

Meetings that work

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Why meetings?

Meetings are held in order to transact business, solve problems, establish or change policy, review progress, organize thinking, and/or impart information - and to involve members. They are an active means of communication. A well-organized and well-run meeting will achieve its purposes, give the participants a sense of satisfaction, and encourage them to attend next time.



Meeting fundamentals

Why do people come to meetings?

- ✓ **Information:** seeking accurate, timely, and personally interesting information
- ✓ **Accomplishment:** to accomplish a particular purpose
- ✓ **Social:** to see friends, meet new people
- ✓ **Good time:** entertaining speakers and interesting programs

Why don't people come back to meetings?

- ☒ **Information:** the meeting wasn't what they expected; nothing of interest/ usefulness was learned, their questions weren't answered; they left frustrated because they didn't know what to do next
- ☒ **Accomplishment:** nothing they cared about was accomplished
- ☒ **Social:** no one talked to them, they did not feel welcome to participate
- ☒ **Bad time:** they were bored or they felt their time was wasted; they left feeling guilty about not volunteering (or guilty because they did)

Tips for successful meetings

Be clear about the purpose of the meeting

Objectives

Why are you having the meeting and what is to be accomplished?

A clear answer to these questions will guide you through the rest of your planning. Use it to work through all the choices about time, location, program/agenda, publicity, etc.

If you find it difficult to plan, look back: are your objectives too vague? Are you trying to accomplish too much for one meeting? Is a meeting even the best way to meet these objectives?



The right time and the right place

The Day

Don't schedule *anything* for the same evening as other school events which parents will attend (e.g. school pageant) or the Stanley Cup final! Try to anticipate what other community activities or events might keep your potential participants away, and work around them. For example, if you expect mainly elementary parents, check with the middle or secondary school that the school feeds into - you may find that those with older siblings in grade 7 or 8 will have a schedule conflict.

The Time

In some communities 7 p.m. is too early for parents to have fed and settled their families; in others no one will stay at a meeting after 9 p.m. Would your potential participants be more comfortable doing this on a Saturday morning than on a week night?

How much time is needed? When will the meeting end?

The place



Is the building easy to find? Are signs needed to direct them to the right room? Is parking easy or awkward, free or expensive? A clear map, showing not only how to get to the site but also where to find parking and which door to enter, will make them feel welcome even before they even arrive-and might encourage some to come who might otherwise be reluctant to venture out on a dark winter evening into an unfamiliar part of town.

Rotate your meetings between areas of the community to make it seem fair to all. For example, parents are more apt to come if it's in their own school, or at least if they're not always having to drive across town. Always holding them in elementary schools might give the message that junior- and senior-high parents aren't expected to attend.

Consider holding the meeting in a facility other than a school for the sake of "neutrality," for example if a school-related issue is involved.

The Room

Under rather than overestimate the room size needed. An overflowing room is a sign of success, and people usually don't mind squishing a bit or even moving down the hall if the evening has started out on such a positive note (do have a contingency plan in place). A half-empty hall can set a negative tone.

Try to find a room that is well lit and well ventilated, neither too hot nor too cold, which will allow you to set up the best possible seating arrangement for the expected number of participants (more below). Check for electrical outlets if you are going to use an overhead projector or television and VCR. A good room setup will make it easier for you and lessen distractions for the participants. If you need a blackboard, does it have one? Be sure there's room to browse any display(s).

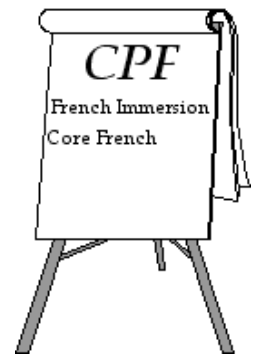
Other not-at-all-minor considerations

1. **Divide the workload.** For example, the chair/facilitator for an information meeting need not be the chapter President. Different people should manage the physical setup, the coffee, and the greetings/hospitality so no one is trying to do two things at once.
2. Depending on the room, facilities, and number expected to attend, you will need to decide on the best **seating arrangement**. Theatre-style seating inhibits discussion; a circle or horseshoe encourages interaction.

Ensure that the participants can see the chairperson or speaker(s) and any audio/visual **aids**. Set things up so that they can also easily see and hear each other. Tables to lean on, to put cups and napkins on, and to jot notes on can also make people more comfortable.

If you want to break out during part of the meeting for small group discussions, find a room where this can be accomplished with the minimum of effort.

3. Ask the chairperson and any presenters if they need any **audio/visual aids**. Consider whether you will need a flip chart or blackboard, overhead projector and screen, etc. Remember markers, tape, etc.
4. **Refreshments** (both types of coffee, tea, perhaps some cookies) can help to establish a welcoming and friendly atmosphere. In fact, if the seating arrangement will allow, you might want to encourage the participants to feel free to get up and fill up at any time during the proceedings.
5. Consider offering **babysitting** (perhaps by some older students under the supervision of a CPF volunteer) to help both parents / single parents to attend.
6. **Start on time**, or just as soon as possible after the announced beginning. This is a courtesy that those who arrived on time will appreciate, and it will make everyone aware that they shouldn't be late for the next session. Don't wait for everyone to get into their chairs—they're probably waiting for you to politely announce it's time to get under way.
7. **End on time** for the sake of those who must leave. You can always invite the participants to stay for a few minutes to chat informally with the resource person(s), chapter Board members, and/or each other.
8. **Be hospitable.** Have one or two members assigned to the task of welcoming people as they come in the door, showing where to put their coats, pointing out the coffee urn, giving out name tags, and suggesting they check out the CPF display while waiting for the meeting to start. Introducing a newcomer to an "old-timer" who will chat until the event begins is always a nice touch. The person who's left to feel like an outsider may never come back again.
9. Ask everyone to wear **name tags** (the sticky "Bonjour" ones are inexpensive), printing their first names in large letters. It's much easier to strike up a conversation with someone if you can use their name, and it certainly helps the chairperson, moderator, speaker to address individuals in the audience. Members of the chapter Board of Directors, committee chairs, and school reps should also indicate their positions on their name tags. People may feel more inclined to phone with a problem - or an offer to help - if they can picture you.



Publicity

1. **Tell the right people.** Who do you hope will attend your meeting? Is it for CPF members only? Preschool parents? Secondary school parents? What about teachers, trustees, grandparents, university education students? The answer will guide your choice of publicity tools.

As appropriate, put notices in your chapter newsletter, the school newsletter, the local newspaper's "what's happening" column, radio and cablevision "bulletin boards," the parish announcements. Put a poster on the school bulletin board (just blow up your announcement onto 11" x 17" copy paper). For CPF members, in addition to your chapter newsletter you might want to do a phone reminder via a telephone tree or school/class reps. Letters of invitation are the best way to reach special audiences (e.g., school board trustees, education administrators, community leaders).

2. **Tell 'em clearly.** Ensure that the purpose of the meeting is clear so that:
 - ✓ those who might be interested are encouraged to attend but
 - ✓ there are no unrealistic expectations and
 - ✓ as appropriate, participants can prepare in advance (gather information to bring, consider an issue, invite another parent to attend, etc.).

Use large type for the information that your target audience is most likely to care about (it may be the topic, it may be the name of a guest speaker, it may be a controversial question). Mention any other drawing cards: who will be speaking, the chance to meet some senior students or graduates, that babysitting will be available, etc.¹. Give both the start and ending times. And don't forget that map!

3. **Tell 'em early.** Tell them as far as possible in advance so they don't make other plans for that time, then remind them at least once closer to the date. If you're planning a series of meetings, perhaps you can schedule and announce them all, or at least the first couple, at the beginning of the school year - then repeat the upcoming ones in your chapter newsletter.
4. **Tell 'em often.** People need to hear or read about something more than once - and often many times - before they pay attention.

1. see section 9 "Visibility"

Resource persons

Before contacting any potential speaker or resource person - well in advance - be prepared with the following information:

1. Most importantly, **exactly what you would like this individual to accomplish**, for whom. "Tell us what you know about ..." isn't good enough: it might take a year! "Tell us something about ..." could lead to a disaster if s/he focuses on an aspect of the topic that's of no interest to your audience. It's far more helpful to say, "We would like the target audience(s) to leave with a better understanding of ..." or "The target audience(s) should learn how to ...".
2. **Who you expect to attend** (mainly parents? English speaking parents? grade k-3 / 4-6 / 7-9 parents? teachers? secondary students?) and roughly how many. What is their background? Their needs?
3. **How this presentation fits into the meeting**: the overall objective, other speakers, order on the agenda, etc.
4. **Time frames**: Starting time, approximate time available for his/her presentation, length of his/her question period, if any. If you are prepared to negotiate the date of the meeting, several dates which would work for you.
5. **Costs**: be clear from the beginning about whether or not the chapter will pay an honorarium or cover any expenses (copying handouts, mileage, etc.).

Also be prepared to provide some **background information** on your French second language program(s), particular concerns within your community, etc. This could be done during the initial interview or in your follow-up confirmation letter.

That **confirmation letter** is important: don't assume the resource person will remember everything you said! Repeat all of the above information for his/her easy reference, confirm any specific points agreed between yourselves, and add the minor details that weren't discussed (e.g., how to find the meeting place, how/when expenses will be reimbursed).

Once your resource person(s) has confirmed his/her participation, don't forget to ask whether any **audio/visual aids** (overhead projector, blackboard, etc.) will be needed. Also, ask for some relevant information for use in introducing him/her to the audience.

Call your resource person(s) again 3-4 days before your meeting with a **gentle reminder** of the date, time, and location. Ask if s/he has any questions, and give him/her directions to the best parking area and the door to enter the building. If s/he has never met you, describe yourself (or the individual who will be meeting him/her if it's someone else) so that you can be found without any awkwardness.



Make your speaker welcome: introduce him/her to key people and help him/her get any equipment, handouts, etc. settled. Let him/her know who will do the introductions, and when.

Have someone ready to **thank the speaker**, and make any presentation as appropriate. (for example, give the speaker a "CPF promotional item"²)

Follow up with a thank-you letter or phone call, possibly sharing feedback from the participants' evaluation and/or news of subsequent actions taken.

2. see "Resources from CPF and others" on page G-1

It's not over when it's over!

The meeting doesn't end when the cleanup's finished! You need to consider *in advance*:

- how to appropriately **thank and acknowledge** any resource people as well as your volunteers;
- what to do about any **follow-up publicity** (in the media and/or in your chapter newsletter to let your members know what you've done);
- if any decisions are to be made, the nature of **any follow-up** (e.g., will a committee need to be established? should you report later to the participants about actions taken?);
- if you are providing information, will the participants understand **what they can do next?** (e.g., how to help their child, where to get more information, how to support a chapter initiative, etc.);
- **evaluation**: what feedback would help you do an even better job next time? what's the best way to gather that information?

Business meetings

The above tips for successful meetings apply to business as well as to information meetings. Following are some specific suggestions for business sessions.

Who can participate?

The business of CPF is conducted by the members of CPF. Only those holding a current membership have the right to vote and to hold office.

Notice of meeting

Your chapter bylaws will include specifics about notices of general (for all members) and Board meetings. It's essential that participants have enough information, far enough in advance, to be able to make informed decisions. At the very least, they deserve to know what topics will be on the agenda.

The meeting outline

A typical business meeting “flow” comprises:

- approval of the agenda
- approval of the minutes of the last meeting
- reports from Officers, committees
- follow up of items from the last meeting(s)
- new business
- note of time, place, and agenda items for next meeting
- adjournment

However, this leaves a great deal of scope for good planning. Here are some questions to help you organize for success:

- What needs to be on the agenda to accomplish the goal(s) of the meeting (and, of course, to meet legal requirements)? Can anything be dealt with in another way? (e.g., put committee reports in your chapter newsletter; if at all feasible, circulate minutes, financial statements, etc. in advance)
- What's the best order for the agenda items? Will the information/decision relating to one item affect another?
- How should each item be approached, to maximize the opportunity for an informed and well-supported decision? For example, does some information first need to be presented? Should someone be bringing forward a proposal or motion?
- How must each item be finalized? Is a motion and vote required? If so, what does it need to include (what will happen, by when, by whom, with what resources, any other limitations)? If the topic is contentious/problematic, should this be a preliminary discussion, with a final decision to be taken at the next meeting?
- How much time is needed for each item?

Facilitating the meeting

There are many excellent resources on chairing meetings. However, the responsibility of the President goes beyond rules of order. S/he can contribute to the success of meetings by:

- ✓ Create a framework for discussion by preparing a clear and realistic agenda
- ✓ Advance the discussion by raising key questions, summarizing, and identifying themes as they emerge
- ✓ Ensure active participation by all, encouraging newcomers and handling strong personalities who may dominate or disrupt the discussion for other participants
- ✓ Summarize and close the discussion by stating emerging consensus or calling for a vote

Social needs

Even at the most formal business session, allow some time before the meeting for the important rituals of meeting and greeting people. Try to seek out new people and make them feel welcome. Consider building in some social time after the business part of the meeting, so that those who must leave early can do so without missing anything important while others have a chance to chat or participate in an informal activity. These strategies will allow you to start and end your meeting on time, as advertised.



Annual General Meeting agenda

Following is a typical agenda for a chapter Annual General Meeting (AGM).

1. Call to order
2. Appointment of parliamentarian. A parliamentarian acts as a consultant to the president only. This would be done when a particularly complicated or contentious topic is to be discussed, but normally a chapter AGM would not require a parliamentarian. If the president wishes to have such an advisor on hand, a qualified person should be found in advance and then appointed at the meeting.
3. Approval of agenda
4. Approval of the minutes of the previous annual general meeting
5. Report of the Treasurer
 - approval of financial statements
6. Report of the President. This can just be brief oral highlights of a written report on the activities and achievements of the previous year.
7. Report of the Bylaws committee. Any proposed amendments to the bylaws should be dealt with before any “new business” (nominations, resolutions, etc.) in case those changes affect the way in which the new business is to be conducted. This is only necessary if your chapter has their own bylaws rather than using the CPF-BC & Yukon ones.
8. Resolutions³. They should be specifically identified in the agenda by topic/title. If possible, they should be submitted in writing and circulated to your members in advance.
9. Report of the Nominations committee.
10. Call for nominations from the floor (if your election process allows for this possibility)
11. Candidates’ remarks (especially important if there is more than one candidate for any position)
12. Election of the Board members. Note: even if the president’s position is up for election, the president does not relinquish the chair for this (or any other) part of the meeting.
13. Announcements
14. Adjournment

3. see “*Resolutions and positions re issues*” on page 10-6

Meeting minutes

Minutes capture the decisions of your chapter for immediate reference *and* for all time. They are:

- ✓ the organization's official record,
- ✓ a reminder to all re commitments and deadlines,
- ✓ a reference for those who missed the meeting,
- ✓ a resource for developing agendas for subsequent meetings,
- ✓ a source of background and historical information when planning, and
- ✓ a reference for report writing.

What should minutes include?

1. Identifying information:
 - name of the chapter
 - type of meeting (Board, committee, Annual General Meeting, Special General Meeting, etc.)
 - place and date
 - quorum count (see your bylaws for requirements), the time of the call to order, and the name of the presiding officer
2. Who was in attendance - this will vary according to type of meeting, but might involve listing separately:
 - members of your Board of Directors and their titles
 - voting members
 - guests
 - absences (just significant ones, such as Board members or committee chairs)

It might also be important to note, within the body of the minutes, any individuals who joined the meeting late or left early, so as to make clear who was and was not in attendance during various parts of the meeting.

3. The decisions that were made:
 - approval of the minutes of the previous meeting, including a careful record of any corrections to be made
 - all motions (including motions to amend), whether or not they were passed: the exact wording, full names of mover and seconder, and whether it was passed or defeated (note: a member may request that his/her vote or abstention be recorded in the minutes)
 - the exact wording of any commitments or assignments made other than through motions
 - due dates, names of those responsible, etc.

It is not necessary to capture discussions in business meeting minutes unless important points arise which will be needed for future reference. Minutes are meant to record decisions and actions taken at a business meeting. (Committee minutes, however, might include more detail - such as the main points arising from discussions - which will help in the development of reports and plans.)

4. Reference to attachments:

Unless they are very short, documents submitted to a meeting need not be copied into the body of the minutes, but should be noted in the minutes and attached thereto for reference (financial reports, committee reports, very lengthy motions, etc.). The minutes would, of course, carefully note any changes made to those documents at the meeting.

5. Time of adjournment and signature of the individual who took the minutes.

Style

Make your minutes easy to use⁴:

- be brief
- be specific
- be accurate
- make assignments/commitments and deadlines clear
- use headings
- number and date each page

The minutes should stand on their own: someone should be able to quickly refer to them the next day or five years later and know exactly what transpired.

Circulating your minutes

Minutes should be circulated to all relevant individuals as soon as possible following the meeting so that they have a record of the decisions made and actions to be taken. Do not wait to circulate them at the next meeting (bonus: you can have a motion to approve the minutes “as circulated” rather than taking precious meeting time to read them.)

Helpful Hints

- Some chapters have found that having a summary of all action items with the name of the person designated to that action, in bold at the end of the minutes makes for easy reference.
- include the date, time, and location of the next meeting, with a phone number for who to call if a member can't attend the next meeting, also in bold.

Keeping the Minute Book

It is the Secretary's responsibility to keep the Minute Book. This should be a ring binder with all of the chapter's minutes inserted in order, the most recent on top. Use index tabs with the dates of the meetings to make reference even easier.

As noted above, all documents submitted to meetings should be filed with those minutes as they form part of the official record and may later be needed for reference.

4. see “*Example of Meeting Minutes*” on page 11-13

Corrections to minutes

Any errors or omissions noted at the subsequent meeting must be made to the relevant minutes. The Secretary should cross out and insert, as neatly as possible, whatever is required to ensure that the meeting minutes are finally accurate.

Example of Meeting Minutes

An example of meeting minutes for a chapter Board of Directors meeting is shown below:



Meeting of the Board of Directors

held on March 15, 2003 at M. Smith house in Anytown, B.C.

Attending: M. Smith (President), J. Doe (Secretary/Treasurer), G. White (Membership Chair), C. Director (Director), P. Past (Past President), T. Jones (Director)

Absent: M. Vice (Vice-President)

Guest: G. Rules (Consultant)

Recorded by: J. Doe (Secretary/Treasurer)

Item	Responsible	Deadline
<u>CALL TO ORDER</u>		
The meeting was called to order by M. Smith at 7:00 p.m.		
<u>APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA</u>		
moved by G. White, seconded by T. Jones: That the agenda be approved with the change of "Consultant's Report" by moved to the second itemCARRIED		
<u>MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING</u>		
moved by J. Doe, seconded P. Past: that the minutes of the February 14, 2003 meeting of the Board of Directors be accepted as circulated ...CARRIED		
<u>CONSULTANT'S REPORT</u>		
G. Rules circulated a written report (attached) on bursaries for PDP programs for French Immersion teachers.		
T. Jones will form a committee to define the bursary criteria for the Anytown PDP bursary and bring a draft for review of the board by April 17, 2003	T. Jones	Apr. 17
<u>FINANCIAL REPORTS</u>		
moved by C. Director, seconded P. Past: that the monthly financial statements to February 28 be received as circulatedCARRIED		
J. Doe and C. Director to have a budget for next fiscal year ready to present at the next meeting	J. Doe, C. Director	Apr. 17

CPF *Canadian Parents for French*

Anytown Chapter

Item (con't)	Responsible	Deadline
<u>MEMBERSHIP</u>		
Discussion on how to retain and attract more members. G. White and committee to put together membership drive plan.	G. White	May 15
<u>NOMINATIONS</u>		
All members of the board agreed to work together to clarify, by Sunday, March 23, a description of the role of a Board Director member. This information to be given to the Chair of the Nominations Committee by the end of March	All Board Members	Mar. 23
	M. Vice	Mar. 31
<u>NEXT MEETING</u>		
The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 16 at M. Vice's house. Call M. Smith 604-999-2222 if you are unable to attend.	M. Smith	
<u>ADJOURNMENT</u>		
The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 p.m.		

Attachments:

- a copy of the Consultants report
- financial statements

