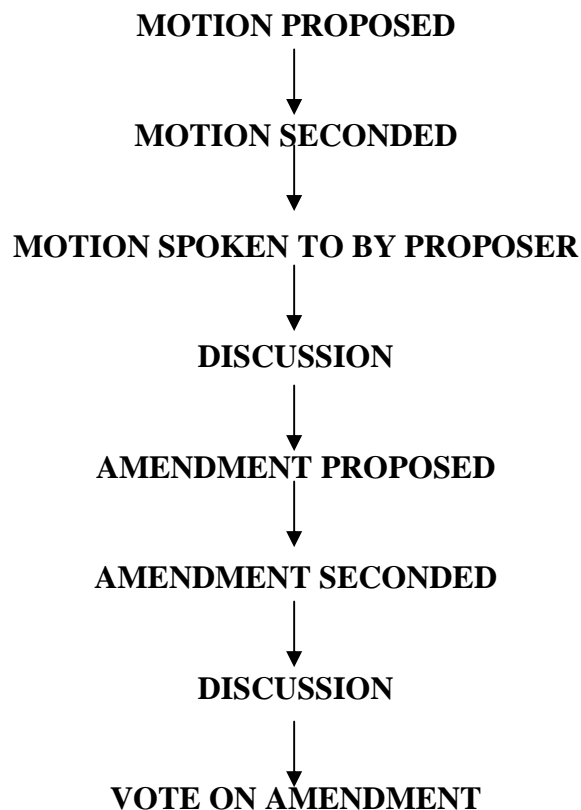
While the chairperson may vote, this is not recommended. The meeting is more likely to have confidence in a chairperson who does not take one side or the other. A casting vote may be allowed for by standing orders. This gives the chairperson an extra vote, but it need not be used, and should only be considered when numbers for and against are even (a tied vote).

### **POINTS OF ORDER**

If a member thinks the rules or standing orders are not being followed correctly, they may say "point of order Mr/Ms Chair."

- The chairperson must deal with points of order immediately.
- The speaker who has been interrupted is asked to sit down and the member who raised the point of order asked "What is the point of order."
- The person should explain briefly and the chairperson then must say whether there is a valid case or not, and rule accordingly. The chairperson's ruling should only be challenged in extreme circumstances.

Possible points of order may arise if there is no quorum, or if someone is speaking for a second time.



## **VOTE ON MOTION**

**If more than one amendment is proposed each should be dealt with in order. After the vote the Chairperson should announce whether the motion or amendment has been carried or lost.**

## **POINTS OF EXPLANATION**

Sometimes something comes up in discussion which needs explanation, but standing orders do not allow this, perhaps because the person involved has already spoken to the motion. In this case, they may raise a point of explanation.

To do this they wait until the speech is finished then signal to the chairperson “Ms/Mr Chair - a point of explanation.” The chairperson decides whether to allow it. A point of explanation must be just that, and not an excuse to speak again in the debate.

## **SPECIAL MOTIONS**

These all effectively limit discussion, and for this reason must be treated with care. The chairperson should make sure everybody present understands what is going on when special motions are used.

**The Closure motion:** “I move the motion be now put.”

- This can be moved by someone who considers the motion before the meeting has been discussed enough, and who has not taken part in the debate.
- If the chairperson judges the closure motion is reasonable, they can accept it.
- At this point the motion being discussed is frequently put to the vote. This is not strictly correct, as the closure motion should be put to vote after the chairperson accepts it. After that has been passed, the motion under discussion can be voted on.

**Motion to proceed:** “I move that we proceed to the next business” or “I move that this discussion be adjourned until next meeting,”

These motions are used when people at a meeting do not want to discuss a matter further or to vote on it. They can be moved by someone who has not taken part in the debate and if the motion is accepted and passed the chairperson moves on to the next item on the agenda.

**Motion to adjourn:** “I move that the meeting adjourn. . . .”

Motion to adjourn the whole meeting should include time and place for re-start of the meeting.

**Motion to suspend standing orders:** “I move that standing orders be suspended to allow.....” There must be a very good reason to suspend standing orders. Occasionally some matter may need to be considered which is not allowed by standing orders. This motion is used most often to allow a special guest to speak in the middle of business when this is the only time they can do so.

## **CHALLENGING THE CHAIRPERSON**

Respect for the authority of the chair is basic to orderly procedure. The rulings of the chairperson should only be challenged if they are grossly wrong and unfair. In order to maintain respect for the leadership of the chairperson and ensure democracy is maintained, the following procedure has been developed.

If a member thinks a chairperson has made a wrong ruling they stand and say “I challenge your ruling.”

Then the chairperson leaves the chair and the vice-chairperson, or some one chosen by the meeting, takes over. This person asks the challenger to give the reason for their challenge, and the chairperson to explain their ruling.

Without discussion, the motion “that the chairperson’s ruling be upheld” is then put to the meeting. If it is passed the chairperson resumes the chair and proceeds from the point of their ruling. If the motion is lost the chairperson resumes the chair and proceeds from the post before their ruling.

## **MEETINGS IN COMMITTEE**

For the purpose of discussing matters which are private and for which publicity is not desired, a meeting can go into committee. Someone should move “that the meeting go into committee for the purpose of discussing.....” If the motion is accepted, seconded and passed the chairperson says “I declare this meeting be in committee.”

The whole, or any portion, of a meeting can be held in committee. Once the ‘in committee’ deliberations are complete, the chairperson declare the meeting resumed. Discussion made “in committee” must be reported back to the meeting in the form of recommendations. These can then be either accepted or rejected.

Adapted from Effective Meetings a Chairperson’s Guide

## **DIVERSITY OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Committees are often made up of 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?

# HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF MEETINGS

Five suggestions for making meetings more efficient, and maybe even shorter.

## 1. Orient participants before the meeting.

New Committee members should be briefed on their roles and responsibilities, policy issues, and relevant projects before the meeting.

## 2. Come prepared

Get the agenda and concise written reports and background information out far enough ahead so people have time to read them. Everyone should then come prepared for discussion and decision making.

## 3. Have an agenda and stick to it.

Time the agenda to limit extraneous discussion. Separate action items for decision making. Discuss the most difficult items first. New items should be dealt with in general business.

## 4. Allow full and fair discussion of a topic, but stay focused.

Avoid oral reports if the same information is in the written report, or simply repeating points already made. Don't let individuals dominate the discussion.

## 5. Start and finish on time.

### RESULTS OFTEN DEPEND ON THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE INVOLVED:

- To solve a problem, fewer than five people is a good number.
- To identify a problem, keep to ten or less.
- When you need to review information 20 should be the maximum.
- For motivational or inspirational purposes, the more the merrier, provided the meeting is soundly controlled.
- If you have a large group, make your meeting short and snappy. A few people can work round the clock to solve a problem but large numbers get restless because they can't be involved to the same degree.
- Be prepared to start on time. When late comers realise that you will start promptly, they will either come punctually, or join a group that is less professional.
- Aim to finish on time, the committee have other things to do, too.
- Guide the committee through the discussions, listen carefully, allow everyone a chance to contribute, and avoid any one person overpowering.
- Sum up from time to time, clarify a point, and gauge when it is time to wrap up a debate, and get consensus. Liaise with the secretary to ensure that the wording of the minute is accurate and understandable.
- Where action is required, set the action points, "by whom, by when". Make sure the action point is understood and agreed upon.
- At the end of the meeting most should feel that they were glad they attended, and will co-operate, and be at the next meeting prepared for more.

Adapted from "Getting your Ideas Across" Geoffrey Moss

## APPRAISING THE PERFORMANCE OF COMMITTEES

Just as employees need to formally evaluate their work performance and receive feedback and recognition on their achievements and on possible areas for improvement, so do committee members.

An annual performance appraisal provides the opportunity for the committee to consider its own strengths and weaknesses in relation to its key tasks and specific objectives, define training needs and to set new objectives.

### **WHO DOES THE APPRAISAL?**

The responsibility for assuring that the appraisal happens rests with the Chairperson who may choose to facilitate the appraisal themselves or may wish to involve the branch manager or other committee members as the whole appraisal is seen as a team effort.

The committee may wish to involve some key staff or members of an advisory group if you have one.

### **THE APPRAISAL PROCESS**

A set date is chosen for the annual appraisal. All committee members and those who have been invited to participate in the appraisal are asked to prepare for the appraisal meeting in their own time reflecting on the key tasks of the committee and on any objectives that the committee had set for the year.

At the appraisal meeting committee members would discuss:

- effective actions that have taken place of the past 12 months
- any concerns
- any changes required.

**REMEMBER THE APPRAISAL IS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF THE  
COMMITTEE NOT ON THE PERFORMANCE OF INDIVIDUAL  
COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Thank the committee for attending, advise them the date and time of the next meeting and declare the meeting closed.

### **TEAM BUILDING**

An important aspect of a Chairpersons role is team building and therefore he/she needs to be aware of both *task* and *process*. Every group has a reason for being together, sometimes it is as straight forward as its members enjoying themselves! Whatever it is, the group's reason for being together is called the *task*.

A successful group needs not only to work towards its long-term aims, but also to take care of the feelings and relationships between individual members. In other words, both the task and the process need attention.

We think of the task as the head work, and the process as the heart work. Both will suffer if they are split from one another. Experience shows that groups often neglect their process, especially if their task is complicated and demanding. An important part of Chairmanship or facilitation, in any sort of group, is getting members to work on the process as well as the task and maintaining a balance.

Some useful questions to keep constantly in mind about the group process are:

- When personal feelings affect the way the group works together, are we prepared to recognise and deal openly with them?
- Are we prepared to express disagreements and conflict openly, so they can be used constructively?
- Do we have the skills we need to do these things and if, not, do we know where to find out about them?
- How much support and encouragement do we give to one another in the group?

## **THINGS TO THINK ABOUT**

- Being the leader doesn't make you one! Effective leaders are task specialists and people specialists. They can fit the people to the task. A good leader chooses not to use power, but instead uses strategies instead to build a team.
- Both process and content are equally important and must be managed carefully. The ideal meeting is one that balances process with content.
- Have fun!! Encourage enjoyment and laughter.
- Be a facilitator not a dominator.
- Don't interpret silence as agreement - check it out.
- The most articulate speaker does not always have all the answers.
- It is important not to make heavy weather of meeting framework.

## **FURTHER RESOURCES**

Chairing Meetings - John Milligan

How to run committees and Meetings - Michael Locke

Working in Groups - Community Resource - NSCSCC

Guide for Committees - Community Resource - NSCSCC

The Role of the Secretary – Community Resources - NSCSCC

Evaluating your organization – Community Resources - NSCSCC