

THE ROLE OF THE SECRETARY

Characteristics of a Good Secretary

- A good Secretary is organized.
- Can keep good records.
- Can record activities.
- Can take action promptly.
- Works well within a group.
- Can multi-task.

Key Tasks

These will be set either in your constitutions or in discussion among the group, but generally, they consist of:

- Minute taking and circulation.
- Clearing the mail-box.
- Recording and responding to all inwards and outwards correspondence.
- Liaison with the President – agenda and general running of the organization and meetings.
- Attend committee meetings.
- Keep comprehensive records e.g. procedures for new entrants' packs, purchase of goods etc.

Whereas the President may be said to be the 'head' of the organization, the secretary is often the 'heart' of it as most things come across their desks and they often deal with those outside the committee as they are the ones who follow up on resolutions/mail/phone calls etc that come from the meeting.

Minute Taking

This is probably the most demanding task of the secretary. Not only do they need to record what goes on, but they usually want to contribute to discussion. Therefore, do not hesitate to ask for proceedings to be put on hold for a minute or two while you catch up with writing up the details.

- Minutes are expected to provide an accurate summary of what went on at a meeting so that those who were not present are able to pick up on events.
- Minutes should provide a record of decisions taken, and how those decisions were reached. However, the secretary does not record word for word what was said and who said it – just the general outline.
- However, any motions put to the meeting must be recorded word for word. Ask the mover, if possible, to write down what they want to say.
- Decisions are usually recorded only as 'Carried' or 'Lost' unless someone requests that the numbers be recorded, or sometimes a person may want their name recorded as being 'for' or 'against' the motion.
- Circulate the minutes as they are recorded.
- At the next meeting they are then put 'on the table' as a motion: i.e. Moved/seconded John/Jane that the minutes are a true and correct record.

- The motion – i.e. the minutes – is then on the table for discussion. It is here that alterations/amendments are made.
- The motion is then put that the minutes of the last meeting, with alterations and/or amendments be a true and correct record of the meeting.
- This will then be carried and the alterations will be made to the minutes before they are filed.
- Both secretary and President should sign the minutes as they are approved at the next meeting. They should be retained in a minute book.

It is not feasible for the secretary to send out minutes to each committee member and then alter minutes according to how they see them. There may be occasions when the members disagree as to whether the minutes are correct in every detail or not. The secretary would then have to circulate many copies after many changes and this is A BIT MUCH to expect of a volunteer who does have other things to do.

We also know that some people will not reply and thus leave it till the meeting to bring up a matter, so nothing is gained by doing it between meetings.

Clearing the Mailbox – Incoming Mail – Inward Correspondence

- Ideally, the PTA should have a box/drawer or some sort of receptacle into which the office person can put all the mail intended for them – letters, newsletters, magazine, fund-raising opportunities. It should be the duty of the Secretary to clear this at least weekly. If that is not possible the job can be delegated to someone else who would then deliver it to the Secretary.
- This mail should be recorded – date received, item or subject and for whom, if not addressed to the secretary or the organization.
It may be an idea to add a column stating the action taken, e.g. passed to chairman.
- Letters/newsletters should be read and summarized for presentation at the meeting. Some organizations are happy to have just a list of the inwards correspondence whereas others will expect the secretary to be able to tell them (briefly) what the letter/newsletter is about. Make sure that your committee decides the process here.
- NZPTA newsletters (either national or regional) should be discussed as there is often material in them that individual PTA members might be interested in e.g. seminars, information about events.
- The 'Parent and School Today' magazine should be shared around – preferably before the meeting so that individuals can summarize an article or two that appeals to them or that they feel others should know about.

Outwards Correspondence

A list of such correspondence should be presented at the meeting with the copies being on hand for committee members to read. Always make a copy of the letter you send out. Most of the letters would have been requested/authorized at the previous meeting, so it is only for records that copies would be kept.

Filing of Documents

The Secretary should maintain and file records, which should consist of:

- a) the minutes kept in a minute book – including minutes of the Annual General Meeting.
- b) a file containing the Handbook, NZPTA and other brochures and the constitution – amended as needed from time to time.
- c) each year's annual reports and financial statements.
- d) all inward and outward correspondence including dated copies of any newsletters sent out.
- e) copies of any press releases or publicity material should be dated and stored.
- f) It would also be helpful to keep records on how various activities were organized – from speakers to fairs to discos. It's very good to know how many pies were ordered or where the sound system was hired from or who did the face painting!

Meetings

Before

- Make sure the agenda (produced in consultation with the President) is circulated along with any proposals or other information which will be discussed at the meeting. This is important as it leads to good discussion with facts brought out as people have had a chance to think about or research the proposals.
- Make sure that the meeting has been properly advertised – whatever the procedure is in your PTA – and that you are there early to set up the room and make it as inviting as possible. This job can be delegated.

During

- Be able to refer at once to the constitution.
- Know the order of business.
- Faithfully record the wording of a motion under discussion.
- Have at your fingertips information on any project the association has underway and;
- Take the minutes as accurately as possible – use a laptop if possible and don't hesitate to ask for a hold for a moment while you catch up.

After

- Get the minutes out as soon as possible – while the proceedings are still clear in your mind.
- Send them out with an Action column which details who is responsible for which job.
- Keep in touch with the President – to support them and make sure that they are doing their jobs.

COMMITTEE MEETING SAMPLE AGENDA

1. Welcome
2. Apologies
3. Additions to Agenda
4. Minutes: Will someone move that these minutes are a true and accurate record of (date) meeting?
All those in favour? All those against? Smith/Brown Carried

Minutes may be amended to more accurately reflect what happened at the previous meeting.

5. Matters Arising from the Minutes: (items may be moved to General Business)
6. Correspondence:
Inward correspondence should be listed (numbered) and routine things passed on to appropriate people for action.
Copies of outward correspondence should be kept.
It should be moved, seconded and voted on that inward correspondence be accepted (or received if you don't want to accept, such as a resignation) and that outwards correspondence be approved.
Time should be allocated for discussion of important correspondence – ideas need to be shared.
Determine who will deal with matters arising from the correspondence.
7. Treasurer's Report:
The Treasurer presents the financial statement, and moves that it be accepted. Once it's seconded, discussion may occur before it's voted on.
8. Reports: (i.e. BOT, Staff, sub committees --- in writing if possible). Again, the presenter moves and the report needs to be seconded before it is discussed.
9. General Business
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
10. Evaluation: Go through jobs (things people said they'd do).
Have we covered everything?
How do you feel about it?
What improvements could we make for next time?
11. Next Meeting Date and Time

Attendance

Often involvement in the PTA Committee is the biggest problem faced. People are often reluctant to go to meetings so when you are planning a meeting, make sure that those who are entitled to attend can do so as easily as possible. Therefore:

- Choose a time which is convenient to those involved. Check this out with representatives of different groups e.g. mothers, shift workers. Sometimes it is an idea to have alternate day and night meetings so that you cater for everyone.
- Think about the venue – it should be accessible and appropriate.
- Let people know well in advance. Tell them what the meeting is about and why they should come. Include all relevant information such as time, date, place, names of guest speaker (and something about their presentation) and other groups who will be there.
- Advertise any facilities you will provide such as child care, refreshments etc
- Use your school newsletter but try to ring a reminder a few days before. This is a job organized by the Secretary, but carried out by others as well – delegate!!
- Make your meetings a combination of formality and informality – they should be interesting and entertaining.

If tension consistently exists in the PTA, you will find committee members reluctant to attend and it almost impossible to recruit members. Try to work out why the tension and fix it. Get outside help if possible.

Look at the NZPTA web-site www.nzpta.org.nz for further information and the 'Give Me Five' web-site www.givemefive.org.nz for a programme for increasing the volunteering in your school.

Preparing for your Annual General Meeting

Why have an AGM?

- Your constitution (especially if you are an Incorporated Society) says that you must have an Annual General Meeting.
- This is for accountability to your members – you are in charge of the money they raise or donate.
- To elect others on to the committee – to be effective and successful, you need good people – these people must be elected.

Often there are two major problems with AGMs – recruiting the right people and attendance. Generally, people won't attend because they're afraid of being put on a committee – make sure that you emphasize in your advertisement that there will be no 'arm twisting'.

To overcome these drawbacks, the committee should consider what if we have:

- Held the meeting in a very nice place – maybe not the school.
- Served interesting food – not just a wine and cheese/ordinary supper
- Provided some entertainment – is there a singer/band in the parent group?
- Had a dynamic speaker – surely there are some local issues.
- Offered child care – videos, play equipment.
- Provided transport – probably not a lot needed.
- Changed the time of year/day/night – check with your constitution.

Constitutional Requirements

Most rules will state that the AGM must be advertised so many days prior to the meeting.

Make sure that you:

- Advise all your members within the required time frame.
- Place the advertisement in the Public Notices of the local paper if required (often a good idea to notify business and new parents who are going to be coming to the school).
- Ensure the Treasurer has the audited accounts ready for presentation – a number of copies need to be made.
- Fulfil the requirements for nomination of office bearers – do they need to be nominated beforehand or can they be nominated from the floor at the time of the meeting.
- Have the minutes of last year's AGM – again copies will be needed for the audience
- Have the President's Report – and any others you wish to present at the AGM.

Preparing the Agenda

This should be either issued with the notice of meeting or be available at the meeting and only that which is shown on the agenda is dealt with at the meeting – apart from Matters Arising and General Business. The AGM agenda differs a little from the monthly meeting one. A suggested agenda here would be:

- Minutes of the last AGM.
- Matters arising from the minutes.
- Presentation of the annual reports and accounts – these are moved by the person presenting them and seconded by someone else. Then they are available for discussion of the content of the reports.
- Election of officers – according to the rules – show of hands/secret ballot.
- Other business.

Who Should be Invited?

As you would like to advertise yourself and the work that you do, it is good to invite:

- All parents and whanau.
- Principal.
- Board of Trustees.
- Any sponsors.
- Friends of the school.

Amendment of Rules or Constitutions

From time to time rules need updating and amending and there will be a process to follow. In general, the proposed amendment will be advertised along with the notice of AGM.

A motion for a rules change (called a Remit) should consist of the following:

- What is there now and what is wanted to be put in e.g. Motion: 'Delete Clause ... and replace it with'
- The reason for the change – known as the 'Rationale' or 'Reason' for the change.

The rules change can generate a lot of discussion. The President must be ready to control this. The secretary notes the main points of the arguments without actual quotes of speakers and records the voting results.

Some AGMs are short – remember it is important in some cases to make the outing worthwhile by allowing time for the members to mix and get to know the committee and perhaps be encouraged to join at later date.

Goodwill engendered by refreshments can make the expense worthwhile.

Remember, these are only suggested guidelines to start you off. Your committee will organise details to fit your circumstances.