

2.3 Effective Meetings

Meetings are the most effective way for groups to plan their work. They allow for discussion, clear communication and an opportunity to build strong relationships in the group.

Planning how your group will use meetings and conducting them in the right way is key for your STAR group to operate successfully during the year.

There are different varieties you can have, from general meetings open to everyone to smaller sub-group meetings for particular purposes. We'll focus here on some basic points to keep in mind when planning your groups 'general meetings'.



General Meetings

Before the meeting...

- ★ **Regular time.** Try to pick a regular meeting time (e.g. every two weeks, Tuesday 6pm), as this will allow members to plan their time and do their best to attend. Check when other similar societies are meeting (ask your societies officer) and don't clash!
- ★ **Book a room.** If there are important topics to be discussed and decisions made with large numbers of people, then you'll need a quiet room of an appropriate size to ensure discussions can be heard and everyone is comfortable. Do this in advance so you're not stuck without a meeting place. If it's a smaller meeting on more informal topics, then you can always find a local cafe. But wherever you choose make sure it is accessible to everyone.
- ★ **Agree an agenda.** Initially this will need to be done by the committee, so meet together in advance and agree on the main topics on discussion. In future, the outline of the agenda can be agreed at the end of the previous meeting, or a suggested outline circulated by email giving people an opportunity to add items, or just pass a paper round at the beginning of the meeting.
- ★ **Email and/or Facebook message the meeting details.** Including:
 - Date, time, location (nice and clear, don't hide them in large paragraphs!)
 - Agenda

At the meeting...

- ★ **Signpost the room.** Make sure people can find your room and have a doorkeeper at the beginning to invite people into the room and keep the door open until the meeting has truly started.
- ★ **Organise seating.** Set up the room to suit the meeting style. Let everyone be included if you're having discussions, and spread the committee around the group so that you don't come across as a scary clique!

- ★ **Appoint a Chair / facilitator.** This can be done before hand by the committee, or agreed at each meeting. But it's important that someone takes responsibility for the following:
 - Introducing the meeting and welcoming everyone
 - Keeping time
 - Ensuring each agenda item is discussed
 - Allowing everyone the opportunity to contribute
 - Discussions stays on topic
 - Everyone is clear on the decision made and action points agreed
- ★ **Appoint note-taker if appropriate.** Agree for someone to take the minutes and type them up afterwards to email round. Then everyone is clear on what was discussed and what tasks were agreed.
- ★ **Introductions.** There are a range of things you can do, but it's important (especially with new people attending) that you give every a chance to introduce each other. And often you'll want to make people feel more relaxed, so think of a quick activity or game to begin.
- ★ **Encourage participation.** Give people a chance to get involved with brainstorming sessions, banner painting, etc.
- ★ **Identify Action Points.** It's vital that after each discussion everyone is clear on *what* action is to be taken next, *who* is going to do it, and *when* they will do it. Check what's been agreed, write it down, then repeat them at the end of the meeting to confirm.
- ★ **Take a break.** If your meeting is over an hour then have a pause for 5-10 minutes and consider providing snacks.
- ★ **Social!** It's often a good idea to have a social activity after the meeting. It helps the group get to know each other and gives you something to look forward to!

After the meeting...

- ★ **Email minutes.** Send everyone who attended and those who couldn't make it the meeting minutes with any agreed actions for people to follow up, plus key dates for the coming weeks.
- ★ **Think!** Reflect on what worked and what didn't, and adjust your meeting style for next time – whether it's to be clearer on who's doing which task, not running over time, encouraging participation, etc.

Your First Meeting

The first few meetings are the most important. There are hundreds of societies out there, so having attracted your new and enthusiastic members you now need to provide them with more info on practical ways they can get involved.

Use the first meeting to:

- ★ Introduce STAR network: what STAR groups do around the UK, national events (National Conference, Action Week)
- ★ Introduce your group and committee, promote what you did last year
- ★ Explain some of the basic issues about asylum in the UK. Perhaps show a brief video or do a quiz
- ★ Get ideas from the group about what they would like to do in the coming term
- ★ But don't bombard people with too much info, especially boring admin!

STAR national team can attend your first meeting. We can help you out by introducing refugee issues and talking about STAR. Please contact the national team to arrange a visit: students@star-network.org.uk

You might also want to think about the following:

- ★ Advertise! Make a meeting poster and display them in cafes, bars, on departmental notice boards and on your society notice board.
- ★ If you have friends in other societies who are meeting before you, ask them if they would be happy to advertise your meeting too (and vice versa of course)
- ★ Pass around a list for people to fill in their contact details again
- ★ Make new people feel welcome:
 - Introduce everyone at the start
 - Explain how your meetings work
 - Avoid in-jokes and jargon
 - Make sure you explain agenda topics before beginning your discussion
 - Try to have room for questions

Varying meetings

Here are some examples of how to spice up & diversify your meetings...

- ★ **Presentations by members.** Encourage people to research a topic about asylum and present to the rest of the group (e.g. pick a different country where refugees come from each week and explain the situation and why people are leaving) or to give an overview of something they have experience in.
- ★ **External speakers** can often add interest and expertise to your meeting. But remember, speakers tend to be very busy people. Be well prepared to use their time effectively. Have a back up plan too.
- ★ **Show a documentary.** Get a short DVD (15 mins) from the STAR national office and watch it at the end.

Inviting speakers

Speakers could include refugees or asylum seekers from your volunteering projects who are happy to speak about their experiences, people involved in local refugee organisations or support agencies, university lecturers, MPs, or STAR staff.

Always:

- Write to confirm the event; the date, time and place of meeting as well as what it is you would like them to talk about and whether anyone else will be speaking too
- Explain how you are advertising their talk and check they are happy with this
- Give them some info about STAR and your group in advance
- Ask them before the meeting how they would like to be introduced
- Write and thank them for coming
- Make it clear if you can pay expenses or not