

10

MEETINGS



community resource kit



For full details and contents of the kit please read the introduction at www.community.net.nz/how-toguides/crk.

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introduction



why are meetings important?

Face-to-face meetings are necessary for discussing things, communicating information, making decisions and developing relationships. They are also so common in organisations that people can take them for granted.

types of meetings

FORMAL

A large part of this section will concentrate on how to organise and run more **formal** meetings, such as annual general meetings (AGMs) and hui Māori. This will include looking at different decision-making styles.

LESS FORMAL

Apart from the AGM, in reality, the majority of community organisations run meetings in a less formal way, sometimes around a kitchen table over a cup of tea. There is no set way to run these less formal (otherwise called informal or ordinary) meetings, but commonly they include:

- checking the minutes or notes from the previous meeting
- checking correspondence and finances
- hearing reports on projects, workers' outputs
- checking on the progress of your business plan (if you have one)
- other matters important to your group.

Although less formal meetings are usually relaxed, it's still important that clear decisions are made and recorded with majority support. It's up to the organiser or chairperson of the meeting to make sure that happens. Even if the group's not used to moving, seconding and voting on motions, it's good practice to adopt a formal "resolution" process for financial and other important decisions. This can be achieved by the meeting organiser or chairperson saying

"Well, is it agreed then that we _____?" and having the decision recorded.

(From *Seizing the Moment II: Turning Community Ideas into Action*.)

checklists for well-run meetings

Well-run meetings produce good results. If meetings aren't run well, what you set out to achieve may not occur and participants may not want to come back again. Meetings can also take up a lot of people's precious time so you need to make sure they run smoothly so time isn't wasted.

Below are some checklists for ensuring your meetings (both formal and less formal) are successful.



Before the meeting checklist

Effective meetings are planned in advance. Make sure that:

- the reason for people meeting face-to-face is clear
- people are invited well in advance
- the time and venue are appropriate for the people you are inviting (check for accessibility, childcare, time to fit with parenting responsibilities etc)
- the objectives of the meeting have been communicated and understood
- any reports and/or background papers or financial statements about which decisions need to be made are circulated before the meeting so they can be read and digested
- people have been reminded about any jobs that need to be completed by the time of the meeting

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Before the meeting checklist continued...

- the physical environment is prepared beforehand (check for warmth, fresh air, light, appropriate seating arrangements, water etc)
- appropriate visual aids are in place e.g. whiteboard, markers, Blu-tak, sheets of paper, recording equipment, overhead projector, data show etc
- any other resources needed for the meeting have been collected
- any displays are assembled
- there is an agenda
- the chair or facilitator knows they will be taking on that role
- the minute-taker knows they are responsible for taking the minutes (see section called "Minute-taker" for more details).

✓ **During the meeting checklist**

The way a meeting starts is critical to its success. People need to feel welcome and included, and if possible, have the opportunity to introduce themselves.

Chairperson/facilitator

It's the role of the chairperson or facilitator to:

- guide the style of the meeting procedure
- make sure the meeting starts on time
- know whether it's appropriate to begin with a karakia or prayer (particularly if the group is Māori, Pacific Island or church-based). Some other words of welcome, inviting people to focus their minds on the matter at hand and share their joint purpose, may better suit a meeting that includes people who might object to taking part in prayers
- welcome members and organise any introductions

continued over...

During the meeting checklist continued...

- be aware that people may face difficulties arriving on time (such as child-minding) or different cultures may follow different time scales
- if there are latecomers, welcome them, give them a moment to settle, then tell them what the group is doing
- list any ground rules that have been developed by the members e.g. agreements about confidentiality of discussion or one person speaking at a time (see section on "Ground rules")
- read and call for apologies
- where appropriate, advise of housekeeping details e.g. time and length of meeting breaks, location of toilet facilities etc
- set a timeframe for the meeting and keep to it
- allow some time at the beginning of the meeting to add additional items to the agenda
- keep to the agenda
- use a range of tools or interventions to assist the group to complete its task e.g. summarising, clarifying, reflecting, suggesting options, raising energy levels, seeking agreement, encouraging participation and solving conflicts
- avoid introducing their own opinion unless it's necessary
- as part of the closure, ensure that it's clear what is to be done by whom and when
- thank everyone for attending the meeting
- where appropriate, end with a prayer or song
- check after the meeting that the room is returned to the state it was in prior to the meeting (includes cleaning whiteboards).

continued over...

During the meeting checklist continued...

Minute-taker

It's the role of the minute-taker to record agreed decisions and tasks from each meeting. Unless there's a particular reason, it's not necessary to record discussion.

The minute-taker should record:

- meeting time, date and venue
- names of those present and any apologies
- name of meeting chair or facilitator and minute-taker
- meeting purpose
- the matters for discussion, agreed action points or decision made and person responsible for and completion dates for those actions
- date, time, venue and purpose of next meeting.

Ground rules

Ground rules should be developed by the group at the meeting who will be bound by them. These rules should cover:

- respect for other people – no interrupting, no long monologues, no personal abuse, allow space for everybody to express their views
- confidentiality – agreement on whether meeting content may be discussed outside the meeting
- responsibility – everybody agrees to take responsibility for timekeeping, keeping to the agenda and voicing their opinions in the meeting rather than afterwards
- decision-making – how are decisions to be made, by consensus or voting? If consensus can't be achieved, at what point will alternative decision-making methods be used, and who will decide?



After the meeting checklist

After the actual meeting has finished, the following jobs need to be carried out:

- action plans and follow ups confirmed
- minutes checked by the chair or meeting organiser and the minute-taker
- the timeframe for circulation of minutes, new reports, background papers, and the next agenda arranged
- minutes circulated (sometimes on their own, sometimes not long before the next meeting when reports and background papers called for at the meeting can go out at the same time).

formal meetings



Formal meetings are often required by a group's constitution or rules. They have established agendas and procedures. The agenda deals with what's to be covered at the meeting, while procedures cover how that's to be done.

annual general meeting (AGM)

A common example of a formal meeting is an organisation's annual general meeting (or AGM). AGMs are usually a reporting requirement for any type of organisation. They are also important as they provide an opportunity for all those who have an interest in the organisation e.g. customers, clients, employees, committee members and suppliers (collectively called stakeholders), to review the state of the organisation and to report on performance on an annual basis.

For more information on AGMs for different organisational structures such as charitable trusts, incorporated societies and various Māori structures, refer to the following Te Puni Kōkiri link – <http://governance.tpk.govt.nz/what/agm.aspx>.

AGENDAS

The basis of any meeting is the agenda. An agenda gives a meeting direction, structure and purpose. The responsibility for preparing the agenda lies ultimately with the secretary with some assistance from the chairperson (and treasurer) where appropriate.

The AGM agenda will depend on the legal structure of an organisation, how actively it's been operating over the last year and how much engagement the board is seeking from those using the services provided.

Regardless of which type of agenda is chosen, preparation is vital so that the meeting runs smoothly and achieves what's needed. The chair, in particular, needs to be well-briefed

and prepared to manage the proceedings to meet its objectives.

(From *Annual General Meetings*, Te Puni Kōkiri website).

A typical AGM agenda might look like this:

- welcome by chairperson
- apologies
- confirmation of minutes of the previous AGM
- business arising from the minutes
- correspondence
- chairperson's report
- treasurer's report and presentation of audited financial statement
- chairperson stands aside if required
- election of office bearers
- general business
- guest speaker
- date of next meeting
- close and refreshments.

(From *Developing Your Organisation* (Chapter 3 – Meetings)).

TIP

Remember to stick to the agenda and not get side-tracked by other issues. Also keep an eye on the time – if the meeting's scheduled for 3 hours, make sure it lasts for no more than 3 hours.

PROCEDURES

As mentioned earlier, there are established procedures for conducting formal meetings. These procedures might be recorded in an organisation's constitution or rules or be established more informally by the usual customs

of the group. The procedures can cover a huge variety of matters but some more common aspects include:

- voting rights – who’s entitled to vote
- quorums – the minimum number of people required to make a decision
- motions and resolutions – moving and seconding motions etc
- points of order.

Voting rights

Voting at formal meetings can be by a voice vote (if the issue is not very contentious), a show of hands (if a voice vote is not decisive), or a ballot (especially if there are more than two outcomes, as when electing officers).

In the case of a ballot, two scrutineers are appointed (one from each opposing faction, if any) and they give each member a slip of paper with a list of candidates on it. Members cross off names of candidates they do not support, then the slips are collected by the scrutineers and counted outside the meeting room. After counting is completed, the chair moves that ballot papers be destroyed. In the event of a tied vote the chair has the final (or casting) vote.

Quorums

The rules governing groups generally require a quorum, or minimum number of people, to be present before a meeting can be held. This is usually, but not always, a third of the membership. If a quorum is lost during the meeting, it’s declared closed. Decisions at meetings are valid only if there is a quorum present.

Motions and resolutions

A motion is a formal recommendation put by a member to a meeting for debate and consideration, by saying “I move that...”. There are two types of motions: those that deal with the business of the organisation itself (substantive motions) and those that deal with the way the meeting is run (procedural motions). Each motion put (except motions “from the chair”) has to be supported (seconded) by another person before it’s open for discussion. The chair then asks the proposer to speak to the motion. Other members can add to this discussion.

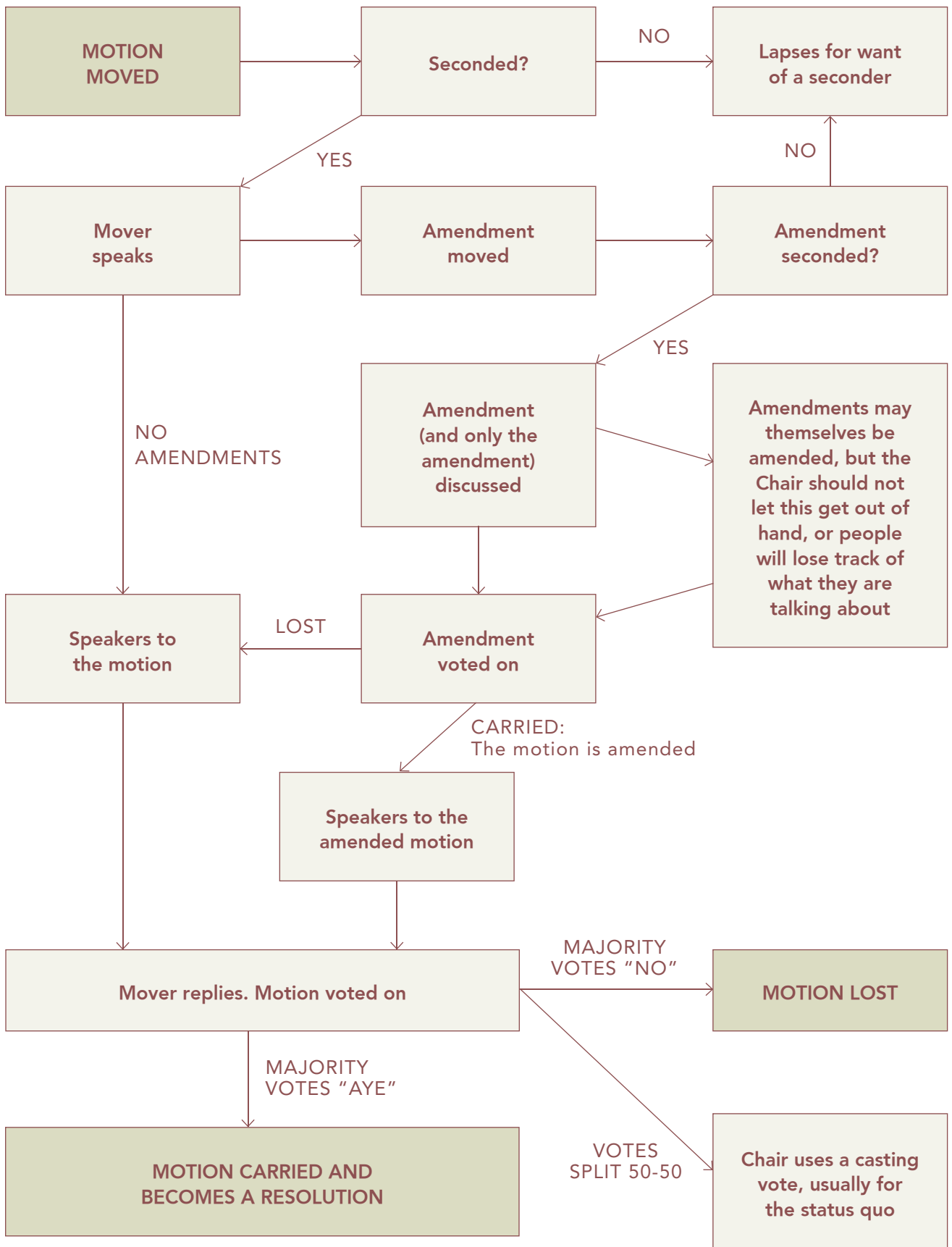
If there is no discussion, the motion is then put to the meeting for a decision, and members indicate (by vote) whether they agree or disagree with it. All motions should be minuted. If a substantive motion is passed, it becomes a resolution.

Motions can be amended before they have been voted on – the same procedure is used as when the motion was originally put, but the mover and the seconder of an amendment should not be the same as those of the original motion. If an amendment is not contentious (such as the correction of a name) and is acceptable to the mover and the seconder of the original motion, it may be incorporated without a vote. An amendment can not be accepted if it goes against the general intention of the original motion.

If an amendment is moved, it should be dealt with before the main (substantive) motion. The meeting then returns to the motion (amended or not) that was first discussed. If the amendment is carried it is incorporated into the motion, which is then further discussed (and, if required, motions can be put to further amend it).

All this is illustrated in the following flowchart.

Motions and amendments flowchart



decision rules

In addition to the different procedures involved in making decisions, groups can also have different decision rules. A decision rule is the approach used to make the choice that is made. How decisions are reached can be as important as the decisions themselves, especially when the long-term health of the group is considered.

There are no perfect decision-making rules – all can lead to situations where either no or inconsistent decisions are made.

The advantages and disadvantages of three useful decision rules are set out in the table below (adapted from *Seizing the Moment II: Turning Community Ideas into Action*).

DECISION RULE	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<p>1. Decision by majority rule:</p> <p>Requires support from more than 50% of the members of the group. Commonly achieved by either voting (by a show of hands or voice) or less commonly by polling (going around the room and asking each person to say where they stand).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • democratic (i.e. it's assumed that at least more people are for the decision than against it) • one way to get a clear decision • can be a quick process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can disguise a 49% opposition and could leave a sizeable opportunity for resentment • can be divisive in critical issues and create problems for group cohesion and participation.
<p>2. Decision by consensus rule:</p> <p>Requires that a majority approve a given course of action but that the minority agree to go along with it. Someone "tests the meeting" by summarising a proposed action. Dissenters choose not to hold out i.e. withhold their view or opinion. May be used selectively (e.g. majority vote to approve correspondence but consensus to carry out a major building programme).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allows for full discussion • allows for wide acceptance and therefore support and implementation of the decision • excellent for important or difficult decisions that will subsequently require considerable group participation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can be very time-consuming • some psychological pressure can be placed on individuals holding out.
<p>3. Decision by unanimous decision rule:</p> <p>Requires everyone to agree on a given course of action and thus imposes a high bar for action.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the most acceptable approach there is, as there is no opposition to a decision • eliminates overt psychological pressure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the most difficult and time consuming way to reach a decision • if all decisions are made this way, a high degree of inefficiency and membership loss may result in the long term, especially among those who want to get things done.

Other less desirable group decision rules are:

- plurality – where the largest block in a group decides, even if it falls short of a majority
- dictatorship – where one individual determines the course of action.

These are less desirable because they don't require the involvement of the broader group to determine a choice. This means there is no real commitment to the course of action chosen, which can lead to problems later on down the track during the implementation phase of a decision.

difficulties in decision-making

WHY DO DIFFICULTIES ARISE?

Some reasons for groups finding it difficult to make decisions during a meeting include:

- no philosophy, no goal, no plan
- processes for decision-making are not clear
- fear of the consequences
- conflicting loyalties
- interpersonal conflict
- cultural insensitivity
- hidden agendas
- people think it will take too long or it can't be done at all
- there is no chance for people to freely express differences
- inadequate leadership
- clash of interests.

MANAGING CONFLICT IN A GROUP

During meetings, conflict within a group can arise. But conflict and disagreement can be seen as positive learning opportunities. By debating issues, we are able to more easily understand and resolve them. For this reason, conflict should not be ignored, minimised or suppressed.

Resolving conflict

Although there is no one right way to resolve

conflict that may arise during meetings, some key elements should be observed:

- allow enough time to deal with conflict
- define the issue in terms that are clear, neutral and acceptable to all parties in conflict
- have at least one person give special attention to the process – someone uninvolved
- use reflective listening to explore the issues: check out what you think is being said at regular points
- have parties to the conflict identify their points of view and what their ideal solutions would be.

To pre-empt irresolvable conflict arising during a meeting, try some of these techniques:

- set ground rules for the meeting
- agree on goals
- agree on a plan
- be clear about the way that decisions will be made (e.g. by consensus)
- offer the freedom to express feelings safely
- give constructive feedback
- define the issues
- group the options in broad categories
- rank ideas (e.g. each person chooses their three most favoured options)
- break into small groups to re-examine remaining ideas, and report back to the full meeting
- brainstorm solutions by listing possible ways of dealing with the matter
- try out an idea then evaluate it
- suspend judgement – withhold opinions until more information has been obtained
- compromise
- agree to abide by a majority vote
- agree to differ.

Mediation

Mediation is a process of resolving conflict that can be used when the level of conflict within the group is beyond the group's ability to resolve it. In these circumstances, it's useful to bring in a neutral third party to mediate (i.e. a mediator).

Their role is to clarify the source of the dispute, facilitate the group identifying solutions for themselves, and establish a course of action when a particular solution is identified. The mediator should not inflict their own point of view on the group.

If you are going to use a mediator, try to find one who has done it before. Mediation requires a high level of skill.

TIP

hui Māori

Hui Māori are another instance of a formal meeting. Below is an example of how a hui on a marae may be organised. However, it is important to note that there are other ways of conducting hui Māori on and off the marae. This is dealt with briefly in the "Flexibility of Hui Māori" section.

EXAMPLE OF A HUI HELD ON A MARAE

Māori hui on marae are governed by the protocol (*kawa*) of the marae. These may differ depending on the *iwi* concerned. A meeting on a marae may be organised in the following way:

- *pōwhiri* and *mihi* (greetings) from *tangata whenua*
- *mihi whakahoki* (response) from those attending or visiting (*manuhiri*). The protocols governing who may speak and the order of speeches are dictated by the *kawa* of the *tangata whenua* (or at the discretion of the *tangata whenua*, another *kawa* maybe adopted – for example in heavy rain, the guests may be called straight into the house). Speeches of *tangata whenua* and *manuhiri* generally include acknowledgement of meeting house and *tūpuna* (ancestors), *ngā mate* (deceased), then the mountain, river, chiefs and tribe of the speaker
- speeches are usually followed by a supporting *waiata* (song) from the speaker's supporters

- the last *manuhiri* speaker lays down the *koha* (gift) at the conclusion of their speech
- *tangata whenua* invite those people present to *harirū* (shake hands/hongi/kiss)
- after the *harirū*, food is shared. This represents cleansing of the visiting party so they become *noa* (ordinary) and part of *tangata whenua*
- the meeting business is usually preceded by a *karakia* (prayer or ritual chant)
- the *take* (the reason for the meeting) is introduced
- the *kaupapa* (procedure or format) is decided
- speakers stand and address the gathering. They have the right to be heard uninterrupted
- decision-making is usually by consensus, though there may be a vote at the end of discussion to formalise a decision
- *poroporoaki* (farewell) when closure is reached by "tying up any loose knots" and reconfirming mutual ties
- the hui ends with a *karakia*.

Note: Hui held in venues other than marae may be run along similar lines.

FLEXIBILITY OF HUI MĀORI

Joan Metge, in her book *Kōrero Tahi: Talking Together*, illustrates alternative procedures for conducting hui Māori that can be adapted to different situations from small group discussions to conference-type settings.

Tikanga (rules)

According to Metge, the *tikanga* (rules) governing discussion at hui Māori are not hard-and-fast directives (though the inexperienced are tempted to treat them as such). They are flexible guidelines that both encourage and require modification according to different circumstances e.g. whether the hui is being held on or off a marae complex or whether visitors are present or not.

Despite this flexibility, Metge mentions five rules of basic importance at hui Māori:

- the use of physical space to express and mediate social relationships
- the making of a distinction between tangata whenua (people of the land) and manuhiri (visitors)
- the framing of discussion with karakia (prayer) and with ceremonials of greeting and farewell
- the vesting of responsibility for the management of discussion in participants as a group
- the appropriate use of one, two or three distinct modes of discussion.

An example of flexibility

One of the examples Metge uses to illustrate how hui Māori can be adapted, is the pōwhiri. This is the welcome ceremony specifically designed to introduce individuals and groups to each other to reduce feelings of strangeness, anxiety or hostility, so that everyone involved feels comfortable enough to engage in discussion.

Metge advocates that in a marae setting, rather than the speeches being entirely or mainly in Māori, organisers of the hui could consider providing English translations or summaries of the speeches either during or after the pōwhiri. This used to be common on marae and in such situations as the Māori Land Court sittings where Pakeha were present. However, this practice has fallen out of favour in a drive to extend the use of te reo Māori (Maori language).

For venues other than marae, a welcome ceremony could be designed that uses the English language but also recognises the status of Māori as an official language and the presence of speakers of other languages. For example, the Māori language could be used to begin and end the ceremony with karanga (call of welcome) and karakia (prayer) and again in the first speech and in waiata. Then speakers from minority groups could be invited to use their own languages in speeches and songs, provided they explain the content in English.

Such adaptations are possible throughout other parts of the hui (refer to Joan Metge's *Kōrero Tahi: Talking Together* for further details).

where to go for more information



publications

Title:

Seizing the Moment II: Turning Community Ideas into Action (Running Community Organisations section)

Author:

Many people contributed

Editors:

Colin Gunn and others

Publisher:

Community Work Training Advisory Committee, Nelson

Publication Date:

1994

Pages:

96

Format/Availability:

Book but now out of print. May be available from certain libraries.

Title:

The Meetings Manual: How to chair and participate effectively in meetings

Author:

Lora Mountjoy, New Zealand

Publication Date:

1998

Pages:

66

Format/Availability:

Book. Cost \$13 + \$3 postage.

Title:

The Zen of Groups – A handbook for people meeting with a purpose

Authors:

Dale Hunter, Anne Bailey, Bill Taylor

Publisher:

Tandem Press, Auckland

Publication Date:

1994

Format/Availability:

Book.

Title:

Kōrero Tahi: Talking Together

Author:

Joan Metge

Publisher:

Auckland University Press

Publication Date:

2001

Format/Availability:

Book.

online resource

Title:

Annual General Meetings

Author:

Te Puni Kōkiri

Format/Availability:

Free online

Link:

www.governance.tpk.govt.nz/what/agm.aspx



website

EffectiveMeetings.com is an online resource centre designed to provide useful information about meetings in the form of articles, tips and quizzes. See – www.effectivemeetings.com.