

Standards for Minutes

The writing of minutes of meetings is a critical task with long term implications. Below are some standards that may assist those charged with this duty in the context of the Florida Conference:

Accuracy

It is the responsibility of the minute-taker/scribe to ensure that the record is clear and accurate. It is therefore expected that if the meeting gets ahead of the scribe, he/she will notify the chair and the meeting will pause to ensure that the record reflects decisions.

Content

The presence of a quorum and the adoption of the minutes of the prior meeting (with or without amendments) should be recorded.

It is not necessary to record verbatim everything that occurs. A paragraph summarizing the discussion so that future readers will be able to understand is sufficient. It is also unnecessary to record who makes and who seconds a motion, only that such procedure has been followed. If a speaker is addressing the meeting on a particular subject or giving a report, their identity and role is important to the record. If a member of the board or committee is responding, their identity and concern only needs to be noted if they request so.

On occasion a committee or board may decline to act on a given matter. It may be important to record that simple fact in the minutes without additional information simply to ensure that the decision is noted.

Voting

The fact of a motion in its original form must be recorded, as well as any second that is required. If the motion fails for lack of a second, that should be noted. As a motion proceeds, amendments should be given to the scribe in writing if at all possible, as the body may wish to hear the motion with the amendment before it votes. Such a request is clarifying for all. A summary of discussion may be valuable, or in some cases unnecessary. The final vote should be recorded with the action as voted and the actual count (numbers of ayes, nays and abstentions) or the fact of pass or fail to pass if not counted. It is particularly important when the vote is about a matter requiring a supermajority vote (2/3 or 3/4). In some instances, state law also regulates how abstentions are to be recorded.

Executive Session

On occasion, a board or committee may need to go into executive session to consider a matter with sensitive personnel implications or pending or threatened litigation or legal proceedings, receiving advice from legal counsel, real estate or other economic transaction. In that event, the record must show that the general meeting recessed and a vote by majority was taken to enter an

executive session regarding [the general nature of the matter under discussion]. At the conclusion of the executive session, the record then shows that the body voted to leave the executive session and reconvene in general session, and any action emanating from that session is recorded in the minutes. Sometimes, on advice of counsel, it is necessary to keep a separate record of the action taken in executive session, and in that instance a document is created showing who was present (or attended by conference call), the fact of executive session and any action taken, plus the conclusion of the executive session. The minutes of the regular meeting should then record that separate minutes were kept of that executive session. The minutes of executive sessions should be periodically (annually) reviewed by the governing body and those which no longer require confidential treatment should be voted to be released and published like open session minutes are.

Confirmation of Content

It can be highly valuable for the scribe to send the relevant portion of the draft of the minutes to the individual making a given report to ensure accuracy. The entire draft should be shared with the Moderator or Chair and the staff person for the body before being sent to the members, once again to ensure accuracy. Nevertheless, care must be taken that the record of the scribe be genuinely the record of the meeting and requests for changes in the draft must be weighed as to their appropriateness. Minutes should only reflect what occurred in the context of that meeting, not what transpires afterward (which should be reported at the next meeting and recorded in those minutes.)

Timing

Minutes form the basis for not only a historical record but also for the development of future agendas and for follow-up actions at the conclusion of a meeting. Therefore it is important that minutes be available as soon as possible after the meeting, at the very least for the chair/moderator and staff, but preferably for all members.