

MINUTES

Minutes serve as the group memory. The most complicated and controversial items are especially important to have clear minutes on. Later on people are likely to have different recollections and it's going to be the written word that will stand as the official agreement.

Essential minimum:

- Date of meeting
- Decisions reached

The following are also important:

- Who was present
- For each item discussed:
 - Information questions asked and what the answers were
 - Main points of discussion, range of opinion, including:
 - Concerns raised, and whether each concern was resolved
 - New ideas
 - "Sense of the meeting"
 - Outcome of that item (tabled until next meeting, sent to committee, etc.)
- If a decision was reached, what the reasons and intentions for that decision were
- Name and reason of anyone standing aside
- Next steps, including any Tasks assigned and if so to who and if there is a deadline for completion

Verbatim minutes (who said what) are generally not as useful as an effective summary. Verbatim minutes place undue attention on the particular personalities involved, whereas consensus process trusts that any concerns coming up are valid concerns for the group and it doesn't matter much who they come from. Also verbatim minutes take too long to read to find what you need.

If there is a proposal, and *especially* if there is a consensus decision, that needs to be stated clearly and explicitly. During the meeting, if the group is nearing consensus, the facilitator should state the sense of the meeting and then have the notetaker read out the proposed minute, because it's the minute that will actually serve as the record of what was agreed to.

It's helpful for groups to have clear guidelines to address:

1. How quickly will minutes be publicly available?
2. What should a person do if they think a set of minutes needs to be revised?
3. Which committees (if any) are expected to take minutes and if so how are those posted and stored?

Storage & Retrieval

You need to be able to access the minutes in order for them to be useful. That means:

1. Storage is in a central location that everyone has access to (either physically or via a website).
2. The minutes need to be organized by Topic and not just by Date.

Many groups create an Agreements Book or Decision Log that calls out all the decisions from the minutes into a separate document organized by topic to fulfill these needs.