

# A Guide to Taking Co-op Minutes

## Why Take Minutes?

Minutes are the permanent official written record of the decisions made by a body of people who met on a certain date for a specific purpose.

It is an important document that is relied upon to see the exact wording of any decision that was taken. Without official minutes, memory would provide the only guide to enforcement of a decision. It is fair to say that each person's memory and interpretation of an event can be different, coloured by a variety of things such as political view, personal perspective, and position of power. Once the wording of a decision is confirmed, the organization can proceed with its interpretation and implementation or perhaps its reconsideration.

A reading of the minutes will verify whether all decisions were made with proper authority and due process. This is very important, as even a seemingly insignificant decision can affect the dignity or quality of life of someone who is subject to the enforcement of that decision.

## Draft vs. Official Minutes

One's job as minute taker is to make a clear record of what decisions took place at a meeting. The recorder's version of the minutes is considered a draft. It only becomes the official record when the body that met "approves" them. In other words, the people whose decisions were recorded have read the draft minutes, and they have agreed that the minutes accurately reflect what took place at that meeting. This is done through a motion to approve the minutes. The date of the meeting for which the minutes were taken should be stated in the motion.

## Typed or Handwritten

Minutes can be typed on a laptop computer or written on a note pad. When using an electronic method, it can save time if minutes are typed from a template that is designed to include the standard items that will be needed. Handwritten notes can be typed, or if legible and complete, can form the final version of the draft minutes.

In all cases, the draft minutes should be prepared as soon as possible after the meeting to ensure accuracy, preferably the following day.

## Formatting

Minutes should be formatted in a way that allows anyone in the future to find the motion they're looking for. Consistent use of formatting tools (indents, **bold** or *italicized* font, font size, etc.) provides a visual structure against which the eye can more easily search out content. Decide on a format and stick to it. Improvements to formatting can be made gradually over time, but should remain basically consistent.

## **Tone and Wording**

The basic tone of minutes should be neutral, stating only important discussion points raised, and clearly documenting the resolution under consideration. Unless specifically requested, the use of names when summarizing discussion points should generally be avoided. There are several standard phrases that can be used:

- “It was suggested that ...”
- “A director stated that ...”
- “Discussion included the following points: ...”

Not all decisions are made in the form of a formal voted-upon motion. It must be made clear in the minutes when a decision is made without a motion. A standard phrase is:

- “It was agreed to ...”

## **Following the Agenda**

Start with a numbered agenda. If an agenda wasn't prepared ahead of time, the first order of business after calling to order is to set the agenda. Ensure that the items on the agenda that is approved by the meeting are numbered. Every note in the minutes should refer to a numbered agenda item. A feature of well-written minutes is that they provide a clear path to follow when anyone looks through minutes in future. A decision can very easily be missed if it is hard to find.

Although many meetings actually follow the order set out in the agenda, because meetings are dynamic human interactions, the order is often interrupted. This becomes a challenge for the recorder. Each time the meeting returns to an item that was begun earlier in the meeting, the original agenda item title and number must be stated.

## **The Minutes**

Always include these items at the top of the official minutes, whether they are hand written or typed:

- Page numbering. A complete way of numbering pages is to state “page 1 of X”, where “X” indicates the total number of pages that make up the minutes. This confirms to anyone in future whether any additional pages were added later or whether any pages are missing.
- The name of the co-op.
- The name of the co-op group that met (committee/board), i.e. “Maintenance Committee”.
- The date of the meeting. To avoid confusion, consider stating the month in words instead of numbers. Is 5/9/13 May 9, 2013 or is it September 5, 2013? Some people put the month first, while others put it in the middle.

- The above items can be contained in the Header and Footer so they appear automatically on each page. Hand-written minutes should at least state “page X of X”, the name of the co-op group and the date of the meeting at the top of each page.
- PRESENT: List all members of the group who were in attendance, by their first and last names. It might seem obvious who Bob, Mike or Nancy is, but keep in mind that minutes are a permanent record of business decisions. When someone reads the minutes in five years it must be clear who made those decisions.
- REGRETS: List all members of the group by their first and last names who sent notice they would be unable to attend.
- ABSENT: List all members of the group by their first and last names who did not attend the meeting, and who did not send their “regrets”.
- OTHERS PRESENT: List all those who were not members of the group, but were in attendance.
- Include “(recording)” or “(minutes)” after the name of the minute taker.
- NOTE: Before the call to order, note any meeting that was stated as scheduled in the previous minutes but did not take place. This provides continuity for anyone reading through the minutes in future, and clarifies that there isn’t a missing set of minutes.
- The first item on the agenda should be a call to order. Record the name of the chair and state the time they called the meeting to order.
- Follow the guidelines above for the body of the meeting. If you are uncertain what was said, you don’t understand an issue enough to record its discussion accurately, or if you need more time, direct a comment to the chair. The chair should be supportive of the role and needs of the recorder, to ensure proper minutes are taken.
- A group often finds it difficult to compose a grammatically correct motion during a meeting. If you find the wording of a motion awkward, read it to the meeting and ensure that the intent is clear. Ask to be authorized to fix the grammar later in the draft minutes. When the minutes are approved, the group will decide if the motion accurately reflects what was intended.
- Format all motions in the same way, perhaps in **bold**. Include the name of the “mover” and “second” of the motion, and the result of the vote (CARRIED, FAILED, DEFERRED, WITHDRAWN, etc.). Here are two examples of formatting:

<b>Motion</b>	<b>That somebody is hired to do something at a cost not to exceed \$XXX.</b>	
	name/name	CARRIED
		1 opposed
		1 abstention

M/S/C	name/name
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**That somebody is hired to do something at a cost not to exceed \$XXX.**

You can develop your own format, but make sure it is easy to read. Keep in mind that the minutes belong to the group. See how motions were formatted in previous minutes and ask the group if they have a preference. Consistency over the long term is best.

- During the meeting, note the first and last names of anyone who joins or leaves the meeting, noting the time. This can be done in *italics* tight to the left margin, as can any other notes on the running of the meeting.
- The last item on the agenda is meeting termination. Note the time the meeting ended.

**Approval of the Minutes**

As noted above, the minutes belong to the group. The group can amend the minutes by adding, correcting or deleting wording.

Board minutes should include signature lines for two directors at the end, preceded by a statement of the date of the meeting that approved the minutes, and whether there were amendments made. For example:

These minutes were approved on November 2, 2013 with/~~without~~ amendment.

Director's Signature

Director's Signature

**Minutes Binder**

To organize the minutes binder for ease of use, arrange the information for each meeting in logical order: Agenda, Minutes (not the minutes of the previous meeting that were considered for approval – they belong with their own agenda), and a copy of all attachments (the meeting package that was distributed to meeting participants in advance of the meeting, and all submissions made during the meeting). Attachments should be ordered in the same way as the agenda item to which they refer.