

MINUTES & RECORD KEEPING

Being a secretary for your organization is not a job to take lightly. This responsibility should not be assigned / delegated to just anyone. Think about these responsibilities when you are considering who will best fulfill this role:

- Is this person well organized and reliable; does s/he complete her/his tasks in a timely way?
- Is this person a good listener; is s/he able to be objective and hear both sides of an issue?
- Is this person on top of what is going on; is s/he able to weed out the trivial information and record the key facts for the record?

As you can see, the role of a secretary is more than “just taking minutes.” The secretary is responsible for complete and objective record keeping. They are, in effect, the historian for your organization. What s/he records will be referred to by current members as a reminder of what needs follow-up and what actions were taken. It will also be kept for future members to gain an understanding of where the organization has been and why. Many organizations make it the secretary’s responsibility to notify the members about upcoming meetings – time, date, location – as well as any important items to be discussed.

It is critical that the secretary attend all meetings. If your organization has a structure that includes committees – be they ad hoc or standing – there should be someone present to accurately record what transpired. It is not necessary to take down everything unless someone requests that their remarks be entered for the record. Motions and resolutions **do** need to be taken verbatim and should be read back during the meeting to make sure they have been accurately recorded.

It is the secretary’s responsibility to signal the chairperson and ask questions regarding the subject being discussed if they become lost or unsure. A secretary should not wait until the meeting has been adjourned to get clarification; individuals can lose their perspective, issues can become less important, and one’s memory can alter what actually occurred.

Immediately after the meeting, the secretary must go over his/her notes while everything is still fresh in her/his mind. S/he should check their notes for the following information:

- Type of meeting (executive, committee, etc.)
- Date, Time, and Place
- List of attendees and those absent
- Time of *Call to Order*
- Approval and/or amendments to previous meeting minutes
- Record of reports from standing and special committees
- General matters
- Record of proposals, resolutions, motions, seconding and final disposition, and a summary of the discussion as well as a record of the vote
- Time of adjournment

These minutes should be sent out to all members within 3 or 4 days of the meeting. This allows members time to read the minutes for accuracy before the next meeting and while the previous meeting is still fresh in their minds.

Some helpful hints on format and final preparations are as follows:

- Use good quality paper of standard size
- If you plan on typing on both sides of the paper, be sure it is heavy and durable; otherwise the type will show through.
- Use a standard format:
 - Capitalize and center the heading
 - List names of those in attendance and those absent
 - Double space between paragraphs and between each item in order of business
 - If you use captions, put them in the margins in capitals
 - When recording sums of money, write them first in words and then put the figures in parentheses ().
 - Number each page at the bottom / center.

TAKING MINUTES

It is often helpful for the secretary to prepare his/herself before each meeting. S/he should be sure to read the minutes of previous meetings, paying attention to and reviewing the agenda and any attached documents. If the organization has agreed upon a standard format for minutes, s/he can use a standardized form and fill in preliminary rough draft information before the meeting so that s/he is able to fill in discussions, etc. as they occur.

If the secretary is unable to attend a meeting, a substitute with the desired qualifications and characteristics (as defined earlier) needs to be appointed. If a substitute is taking minutes, the following hints will make the job easier:

- Identify yourself before speaking
- Speak slowly
- Present motions in writing to the secretary (this is a good practice even when the regular secretary is present)
- Raise hands high during vote counting
- Summarize discussions

There are several ways to take minutes during a meeting and each organization needs to choose the most appropriate method for them. Minutes can be recorded in writing or on tape. If you choose to tape the minutes, you can tape the entire proceedings word-for-word and listen to them later, pulling out the pertinent information. Taping an entire meeting is an extreme form of taking minutes; it is akin to sitting through the same meeting twice.

A second, more practical option is to record a summary of debates, agreements and disagreements with a sufficient explanation of the character of each.

It is often helpful for minute taking and for those attending the meeting if either the chair or the secretary summarizes decisions that are reached. The summarizer should be most careful in clarifying those points of greatest controversy.

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