

## Tips for Running an Effective School Forest Committee Meeting

One of the most important roles as chairperson is running a meeting that is effective and efficient. In order to do this, plan ahead, keep the meeting on topic and delegate duties to members with specific timeframe and expectations.

Consider having a member volunteer to be the secretary. That member can take minutes and send them out to the committee after each meeting. This keeps track of all decisions, delegations and future agenda items. If you have more than 8 individuals on your committee, consider breaking the group into subcommittees.

Below are some helpful hints on running a committee meeting: before, during and after.

### Before the meeting

- It is a good idea to set up meetings in advance and meet a few times throughout the year.
- Reserve a location and set a time for each meeting. Give members adequate time to plan on attending.
- Have an agenda for each meeting. Decide which items are for information, discussion, or decision making. Allocate time for discussion according to the importance of each issue. Schedule more important items first on the agenda.
- Clearly write the meeting goal(s) on each agenda.

At your inaugural meeting or the first meeting of the year, your primary task may be generating goals and tasks. Then each subsequent meeting may be devoted to reporting on and/or accomplishing a specific goal.

Examples of meeting goals: By the end of this meeting, we will:

- *Create a mission statement for our School Forest*
  - *Prioritize the top 3 goals to achieve in the school forest this year*
  - *Identify 1 or 2 people to organize the trail-clearing event*
  - *Meet our forester and learn how we can improve the health of our forest*
  - *Hear from each group how their project is proceeding*
- Send the agenda and any necessary paperwork or materials to each member before the meeting. Give them adequate time to review materials before the meeting date.

### During the meeting

- Start and end meetings on time. If work isn't done when time is up, negotiate a time for further discussion.

Even if individuals arrive late, START. Consistency is key. Starting on time shows respect to those who arrived on time and may help late-comers change their behavior for subsequent meetings.

- Keep to the agenda, try to be brief when making a point and ensure time is used effectively.
- Facilitate a thoughtful discussion. The chairperson should:
  - Set **meeting ground rules** at the first committee meeting, and stick to them
  - Seat people strategically to encourage participation. Use name cards if attendees do not know one another.
  - Prompt thoughtful responses and make sure all voices are heard fairly
  - Draw out quieter members and respectfully discourage those who are monopolizing the meeting
  - Double-check for agreement on important issues. Seek opposing points of view.
  - Steer away from discussing or rehashing previous decisions or negative topics.
- Give credit where it is due for accomplishments
- Make sure all decisions are recorded along with who is responsible for implementing them.
- Conclude each meeting with a summary of what is to be done by whom and when it should be accomplished.
- Set a time for the next meeting if applicable. It is a good idea to set the dates for meetings well in advance.

### **After the meeting**

- Send members a summary of the meeting, keying on the decisions made and on the assignments given. If you have selected a secretary, delegate this duty to them.
- If possible, allow some social time after each meeting!