

NEW SOUTH WALES TEACHERS FEDERATION

MEETING GUIDE FOR WORKPLACES AND ASSOCIATIONS

The purpose of this booklet is to assist Workplace Committees and Associations to plan and conduct effective Federation meetings



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978-0-6488085-6-5 (print)

978-0-6488085-7-2 (digital)

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2010. March 2020. 20069

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PLANNING A MEETING

A successful meeting depends on everyone having a clear understanding of what the meeting sets out to achieve. Setting a clear agenda can assist with this. When planning a meeting consider the order of business, draft any motions required for the meeting, and then prepare and circulate the agenda to financial members as notification of the meeting.

Sample workplace meeting agenda

Federation meeting

When: Monday 6 June at recess

Where: Staffroom

Order of business:

- Meeting declared open
- Acknowledgement of Country
- Apologies
- Federation Representative's report
- Questions
- Business arising from the Federation Representative's report
- Motions on notice (*list them*)
- General business
- Close of meeting

Sample Association meeting agenda

Gumnut Teachers Association meeting

When: Wednesday 7 August at 4pm

Where: Gumnut Community Hall, 5 Gumnut Road, Gumnut

Order of business:

- Meeting declared open
- Acknowledgement of Country
- Apologies
- Election of timekeeper
- Minutes of last meeting
- Correspondence
- Treasurer's report
- Executive report
- School reports
- Councillor's report
- Organiser's report
- Motions on notice (*list them*)
- General business
- Close of meeting

CONDUCTING A MEETING

Good meeting practices encourage diversity and democracy, and support making effective decisions that have consensus. These meeting guidelines are designed to:

- foster the democratic exchange of ideas
- develop effective decisions that have majority support
- make efficient use of the available time.

Attendance record

A record must be kept of the members who attend the meeting. This can be done by way of a sign-on book or by record of the minute taker. Any apologies of members who said they could not attend should be recorded.

Quorum

Federation does not set a required minimum number of members for a Federation workplace meeting to go ahead, but leaves it up to members to determine whether they want to set a quorum in their workplace.

Associations usually set a quorum to suit their size and efficient operation, which is normally defined in their constitution.

Chairperson

The chairperson is responsible for the conduct of the meeting, assisting in its smooth, democratic operation.

Members present at a workplace meeting elect a person to chair the meeting. It is preferred that the chairperson is not the Federation Representative because they are too busy giving reports, answering questions, moving motions or entering debate to effectively act as chairperson.

For an Association meeting, it is expected that the President will undertake the role of chairperson. When the President is absent, the responsibility to chair the meeting falls to the Vice President.

Setting time limits

Federation encourages the implementation of time limits for each meeting item. These allow for fair sharing of the time available and help ensure the meeting will get through its urgent business.

There will usually be five minutes for a report, three minutes for a mover and seconder, and three minutes for the reply. An extension of time can always be moved, seconded and voted on, if necessary.

Meetings might consider appointing a time keeper to help ensure the efficient running of a meeting.

Minuting the meeting

A minute taker needs to record the motions moved during the meeting and whether they were carried or lost, as well as a short description of any other discussions and decisions of the meeting.

For a workplace meeting this may be a role undertaken by someone on the Federation Workplace Committee. Alternatively, the meeting may elect someone to undertake this role each meeting.

For Association meetings, it is the role of the Secretary or Minute Secretary (if the association has one) to record the minutes of the meeting.

Previous minutes and business arising

Association meetings should confirm the minutes of the previous meeting by moving a motion that “the minutes of the previous meeting be confirmed”. Any objection raised to this motion should be on the grounds of accuracy, not because the objector does not like what had been decided.

The chairperson will ask if there is any business arising from the previous minutes. Motions relating to matters mentioned in the minutes should then be moved, seconded and debated before moving on to the rest of the agenda. Some items relating to the previous minutes will come up later on the agenda under reports, or other listed items, and the chairperson should remind the meeting of this to assist with keeping to time.

Reports

Verbal or written reports may be made to a meeting to share relevant news, information or progress on a campaign or industrial matter. Reports are often made by, but not limited to, Federation Representatives, Association office holders, Councillors or Organisers.

Tips for presenting a report to the meeting

- Be prepared — know your facts
- Provide a written report whenever possible
- Limit your verbal report to three minutes, highlighting the main points
- Stand up, make eye contact and speak clearly
- Make sure your colleagues understand your report

Question time

After a report, a member may move that the meeting hold a period of question time, including a time limit for the period of questions. The motion will need a seconder and then be put to a vote.

Substantive motion

A substantive motion, often simply referred to as a motion, requires something to be done (some person or group to take specific action) or expresses a policy on some matter.

Tips for preparing a motion

- Limit your motion to one issue
- Include a direction for an individual or group to take a specific action
- Don't clutter the motion with supportive argument, save it for debate
- Make sure the motion is in line with Federation policy (check with your Organiser if you are unsure)
- Maximise support for the motion/s before the meeting
- Organise a mover and seconder before the meeting

Procedural motion

A procedural motion deals with the conduct of the meeting itself or, as the word implies, establishes a procedure to best deal with a substantive motion that may be before the chair. (See Types of procedural motions, page 12)

Amendment

An amendment is a proposal to change a part of a motion. Amendments can be moved to both substantive and procedural motions.

No one who has spoken in the debate on the original motion or an amendment may move or second an amendment, though they may speak on a subsequent amendment moved and seconded by others, if they are recognised by the chairperson.

Amendment by way of addendum

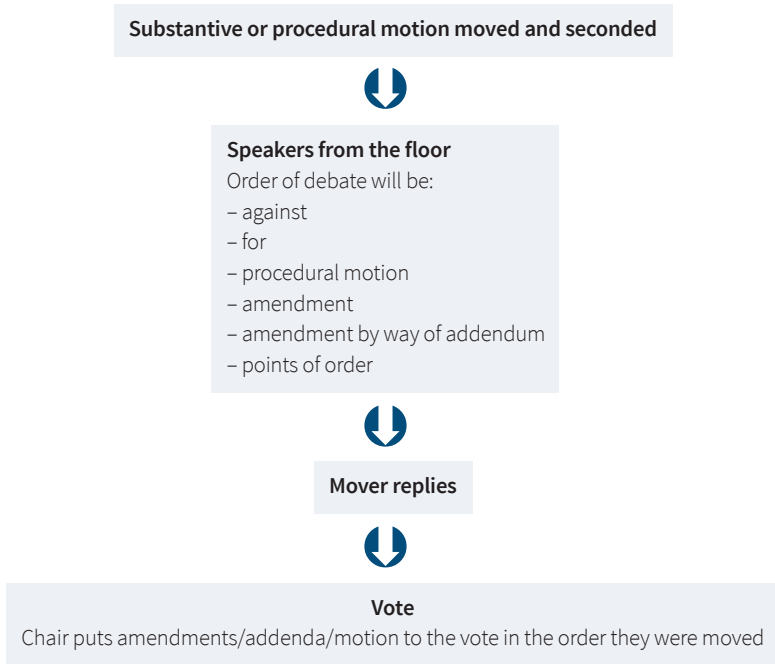
An addendum is an amendment that adds to the resolution being discussed but does not alter its intent. For example, a motion may be before a meeting to hold a forum on a union issue and someone might request that the mover of the motion accept the idea that material outlining the union's case be made available in bulk at the event.

Addenda are treated in the same manner as amendments.

Mover and seconder

All motions, procedural motions and amendments must be moved and seconded before being debated. The mover or seconder may take this opportunity to make a speech in support of the motion, if they want to.

Debate process



There should always be an equal opportunity for members to express opposing views, provided that:

- the view of the next person to speak varies from the previous speaker
- the proposed amendment is in order, changing the preceding motion and/or amendment.

No member shall speak more than once to a motion or an amendment without the consent of the meeting.

There is no limit on the number of amendments that can be moved.

A procedural motion takes precedence in debate.

A chairperson should tend to err on the side of generosity when allowing members to move amendments although their decisions can be adjudicated on by the meeting if someone takes a point of order.

Point of order

A point of order queries whether meeting procedure or established practice has been breached, the irrelevance or continued repetition of a speaker, or contradiction of a previous decision. It can be used at any time during a meeting, including interrupting a speaker, but it must be valid.

Having heard the point of order, the chairperson will make a ruling on the validity of the issue raised.

A point of order is not to be raised because you disagree with someone or do not like what is being said.

Out of order

The chairperson has the power to rule a motion, procedural motion or amendment out of order, but should use this power with restraint.

They may rule a motion or amendment out of order if it is:

- irrelevant or frivolous
- contrary to Federation policy, where it must be upheld (for example, if the motion is racist, homophobic, sexist)*
- provision has been made elsewhere in the agenda for the proposal to be dealt with
- a direct negative of the motion being debated.

*A motion can be contrary to policy when it seeks to change current policy, for example, by referring a new policy position or recommendation to change existing policy to Federation Council or Executive.

Voting

The chairperson will say: "All those in support of the motion say 'aye', all those against say 'no'."

The result is declared on the basis of a simple majority.

If more than auditory evidence is necessary to declare the result, the order of evidence is:

1. Show of hands
2. A count — actually count the hands and declare the numbers. Any member can ask for this
3. A division — those for and those against physically congregate on separate sides of the room. They are counted again and the numbers declared.

The chairperson doesn't have to wait for a request for a count or show of hands but can use their initiative if the evidence is unclear. They should always try to appear decisive and in control.

Secret ballot

Any member can call for a secret ballot. A returning officer should be nominated and elected by the members, with this person then distributing the ballot papers for members to sign. A record of who has voted should be maintained to ensure that only Federation members participate in the process and that people only vote once.

When counting the votes, the returning officer can be accompanied by scrutineers (people appointed by either side of the vote to observe the voting, and counting of the votes to check any irregularities). Once the vote is counted, the returning officer announces the result.

CHAIRING A MEETING

The chairperson is responsible for ensuring the meeting is conducted according to the meeting procedures, and in an orderly and timely manner.

Tips for the chairperson

- Learn the meeting procedures
- Have a copy of the meeting procedures and the agenda with you when you chair a meeting
- Stick to the meeting procedures
- Do not permit more than one speaker at a time
- If the discussion becomes heated, lengthen the time between one speaker sitting down and the next being allowed to speak
- Do not shout from the chair
- When confronted by a point of order, take your time in coming to a decision. Explain your reasons for a decision. After an explanation is given from the chair do not engage in argument on the same point
- Try not to forget common sense, firmness and impartiality

Debate processes

Single motion

Mover of the motion rises, announces and speaks to the motion



Chairperson asks if there is a seconder for the motion



Secunder of the motion rises, seconds the motion, and may choose to speak to the motion



Speakers from the floor speak to the motion. The order followed is to accept a speaker against the motion, followed by a speaker in favour



Mover of the motion has the “right of reply”, to respond to the debate



Chairperson announces the meeting will vote and reads out the exact wording of motion



Chairperson calls for a vote on the motion



Chairperson announces the result of voting: “I declare this motion lost/carried.”

Motion with a single amendment

Mover of the motion rises, announces the motion and speaks to the motion



Chairperson asks if there is a seconder for the motion



Secunder of the motion rises, seconds the motion, and may choose to speak to the motion



Speakers from the floor speak to the motion (against/for/against/for etc)



Mover of an amendment (technically speaking against the motion) rises, announces the amendment and speaks to the amendment



Chairperson asks for a seconder for the amendment



Secunder of the amendment rises, seconds the amendment, and may choose to speak



Speakers from the floor speak against the amendment (and/or in favour of the original)



Mover of the motion can take their “right of reply” to respond to the debate



Chairperson announces the meeting will vote on the amendment and reads the amendment



Chairperson calls for a vote on the amendment and declares the result: “I declare the amendment lost/carried.”



If the amendment is carried:

- The chairperson announces the meeting will vote on the original motion as amended. The chairperson reads out the exact wording of the original motion as amended
- The chairperson calls for a vote on the original motion as amended
- The chairperson announces the result of voting: “I declare the motion as amended lost/carried.”

OR

If the amendment is lost:

- The chairperson announces the meeting will vote on the original motion and reads it out
- The chairperson calls for a vote on the original motion
- The chairperson announces the result of voting: “I declare the original motion lost/carried.”

Motion with multiple amendments

Original motion moved/seconded, for example, “That Federation creates posters for schools to promote access to lactation breaks.”



The next person to speak will either:

- oppose the original motion; or
- move an amendment, for example, moved/seconded “That Federation creates posters for schools to promote access to a range of family related leave.”



The chairperson will decide whether the next person to speak is in order, on the basis of who spoke last. So, the next person to speak will either:

- support the original motion; or
- oppose amendment 1; or
- move another amendment; or
- move an addendum (that is, making changes to the amendment), for example, moved/seconded: “That Federation creates posters for schools to promote access to a range of family related leave, highlighting wins in the past few years.”

Remember, the speaker’s point of view must vary from the previous speaker.



When the debate ends, the chairperson has the original motion and amendments in the order in which they were moved:

Original motion: “That the Federation creates posters for schools to promote access to lactation breaks.”

Amendment 1: “That the Federation creates posters for schools to promote access to a range of family-related leave.”

Amendment 2: “That the Federation creates posters for schools to promote access to a range of family-related leave, highlighting wins in the past few years.”

Amendment 3 “That Federation email all members a copy of the poster.”

The chairperson will put amendments/addenda to the vote in the order in which they were moved. All amendments have to be put to a vote regardless of them contradicting an amendment previously carried.

Amendment 1 is put first and the meeting is making a choice between it and the original motion. Let’s assume it is carried. *This means the original motion will not be put on its own.*



Amendment 1 now takes the temporary status of the “original”. Amendment 2 is put next. The meeting is now making a choice between amendment 1 (which has already been endorsed) and amendment 2 — *unless* the amendment has been moved to whatever is carried (which means it adds to the motion, rather than replacing it). *Let’s assume that amendment 2 also is carried. This means amendment 1 is rejected and amendment 2 takes the temporary status of the “original”.*



Amendment 3 is put next. The meeting now makes a choice between amendment 2 and amendment 3. *Let’s assume amendment 3 is lost. We are then left with amendment 2.*



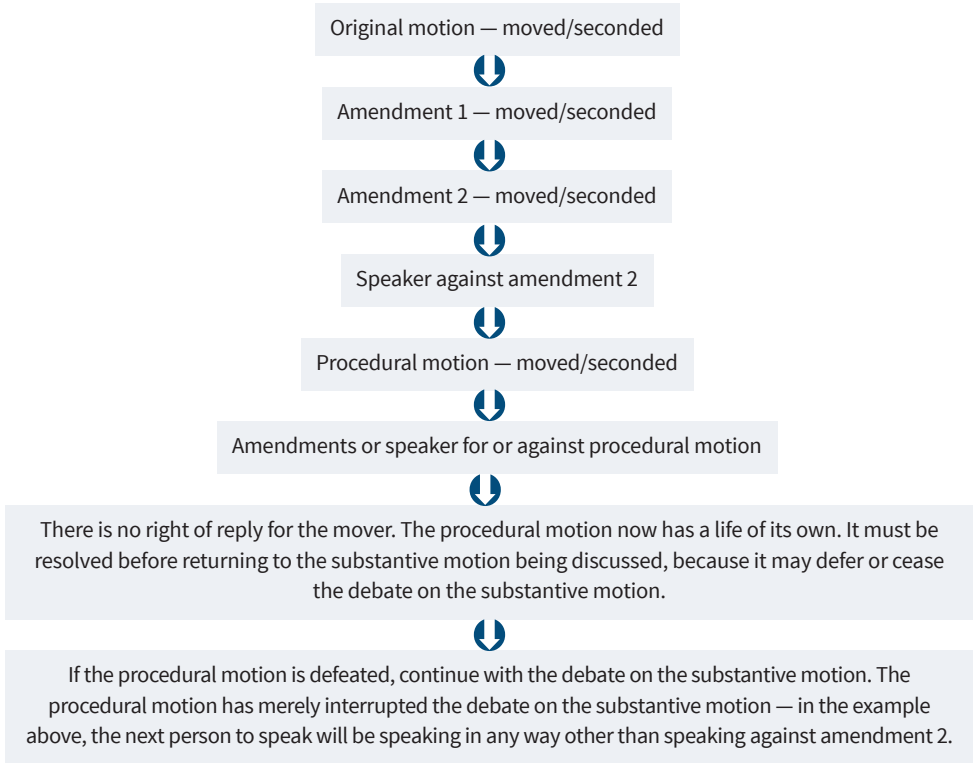
The chairperson puts the motion (as amended by the decisions of the meeting). It now becomes the “original” or surviving motion. If it is defeated, you have no substantive resolution from that debate.



The chairperson declares the motion (as amended) carried/lost.

Process for procedural motions

When a procedural motion is moved in a debate or at a meeting, it must be debated out before returning to the other business before the meeting. It takes precedence in the debate. Restrictions on those who have spoken in the substantive debate are lifted for discussion of the procedural motion.



Types of procedural motions

Move that the question be put

If a member wishes to bring debate to a close at any time, provided no speaker is interrupted and they are granted the call to speak, the member can move “that the question be put”.

The chairperson has the right to accept this motion without a seconder, but it is usual to call for a seconder.

The mover and seconder must be persons who have not spoken previously in the substantive debate.

If the motion is carried it means the debate that has been interrupted must close. No further debate is allowed with the exception that the original mover can exercise right of reply. A vote is then taken on any amendments and the original motion.

If the motion that the question be put is defeated then debate continues as before.

Move that the meeting go into committee

By going “into committee”, the strict order of debate is avoided and people can speak more than once.

This type of motion can be moved at any time.

Always put a limit on the period of time involved, or the committee stage will reduce time for the substantive debate.

The motion “to go into committee” must have a seconder. The mover may have spoken previously in the debate. Discussion and amendment is allowed before the procedural motion is put to a vote.

This is a very effective way of reducing confusion and puts people in a more relaxed frame of mind. It is particularly useful when people are not use to formal meeting procedure, or if time isn’t pressing and it is thought useful to provide a freer forum for discussion.

Move that the meeting proceed to the next item of business

If a member wishes to avoid a vote being taken, provided a speaker is not interrupted, the member may rise and say: “I move the meeting proceeds to the next item of business.”

This motion must be seconded.

The mover and seconder must be persons who have not spoken previously in the substantive debate.

This procedural motion can be moved while there is an amendment before the meeting. This is put to the meeting with discussion but without amendment. If it is carried, no vote is taken on the original motion. If lost the debate proceeds as before.

Move adjournment of debate — also adjournment of meeting

If a member wishes to avoid a vote being taken they may move that the debate be adjourned, provided a speaker is not interrupted. This procedural motion can be moved while there is an amendment before the meeting. The mover and seconder must be persons who have not spoken previously in the substantive debate.

The chairperson allows discussion on any amendment of this motion then puts it to the vote.

If this procedural motion is defeated it can be moved again after an interval. If this motion is carried, the mover has the right to reopen debate upon resumption of the debate/meeting.

Move an extension of time for a speaker or to extend the time for the debate

If a member believes a motion needs further discussion or that the current speaker’s contribution needs additional time to be heard in full, the member can move for an extension of the time limit.

Motions for an extension of time for a speaker or to extend the time for the debate may be amended (for the amount of time), but without discussion.

Process for amendments

Original motion — mover/seconder



Speaker against original motion



Amendment is moved/seconded (it is taken as a speech against the original or previous amendment and appears to be out of order, but an amendment is always in order)



The next speaker will be at variance with this, either:

- speaking against the amendment; or
- for the original; or
- moving a further amendment

Even though a person may have a different view from the previous speaker they may be philosophically or tactically in sympathy with them.

A small variation in wording via an amendment may be sufficient to make all parties happy or settle on a suitable compromise.

The only limit on the number of amendments that can be put in a debate is time. A debate can consist of a whole series of amendments proposed one after the other. The view is held that by doing this, the meeting is exposed to the maximum number of alternatives to the original, for the final decision of the meeting.

Process for point of order

When a point of order is raised the current speaker shall sit down and the member raising the point shall first state the point of order. The chairperson may then hear that member on the point, hear further discussion, or rule at that stage, but the point of order shall be decided before the debate proceeds.

Points of order must deal with the conduct or procedure of the debate. A point of order is not justified merely because a member makes a statement that someone else feels is incorrect.

The member rising to put the point of order must prove one or more of the following:

- that the speaker is travelling outside the scope of the question
- that inappropriate language is used
- that there is an infringement of the standing orders, or in the absence of standing orders, is acting contrary to the general custom of debate.

The most convenient time for raising a point of order is when no one is speaking, although there is nothing to stop you interrupting a speaker.

How a point of order is handled

The chairperson may hear the member on the point raised or hear further discussion from the meeting on the point



The chairperson rules on the point raised and the meeting proceeds on the basis of that ruling

Dissent from the chairperson's ruling

The members are the final arbiter of how a meeting will be conducted.

Any member of the meeting may move dissent from the chairperson's ruling. If this happens, then:

The dissenter explains their reasons for dissent



The chairperson remains in the chair and explains reasons for their ruling



The chairperson moves, "That the chairperson's ruling be upheld."



The meeting decides the issue by majority vote if the ruling is upheld.

If the vote goes against the chairperson, they simply alter the rule accordingly and the meeting proceeds. The chairperson does not vacate the chair.

The chairperson will only leave the chair when they wish to enter the debate on a substantive or procedural motion. They may not resume the chair until that matter is resolved.

Right of reply

If there has been debate, before the vote is taken the mover of the original motion has the right of reply.

This speech must deal only with points made in the debate — not introduce new matters.

The mover of an amendment does not reply.

Chair puts amendments/addenda/motion to the vote in order they were moved

Before the vote is taken, the chairperson or minute taker/secretary will read out the exact terms of the motion or amendment concerned, so everyone knows what they are voting on. In order to help the minute taker/secretary write it down clearly, whoever moves a motion or amendment is required to provide it in writing to the chair immediately once the motion or amendment is moved.

When a vote is taken, any amendments are put to the vote first. Amendments are voted upon in the order in which they were moved. If all amendments are defeated, the original motion is put to the vote. When all amendments have been voted, if any amendments are carried, the motion as amended (usually called the substantive motion) is then put and voted upon.

Chairperson's casting vote

When those in favour of a motion and those against it are equally divided, the chairperson's options are:

- to vote for the motion (in which case the motion will be carried)
- to vote against the motion (in which case the motion will be lost)
- to refuse to vote at all (the motion will be declared “not carried” and may therefore be brought up again at a later meeting).

By convention, the chairperson will not use the casting vote to create new policy but will vote against the motion.

NEED MORE HELP?

While formal meeting procedures sound complicated at first, with practice — like all things — they become easier to follow. When everybody understands the procedures, and approaches the exercise with a positive motivation to reach collective decisions that meet the needs of the group, the procedure becomes quite a simple and efficient way of making decisions.

Of course, the only way to learn is to attend some meetings. Application of theory is the best way to reinforce the procedures outlined in this booklet. So, make sure you attend and participate in your Federation workplace meeting — and your local Association meeting where possible.

Meeting procedures are covered in some Trade Union Training courses including Fundamentals for Federation Representatives and Women's Contacts, and Association Executive (Presidents, Secretaries and Treasurers). For dates and further information about these courses please see the Trade Union Training program on the website at nswtf.org.au/training or contact tut@nswtf.org.au.

Your local Organiser can also answer questions you may have about meeting procedures. Organisers can be contacted on organisers@nswtf.org.au, by calling (02) 9217 2199 (for Sydney region) or contacting your local regional office (details are listed on our website).

Members can also attend Council as observers, to see meeting procedures in action.