

Speak Up

Start-up guidelines for Representative Committees

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Introduction

The purpose of this booklet (2nd Ed) is to help everyone to understand how a representative committee can empower you as a participant. It will also give some helpful pointers about the skills which you will need to use whilst being a representative. Representative committees ensure that all EVE services are conducted in partnership with all of its participants – that means you! Use this manual to help you get set up, or to give others outside of EVE Ltd an outline of what exactly your committee is all about.

A Representative Committee

What is a Representative committee?

A representative committee is a group of elected participants who provide a voice to all in their location; you can do this by giving feedback on concerns, needs, suggestions or queries which are highlighted to you while in your committee role.

Terms of Reference

The Boundaries of the Representative Committee – Terms of Reference

Once elected every committee should draw up a terms of reference – the staff facilitator can help you do this. The 'Terms of Reference' gives a clear idea to all of what exactly you will be doing when forming a representative committee for your location. A terms of reference is like your committee's mission statement.

Include the following in your 'Terms of Reference'

- A couple of lines explaining what your aims are e.g. to listen to all concerns and address them appropriately.
- A couple of lines clearly detailing areas/issues which are outside of your role e.g. money, budgets, staff issues etc.
- List all of your committee members.
- How long you will all be in your roles before you plan to have another election e.g. 6 months – 1 year etc.
- A clear indication of how often you will have your group meetings and then how often you will meet with the centre manager to give feedback e.g. we will meet every 4 weeks with everyone and then with the manager in the following days (2 – 3 max. days recommended for feedback meeting)

As each new committee is elected they can change the terms of reference if they wish for their time in the role.

A Committee Makeup

Who makes up a representative committee?

Generally there are 3 main roles, some locations that have a large number of participants have a bigger committee to help spread out the duties, so decide what suits you best. The 3 more common roles are:

- Chairperson
- Vice-Chairperson
- Secretary

All roles are of equal importance and without one the committee does not run as smoothly.

Those who take on these roles will have the responsibility to listen to the views, suggestions and opinions of your fellow participants and represent them as issues of concern.

Some committees like to rotate the roles e.g. each gets an opportunity to be a chairperson, vice-chairperson and secretary – decide for your committee what suits you best.

It is advisable to have a number of subs for each role e.g. someone who can step up into one of the roles should someone find themselves on leave of any kind for an extended period of time.

The Chairperson

What does a chairperson do?

The Chairperson leads each meeting and is responsible for the overall running of the committee.

The main tasks include:

- Making sure each meeting runs smoothly.
- Setting an agenda for each meeting a couple of days beforehand with the vice-chairperson and secretary.
- Bringing up issues of concern at the meetings.
- Ensuring everyone gets a chance to have their say at the meetings.
- Listening to everyone and making sure opinions and suggestions are respected.
- Setting the date for the next meeting.
- Meeting the centre manager to give the feedback.

A positive and respectful Chairperson will be remembered for their suitability to the role – so aim for this while occupying the position.

The staff facilitator is on-hand to support you in your role when and if required.

The Vice-Chairperson

What does a Vice – Chairperson Do?

The Vice-Chairperson assists the Chairperson in their role.

The main tasks include:

- Assisting and supporting the Chairperson or secretary in their duties.
- Helping the meetings to run smoothly.
- Attending the meeting with the centre manager along with the chairperson to give the previous meetings feedback.
- Taking on the duties of the Chairperson when they are unavailable.

The staff facilitator is on-hand to support you in your role when and if required.

The Secretary

What does a secretary do?

The secretary ensures that all meeting events etc. are recorded for everyone to read and track progress.

The main tasks include:

- Take notes during meetings
- Type up the minutes after the meeting
- Typing up the agenda for each meeting after it has been agreed.
- Doing any photocopying needed for each meeting.
- Putting up any signs/notices on the committee notice board.
- Giving out the attendance sheet at the start of each meeting so everyone can sign in.
- Taking note of the next date for a committee meeting.

The staff facilitator is on-hand to support you in your role when and if required.

The Staff Facilitator

How staff are involved in your committee?

At the start a staff member acts as a facilitator for the new committee, this is to help the new committee get the support and assistance to figure out their new roles and the duties that go with them. The facilitator may become involved in the following:

- Informing everyone about the committee
- Assisting in the elections
- Helping the new committee draw up their terms of reference
- Helping the new committee draw up the first meeting agenda
- Sitting in on the first meeting – as a support for the committee
- Giving support in any area of the committee work as required
- Keeping the management updated

It is up to the committee to tap into the facilitator for support and assistance, otherwise the facilitator should occasionally ensure everything is ok without being intrusive in any area of the committee work.

The Election

How to organise an election

The facilitator leads a lot of this – it is recommended that the elections follow this path:

- The facilitator meets with everyone and explains what a committee is, the duties and responsibilities
- He/she then explains how many participants are needed to make a committee up and the roles involved.
- It should be suggested that people go off and think about putting themselves forward for the committee
- After a period of time e.g. one hour, day, week etc. nominees should be sought.
- The facilitator should prepare voting slips and a date set for the voting to take place.
- On the date set it is advisable to gather people together and give each the opportunity to vote and post their vote into a box.
- The facilitator should then count the votes with a witness and the final selection announced to the participants and staff/manager.

Although the above is advisable, each location is unique so please use a voting system which best suits your needs ensuring that it is fair and true to the wishes of the participants.

First Committee Duties

The first duties of the new committee

- Have the first committee meeting with everyone
- Plan for the next meeting
- Promoting and encouraging other participants and the committee work.
- Finalise arrangements to give feedback to manager
- Organise a notice board for committee business only
- Organise a suggestion box

First Committee Meeting

What happens in the first meeting?

The first meeting can be an exciting and nervous time for the new committees however there a few things which need to be addressed in the first meeting – they are:

- Hand out the sign-in sheet
- Give a brief outline of what the committee is all about – it is recommended that the chairperson should go through their 'Terms of Reference' so that everyone is clear from the start.
- Tell everyone where the notice board is – if there is not one yet ask where people would like it to be placed.
- Tell everyone that there is now a suggestion box and where it is – if there is not one yet ask where people would like it to be and perhaps volunteers to help put it together.

- Raising any issues people may have for their first meeting.
- The staff facilitator is on-hand and available to help with any of the following you simply have to request his or her assistance.

Agendas

How to put an Agenda together?

Your agenda should have the date and time of the meeting written on it as well as a list of the items for which the chairperson will discuss. Below is a sample of a made up agenda:

Agenda 12th February 2006 – 2pm

- Welcome (Everyone to sign in on sheet)
- Minutes (Let everyone know that the minutes from the last meeting are on the notice board so people can look over them there).
- Matters Arising (This is for any feedback on actions or issues that were to be carried out or discussed following the last meeting).
- Outings (Suggestions as to where we can go for the summer outing).
- Smoke breaks
- Time keeping
- AOB
- Next meeting date

(There is a blank agenda form in the back of this booklet so you can use it for your own committee if you like)

Minute Taking

How to minute meetings?

The secretary is mainly responsible for minute taking during the meetings. Your minutes need to record the following:

- Any issues which arise and any of the actions/enquiries which have to be followed up e.g. "John Smith asked if we could go to Trabolgan for a break, Mary is to suggest this to the centre manager as a possible location for summer break" this will be the bulk of the minutes – very little else will need to be recorded however you may find you have 2 pages of issues and actions so be alert and ask for people to slow down if you need to.
- Date for the next meeting – it is important to keep a note of the next date so that everyone is aware of where the meeting is taking place, what time it is at and that everybody has this information in good time.

When taking minutes during the meeting only take down words (which when typing up later) that can remind you about the rest of the discussion and you can add information then e.g.

In the meeting you write – "Trabolgan"

Then you can fill in the information later – "John Smith asked if we could go to Trabolgan for a break, Mary is to suggest this to the centre manager as a possible location for the summer break"

Your facilitator can help you figure out what way suits you and your committee best when recording minutes – audio equipment can be used once everyone is ok with it.

Case Study

My Experience as a Participant Representative

Speak up, we all have a voice. We all need a voice, to communicate, to talk to each other. As for me I find it hard to communicate with other people. Having this disability (Schizophrenia), my mind is in a kind of in and out situation, a 'this way – that way' kind of thing.

I represent the team members of Thomas Court. I listen to team members when they come to me with suggestions or complaints and I bring them to the committee. It's an achievement because many years ago I didn't think that I could do anything like this. I've had to push myself to do things. When I was asked to represent the team members I was reluctant because I wasn't sure of my ability. But I was able and I'm still learning in my role and it's opened up new doors and opportunities for me.

I know that it's hard for people with disabilities, there's no way of denying it, but we can go forward marching to a beating drum. We do need a voice, our own, all of our voices. So let's SPEAK UP and be counted for. **I did it, so can you.**

Alan Gregg
Participant Representative

Case Study

Contribution from a Representative Committee Facilitator

I have been the facilitator with Cherryfield Participant Representative Committee since its inception. I have found the Representative Committee to be hugely beneficial to the centre as a whole and also very rewarding for me personally, particularly when I see what the participants have gained from the experience of taking part.

The Representative Committee has given clients a huge sense of involvement in the running of the centre and has given them a platform to advocate for themselves, where previously they may have had none. This has led, among other things, to a variety of new ideas and suggestions to improve the service which has been taken on board by the staff and management. Shared ownership of the service has increased the sense of partnership within the centre.

Representative Committee Facilitator
EVE Limited Cherryfield

Additional Extras

Representative Committee Meeting Agenda Template

1. Firstly include the title of those meeting, for example Representative Committee Meeting.
2. Also include the **date** of the meeting.
3. Next include the **items for discussion**. These should have been **agreed before hand**. This description does not need to be detailed just one or two words.
4. You should **first include** apologies from those who are absent or late. If this is not your first meeting the **second item** on the agenda should be to **read over the minutes of the last meeting**. This can be done briefly.
5. If there are any **outstanding items** from these minutes they can at this point be discussed again and people can **re-volunteer** to complete them.
6. **Each item** to be discussed is **numbered** (see below).
7. Anything that has not been agreed or listed as a point for discussion can be brought up under **A.O.B** (which means any other business).
8. Always send the agenda out in good time so people attending can be prepared.

Sample Agenda

Centre Representative Committee
3/1/2006

Agenda

1. Apologies.
2. Minutes of last meeting read and agreed.
3. Meeting times *
4. Election of Committee*
5. A.O.B
6. Date of next meeting.

* 2, 3 are examples of points that may be discussed in your centre

Representative Committee Meeting

Date:

Agenda

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
9. A.O.B
10. Date of next meeting

This Agenda can be photocopied and used for each meeting.

Representative Committee Meeting Minutes Template

How do you minute meetings?

1. The **secretary** is usually responsible for taking minutes during the Representative meetings. **Minutes need to record:**
 - **Those present** at the meeting.
 - **Issues/conclusions** that arise in the meeting.
 - **Actions (if any)** to be taken on the issues raised.
 - **Dates** for further meetings.
2. Make **brief, clear** and **easy to follow** points, they do not have to be word for word as this would be impossible to do and too time consuming.
3. It may be useful to make **bullet points** during the meeting. You can then add brief explanations after the meeting.
4. The minutes should be **typed up as soon as possible** so as they are accurate. The person in this role will receive **adequate support** if required.
5. **Literacy** difficulties can be overcome by using **audio equipment**; it is important however to ask permission of all those attending the meeting.
6. It is important that the **minutes are sent** to the relevant people **in good time**.
7. Chairperson will invite further comments via A.O.B section.

Sample Minutes

Representative Committee Meeting

Date: 3/1/2006

Present: John Doyle, Harry O'Connor, Anne Smith.

Apologies: Mary O' Brien.

1. Minutes of last meeting read and agreed. No further action was required.
2. It was agreed by all that the meeting times should be the last Friday every month at 12.00.
3. After much discussion it was agreed that the election of reps will be held on an annual basis.
4. Anne Smith volunteered to help find a venue for the Christmas party. She will bring information back to us for the next meeting.
5. There was no other business to be discussed.
6. The next meeting will be on Friday the 27th January.

Memo Template

It is **important** to **notify** or **remind all of the relevant people** about the **next meeting**.

To do this you can **send a memo** or reminder around.

Include the **date, time** and **venue** of the meeting.

This is also a **good opportunity** to remind people **who to notify** in the event they would like **something included** on the agenda, and the **date to do** this by. (See example on next page)

MEMO

Representative Meeting

Date:

Time:

Venue:

If you have any issues to be discussed please notify _____(person)

before _____(time)

This Memo can be photocopied and used for each meeting.

Checklist for Representative Committee Meetings

Items to be carried out leading up to the next Representative Committee Meeting and during the Representative Committee Meeting. Please tick the box once the job has been completed.

1. Minutes of the previous meeting to go out in good time in order to remind members of the actions that need to be taken.....

2. Agenda to go out in good time to ensure that all members attending will be prepared.....

3. Practical elements of the meeting to be organised:
 - Location (size and overall suitability of room).....
 - Time of the meeting
 - Items for discussion (Agenda)
 - Time allocated to meeting.....

Items to be carried out during the Representative Committee Meeting

4. Secretary to ensure all members are signed in.

5. Secretary to hand out copies of the Agenda and Minutes from previous meeting.....

6. Chairperson to ensure that the Minutes from the previous meeting are read and that all actions are noted. Chairperson to secure agreement on the record of the previous minutes.

7. Chairperson to address the content of the Agenda and invite discussion and comment.

8. Secretary to record the issues and actions agreed for each item on the Agenda.

9. Chairperson to invite members to raise any other business (A.O.B.).....

10. Chairperson to conclude meeting and schedule date for next meeting.

11. Secretary to record date for next meeting.

*Note in the absence of the Chairperson the Vice-Chairperson will assume their duties.

This checklist can be photocopied and used for each meeting.

Acknowledgements

This handbook was originally funded by the European Year for People with Disabilities (EYPD) and has subsequently been reviewed based on feedback received from representative groups who have used the document.

EVE Limited is a subsidiary company of the Health Service Executive and provides a network of training and employment services for people living in Dublin, Wicklow and Kildare who suffer from Mental Health difficulties, learning disabilities and Asperger Syndrome.

We would like to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of the participants and staff of EVE Ltd who were involved in the project and subsequent revision resulting in this the 2nd edition. We hope many people will gain from this initiative and effective Representative Committees will develop as a result.

Glossary of Terms

- **Agenda** List of things to be dealt with, especially at a meeting
- **Committee** A group of people appointed to perform a specified service or function
- **Guideline** Set rule for doing something
- **Liaising** Establishing and maintaining communication (with)
- **Representative** Person chosen to stand for a group
- **Minutes** A record of proceedings of a meeting
- **To record** To put into writing

