

# Speak Up

START-UP GUIDELINES FOR REPRESENTATIVE COMMITTEES



Slánú - EVE's Support & Development Department





This guide was produced by EVE and reviewed by Plain English Ireland. Based on this review, the guide has received the Plain English Clarity Mark.

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## Introduction

The purpose of this booklet is to help you understand how a representative committee can empower you as a participant. It will also give some helpful pointers about the skills you will need as 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 an outline of what your committee is all about.

## Representative committies and EVE organisational vision

EVE's Vision Statement states that the organisation is 'committed to the development of cultures of wellness'. The vision also states: 'We will achieve this through the delivery of hope-inspiring, recovery-oriented services and environments in the pursuit of well-being'. We are therefore strongly committed to working in a recovery-oriented way that highlights people's strengths. We believe that having a representative committee in place in each EVE centre supports people's journeys, which will help us to fulfill our vision.

As a recovery ethos strongly underpins how we work with participants, we will now briefly outline its main aspects.

### **What is a representative committee?**

A representative committee is a group of elected participants who act as a voice for all the participants in their location. You can do this by giving feedback on concerns, needs, suggestions or queries which are made to you while in your committee role. This may include issues that are of concern to all participants in all EVE centres, not just your own (such as changes in welfare benefits).

## **What is mental health recovery?**

Traditionally, recovery was used to mean 'cure', but people who have experienced mental distress and recovery have defined recovery in a different way.

Recovery, in this sense, describes how people who have mental health difficulties use both personal and other resources in their lives to develop a positive identity and a satisfying life. It is a different process for each person.

This definition does not always mean 'cure' in the traditional sense (clinical recovery), but involves a person creating a good life despite their mental health difficulties (personal recovery).

People in recovery tell us that this ongoing process involves the growth of:

- ▶ hope
- ▶ meaning
- ▶ purpose
- ▶ control over the decisions affecting their lives
- ▶ participation in their communities

Recovery is linked with a person's overall well-being, including feeling at ease in yourself, with other people around you and being content with different parts of your life.

## Terms of reference

### **The boundaries of the representative committee**

Once elected, every committee should draw up terms of reference – the staff facilitator can help you do this. A terms of reference is like your committee's mission statement. This can be reviewed from time to time during the term of the committee. The terms of reference provide a clear idea of what exactly you will be doing when forming a representative committee for your location.

Include the following in your terms of reference:

- ▶ A couple of lines explaining what your aims are (for example, to listen to all participants' concerns and address them appropriately).
- ▶ A couple of lines clearly detailing areas/issues that you will not be dealing with, such as money, budgets, staff issues and so on.
- ▶ List all of your committee members.
- ▶ How long you will all be in your roles before having another election, for example, six months to one year.
- ▶ How often you will have your group meetings and how often you will meet with the centre manager to give feedback. For example, we will meet the first Thursday of every month from 11am until 1pm with everyone and then with the manager in the following days (two to three days is recommended for the feedback meeting).

- ▶ A couple of lines about your level of independence. For example, whether you will have the committee facilitator sit in on all of your meetings, or only look for help with typing up agendas and minutes

As each new committee is elected, they can change the terms of reference, if they wish, for their time in the role. However, if a committee changes the terms of reference, they should inform all other participants and staff in the centre.

## The committee format

### Who makes up a representative committee?

Generally there are three 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 three more common roles are:

- ▶ Chairperson
- ▶ Vice-chairperson
- ▶ Secretary

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

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

Some committees like to rotate the roles. For example, each member gets an opportunity to be a chairperson, vice-chairperson and secretary. You need to decide what suits your committee best.

It is a good idea to have a number of substitutes for each role. That is, someone who can step into one of the roles if someone finds themselves absent 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.

An effective chairperson is positive and respectful.

The chairperson's 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 feedback.

The staff facilitator is available to support the chairperson, if and when required.



## The vice-chairperson

### What does a vice-chairperson do?

The vice-chairperson assists the chairperson in their role.

The vice-chairperson's 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 and the chairperson to give feedback from the previous meeting.
- ▶ Taking on the duties of the chairperson when they are unavailable.

The staff facilitator is available for support, if and when required.

## The secretary

### What does a secretary do?

The secretary ensures that the proceedings of all meetings, events and so on are recorded for everyone to read and use to track the committee's progress.

The secretary's main tasks include:

- ▶ Take notes during meetings.
- ▶ Typing 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 date of the next committee meeting.

The staff facilitator is available for support, if and when required.

## The staff facilitator

### **How are staff involved in your committee?**

At the start, a staff member acts as a facilitator for the new committee. This helps 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.
- ▶ Giving support in any area of the committee work as required.
- ▶ Keeping the management updated on issues arising.

Once the committee has been working effectively for a while, it is up to the committee to ask the facilitator for support and assistance when they need help. The facilitator should occasionally make sure that everything is ok without being intrusive in any area of the committee's work.

## The election

### How to organise an election.

The facilitator will be responsible for a lot of the election process. It is recommended that the elections follow this path:

- ▶ The facilitator meets with everyone and explains what a committee is, the duties and responsibilities.
- ▶ They then explain how many participants are needed to make up a committee 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, nominees should be sought.
- ▶ The facilitator should prepare voting slips and a date set for the voting to take place.
- ▶ On the chosen date 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 should be announced to the participants and staff/manager.

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

## First committee duties

### **The first duties of the new committee are:**

1. Have the first committee meeting with everyone.
2. Plan for the next meeting.
3. Promoting and encouraging other participants and the committee's work.
4. Finalise arrangements to give feedback to the manager.
5. Organise a notice board for committee business only.
6. 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 committee. Things which need to be done in the first meeting are:

- ▶ Pass around the sign-in sheet.
- ▶ Give a brief outline of what the committee is all about – the chairperson should go through their terms of reference so that everyone is clear from the start.
- ▶ Tell everyone where the committee notice board is – if there is no notice board, 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 no suggestion box, ask where people would like it to be and look for volunteers to help arrange this.

- ▶ Raise any issues people may have.
- ▶ The staff facilitator will be on-hand and available to help with any of the duties; you simply have to ask for their 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 the chairperson will discuss. Below is a sample of a made-up agenda.

#### *Agenda*

*20th December 2012 – 2pm*

- ▶ Welcome (everyone to sign in on the sign-in sheet)
- ▶ Minutes (let everyone know that the minutes from the last meeting are on the notice board so people can look over them)
- ▶ Matters arising (this is for any feedback on actions or issues that were to be carried out or discussed after the last meeting)
- ▶ Outings (suggestions as to where we can go for the summer outing)
- ▶ Smoking break if necessary
- ▶ Time keeping
- ▶ A.O.B. (any other business)
- ▶ Date and time of the next meeting

There is a blank agenda form at the back of this booklet you can use for your own committee if you like.

## Minute taking

### How to take minutes at the meeting

The secretary is 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, for example, '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'. The minutes will mainly be things like this – very little else will need to be recorded. However, you may find you have many pages of issues and actions, so be alert and ask people to slow down if you need to.
- ▶ The date and time for the next meeting. It is important to keep a note of the next date so that everyone is aware of when the meeting will take place in good time.

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

## Case study – participant representative

### 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. **I did it, so can you.**

Alan Gregg  
Participant Representative

## Case study – committee facilitator

### **My experience as a committee facilitator**

I have been the facilitator with Cherryfield participant representative committee since it began. 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 participants 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 to, among other things, a variety of new ideas and suggestions to improve the service which have 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 Cherryfield



## Sample Meeting Agenda Layout

1. Include the title of the meeting, for example, Representative Committee Meeting.
2. Include the date and time of the meeting.
3. 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 quickly. Once those who are present have made sure the minutes are correct, they are agreed.
4. Next include the items for discussion. These should have been agreed beforehand. This does not need to be detailed, just one or two words.
5. If there are any outstanding issues from these minutes, they can be discussed again now and people can re-volunteer to complete them.
6. Each item to be discussed should be numbered.
7. Anything that has not been agreed or listed as a point for discussion can be brought up under A.O.B (any other business).
8. Always send the agenda out well before the meeting so people attending can be prepared.

## Sample Agenda

### **Representative Committee Meeting**

**20th December 2012**

#### **Agenda**

1. Apologies
  2. Minutes of last meeting read and agreed
  3. Next week's outing\*
  4. Election of committee\*
  5. A.O.B.
  6. Date of next meeting
- \* Numbers 2 and 3 are examples of points that may be discussed in your centre

## Representative Committee Meeting

**Date:**

### **Agenda**

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of last meeting read and agreed
- 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 to take minutes

1. The secretary is responsible for taking minutes during the meetings. The 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
  - ▶ Date and time of the next meeting
2. Take the minutes in brief, clear and easy to follow points, they do not have to be word for word as this would be too difficult and 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 to make sure they are accurate. The secretary will receive adequate support if required.
5. Literacy difficulties can be overcome by using audio equipment. However, it is important that everyone attending the meeting agrees to using audio equipment.
6. It is important that the minutes are sent to the centre manager and all those present at least two weeks before the next meeting.
7. The chairperson will invite further comments in A.O.B. (any other business).

## Sample minutes

### **Representative Committee Meeting**

**20th December 2012**

**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 of every month at 12pm.
3. After much discussion it was agreed that the election of representatives will be held once per year.
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 25th January.

## Memo template

It is important to notify or remind all of the participants 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 they should notify if they would like something included on the agenda, and the date to do this by. (See the example on the next page.)

## MEMO

### Representative meeting

**Date:**

**Time:**

**Venue:**

If you have any issues to be discussed please notify

\_\_\_\_\_ (name)

before \_\_\_\_\_ (time and date).

This memo can be photocopied and used for each meeting.

## Checklist for representative committee meetings

### Tasks that need to be completed before the next representative committee meeting.

1. Minutes of the previous meeting to go out in good time in order to remind participants of the actions that need to be taken .....
  
2. Agenda to go out in good time to ensure that all participants attending will be prepared for the meeting .....
  
3. Practical elements of the meeting to be organised:
  - ▶ Location (size and suitability of the room) .....
  - ▶ Time of the meeting .....
  - ▶ Items for discussion (agenda) .....
  - ▶ Time allocated for meeting .....

### Tasks that need to be completed during the representative committee meeting.

1. Secretary to ensure all participants are signed in .....
  
2. Secretary to hand out copies of the agenda and minutes from the previous meeting .....



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3. Chairperson to ensure that the minutes from the previous meeting are read and that all actions are noted.  
Chairperson to ensure that the previous minutes are agreed .....
4. Chairperson to lead the discussion and comment on the points on the agenda .....
5. Secretary to record the issues and actions agreed for each item on the agenda .....
6. Chairperson to ask participants to raise any other business (A.O.B.) .....
7. Chairperson to conclude the meeting and schedule the date and time for the next meeting .....
8. Secretary to record the date and time for the next meeting .....

\* **Note:** If the chairperson is absent, the vice-chairperson will take over 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 is a programme within the HSE, whose primary role is to provide community-based, recovery-orientated programmes for adults who experience mental health difficulties, intellectual difficulties, Asperger's Syndrome, or physical and sensory disabilities. We do this through our network of Vocational, Rehabilitative and Clubhouse services in 21 locations across the HSE Dublin North East and HSE Dublin Mid-Leinster regions.

We would like to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of the participants and staff of EVE who were involved in the project and subsequent revisions resulting in this third edition. We hope many people will gain from this initiative and effective and empowered 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 specific service or function
- ▶ **Guideline** A set rule for doing something
- ▶ **Liaising** Communicating with another person or group
- ▶ **Representative** A person officially chosen to stand for a group
- ▶ **Minutes** A record of proceedings of a meeting
- ▶ **To record** To put into writing

Notes

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**Notes**

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