

# NSGEU

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## Local Secretary's Handbook

Fall 2016

Nova Scotia Government & General Employees  
Union

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# The Role of the NSGEU Secretary

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The Secretary's role will vary depending on the working relationship with the President, but the basic principals are captured below:

- Attend all Local Meetings and Executive Meetings and take Minutes
- Maintain record of members attendance at meetings
- Draft Agendas for Local Meetings and Executive Meetings for President
- Send out notices to membership regarding meetings and events
- Obtain signed membership status from the Labour Resource Centre prior to Local General Meetings – this can be done every few meetings
- Maintain Minutes of all meetings during your term
- Submit Minutes to the NSGEU in accordance to your Local By-laws
- Book meeting room location when required
- Attend Local Meetings with required documents
- Verify requirements regarding delegate credentials to Convention
- Pass along Local and Special Meeting information and any Local Announcements to the Labour Resource Centre for posting on the NSGEU Website

The role of the Secretary is vital to the efficient running of the Local, without a Secretary the running of a Local is greatly hampered.

In this handbook there are hints and suggestions to help you achieve your goal of being a great Local Secretary.

## **Advantages of being the Secretary:**

- Gives you easy access to other members in the group
- Keeps you up to date on what is going on within the Local
- Enables you to help the Local Executive accomplish the goals of the Local

# Minute Taking Made Easy

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## Minutes:

- Provide an official record of a meeting
- Provide information on issues discussed and how they were finally resolved
- Provide the timelines for what has been done/ accomplished / left to do
- Provide the information on who was assigned or tasked (or even volunteered) specific tasks and dates for completion
- Must be clear, accurate, concise, and informative

People don't always remember exactly what was discussed in a meeting and sometimes people leave a meeting with different understandings of what was discussed. Minutes are meant to solve these problems.

## Effective Minute Taking:

To be an effective minute taker, you must develop your ability to separate the essential from the nonessential. You must be able to pick out the key points. Remember, the quality of minutes is not determined by their length, but by their content. Keep a focus on the 'big picture' to capture the important issues instead of getting bogged down in recording everything that's said.

Often, minute takers try to get down every word spoken. This can be because of insecurity, from not being comfortable taking notes, not knowing the subjects or process, or because of the basic fear of getting it wrong. This can all be elevated by doing a few things in advance; if you're unsure of the topics, read previous minutes, getting familiar with taking notes and coming to the meeting prepared.

NOTE: You are not a tape recorder. You do not need to write down every word you hear!



Finally – review your notes as soon after the meeting as possible while your memory is still fresh.

## Ideas to help you streamline your notes:

- Eliminate vowels – A sign in a city subway used to say “If u cn rd ths, u cn gt a gd jb.” Which translates to If you can read this, you can get a good job. This may help you or it may take you more time trying to eliminate all the vowels then focusing on the meaning
- Use word beginnings to represent words you may use over and over again – imp for important, inp for input
- Use standard symbols in place of words, either your own or some of the ones suggested below.
- Shorten long statements both by omitting many of the unimportant words and by abbreviating the important ideas (for everything OTHER than Motions, which we will discuss later)
- Write smaller, you use less unnecessary movement

## Symbols:

∴	therefore	≈	approximately
b/c	because	s/b	should be
↑	increase	w/b	would be
↓	decrease	*	most important
→	leads to	<	less than
vs	versus	>	greater than
w/	with	Δ	change
w/o	without	esp	especially
def	definition	eg	example
#	Numbered item of Business	+	For

## Symbols Con't:

? Question

- Against

P Proposal

P Proposal defeated

R Resolution

R Resolution defeated

M Motion

M Motion defeated

A Amendment

A Amendment defeated

V Vote passed

V Vote defeated

These are just suggestions; you can create and get comfortable with your own form of shorthand. The object is to make minute taking easier on you, not to burden you with remembering a bunch of symbols. If the symbols don't make sense to you, don't use them. The most effective symbols are those that make sense to you – then stick with them.

## Summarizing:

A summary consists of only the most important and relevant information. It provides a shorter version of the original conversation without the loss of its meaning, but without including a tone of irrelevant stuff. Minutes exist to provide a documented account of the proceedings of the Local and must include some important items that will be addressed later in the session.



### For example:

At a local meeting under the Treasurer's Report a discussion was had regarding a

door prize to be considered for a future meeting. After the Treasurer is finished giving his update, Jim says "I want to say that I think we should spend \$50 on a door prize at our Christmas meeting in December. I feel we never give back to our members who show up to these meetings throughout the year and it's about time we do something to help boost attendance and encourage people to come out. Also it's a month of giving so I feel that for December we can at least have a door prize. Maybe we can even get someone to show up at the meeting dressed as Santa, I think that would be excellent". Mary raises her hand and when the President acknowledges her, says "I agree with having a door prize during the December meeting but because not all of our members celebrate Christmas I am opposed to the Santa costume. I think that's too over the top and a bit silly". Jim says there's nothing silly about Christmas. Stanley is next on the speakers list and says "I move we spend \$50 for a door prize to be given out at December's meeting". John seconds the motion. The President says "there's a motion on the floor to spend \$50 on a door prize at the December meeting and it's been seconded – are there any speakers on the motion?". Wanda says "I am in favour of a door prize at our December's meeting". The question is called, the President holds the vote and the motion is carried.

### This whole transaction can be summarized in your notes like this:

Jim – good idea to spend \$50 on a door prize to be given out during Decembers meeting. There was discussion around this. A motion was made by Stanley "I move that we spend \$50 for a door prize to be given out at December's meeting". Motion was seconded by John and discussion was had.

This captures the important stuff, you didn't need to capture the santa suit exchange as it's irrelevant. If it had been part of the motion and was carried, it's not relevant who suggested it.

**The minutes could look like this example:**

4. Treasurer's Report

4.1 \$50 Door prize

Discussion was had regarding spending \$50 on a door prize during December's meeting. A motion was made, it was properly moved and seconded. A vote was held and the motion was carried.

**Motion by:** Stanley

"I move that we spend \$50 for a door prize to be given out during December's meeting"

2<sup>nd</sup> by: John

Motion: **CARRIED**

The important parts are captured and it's easy to see in the Minutes.

# Local Meetings

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## **Meeting Preparation:**

Working with the President of your Local is key to an effectively run Local and meetings. It would be best if you met one on one with your Local President at the start of the term to decide who will do what. Some Presidents like to call the meetings, send out the notices, and create the agendas. Others are more than happy to have the Secretary do these tasks. Some Locals have By-Laws that spell out the roles and duties of each Executive position. Whether there are duties outlined in your By-laws or not, it's always great to have a well defined working relationship with the Local President. The following is a check list of duties to be decided whether the Secretary or the President will be the person in charge of making them happen.

## **Duties Prior to a Local Meeting:**

- Setting Local Meeting dates
- Booking meeting location
- Notifying the membership in advance (follow your By-laws if time frames are given) and canvassing for agenda items
- Creation of the Agenda, ensuring any items with follow-up actions from the last meeting are brought forward
- Obtaining a signed membership list from the Labour Resource Centre every few meetings (keeping in mind they need a few days notice)
- Securing a volunteer for check in duties (stewards are great for this)



## Items to bring to a Local Meeting:

- Membership signing cards – for those who are unsigned and wish to participate, but they must fill out the card and give it to a member at the entrance checking membership status
- A copy of your Local By-Laws and the NSGEU Constitution and By-Laws are essential
- A sign in sheet at the entry, everyone attending the meeting must sign in
- Copies of the Agenda
- Copies of the previous minutes
- A volunteer tasked with “sign-in” door duties
- Paper to take notes
- A couple of pens or pencils (you never know when one will give out)
- A watch
- A calendar – if your local is to determine the next meeting date at the end of the meeting

Once you and your President decide who will acquire these items, these things will become second nature and your meetings will go smoothly. Having a package or box with the essentials left in will make it easier then pulling this together meeting after meeting.

**NOTE:** The signed attendance sheets should be kept with the secretary! Copies can be sent to the Treasurer but the Secretary should keep a set with the minutes. Many things hinge on meeting attendance; for example convention delegate requirements, running for Board positions, etc.



## Minute Taking Process:

- Sit near the President so that you can assist each other, it's helpful to face the room so that you can see who's speaking
- Any materials at the meeting should be kept with the minutes (written reports, handouts, etc)
- Arrange a signal, such as a slight raising of the hand, with the President to let her/him know that you need assistance in getting motions / important items verbatim. Nobody minds if you need to get a motion down and it takes a minute. Verify it by reading it back to the person making the motion so that there is no mistake
- Indicate in your notes the name of the person making the motion
- Write the exact words of anybody who asks that their view be made part of the minutes
- Be alert during the informal discussion that sometimes follows the adoption of a main motion. This discussion is centered on implementation of the action, the details about who will do what, when, and how. Record each detail as it is suggested. After a detail is agreed upon, and this can be by a vote, write agreed or a yes by it. Draw a line through suggestions made that are not accepted. These unaccepted suggestions do not have to be in the typed minutes later, but are a good record.
- Be sure to keep track of everything the President and other Executive members agree to do, they'll be counting on you to capture these items so they can follow up (these duties may be assigned to a Vice-President and in that case you don't have to worry about it)
- Write down the date and time of the next meeting
- Record the time of adjournment
- Type up the minutes sooner rather than later after the meeting, while your memory is still fresh and your notes and symbols still make sense to you

## General Guidelines of What to Record:

### Record

- Pros and Cons of issues – this would be the reasons for or against an issue
- New information
- All motions – passed and defeated
- Results of motions
- Expected action

### Do Not Record

- Speaker's experiences
- Old material
- Redundant information
- Withdrawn motions
- Personal comments
- He said/she said information

You may refer to an agenda item briefly or elaborate on it, but each agenda item must be recorded, even if it is only one sentence or that it was deferred.

You may or may not use names in the minutes (motions made must have a name attached to them), but you must be consistent. This will depend on the size of your Local and how well everybody knows each other. If there is more than one person with the same first name and you're not using last names in minutes you do need to include at least the first letter of the last name to distinguish members, ie Ian T and Ian B.

Don't worry if you miss a point. If it's important it will be restated later or you can check with the speaker afterwards or you can ask the President to have the speaker make the point again. It can be a hard job keeping up with the conversation and most people don't mind waiting for a minute while the Secretary clarifies something.

## **Formatting the Minutes:**

- The top of the Minutes should clearly state the purpose of the meeting and should include the date, time and location of the meeting

### **Minutes**

**NSGEU Local # \_\_ Meeting**

**Location, Date, Time**

OR

### **Minutes**

**NSGEU Local # \_\_ Executive Meeting**

**Location, Date, Time**

- The minutes should be in the same order as the Agenda at the meeting
- Use the past tense and write complete sentences
- Motions should be clear and obvious as to whether they passed or not and the person who made the motion should be identified
- The debate concerning a motion does not have to be included; although reasons for decisions should be
- When a Motion has been amended, the history of that amendment should be listed

## **Sample Agendas:**

Agendas can be itemized or timed, depending on the wishes of the Local President

### **Agenda**

#### **NSGEU Local 007 Meeting**

**December 25, 1999 – 12:00 – 1:30**

1. Introductions (Local Executive & any guests)
2. Agenda
3. Minutes from November 25, 1999
4. Items from Minutes
  - a. Christmas Party plans
  - b. Assignment of Duties for Vice-Presidents
5. New Business
  - a. Review of Attendance Management announcement from HR
  - b. Stewards Training
6. Reports
  - a. President's Report
  - b. Vice President's Report
  - c. Treasurer's Report
  - d. Secretary's Report
  - e. Chief Steward's Report
  - f. Occupational Councilor's Report
  - g. Regional Councilor's Report
  - h. Labour Council Delegate Report
7. Employee Relations Officer
8. AOB (any other business)
  - a. Announcements
9. Next Meeting
10. Adjournment

## **Agenda**

### **NSGEU Local 007 Meeting**

**December 25, 1999 – 12:00 – 1:30**

- 12:00 Introduction of Local Executive
- 12:05 Agenda
- 12:10 Minutes from previous meeting
- 12:15 Items from Minutes
  - a. Christmas Party plans
  - b. Assignment of Duties for Vice-Presidents
- 12:30 New Business
  - a. Review of Attendance Management announcement from HR
  - b. Stewards Training
- 12:45 Reports
  - a. President's Report
  - b. Vice President's Report
  - c. Treasurer's Report
  - d. Secretary's Report
  - e. Chief Steward's Report
  - f. Occupational Council's Report
  - g. Regional Council's Report
  - h. Labour Council Delegate's Report
- 1:05 Employee Relations Officer
- 1:15 Any Other Business (this would include announcements)
- 1:25 Next Meeting
- 1:30 Adjournment

Sources for this document (and a good read for more information):

Dochterman, Delores. *The Art of Taking Minutes*. Santa Rosa: Synder Publishing Company, 1981

Fry, Ron. *Taking Notes, Second Edition*. New Jersey: Career Press, 1994

Kilgour, Lauralee, and Lucy Mae Jennings *Administrative Procedures for the Canadian Office*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Ontario, Prentice Hall Canada Inc., 1994

Watson, Jane: *The Minute Takers Handbook*, Second Edition. North Vancouver: Self-Counsel, 1999.