

Effective committee meetings

It is important that there is good regular communication between all those involved in the running of a branch or a group.

Why meet?

As branches and groups play a part in supporting people locally with MND, meeting is important to help with planning fundraising activities, raising awareness, planning support meetings and to catch up with each other on what is happening locally. A group may not be involved in certain activities so there may not be the need to meet very often.

Meeting as a branch

The management committee of a branch should meet at least four times in each calendar year. Any two branch management committee members have the right to call a meeting. Some branches prefer to set the dates for committee meetings a year in advance, as this helps with planning and booking venues. However, if new volunteers join the committee during the year, a review of meeting dates may need to take place.

Meeting as a group

As a group is less formal, a group can meet as often as they need or would like.

Where should we meet?

It is good practice to meet in a venue that is accessible, private and neutral so people feel they can speak freely and that refreshments are available. Some branches and groups use local hospices, community centres, council offices, church halls for example, rather than volunteers' homes as this allows for people to feel at ease. Some organisations such as Volunteer Centres offer very reasonable room hire rates and some branches and groups are able to use rooms for free after explaining they are a charity.

What else do we need to consider?

For all meetings, this includes, support meetings, committee meetings, fundraising events, AGMs, we need to carry out a risk assessment of the venue. There is a venue checklist form to record the details of the assessment and this form needs to be kept for three years. It maybe that someone within the branch or group has responsibility for carrying out/ recording risk assessments.

What do we talk about?

Agenda for a branch

Depending on the priorities of a branch, the agenda items may change at any time to reflect this. Some branches have standard agenda items such as secretary report, chair report, treasurers report and fundraising. An [example agenda](#) is available on the Volunteer Zone.

Agenda for a group

As a group is less formal, the agenda items can vary and may change to reflect the activities of the group at any one time. The East Kent Development Group often find they have a lot on their agenda so to try and keep the meeting to time, the campaign contact and the webmaster email a brief summary of key updates a few days prior to the committee meeting. This allows for everyone to be informed without too much time being taken up on the agenda.

Top Tips

Involving everyone in the meeting:

One way to ensure that everyone gets involved in the meeting is to circulate a copy of the agenda in good time before the meeting with any necessary attachments, reports etc so everyone is aware of what is to be discussed. Usually the secretary will circulate a copy of the agenda, but the chair or another volunteer can also do this.

Sarah Ezekiel, of the North West London Branch, says:

"Circulating the agenda before the meeting is essential. It's a good idea to have copies of the minutes from the last meeting available too. Try to stick to the agenda and type up the minutes and circulate quickly so that committee members are reminded to act on anything required."

Facilitating a meeting:

It's important to start the meeting on time and finish on time so the focus remains on the agenda items.

Why do we need to minute our meetings?

Minutes are primarily a record of the committee's decisions and who agreed to carry them out. They should be brief and to the point but may include important comments in support of the decisions taken. Following the meeting, get your minutes written up and circulated to committee members as quickly as possible to remind them to take any necessary action.

Whoever is responsible for typing up and circulating the minutes should also send a copy to the Volunteering Team volunteering@mndassociation.org and a copy to your Area Support Coordinator (ASC). The Branch Charter does mention that all minutes should be sent to the Volunteering Team within 30 days of a meeting, and reading your minutes keeps us informed and highlights ways we might be able to provide further information or support. They also help give us a picture of what branches and groups are doing locally.

For branches minutes should be kept securely for three years. After three years, the minutes can be shredded or sent to the Volunteering Team to be archived.

For groups, keeping records of the meetings is also important and the records may not necessarily be minutes as such but could be action points agreed, these should also be sent to the Volunteering Team.

The importance of Data Protection

Whoever is responsible for typing up the minutes, should also remember that people with MND should not be identifiable in minutes, so only initials can be used.

When discussing requests for financial support, committee members should be aware of how much detail is discussed about the person who has requested support. Discussing the person's life story and personal details is not appropriate. More information about data protection is available on the [Volunteer Zone](#).

The role of secretary

Sometimes it may be helpful to break down the task of the secretary and share these out among other committee members. It gets other people involved and lightens the load on one person. For example, there could be a specific volunteering role for a minute's secretary.

Visitors at committee meetings

Committee meetings can also be a good opportunity to invite potential volunteers to find out more about the activities of the branch or group but do be careful not to discuss any confidential information.

Both regional and national staff like to be invited to committee meetings. It gives us the opportunity to find out more about any specific issues that need to be discussed or staff may wish to attend (or invite themselves to attend) to give information.

Sub-committees

Some branches and groups have set up sub-committees to focus on specific activities such as fundraising or communication. Sometimes the agenda for a committee can be quite long so being able to go into further detail at a separate meeting can be very beneficial.

Good Practice Example:

The South Yorkshire Branch have set up two sub-committees – one for communications and one for fundraising.

Ann Quinn says "We have ten people on our committee and trying to discuss everything in one meeting is quite difficult as we have meetings every five to six weeks. A couple of years ago we were revamping our newsletter, database and website and felt this was a big task. The idea was that a communications sub-group should be formed and then this group of four volunteers would meet then feedback to the main committee. It was felt that due to the nature of the activities that those involved with the sub-group should be a part of the main committee.

"Regarding the fundraising sub-group, this was felt that volunteers did not need to be part of the main committee, so less official (although less official does not mean less commitment). Again the idea is that the fundraising committee feeds into the main committee, although this has been a struggle at times to get people to commit, volunteers coming on board to the fundraising sub-group are able to organise and plan events with the support of the main committee"

Other types of meeting

Branches and groups can hold different types of meetings such as, planning meetings/ branch/ group reviews, support meetings and open meetings.

Branch/Group Reviews and Planning Meetings

Both branches and groups work with their ASC to plan and develop their activities in support of people living with MND. One method often used to achieve this is the annual branch/ group review or planning meeting where the branch/ group takes time out from usual business to step back and think about the year as a whole; what's gone well, what have been the difficulties and how these might be overcome and what the branch/ group want to achieve in the next 12-18 months.

Before the meeting, the ASC will circulate to volunteers some key topics for discussion so everyone is aware of what will be discussed. During the meeting the ASC will facilitate the discussion, with follow up notes circulated so everyone is aware of the action points for the next 12-18 months.

Contact your ASC to discuss a suitable time to hold your review or planning meeting; it could be a separate meeting that is planned outside of your committee meeting (a review could take around hour).

Top Tip

The West Sussex South Branch hold an annual planning meeting where all the committee meet for a day to review the previous year and make plans for the year ahead.

Sue Krueger chair says: "The West Sussex South Branch holds a planning meeting every year to bring all the visitors together with other committee members for an exchange of information. A review of the past year is carried out and goals set for the coming year, with everyone being able to voice new ideas and to discuss matters of the branch. Committee members benefit from meeting some visitors, whom they may not know well and hearing about problems affecting people living with MND and visitors, to enable them to make more informed decisions when allocating funds. Visitors benefit from hearing about fundraising efforts and other work done by the committee. The effectiveness of branch and committee meetings is also discussed, and the business part is followed by lunch or tea to create a more social atmosphere."

Annual General Meeting

Every year in February, March or April, all branches need to hold their Annual General Meeting (AGM). All branch members are invited to elect new committee members for the coming year and report on the activities of the branch for the past year. More information on how to run an effective AGM is available on the Volunteer Zone.

Open meetings/Informal drop in sessions

Open meetings provide a branch or a group with an opportunity to keep in touch with its members on a personal basis enabling people living with and affected by MND to:

- meet face to face
- share ideas and information
- support each other

Not everyone affected by MND may want to attend a meeting, but those that do attend meetings value them because they:

- reduce isolation through the offer of friendship
- offer a chance to meet up with other people living with the disease
- provide information
- offer a social event where they can feel comfortable

What does an open meeting look like?

Open meetings come in all shapes and sizes, and a variety of venues are used from garden centres to hospices.

Support meetings

It can be of great benefit to also organise meetings for specific groups of people such as people living with MND and their carers or sometimes carers on their own. This creates a safe environment to address specific needs.

People living with MND will often find it easier to attend such support meetings if they are personally invited by someone they have already met or spoken to on the telephone.

Further information about open meetings and support meetings, and other ways to support people living with and affected by MND, is available on the [Volunteer Zone](#).