

A TOOLBOX FOR LEADERS

At the Beginning of a New School Year

The leader plays an important role in creating a climate of trust and respect where the views of all members are listened to and understood. This climate provides a strong foundation for working together.

- Have an informal 'welcome aboard' meeting for all new members and explain school partnership councils and how meetings and committees will function.
- Explain the role of school partnerships.
- Discuss the importance of school partnerships: building relationships to assist in decision making at the school level.
- Provide an orientation session where new members
 - receive a copy of *School Partnerships: A Guide for Parents, Schools, and Community*
 - review the key points in the Guide
 - share their experiences
 - engage in a mentorship program
 - participate in an informal discussion where experienced council members share experiences and discuss the benefits of active involvement on the partnership council in supporting positive school and community change
- Make sure that the Council is representative of the community—invite members of minority groups to participate.

Components of Effective Team Building

Team Mandate

Clarifying the school partnership council's mandate before visioning or planning begins is an important first step. To be effective, members need to be clear about what decisions, if any, the council can make on its own and when it will be preparing recommendations for others to approve and carry out.

Goal Setting

The primary goal of all school partnerships is to work toward the best possible education for all students in their school. The school partnership council is a place where students, parents, teachers, principals, community members, administrators, and trustees discuss and plan education in their school and community.

School partnership councils

- clarify their mandate, create their vision, and define their mission statement and priorities. These issues are respectfully aligned with those already practised by the school. New ideas are introduced as priorities and are developed after the mandate, mission, and vision have been identified and agreed upon.
- support school and school division planning, community reports, programs, and priorities through ongoing discussions and feedback
- participate in school and school division planning, recommending and supporting future directions for the education of their students

Planning

Planning is setting priorities for a group and creating an action plan to achieve outcomes and priorities. The steps usually include

- written priorities and outcomes
- clear action plans with strategies and timelines
- collection and analysis of information
- assessment and evaluation of progress
- evaluation of results
- communication of results and decision making for next steps

Evaluation

Evaluation is a process directed toward improvement. Evaluating partnership council meetings on a regular basis can assist the group in

- planning effective meetings
- making positive changes at meetings
- making budget decisions
- setting new priorities
- vision building

Finances

- Each school partnership council needs to deal with the issue of financial support. Whether or not the school partnership council raises funds for school initiatives is a local decision.
- If a school partnership council has financial responsibility, it needs to establish a process for record-keeping and budgeting. For ACSLs, the process must comply with school division policies and procedures.

Suggested School Partnership Procedures

(Adapted from *The Roles, Responsibilities and Functions of a Board, A Board Development Guide*. Manitoba Family Services, 2002. Reproduced with permission.)

School partnership councils establish procedures that are used to inform all members. These procedures and policies assist partners in contributing effectively to school improvement.

School partnership councils may

- develop agendas
- establish a process by which they select and train (if required) a chairperson
- select a secretary to record minutes
- establish subcommittees
- use a process to reach decisions as a group (see *Decision-making Models*—pages 24 and 25)
- create or revise a constitution and by-laws (see *Creating a Constitution*—pages 23 and 24)
- develop or revise mission and vision statements for their group (see *Vision and Mission Statement*—page 22)
- plan with other education partners

Selecting a Chairperson for the School Partnership Council

The chairperson is usually nominated by the council members and each member is allowed to vote. Other methods of selecting a chairperson are possible. Typically, the position of chairperson is held for one year, but in some cases the role may be extended for a longer period. The chairperson

- sets a climate for collaboration and decision making
- establishes agendas
- conducts meetings
- establishes rules of order for meetings
- establishes and delegates responsibility to subcommittees where appropriate
- leads the committee in developing a constitution

Selecting a Secretary

The secretary is usually nominated by the council members and each member is allowed to vote. Typically, the position of secretary is held for one year but may be extended for a longer period. The secretary is responsible for recording and distributing the minutes of all the meetings. Minutes are the permanent record of the meeting. Effective minutes are usually brief and to the point and objectively summarize the main ideas

and points of discussion. It is important that the minutes record all motions, including who made the motion, who seconded it, and whether the motion was accepted or defeated.

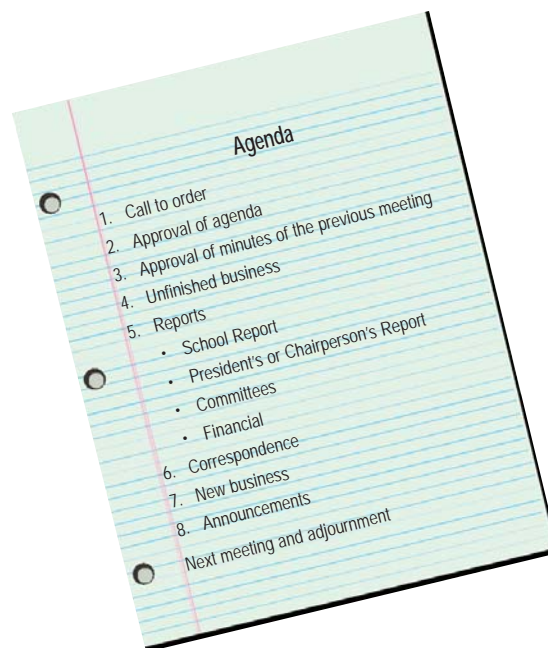
Minutes usually contain:

- name of the group
- date, time, and location of the meeting
- name of the chairperson
- names of individuals present, absent, and sending regrets
- approval or amendment of minutes of the previous meeting
- summary/highlights of business for each agenda item
- clear indication of follow-up action or activity
- motions and resolutions recorded word-for-word
- list of correspondence, reports, and documents presented
- secretary's name

Setting Agendas

An effective meeting requires an agenda. It provides an outline of what will be discussed, what decisions need to be made, and in what order. An agenda advises participants of the date, time, location, and topics of the meeting. The purpose is to provide structure to the meeting, to inform, and to advance the business of the meeting.

The following is a sample of a meeting agenda:



Preparation for Meetings

- Prepare the agenda with key people (such as principal, committee executive).
- Be prompt and enthusiastic.
- Tell the vice-president if you will be absent from a scheduled meeting.
- Start on time. Run an orderly meeting. Guide the discussion. Tactfully shift conversations that are not productive or that are being dominated by one or two people.
- Follow meeting procedures and the agenda in a courteous and thoughtful manner.
- Make guests feel welcomed.
- Organize committees and subcommittees for partnership council tasks. Offer help to people who have been assigned tasks.
- Encourage everyone to participate in the meeting.
- Plan and follow up with committee leaders for progress. Acknowledge members at meetings for their assistance.
- Keep the agenda moving. When the discussion stalls, agree to return to the issue at a later, specified time, or delegate a small group to study the issue and report back to the group at the next meeting.
- Thank everyone for being at the meeting. Make sure everyone knows when and where the next meeting will be. If there are assignments to be finished for the next meeting, summarize what is being reported at the next meeting.
- End the meeting on time.

Conducting Effective Meetings

Meetings are held regularly and for specific reasons to

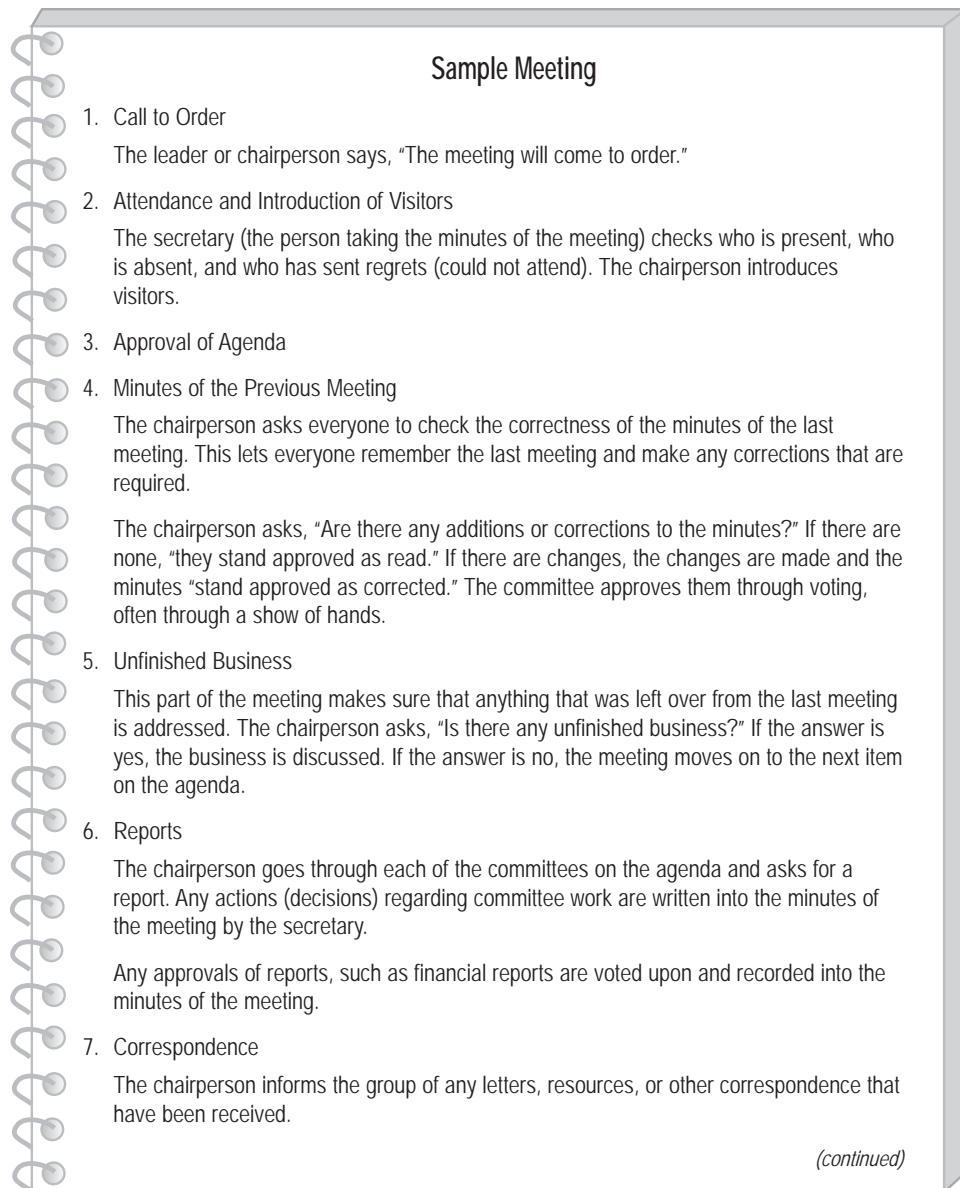
- ensure action
- resolve a problem
- review a report
- provide information
- promote meaningful and helpful discussions
- receive information

A clear understanding of the purpose of each meeting and the role of the school partnership council are necessary for the meeting to be effective. Well-managed meetings facilitate productive planning, problem solving, and a positive exchange of ideas.

Running a Meeting

Many leaders use a process called “Roberts’ Rules of Order” during their meetings to help the agenda run smoothly. The rules of order are sometimes called ‘parliamentary procedure’ and are used to make sure everyone at the meeting knows what happened at the last meeting, to make decisions and to end the meeting.

The following is a sample of a meeting, following an agenda, using formal rules of order:



Sample Meeting

1. Call to Order
The leader or chairperson says, “The meeting will come to order.”
2. Attendance and Introduction of Visitors
The secretary (the person taking the minutes of the meeting) checks who is present, who is absent, and who has sent regrets (could not attend). The chairperson introduces visitors.
3. Approval of Agenda
4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting
The chairperson asks everyone to check the correctness of the minutes of the last meeting. This lets everyone remember the last meeting and make any corrections that are required.

The chairperson asks, “Are there any additions or corrections to the minutes?” If there are none, “they stand approved as read.” If there are changes, the changes are made and the minutes “stand approved as corrected.” The committee approves them through voting, often through a show of hands.
5. Unfinished Business
This part of the meeting makes sure that anything that was left over from the last meeting is addressed. The chairperson asks, “Is there any unfinished business?” If the answer is yes, the business is discussed. If the answer is no, the meeting moves on to the next item on the agenda.
6. Reports
The chairperson goes through each of the committees on the agenda and asks for a report. Any actions (decisions) regarding committee work are written into the minutes of the meeting by the secretary.

Any approvals of reports, such as financial reports are voted upon and recorded into the minutes of the meeting.
7. Correspondence
The chairperson informs the group of any letters, resources, or other correspondence that have been received.

(continued)

Sample Meeting (continued)

8. New Business

This part of the meeting is designed for new ideas.

- The chairperson asks, "Is there any new business?" The people at the meeting explain their ideas one at a time. The chairperson helps the flow of conversation by letting only one person talk at a time.
- If actions (decisions) are required based on someone's idea, the action is stated as a 'motion'. Someone at the meeting says, "I move that we (action to be taken)...." The secretary records the motion and the name of the person who made it. A second person must agree with the motion. "I second the motion" is the typical way people say this at a meeting.
- The chairperson then says, "It is moved and seconded that we (action to be taken). Is there any discussion?" Everyone has a chance to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the motion before they vote on whether they like the idea or not.
- When the discussion has ended, the chairperson asks, "All in favour (repeat the motion)?" People usually raise their hands to show they agree. "All opposed?" People who don't like the motion raise their hands to show they disagree. "Abstained?" People who don't want to choose for or against the motion raise their hands.
- If the majority of people agree, "The motion is carried." If more people vote no, "the motion is defeated." The secretary records the decision.

9. Announcements

The chairperson asks, "Are there any announcements?" The place, date, and time for the next meeting and any actions that will occur between meetings are announced.

10. Adjournment

The chairperson asks, "Is there a motion to adjourn?" Someone 'moves' to adjourn the meeting. A second person says, "I second the motion." The chairperson then says, "It is moved and seconded that we adjourn. All in favour?" People raise their hands to indicate agreement. "All those opposed?" People raise their hands to indicate they do not want the meeting to end. "The motion is carried and the meeting is adjourned" when the majority of people have voted to end the meeting.

(Adapted by permission from "So You're the Club President" www.extension.iastate.edu/publications/4H71A.pdf. Copyright 2003 Iowa State University Extension.)

Forming Committees

The use of committees can be an effective way to share the workload and involve more members of the school community. Committees can be formed to address a number of needs. It is important that their purpose and responsibilities be defined clearly.

The advantages of using committees include:

- sharing of workload
- allowing for individual participation
- giving people with special skills and interests an opportunity to participate on a committee
- increasing members' ownership for the school partnership council's work

Using committees effectively is important. The following suggestions offer school partnership councils a number of ways to become more effective and efficient:

- use short-term committees when appropriate; they appeal to busy people
- ask people other than school partnership members, including school staff, parents, community members, and professionals to assist
- create each committee for a specific reason
- ensure each committee has clear direction
- avoid overloading one or two members

Vision Statements

A vision statement is a clearly written description of a shared dream or image of what a school community should or could become in the future. The challenge is blending the dreams or vision of all individual council members into one vision that reflects the values of the school's community. A school partnership council vision statement clearly articulates the future everyone will work toward. Vision statements are:

- strongly held beliefs
- broad or general in focus
- easy to picture
- key factors critical to developing and maintaining an effective, caring school environment

Mission Statements

A mission statement states why a school partnership council exists. Because the primary function of partnership councils is to enhance student success, this should be reflected in the mission statement. The mission statement of a partnership council supports the existing mission statement of the school.

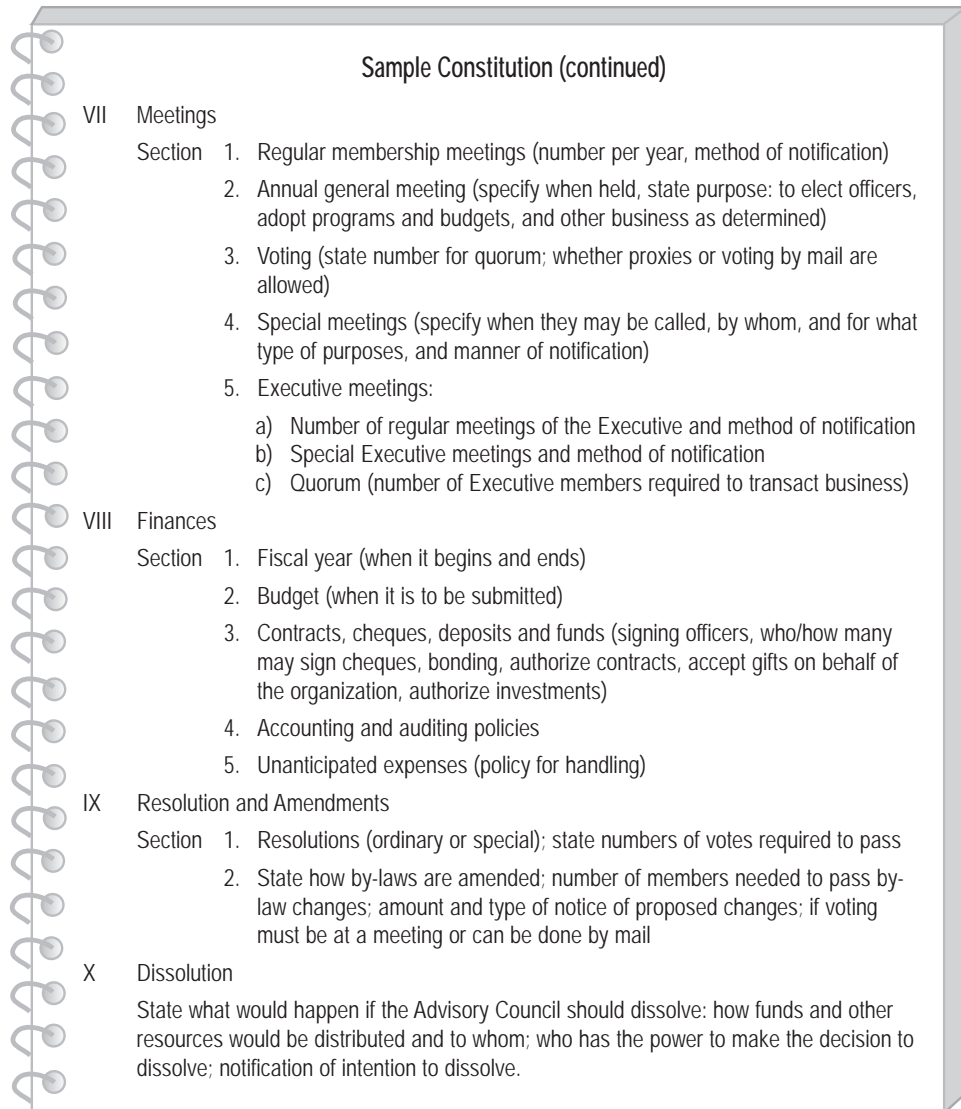
Creating a Constitution

A constitution outlines how a school partnership council operates and describes aspects of the organization.

Sample Constitution

- I Name of Organization
- II Purpose of Organization
- III Objectives of Organization
- IV Membership
 - Section 1. Eligibility (who may be a member)
 - 2. Types of membership (voting, non-voting, etc.)
 - 3. Resignation and reinstatement procedures
- V Partnership Council
 - Section 1. Composition:
 - a) Officers (chairperson, vice-presidents, secretary, treasurer)
 - b) Other council members (numbers)
 - 2. Terms of office (how long council members and officers serve)
 - 3. Nominations and election procedure
 - a) Nominating committee (method of selection, number of members, when they must present their recommendations)
 - b) Elections (when held, how conducted, filling vacancies, removal)
 - 4. Duties and powers (of the council and of the individual members of the council)
- VI Committees
 - Section 1. List standing committees and authorized ad hoc committees as deemed necessary by the council. Usual standing committees are those which must function year-round in order to sustain the organization (e.g., executive, fundraising, membership, and programs)
 - 2. Appointment method (state that committee chairpersons are appointed by the chairperson or are elected by the council)
 - 3. Term of office
 - 4. Chairperson
 - 5. Vacancies (filling) and removal of committee members
 - 6. Terms of Reference (duties and responsibilities)

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Decision-Making Models

There are a number of ways a school partnership council can reach decisions. The approach taken usually depends on the priority of the issue and the degree of agreement among council members. Depending on the importance of the decision, a combination of models may be regularly used.

Collaboration is achieved through dialogue:

- talk and work together to reach a group decision
- collaboration is used when the issue has been fully discussed and most council members are in agreement with the general direction of the decision

Consensus building requires individuals to agree on an action that meets the needs of the group:

- state the issue to open discussion
- narrow the focus of discussion to areas of concern
- modify statements where agreement needs to be reached
- use consensus voting

Consensus is used when the issue has been discussed and some council members are hesitant with the direction of the decision.

Majority vote rule is usually used when feelings and views on an issue are deeply held and collaboration or consensus is not achievable:

- state and discuss the issue
- the chairperson calls for a vote
- votes are counted and the majority wins
- if the vote results in a tie, the chairperson votes to decide the matter

Majority vote rule is used when the issue has been formally discussed and council members are divided on the direction of the decision.

Helpful Hints to Resolve Disagreements

(Condensed and adapted from *Working Together: A Guide to Positive Problem Solving for Schools, Families, and Communities*. MECY, 2004. Used with permission.)

These are some suggestions that are helpful to guide the process to resolve disputes that may arise from time to time.

Be flexible: Consistency is important, but so is flexibility. Flexibility respects unique situations and individuals. Consider each other's positions, suggestions, and points of view. Consider a variety of possible solutions.

Be timely: When a dispute arises, the goal is to resolve it quickly and fairly. But it is also important to have time to gather information and prepare.

Create a comfortable meeting environment: When setting up a meeting, the time should be convenient for everyone. Everyone should be able to see and hear each other easily.

Deal with anger: If you are in a dispute with someone who is angry, you might patiently listen. You might calmly explain that now may not be the best time to have the conversation. Suggest another time if anger gets in the way of finding a solution.

Deal with issues: Don't let little things become big things. Any time is a good time to encourage open, honest communication. Try to work together to understand and solve problems.

Establish ground rules: Create guidelines respecting rules of behaviour and communication, and the kinds of things that could stop a meeting.

Focus: The best way to keep a meeting productive and focused is to be clear about the purpose of the meeting, the key issues that are being discussed, and the motives and goals of the people involved.

Work together: Sometimes it is difficult to understand another person or to make ourselves understood. Try to be open to ways of working together. Resolving disputes builds relationships that support learning.

Guidelines for Developing Terms of Reference

Terms of reference should include the following points:

- Name of Committee:* What is the committee's name?
- Purpose:* What is the general description of the area in which the committee works and what does it do?
- Membership:* Is representation from interest groups needed? Is staff assistance needed: Who is appropriate? What is the length of term? Are members appointed or elected?
- Time Frame for Ad Hoc Committees:* How long will the committee(s) take to complete their task?
- Mandate:* Which decisions will the committee make?
- Accountability:* To whom does the committee report? How often does it report?
- Orientation:* How are new members oriented?
- Meeting Schedule:* Are meetings held on a regular basis?
- Responsibilities and Functions:* Are these compatible with vision and mission statements?
- Budget:* How much money is needed? Where will these funds be obtained?