

Chapter 18

Just a Minutes

In This Chapter

- ◆ What the minutes should include
- ◆ What the minutes shouldn't include
- ◆ Making minutes easier to prepare
- ◆ Reviewing and approving the minutes

People make preparing *minutes* out to be a lot worse than it really is. They often think of the minutes as a daunting document to create because they believe that they must note everything everyone said at the meeting. Since it's hard to keep track of everything, they frequently don't keep track of *anything*. But minutes aren't that bad. They are simply the written record of the proceedings of a deliberative assembly. They serve to record the actions taken at a meeting, not what was *said* at that meeting.

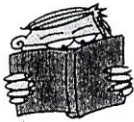
Minutes serve as the institutional memory for the organization. Because you have them to refer back to, they prevent a group from doing the same thing over and over.

In addition, minutes serve as a record of what was decided at the meeting. If the organization gets involved in a lawsuit, the minutes are one of the first documents that all parties will request. And when ruling, a judge or jury will give much more weight to the official minutes of the meeting than to what any particular individual recalls happening.

What to Put in the Minutes (and What to Leave Out)

Robert's recommends that minutes contain the following items:

- ◆ Kind of meeting (regular, special, and so on).
- ◆ Name of the organization.



Robert's Says

Minutes are the written record of the proceedings of a deliberative assembly. They are a record of what was done at the meeting, not what was said at the meeting.



Parliamentary Pearls

Although it's not necessary to include the full report of the treasurer in the text of the minutes, many groups find it helpful to include the previous balance, income totals, disbursement totals, and current balance in the minutes.

- ◆ Date, time, and place of the meeting.
- ◆ Names of the presiding officer and secretary, or in their absence, the names of their substitutes.
- ◆ The approximate number of members present (optional).
- ◆ The establishment of a quorum (optional).
- ◆ Record of the action taken on the minutes of the previous meeting.
- ◆ The exact wording of each main motion as it was voted on, and whether it passed or failed, along with the name of the maker. In addition, if the vote was counted, the count should be included, as well as the tellers' reports, if any; in roll call votes, the record of each person's vote is included.
- ◆ Any notice given at the meeting. Previous notice is sometimes required, such as with amendments to the bylaws; if any such notice was given at the meeting, it should be included in the minutes.

- ◆ Points of order and appeals.
- ◆ For committee reports, the name of the committee, and the reporting member. If the committee provides a printed report, attach it to the minutes and note that it is attached.
- ◆ The hour of adjournment.

Robert's is equally clear about what should *not* be included in the minutes. The following should not be included:

- ◆ The opinion or interpretation of the secretary.
- ◆ Judgmental phrases such as "heated debate" or "valuable comment".



- ◆ Discussion. Minutes are a record of what was *done* at the meeting, not what was *said* at the meeting.
- ◆ Motions that were withdrawn.
- ◆ Name of person who seconded a motion.
- ◆ Flowery language.
- ◆ Reports in detail.
- ◆ Transcripts of the meeting. While some groups choose to have a transcript of the meeting, it should never substitute as the minutes of the meeting.

Getting the Minutes Approved

The minutes are made official only after they are approved, which usually takes place at the next meeting.

If your organization frequently makes changes to the minutes, you might want to send out the initial, unapproved set with the word “draft” clearly printed on them. Then, when the minutes have been changed and approved, the official minutes can be sent out.

If your organization seldom has changes to the minutes, two sets, one draft and one approved, will probably be unnecessary.

Sign 'em

After the minutes have been corrected and approved by the membership, they should be signed by the secretary (the president's signature isn't required). The word “approved” and the date of the approval should also be included.



Gavel Gaffs

Although including the words “Respectfully submitted” right before the secretary's signature used to be common practice, it is considered outdated to do so today. Instead, simply sign your name.

Book 'em

The official copy of the minutes are the property of the organization. They should be entered in the *minutes book* and kept by the secretary if the organization doesn't have a headquarters office. If there is an office, the official copy of the minutes should be kept there.



Robert's Says

The minutes book is usually a three ring binder, that contains a complete copy of all of the minutes.



The official copy of the minutes should have attached to it the original signed copies of each of the following:

- ◆ Committee reports
- ◆ Officers' reports
- ◆ Written motions
- ◆ Tellers' reports
- ◆ Correspondence

If the secretary distributes copies of the minutes to the members, it isn't necessary to include all of the attachments with them. Instead, you can include a brief summary of the attachments or at least a reference to them. Members can get a copy of them from the secretary if they wish to review them.



Parliamentary Pearls

Just because the minutes are an official document doesn't mean that they have to be hard to read. Some simple formatting can make the minutes easier to read. Here are a few suggestions:

- ◆ Set off each section with a boldfaced heading
- ◆ After each motion, bold the words that indicate if it passed or failed
- ◆ Turn on the line numbering feature so that each line of the minutes is numbered.

Make a Minutes Template

In Chapter 15, I suggested creating a template for the agenda. Creating and using a template for the minutes also saves a tremendous amount of time. The following document is a sample of a minutes template.



Sample Minutes Template

MINUTES of [Organization name]

Meeting date: _____

Call to order: A _____ [kind of meeting] meeting of the _____ [organization name], was held in _____ [place, city, state] on _____ [date], 20____. The meeting convened at _____ [time], President _____ [name] presiding, and _____ [name], secretary.

[Some small organizations choose to list attendees. This works well for boards of directors.]

Members in attendance: [optional item]

Members not in attendance: [optional item]

Approval of minutes: Motion was made by [name], and seconded to approve the minutes of the _____ [date] meeting. **Motion carried.**

Officers' reports:

President

Vice president

Secretary

Treasurer

Board and committee reports:

Unfinished business:

[Subject title]

Motion: Moved by [name] that [state motion].

Motion carried. Motion failed. [leave only one of these]

New business:

[Subject title]

Motion: Moved by [name] that [state motion].

Motion carried. Motion failed. [leave only one of these]

Announcements:

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at _____ [time].

Secretary

Date of approval

[Organization Name]

Skeletal Minutes

Skeletal minutes are minutes prepared in advance of a meeting or convention. They include everything that will be occurring, in the order it will occur, based on the agenda and the script for the meeting. The person in charge of the minutes can fill in the details during the meeting. Skeletal minutes can be used at any type of meeting, but they are probably of greatest assistance at conventions, when a lot of issues will be covered.

Minutes Approval Committee

When you don't meet very often, it might be difficult to recall what happened at the previous meeting, much less what order it was done in. Some of us have trouble remembering what we had for lunch yesterday, much less how the wording ended up on that controversial motion at the annual meeting last year!



Gavel Gaffs

When there is a minutes approval committee, the minutes don't need to be approved by the membership at the next meeting, because they have already been approved by the minutes approval committee. The minutes approved by the committee are the official minutes of the meeting.

When there is going to be at least a few months between meetings, it's probably best for the organization to have a minutes approval committee.

Essentially, this is a small group of members who work with the secretary to create an acceptable set of minutes immediately after the meeting. If office equipment is available, they can enter the minutes into a computer, print them out, and make photocopies so that the final copy can be proofed, agreed upon, and signed before the minutes approval committee members go home.

Samples Please!

Since skeletal minutes may be a whole new concept to you, I am including some samples that might be helpful. The first sample is the first few paragraphs of skeletal minutes of the third meeting of a convention. The second is the first few paragraphs of the minutes for that meeting. The third is the sample set of minutes for an organization that meets monthly.



Sample Skeletal Minutes

The third meeting of the Seventeenth Annual Session of the American Association of Fun Loving People was convened on August 9, 20XX, at _____ A.M. President Joyful presided and Harry Happy, secretary, was present.

The report of the Credentials Committee was presented by Geri Glad, Chairman.

Geri Glad submitted the list of delegates and alternates who had registered up until _____ A.M. The number of delegates registered was _____. On behalf of the Credentials Committee, Geri Glad moved that the revised roll of delegates submitted be the official roll of the voting members of the delegate body. **The motion PASSED or FAILED** [circle one]

or

Geri Glad reported there were no changes since the last report of the Credentials Committee and the voting strength remained at _____.

President Joyful declared a quorum present.

Sample Minutes Prepared from Skeletal Minutes

The third meeting of the Seventeenth Annual Session of the American Association of Fun Loving People was convened on August 9, 20XX, at 10:05 A.M. President Joyful presided and Harry Happy, secretary, was present.

The report of the Credentials Committee was presented by Geri Glad, Chairman. Geri Glad reported there were no changes since the last report of the Credentials Committee and the voting strength remained at 555.

President Joyful declared a quorum present.

Sample Minutes of Organization That Meets Monthly

Minutes of the Association of Fun Loving People

Ain't-It-Fun Chapter

Meeting Date: April 1, 20XX

Call to Order: A regular meeting of the American Association of Fun Loving People Ain't-It-Fun Chapter, was held at the Fun-Fun-Fun Hotel in Ain't-It-Fun, North

continues



continued

Dakota, on April 1, 20XX. The meeting called to order at 6:00 P.M., by President Sally Never-Sad, and Mary Merry, secretary, was present. President Never-Sad declared a quorum present.

Approval of Minutes: Motion was made by John Jolly to approve the minutes of the March 2, 20XX, meeting. **Motion carried.**

Officers' Reports:

Reports were given by the president and the treasurer.

The treasurer reported the balance on hand at the beginning of the reporting period as \$100, receipts of \$25 from dues, current disbursements of \$25 and a balance on hand of \$100. The report was filed.

Committee Reports:

Finance Committee Chairman Sam Smiley reported on the motion to purchase a computer that was referred to the finance committee at the last meeting. The committee recommended that the members approve the motion with the amendment "not to exceed \$3,000." After discussion and further amendment the following motion was voted on: "We purchase a PC compatible computer at a price not to exceed \$3,000."

Motion carried.

Program Committee Chairman Gail Glee reported the plans for the program for the remainder of the calendar year.

Unfinished Business:

Paint Headquarters Building

Motion postponed from last month's meeting: "I move that we paint the headquarters building green." After discussion and amendment the following motion was voted on: "I move that we paint the headquarters building white." **Motion carried.**

New Business:

August Fundraiser

Motion: Moved by John Grin that "we sponsor a fundraiser in August. The details are to be worked out by a committee of three appointed by the president." **Motion carried.**

President Never-Sad appointed the following members to the August Fundraiser Committee: Mike Money, Cathy Cash, and Charlie Currency.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 8:45 P.M.

Secretary

Date of Approval

American Association of Fun Loving People

Ain't-It-Fun Chapter

The Least You Need to Know

- ◆ The minutes should be a record of the actions taken by the group, not a record of what was said at the meeting.
- ◆ If your organization makes frequent changes to the minutes, create an unofficial version marked “draft” to send out to members for them to review.
- ◆ Once minutes are accepted by the membership, they become the official record of the meeting.
- ◆ Organizations that meet infrequently should consider using a minutes approval committee, which prepares and approves the minutes immediately after the meeting.



