

Meetings via telephone conference



For national groups where the trustees and staff are located all over the UK, organising face-to-face meetings can be difficult, time consuming and expensive.

One solution is to hold at least some of your meetings over the phone using a telephone conference facility. No special equipment is needed and those attending the meeting will not have to travel which will reduce the time the meeting takes and the costs to the group. Child care is likely to be easier to arrange and it will not be necessary to hire a venue for the meeting.

Some restrictions may apply to how often you can rely on a telephone conference meeting, depending on the wording of your group's constitution/governing document. Some will state a minimum number of face-to-face meetings which the board must hold each year. However, meetings in addition to this minimum can be help by telephone conference.

Managing a telephone conference

Using a telephone conference facility for the first time can be daunting but should only take a little while to get used to. With a little forward planning the call will also go more smoothly. Ask all those taking part in the meeting to read through the following list prior to the first conference call.

Before the conference

- Switch off call waiting facilities
- Make arrangements for childcare for the duration of the meeting
- Try to minimise anything which you know causes interference on a cordless phone
- Minimise anything which could cause background noise during the call

contact a family
for families with disabled children

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Freephone Helpline 0808 808 3555 (Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm)

Textphone 0808 808 3556

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During the conference

- Be by the phone a few minutes before the scheduled start time
- Speak directly into the mouthpiece
- Do not put phone on hold if this plays music - everyone else on the call will hear it!
- At least to begin with identify yourself when you speak
- Remember there are several people on the phone and try not to speak over each other

Circulate the agenda before the meeting as you would for a face-to-face meeting. The Chair may need to take a more active lead in the meeting in order to ensure that everyone contributes and the business is completed.

Whoever is chairing the meeting should make sure they are called first so they are available to welcome the other participants to the meeting. It usually takes a few minutes while all the participants are connected before the meeting can start.

For a small charge it is also possible to have the call taped. This removes the need for a minute taker letting all participants take part in the meeting.

Booking a telephone conference

An organisation which provides telephone conferencing facilities specifically for the voluntary sector is Community Networks. The contact details are:

Community Networks, Ground Floor, 12-20 Baron Street, London N1 9LL

Tel: 020 7923 5250 Fax: 020 7713 8163 enquiries@community-networks.org

<http://www.community-networks.org>

Because Community Networks is a charity it offers very good rates and special reduced fees for support groups. The actual costs depend on the length of the conference, the number of people taking part, the income bracket of the support group and whether participants call in or Community Networks calls out to them.

However, as an example for a support group meeting with up to ten people taking part the cost for a conference for one hour would be £10.00.

For likely costs for your group check the website or contact the number above.

This guide is part of the Contact a Family Group Action Pack. For more information please visit www.cfamily.org.uk or telephone 020 7608 8700.

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