

Getting involved: a guide to common meeting terms

Please note: Not all of these terms may apply to your committee

Terms of reference: a document that outlines the purpose, powers, membership composition, duties and responsibilities of the committee. It can only be amended by the establishing organisation.

Co-opted member: Co-opted members are usually members additional to a committee. They are not listed as a required member in the terms of reference but may be appointed for a special reason (e.g. professional skill or experience). They have the same rights and responsibilities as other members.

Ex officio members: Members who are appointed to the committee because of the position they hold within the organisation. In this case, the committee position is awarded to the "position" (e.g. The CEO, The Community Engagement Worker) and not to the individual. If the individual leaves that position, the new holder of that position will take up ex officio membership of the committee. There will be reference to this, where it applies, within the Committee's Terms of Reference.

Quorum: Quorum is the minimum number of members of a committee necessary to conduct the business of that group. The quorum is usually specified in the Terms of Reference of the committee. Generally if a quorum is not met, those present can meet to discuss matters but cannot conduct any formal business on behalf of the committee – i.e. this does not count as a formal committee meeting.

Proxy: A person authorized to act on behalf of a committee member where that member is not able to attend the meeting. The processes for appointing a proxy (if applicable) will be set out in the committee's Terms of Reference.

In camera: This is a decision made by the committee to deal with some matters privately. Non- members are invited to leave the meeting and no record of the discussion is made. The Chair may wish to have a record of the discussion in camera however it will not be published outside the immediate committee.

Adjournment: Postponing or breaking off a meeting to another time or place.

Motion: A motion is a proposed decision to do or not to do something before it can be adopted (that is, passed or carried) by the meeting.

Procedural motion: Deals with the conduct of the meeting itself, e.g. 'that the meeting be adjourned', 'that Item 5 be discussed after item 12'.

Notice of motion: At the end of the meeting, members may give notice of their intention to raise certain agenda items at the next meeting. This enables the other members to familiarise themselves with the issues involved in the meantime, and it ensures inclusion of the motions in the agenda of the next meeting.

Amendment: A change or proposed revision to the terms of a motion. Words can sometimes be added, removed or replaced to improve the motion without contradicting it.

Resolution: Is the decision made by the committee or outcome of a motion debated at the meeting.

Circular resolution: Where it is not possible for a committee to meet and the majority of members agree, a committee may consider a resolution by either electronic or certified documentation. This will involve sending copies of the motion and any supporting documentation to all eligible members together with instructions on how to respond and the length of time given to respond.

If a majority of the members eligible to vote indicate that they agree with the resolution, then a resolution in those terms must be taken to have been passed at a meeting of the committee held on the day on which the last of the members making up the majority indicated their written response.

Procedural matters: These are matters included on the agenda that deal with the running of the meeting itself, e.g. apologies, confirmation of previous minutes.

Tabled: A paper that is tabled is one that is presented in hard copy at the meeting.

Standing orders or rules of order and debate: are the permanent rules for the regulation of the business and proceedings at the committee/board meetings within an organisation.

Special/extra-ordinary: Is a meeting held to discuss a specific topic(s) outside the normal meeting schedule.

Point of order: Is taken when a person officially draws the attention of the chairperson to a breach in rules or irregular proceedings of a meeting. This may be one involving facts (e.g. that a quorum is not present), or one involving opinions (e.g. that a speaker's remarks are not relevant to the subject of debate), or a mixture (e.g. that a motion is outside the scope of the agenda). A point of order is not raised because you disagree with or do not like what is being said.