

Meetings



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These should be planned and produced as though they were stage shows because that is what they are with Scouting in the spotlight. The speakers are the cast, there is a programme and there is an audience which has come along for what they hope will be an interesting and enjoyable occasion.

Unfortunately not every local Scout Organisation thinks of meetings in theatrical terms. The results are unplanned, unrehearsed, disorganised events, which disappoint everyone and discourage attendance on future occasions.

So as not to waste what should be a unique opportunity for direct communication with the public, the first essential is to start planning early in a logical sequence.

Objective

Once you establish clearly the purpose of having a meeting, everything else will fall into place, whether it is the Annual General Meeting, a launch for a new project or an open evening. Whatever the occasion, detailed arrangements may differ but the principles will apply to them all.

Location

If you have your own premises, all being well, its use as a formal meeting place will have been allowed for in the design and the necessary facilities included in the construction and fittings. If this is not the case, or you have to use alternative premises because you have none of your own, you should look for somewhere which is:

- a) Large enough to seat your audience comfortably
- b) Well ventilated and with heat control

- c) Suitable for any displays, film/slide show etc. you propose
- d) Well lit, with controllable lighting (and blackout facility)
- e) Built with adequate toilet/cloakroom facilities
- f) Quiet and unlikely to suffer from interference from outside
- g) Equipped for dispensing refreshments
- h) Near car park facilities.

Invitations

When the date, hour, place and outline programme are decided, it is time to plan the guest list and invitations.

Issue general invitations four to six weeks **before** the date of the meeting. Get Members to follow up, where possible, with verbal reminders to parents and friends **so** that you can get an idea of the likely acceptances. Check more formally with representatives from the sponsors, community leaders and other special guests.

Very special guests such as the Mayor and civic officials and guest speaker will need the longest possible advance notice if they are important to your meeting. You may have to pick a date to suit their convenience as well as avoiding clashing with other local interests.

Write to local newspaper editors enclosing a copy of the programme and inviting their representatives to attend.

The Scout Association

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Guest

Appoint young Leaders, Venture Scouts and other Scouts to be stewards and ushers. Special and distinguished guests should be met on arrival, introduced to the Chairman and Commissioners who should escort them to their seats. The Public Relations Officer or a Scouter should be responsible for welcoming press representatives and seeing to their needs since they are likely to have other events to cover and will need to get their material quickly.

Refreshments

Coffee and biscuits or whatever refreshments you are offering must be ready at the appropriate programme interval and served in presentable crockery - not cups and plates which carry all the signs of much use and abuse.

The stewards and ushers should dispense the refreshments speedily and efficiently - and collect the empties afterwards.

Two key people

The success of a meeting depends very much on liaison between the person delegated to supervise all the planning and preparation and whoever is to take the Chair or control the actual meeting. If they work together and gain the co-operation of all the others who have a part to play - from the speakers down to the person working the lights - you will be able to welcome your guests in the confident expectation they, and you, will get from the occasion what you are both hoping for and the meeting will serve its purpose well as a means of communicating with the public.

Minutes and reports

Minutes of previous meetings, which are to be 'taken' at the meeting, should be pre-printed and distributed beforehand, or at least be given to people as they arrive.

The same applies to reports which are going to be given verbally at the meeting, including financial reports. Press representatives can be given a copy of these reports which save taking notes, which could be too selective.

One further point regarding reports; the audience will not be pleased to receive a long-winded verbal delivery of a report which they already have in front of them in written form.