

Agenda Guide (Working Guide)

A practical guide for community and voluntary groups

1. What is an agenda?

An agenda is a simple plan for a meeting. It sets out what will be discussed, in what order, and helps keep the meeting focused and on track.

A good agenda makes it clear what the meeting is about, what needs to be decided, and what people should prepare for. It also helps ensure meetings lead to clear decisions and actions, which are then recorded in the minutes.

2. Why an agenda matters

Having a clear agenda keeps meetings structured and focused. It helps avoid unnecessary discussion, ensures important items are not missed, and supports clear decision-making.

For groups and committees, it also creates a clear link between meetings, actions, and outcomes.

3. How to prepare an agenda

An agenda is usually prepared by the facilitator, chair, or coordinator, often with input from others. Agenda items may come from members, representatives, or previous meetings, but are usually finalised by the facilitator or coordinator.

Start by reviewing the previous minutes, any outstanding actions, and key items that need discussion or decisions.

Try to keep the agenda realistic. It is better to cover fewer items well than too many items poorly. Priority should always be given to items that require decisions or actions.

4. What to include

A typical agenda includes the key elements needed to run a structured meeting. This usually begins with meeting details, followed by confirmation of previous minutes and matters arising.

It then moves into the main agenda items, which should focus on discussion and decision points. Time should be used carefully, allowing more space for important items and keeping updates brief.

The agenda should close with any other business and the date of the next meeting.

5. Writing agenda items

Agenda items should be clear and specific, so people understand what is expected.

If an item requires a decision, this should be clear in how it is written. Where helpful, you can also indicate whether an item is for information, discussion, or decision. This helps manage expectations and keeps the meeting focused.

For example, “Community Event” is too vague, while “Decision on Summer Community Event Date” makes the purpose clear.

6. Good practice

Keep the agenda clear and easy to read. Use plain English and avoid unnecessary detail.

Share the agenda in advance so people have time to prepare. For most groups, this should be at least a few days before the meeting. If documents are needed, they should be shared alongside the agenda.

7. During the meeting

The agenda should guide the meeting rather than control it. It helps keep things on track, while still allowing some flexibility where needed.

If new items are raised, they can be taken under “Any Other Business” or scheduled for a future meeting.

8. Final note

A clear agenda sets the tone for a focused and productive meeting. It supports respectful discussion, helps ensure everyone has a chance to contribute, and makes it easier to capture clear decisions and actions in the minutes.