

Roles of Officers

This information sheet provides some guidance to the jobs generally taken on by the Chair, Secretary and Treasurer.

In small, fairly informal groups you don't need to stick to rigid rules about official roles. A lot of the work can be shared out amongst the committee as a whole – the more people who are actively involved, the better. The important thing is that everyone knows what they have taken on, and that this has been discussed and agreed by the whole committee.

The information here is a starting point for discussion in your committee about what needs to be done, and who will do it.

The role of the Chair

The Chair's job usually falls into four main areas:

- Chairing meetings.
- Helping the committee to work together as a team.
- Having an overview of the work of the group.
- Being the main contact person for the group.

Chairing meetings

Chairing meetings is the most visible role of the Chair.

Your job is to help the meeting to run smoothly and effectively and involve everyone. The Resource Centre information sheets Chairing a meeting and The Agenda have more advice and tips on how to do this.

Here are some central points:

- Plan and think about the meeting in advance.
- Prepare an agenda.
- Make sure the meeting gets through all the necessary business.
- Make sure everyone gets a chance to talk and no one dominates.
- Make sure clear decisions are reached and any action noted.
- Start and finish on time.

Helping the committee to work together as a team

The strongest committees work as a team. The Chair is an important part of the team, but is not the boss. It is not your role to make all the decisions, or do all the work. It is your role to encourage and involve all committee members in whatever way they are able to contribute.

Having an overview of the work of the group

The day-to-day work of the group is important, but someone needs to be thinking about the bigger picture.

It's not up to the Chair to decide the direction and activity of the group, but to help the committee work this out.

Regularly remind yourself of your aims and think about what needs to be done to achieve them.

Some ways of doing this are:

- Once a year, have a discussion at the committee about the group's plans for the coming year. What are the main things you want to achieve?
- Have a regular item on the agenda to discuss how recent events and activities went. For example, what worked and what didn't at your public meeting, or the successes and problems with a Fun Day.

Being the main contact person for the group

The Chair is often the first point of contact for the Council, other voluntary organisations or anyone else interested in the work of the group. You might be asked to attend other groups' events, or to get involved with another project.

It's not the Chair's job to take all of this on by yourself. Discuss it with committee members, see if it is something the group wants to do and if so who is best person to do it.

The Chair, along with the Secretary, is also often the advertised contact person for new members.

The role of the Secretary

The Secretary's job usually falls into three main areas:

- Taking minutes at the committee and general meetings.
- Keeping people informed about the organisation's activities.
- Receiving and responding to information, emails and letters.

Taking minutes at meetings

Taking minutes is often the main job of the Secretary.

Minutes are simply notes taken during the meeting to remind you what was discussed and agreed. For a detailed look at what this involves, see the Resource Centre information sheet Taking Minutes.

A few central points to remember are:

- Don't try to write everything down – it's impossible and not useful.
- Concentrate on getting down what has been decided, and who is going to do it.
- Listen carefully to the discussion and think about what overall points are being made.

Keeping people informed

There is a basic level of communication needed in every group:

- Committee members need to know the date, time and place of the next meeting, and receive minutes and an agenda.
- The people you are trying to reach and include in your group need to know you exist, what you are doing, and how to contact you and get involved.

How much, and what sort of publicity you need will depend on exactly what you are trying to do. It's not up to the Secretary to make all the decisions about your publicity and communication – the committee as a whole needs to think about this, and divide up and delegate tasks.

There are also lots of different ways of communicating with each other. You need to work out what suits your members best, and might want to use a mix of different methods, such as social media as well as printed flyers.

Receiving and responding to information, emails and letters

The Secretary, along with the Chair, is often the contact for information from other organisations or any formal communication with the group.

The Secretary and Chair are also often the advertised contacts for people interested in joining the group.

The Secretary's role is to make sure that any information they receive is dealt with. This doesn't necessarily mean doing it all yourself, but making sure that someone is. For example, an invitation to attend an event could go to the next committee meeting and an enquiry from someone interested in joining the group could be passed on to another committee member.

The role of the Treasurer

The Treasurer has the day-to-day responsibility of looking after the group's money. They need to have an overview of the group's financial situation and provide information to help the group make informed decisions.

It is important to remember that the Treasurer does not have sole responsibility for the group's finances. It is up to the committee as a whole to decide how funds will be raised and spent. It's also up to the committee to make sure that the group's money is being handled properly.

The Resource Centre has three very useful information sheets which look in more detail at different aspects of looking after your money. These are The Role of the Treasurer, Your group's money and Financial rules.

The Treasurer's job covers two main areas:

Keeping financial records for the group.

Keeping the group informed of their financial situation.

Keeping financial records for the group

The most important thing is to write everything down, and to keep all connected paperwork. Don't put off the task of recording money that has been received and spent until it becomes confusing and complicated. Do it straight away!

Here is quick checklist of the main tasks:

- Keep a written record of the money going in and out of the group funds.
- Check and keep bank statements.
- Keep receipts for all items bought.
- Keep paperwork for all grants and money received.
- Have a system for dealing with expenses and petty cash.

Keeping the committee informed

It is the Treasurer's job to keep the committee informed about the group's money, so everyone understands the overall financial situation.

It's useful to give a financial update at every committee and general meeting. This doesn't have to be a big task. The Resource Centre's template How much money do we have provides a handy guide – you just fill in the relevant information.

It's useful for your update to cover:

- How much money the group has.
- How much has been spent since the last meeting, and what on.
- Any problems or issues you have spotted – for example, if there isn't enough money to pay the room hire for your next meeting.

At the Annual General Meeting you will need to provide a fuller report that covers the whole year. The Resource Centre can help its member groups by providing an independent examination of accounts.

Summary

The strongest committees work as a team – the work is spread around, everyone is playing a part and you are all getting on with each other. This is easier said than done and doesn't just happen by itself – it takes time and thought.

One of the key factors is regular, open and full discussion at your committee meetings. Try to make sure that everyone is involved in decisions about the work of the group, and how responsibilities and jobs will be divided up.

A useful starting point might be to discuss the different jobs outlined in this sheet and adapt and develop them to suit your committee.

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