Northwest Cooperative Development Center
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Cooperative Starter Series
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How and Why to Take Notes

Minutes, although seemly a chore, are a critical part of an organizational meeting. Minutes primarily serve as an official record of what occurred, decisions made and update those absent; but also:

- ensure new group members can be brought up to speed
- facilitate transparency to non-committee members
- enable accountability for those present
- provide a historical context for present conditions
- keep people on track with action items

This is not simply a clerical job but is one of the more powerful roles one can play in a group. *For a board of directors, minutes are a legal document and are to be treated accordingly,* i.e. they require an approval voting.

Minutes can be as specific as an exact transcription of everything said or as simple as a quick list of resolutions; keeping in mind that too much detail and be just as counter productive as not enough detail.

Before the meeting begins make sure to have:

- a designated scribe/recorder
- pre-selected your recording tool (i.e. paper and pen or laptop, etc.)
- a final draft agenda on hand
- a sign up sheet if you do not know who is coming
- an idea of the amount of detail the group wants recorded
- a clear plan for dissemination of the notes

For the most part, minutes are simply a fleshing out of the agenda; but minutes should also include:

- a list of names of those present and the times they arrived
- the time the meeting began and ended
- not everything that is said but the main ideas
- any decisions that were made and how it was made
- any next steps or “actionables” and who is responsible
    - *clearly denote and emphasize any commitments to help keep aware of who is responsible for what*

After the meeting, ensure that the scribe:

- transcribes, edits and cleans up the notes ASAP
- emails out the draft minutes ASAP

For more info:
www.careerplanning.about.com/cs/communication/a/minutes.htm
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minutes