Topic 9

EMERGE
Supporting Farmer Led Groups

A collaborative project between
TAS FARM INNOVATION HUB
RMCG

Running effective meetings

Effective meetings respect members' time and help turn discussion into decisions and action. Whether your group is just getting started or has more formal meeting requirements, meetings should be purposeful, inclusive and well organised. Use enough structure to keep things moving, while making sure members can contribute, share different views and be involved in decisions.

The level of formality can grow with your group; what matters is having a meeting process that works for your members and meets any requirements set by your group's rules or structure.

1. Before the meeting – prepare for purpose

Begin by being clear about why the meeting is needed and ideally what should be different by the end of it. Schedule meetings with your member's availability in mind and give members enough notice to plan their attendance. (Your governing rules may also state a minimum notice period).

a. Set and circulate the agenda (see **Topic 8**) in advance, with the meeting time, location and any documents members need to read to fully participate.

b. Include only items that contribute to the meeting's purpose. Put urgent, strategic or discussion-heavy items early, when energy is highest.

c. For each agenda item, state the item's purpose e.g. 'for information', 'for discussion', 'decision or action required' and allocate a realistic amount of time accordingly.

d. Especially where a decision is required, the person responsible for the agenda item works with the Chair to circulate the proposal, budget or recommendation beforehand so members can arrive prepared.

e. Confirm the venue, equipment, catering and guest speakers if required. Choose a practical, comfortable location and time for the season.

f. Check any governance requirements, including quorum, notice periods and procedures set out in the association's constitution or rules.

2. At the meeting – chair for participation and decisions

The person leading or chairing the meeting helps set the tone. They keep the discussion on track, encourage everyone to contribute, make space for different views and help prevent one or two voices from dominating (see Figure 1). In more formal groups, the Chair also helps ensure the meeting follows the group's agreed rules and processes.

- **Set expectations for participation.** These can be framed as 'ground rules' or a 'code of conduct'. This could include:
  - **Boss free zone** – if participants or members are from the same farm team or business, they should enter the meeting as equals without fear of judgement or repercussions.
  - **Share the air** – give everyone an equal chance to speak.
  - **Tackle problems, not people** – critique ideas and behaviours respectfully without making personal attacks.
  - **Actively listen** – pay attention and wait until others are finished before speaking.
  - **Stay present** – phones away and avoid multitasking.
  - **Stick to the agenda** – sometimes topics come up. Use a 'parking lot' to acknowledge topics and put them to the side to cover off later.
- **Start and finish on time.** Follow the circulated agenda unless the group agrees to change it.

- **Keep discussion connected to the group's purpose** and focussed on the matter or decision in front of the group.
- **Invite different views and respectful disagreement**, ask quieter members for their perspective and manage side conversations or repeated points.
- **Make motions, resolutions and decisions clear** before moving on, ensure these are recorded. For significant financial or contentious matters, use the group's formal decision-making process.
- For **every agreed action, record what will be done**, who is **responsible** and when it is due.

3. Keep meetings farmer-friendly

Group members are often volunteers balancing farm, family and community commitments. Meetings are more likely to retain engagement when members can see that their time leads to useful outcomes.

- Avoid long one-way reports. Put information-only reports in the meeting papers where possible and use meeting time for questions, choices and issues that need the group's input.
- Explain unfamiliar acronyms and introduce new members or guests.
- Use guest speakers, farm walks, project inspections or visits from time to time to keep meetings useful and connected to members' interests.
- Recognise contributions and create some space for informal conversation – relationships are an important part of effective farmer groups.
- Recognise and aim to direct energy levels – keeping engagement high, with balanced emotions.

4. Close well – make the next steps unmistakable

Before people leave, briefly summarise the decisions made and the actions arising. Confirm the next meeting date and thank members for their contribution. If an issue cannot be resolved within the available time, agree whether it needs a separate meeting or should return as a properly prepared agenda item next time.

5. After the meeting – follow through

- Prepare and circulate concise minutes (see **Topic 8**) promptly rather than waiting until the next meeting.
- Record attendance, key matters considered, decisions and motions, and the actions arising. Minutes do not need to be a transcript.
- Use an action register with an owner and due date and follow up between meetings where needed.
- Bring outstanding actions back to the next meeting so accountability is visible and progress is maintained.

Before

- ☑ Purpose is clear
- ○ Agenda and papers circulated
- ○ Decisions identified in advance
- ○ Venue/logistics confirmed.

During

- ○ Start on time
- ○ Hear different viewpoints
- ○ Keep to agenda and time
- ○ Clarify decisions and actions.

After

- ○ Circulate minutes promptly
- ○ Send/maintain action list
- ○ Follow up action owners
- ○ Prepare outstanding items for next agenda.

What good looks like

Maintain good group dynamics by keeping people engaged and where they leave the meeting knowing what was decided, what they need to do, who else is responsible, when actions are due, and when the group will meet again. A good group values members' time and that their contributions are making a difference.

Potential schedule of meetings

A simple meeting schedule can help your group stay focused, share responsibilities and keep projects moving. The frequency and format should be adapted to suit the size, purpose and stage of your group. Below are some ideas for meetings to get you started.

Depending on your governance structure (e.g. incorporated), the *Australian Institute of Company Directors* has a comprehensive list of key governance issues that are likely to populate your annual calendar. This resource is linked below.

Table 1 - Meeting purpose, frequency, and topics

Meeting purpose	When	Who	Key topics / actions
Establishment and direction	At establishment, then annually	Whole group	• Confirm the group's purpose, goals and priorities • Identify membership, skills and diversity gaps • Agree roles and responsibilities • Establish governance arrangements, Terms of Reference and meeting ground rules • Declare and manage conflicts of interest • Consider succession and the longer-term future, including on-boarding processes
Membership and engagement	Quarterly	Whole group / committee	• Check whether members are engaged and getting value from the group • Identify who may be missing and opportunities to broaden membership • Consider whether you need different skills, experience, and perspectives • Check that opportunities to contribute and workloads are evenly shared • Identify barriers to participate and ways to make involvement easier • Seek feedback on meetings, activities, and communication • Recognise member contributions and identify ways to celebrate progress • Identify emerging leaders and succession opportunities
Regular group meeting	Monthly, bi-monthly or as agreed	Group members	• Review previous minutes and actions • Project/activity updates • Make decisions and vote on motions where required • Review upcoming priorities, risks and issues • Allocate actions, responsibilities and timeframes • Record and circulate minutes

Table 1 (continued)

Meeting purpose	When	Who	Key topics / actions
Project and activity planning	As required / ahead of major activities	Group + relevant working groups or committees	• Confirm project scope, objectives and intended outcomes • Plan activities, responsibilities, milestones and resources • Identify risks, compliance requirements and approvals • Establish working groups where useful • Identify practical "quick wins" to build momentum
Finance and funding	Quarterly and before funding rounds	Group / Treasurer / relevant advisers	• Review budget, income and expenditure • Identify upcoming funding needs • Consider grants, sponsorship, member contributions, or other income • Review grant obligations and reporting requirements • Plan and approve major expenditure
Stakeholder and communications	Quarterly or around key activities	Group + relevant partners	• Identify stakeholders, partners and people to engage • Review stakeholder engagement activities • Plan communications and key messages • Agree talking points or an "elevator pitch" • Coordinate events, consultation and community engagement
Annual review and forward planning (may be held alongside or inform the AGM)	Annually	Whole group + advisers/ partners as needed	• Use this time to plan for the AGM • Review progress against goals and projects • Celebrate achievements and capture lessons learned • Review governance, risks and committee effectiveness • Identify emerging priorities and opportunities • Review membership, skills and succession needs • Agree priorities and an action plan for the next 12 months

For every meeting: have a clear agenda, circulate relevant information beforehand, record decisions and actions, assign responsibility and due dates, and circulate minutes promptly after the meeting (see **Topic 8**).

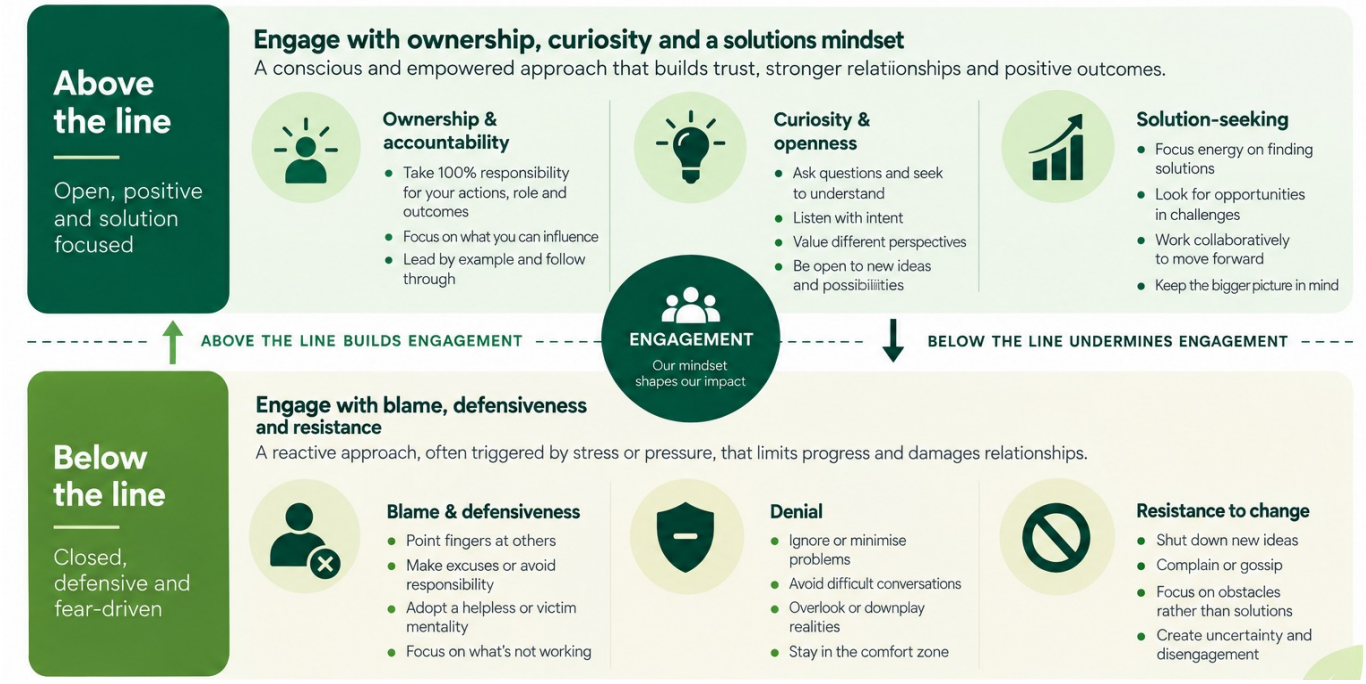

Figure 1 - Run an effective meeting by operating above the line

Additional Resources

- **Victorian Landcare Program (2016)**
  Landcare Note 1.5 Effective meetings
  https://www.landcarevic.org.au/assets/Uploads/2.5-Effective-meetings.pdf
- **WA Grower Group Alliance (2021)**
  The Grower Group Toolkit for Effective Farmer Groups, Vol. 4
  https://www.gga.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Vol-4_April-2021-GGA-Toolkit.pdf
- **Australian Institute of Company Directors (2020)**
  Annual Board Calendar
  https://www.aicd.com.au/content/dam/aicd/pdf/tools-resources/director-tools/board/annual-board-calendar-director-tool.pdf

How this resource came about

The Emerge project was funded by the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund to support new, emerging and informal farmer groups to develop their skills and knowledge, and to create this set of resources for use by groups into the future. Groups participating in 2026 received coaching and additional learning opportunities to supplement the content of these resources.

TAS FARM INNOVATION HUB RMCG

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