

# FOSTERING COHESION THROUGH STREAMLINED FAMILY COMMUNICATION





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# 01

## DEFINING THE IMPETUS FOR FAMILY MEETINGS



## Why are Family Meetings Important?



As of 2023, family owned businesses constitute 90% of private companies in the UAE [1]. In Dubai alone, these family businesses generate over 40% of the emirate's GDP and employ around 70% of the private sector workforce [1] [2].

challenges, family businesses can adopt a proactive approach by formalizing and professionalizing internal dynamics through regular family meetings.

Family meetings, in its various forms, serve as a platform for business-owning family members to convene and discuss matters relevant to the family enterprise. The strategic benefits of such meetings are manifold:

### Improved Interpersonal Dynamics



Family meetings foster strong interpersonal relationships among family members, establishing a sense of trust, unity, and common purpose within the business.

### Enhanced Governance Practices



By providing a formal setting, family meetings facilitate comprehensive reviews and updates of internal governance structures and documents. This ensures accountability, effective decision making and alignment with risk appetite.

### Inclusive Decision Making



Engaging all family members in the process of decision-making and business development ensures that diverse perspectives are considered, leading to better-informed and more robust choices.

### Platform for Transparent Family Communication



Family meetings offer forums for open, honest communication within the family. They strengthen emotional bonds, resolve conflicts, and preserve cherished traditions.

### Avenue for Mentorship and Knowledge Transfer



Family elders can use these meetings to impart their knowledge, experience, and expertise to younger family members, preparing them for future leadership roles.

Despite their lasting impact on the economic fabric of the nation, the dynamics within family businesses are often riddled with complexities in various aspects, including succession planning, conflict resolution, talent management, governance among others. To effectively address these

## Types of Family Meetings

The quantity and nature of family meeting forums differ based on the scale, intricacy, and unique needs of family businesses. Below are general recommendations for different categories of family meeting forums:

### Family Assembly



**Purpose** ➤ The family assembly serves as a formal platform to discuss both business and family matters. It empowers family members to express viewpoints on business growth and familial concerns.

**Composition** ➤ It welcomes involvement of all family members.

### Family Council



**Purpose** ➤ A family council is a subset of the family assembly, engaging in more targeted discussions. It addresses both family and business matters in its deliberations.

**Composition** ➤ Could vary between 5 – 10 elected family members depending on the size of the family business.

### Family Council Sub Committees



	Next-Generation Education Committee	Recreational and Charitable Committee	Conflict Resolution Committee
<b>Purpose</b> ➤	Facilitates and promotes formal and informal educational initiatives to shape the educational journey for the benefit of the family's sustained success.	Focuses on organizing leisure activities and philanthropic initiatives to promote family bonding and contribute positively to the community.	Addresses and resolves conflicts among family members and within the business to maintain harmony and effective operations.
<b>Composition</b> ➤	Consists of 1 – 2 eager next generation family members, senior family leaders and / or professionals.	Consists of family representatives, professionals and external advisors.	Consists of neutral family business owners, external legal / governance experts, senior management not directly involved in the conflict, neutral / independent mediators.

# Choosing Family Meeting Forums to Fit Your Needs

The selection of family meeting approaches is individualized based on the specific nature, size, and complexity of your family business. Factors that may be considered include the generation of the family business, the number of family members involved in the company, the extent of expansion or global operations, and other relevant considerations.

Depicted below are general family business types. Families may use the below guide to establish appropriate family meeting forums within their business:

Type	Definition	Family Forums					
		Family Assembly	Family Council	Conflict Resolution Committee	Recreational Committee	Charitable Committee	Next-Generation Education Committee
<b>Genesis Stage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First-generation entrepreneur or founder.</li> <li>• Decision-making is centralized around the founder.</li> </ul>						
<b>Sibling Collaboration (Early Stage)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family business is beginning to transition to second generation</li> <li>• Siblings have key managerial and ownership roles</li> </ul>	✓					
<b>Sibling Collaboration (Late Stage)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family business has matured post sibling transition</li> <li>• Some siblings occupy primary leadership positions</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓			
<b>Cousins Consortium</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involves an extended network of family members spanning multiple generations including not only cousins but also individuals connected through marriage, such as spouses, in-laws, and other relatives.</li> <li>• Comes into effect when family has multiple branches and subsidiaries</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Family Businesses may also consider adopting an objective based approach to family meetings. This involves identifying key aspects within the family business that require attention, prioritizing the challenges and choosing suitable meeting forums to tackle specific issues effectively.

Objective	Family Forums					
	Family Assembly	Family Council	Conflict Resolution Committee	Recreational Committee	Charitable Committee	Next-Generation Education Committee
Vision, mission, values	✓	✓				
Strategic direction	✓	✓				
Succession planning	✓	✓				
Governance policies, procedures and practices	✓	✓				
Financial planning, budget and investment decisions	✓	✓				
Business growth and diversification	✓					
Family employment decisions		✓				
Family employment policy	✓	✓				
Family and next generation education and training	✓	✓				✓
Dispute / conflict resolution		✓	✓			
Philanthropy and social responsibility		✓			✓	
Family event coordination		✓		✓		

# Key Challenges and Mitigating Measures

While Family businesses often aim to use family meetings as a unique approach to promote sustainable growth and enhance collaboration, several challenges hinder the successful implementation of such meetings. Identifying and mitigating these key factors is essential for overcoming obstacles and ensuring the effectiveness of family meetings.

## Challenges



**Busy schedules making it challenging to find a suitable time for everyone to convene**

**Poor or insufficient planning for family meetings can lead to disorganization and inefficiency during the meetings**

**Agenda may be overloaded or insufficient leading to rushed discussions**

**Lack of follow ups**

## Mitigating Measures



**All regular recurring family meetings must be scheduled well in advance, preferably in December of the previous year**

**Appoint a designated meeting secretary to oversee the planning process**

**Assign standing agenda items for each recurring meeting which are spaced out in a way that accommodates meaningful discussion**

**Record meeting minutes, assign action items to specific individuals, and regularly review progress during subsequent meetings**





# 02

## CALENDAR FOR FAMILY MEETINGS AND STANDING AGENDA ITEMS



## Designing Your Family Meeting Agenda

Family meetings are most effective when they are embellished with a well-rounded agenda that revolves around three key components: business, learning, and social. The business component involves discussions on strategic direction, purpose and succession, allowing the family to make important decisions and plan for

the future. The educational component is equally vital, focusing on personal development and educating new members about the business. Finally, the social component includes activities that promote strong relationships, unity, and bonding among family members. This balanced approach ensures that family meetings not only address practical matters but also nurture personal growth and maintain a strong sense of togetherness.



Component	Overview of areas to be considered for different type of family meetings
<b>Business Component</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic Plan</li> <li>• Vision, Mission and Values</li> <li>• Next Generation Succession</li> <li>• Summary of Business Performance</li> <li>• Conflict Resolution</li> </ul>
<b>Learning Component</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External Expert Sessions</li> <li>• Training for Next Generation</li> <li>• Recalling Family History</li> <li>• Leadership Development</li> <li>• Trainings Financial Literacy</li> </ul>
<b>Social Component</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing Significant Family Milestones</li> <li>• Family Games and Tournaments</li> <li>• Family Bonding Exercises</li> <li>• Community Involvement</li> <li>• Cultural and artistic activities and creative expressions</li> </ul>

Please refer to pages 16, 17 and 18 for a detailed meeting calendar and standing agenda items

## Annual Family Meeting Calendar and Standing Agenda Items

By setting a schedule and defining standing / recurring agenda items for the entire year, family members can plan and prioritize their attendance, ensuring active participation in decision-making processes. The inclusion of key agenda items, such as financial updates, succession planning, and strategic discussions, provides structure and direction to each meeting. Having a well-defined agenda helps optimize meeting time, facilitates productive discussions, and ensures that critical matters

are addressed systematically. When establishing your standing agenda, it's crucial to steer clear of addressing matters and conversations pertaining to management. Keep family and business matters distinct.

Presented below is a meeting planning tool that can be valuable for organizing and structuring meetings effectively.

Illustrative Scheduled Meetings Committee												
Family Assembly	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
<b>Family Assembly</b>		✓						✓				
<b>Illustrative Standing Agenda Items</b>												
Vision, mission, values		✓						✓				
Strategic plan including progress against set strategy		✓						✓				
Election of family council and other committees (if required and applicable)		✓										
Annual budget for family assembly and other sub committee activities, along with progress tracking		✓						✓				
Summary of the business performance		✓						✓				
Business restructuring (expansion, mergers, acquisition etc.)		✓						✓				
Family member compensation		✓										
Major policies and procedure change (e.g. Family charter, employment policy)		✓						✓				
Report from the family council and other family committees on various matters		✓										
Family Education and Next Generation Development		✓						✓				
Amendments to family protocols		✓						✓				
Specialized knowledge sessions facilitated by external speakers								✓				

The above is an illustrative, the frequency of meetings and relevant standing agenda items can vary based on the size and complexity of the family business



# Annual Family Meeting Calendar and Standing Agenda Items

Illustrative Scheduled Meetings Committee												
Family Council	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
	📅						📅					
<b>Illustrative Standing Agenda Items</b>												
Review and update the organization's vision, mission, and values	📅						📅					
Potential successors for key leadership positions and individualized succession plans	📅						📅					
Family business governance policies and procedures such as family employment policy, family constitutions, etc.	📅											
Annual budget for family council and other sub committee activities, along with progress tracking	📅											
Summary of business performance	📅						📅					
Education and Training plan for the family members and next generation	📅											
Addressal and resolution of disputes / conflicts (if any)	<b>As and when required</b>											
Updates from other sub committees (if any)	📅						📅					
Discussion on philanthropic initiatives for the year							📅					
Family recreational activity planning	📅											

The above is an illustrative, the frequency of meetings and relevant standing agenda items can vary based on the size and complexity of the family business

Illustrative Scheduled Meetings Committee												
Next-Generation Education Committee	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
		📅								📅		
<b>Illustrative Standing Agenda Items</b>												
Education and training plan for the next generation including progress update on established plan for the year		📅								📅		
Progress on leadership development programs for the next generation		📅								📅		

Illustrative Scheduled Meetings	
<b>Conflict Resolution Committee</b>	<b>This Committee shall convene as and when required</b>

Illustrative Scheduled Meetings Committee												
Family Charitable Committee	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
	📅					📅						📅
<b>Illustrative Standing Agenda Items</b>												
Review and allocation of committee budget	📅											
Evaluation of existing partnerships	📅											
Discussion of new opportunities						📅						📅
Family volunteering and engagement	📅					📅						
Impact reporting (if required)						📅						

Illustrative Scheduled Meetings Committee												
Family Recreational Committee	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
			📅						📅			
<b>Illustrative Standing Agenda Items</b>												
Review and allocation of committee budget			📅									
Recreational activity plan for the year			📅						📅			

The above is an illustrative, the frequency of meetings and relevant standing agenda items can vary based on the size and complexity of the family business







# 03

## IMPORTANCE OF A MEETING SECRETARY AND KEY SECRETARIAT PROCEDURES



## The Crucial Role of a Meeting Secretary in a Family Business

While the family's willingness to convene for meetings is important, the effectiveness of such meetings may be limited without a dedicated meeting secretary. The role of a meeting secretary in family businesses is multifaceted and crucial for creating a conducive environment during meetings. They serve as administrative coordinators, managing the scheduling and logistics of meetings. During meetings, they act as moderators and note-takers, ensuring that discussions remain focused and well-documented. After the meeting, they take on the responsibility of record-keeping for future reference. Selecting the right meeting secretary is paramount, and they can be either family members, non-family employees, or an external professional. Regardless of their background, the meeting secretary should possess certain key qualities, which are listed below:

Key Skills	Experience
 <b>Proficient Organization and Time Management skills</b>	<b>Demonstrated ability to handle confidential information and maintain a high level of discretion in sensitive family business matters</b>
 <b>Attention to Detail</b>	<b>Previous experience in coordinating and managing family business meetings or similar gatherings with multiple stakeholders</b>
 <b>Interpersonal Skills</b>	<b>Administrative planning and logistical experience in organizations of similar size and complexity</b>
 <b>Problem Solving</b>	<b>Demonstrated experience in interacting with C Suite individuals in organizations of similar size and complexity</b>
 <b>Listening Skills</b>	<b>Demonstrated experience of handling conflicts /dissenting opinions within a family business</b>
 <b>Flexibility and Adaptability</b>	<b>Demonstrated proficiency note taking, summarizing discussions effectively and in using productivity tools and software, such as Microsoft Office and other project management tools.</b>

## Planning in Advance

Planning in advance is crucial for the success of these meetings, as it ensures active participation, prepares participants with relevant materials and meeting expectations, streamlines the flow of the meeting, and facilitates the addressing of conflicts constructively. Depicted below is an illustrative guideline for a family meeting planning schedule.

<b>November (previous financial year)</b>	<b>Evaluate / re-evaluate the frequency of family meetings in line with the nature and complexity of the business.</b>
<b>Beginning of December (previous financial year)</b>	<b>Work with key stakeholders to identify crucial agenda items for each recurring meeting and create standing agenda</b>
<b>End of December (previous financial year)</b>	<b>Set tentative meeting dates for the upcoming year and confirm availability with meeting members and attendees</b>
<b>Early January</b>	<b>Send official meeting invites with standing agenda items to the meeting members and attendees</b>
<b>4 weeks before scheduled meeting</b>	<b>Schedule a meeting reminder prior to relevant family meeting</b>



## Checklist to Follow Before, During and After Family Meetings

Family meeting secretaries may choose to have a dedicated and comprehensive checklist that covers the essential steps before, during, and after each meeting. This checklist acts as a roadmap through the planning process, facilitating seamless flow of activities before, during and after the meeting, and capturing key takeaways for future reference.

Before the Scheduled Meeting	During the Meeting	After the Scheduled Meeting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Arrange for a meeting venue ➤ 5 weeks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Record attendance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Distribute draft meeting minutes ➤ 1 week</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Engage a professional facilitator (if required) ➤ 5 weeks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Record meeting minutes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Finalize and distribute updated meeting minutes (after feedback from members) ➤ 2 weeks</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Send meeting reminder and preliminary agenda to attendees ➤ 4 weeks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Coordinate / facilitate meeting presentations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Update the action item tracker ➤ 2 weeks</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Gather feedback on meeting agenda ➤ 4 weeks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Obtain signatures from all present meeting members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Archive meeting documentation ➤ 2 weeks</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Obtain updates on previous action items ➤ 3 weeks</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Collect supporting meeting materials from relevant stakeholders ➤ 2 weeks</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Share meeting details and supporting documentation with attendees ➤ 1 week</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Arrange for refreshments and meeting supplies (if applicable) ➤ 1 week</li> </ul>		

## Key Protocols for Recording Meeting Minutes

Writing meeting minutes is a significant responsibility for the secretary, but it comes with unique challenges in the case of family meetings. Unlike formal board meetings, family meetings involve a more informal and personal dynamic, which must be reflected in the meeting minutes. Striking the right balance becomes crucial, as the minutes should capture important discussions while avoiding unnecessary details about conflicts or personal matters. Fairness is of utmost importance, as family members may closely scrutinize the minutes, making the task even more delicate. Three essential components may be included in the meeting minutes (Refer page 27 for a meeting minutes template):



**Agenda Item:** Clearly align the minutes with the agenda shared prior to the meeting. If any new agenda items are introduced during the meeting, it should be explicitly stated in the minutes.



**Discussion:** Provide a concise and summarized version of the discussions. Avoid depicting dissenting opinions or conflicts. If formal voting is conducted, record the relevant names and the number of votes in favor or against decisions. For informal voting methods, note specific remarks against each member's name.



**Action Items:** Record any action items arising from the discussions, which will be beneficial for future meetings.



## 04

## APPENDICES



## Self-Evaluation Guide: Current Decision Making Framework v/s Aspired Outcome

Assess the decision-making framework within your family business using the below template and utilize the tools in section 1 to map your desired outcomes. Use the 'Final Decision Maker' category to identify individuals or governing bodies responsible for making ultimate decisions regarding the specified objective. Use the 'Consulting Authority' category to identify individuals or governing bodies who provide consultation for decisions pertaining to the relevant objectives, if applicable.

S.no	Objectives	Current State		Aspired Outcome	
		Final Decision Maker	Consulting Authority	Final Decision Maker	Consulting Authority
1	Vision, mission, values				
2	Strategic direction				
3	Succession planning				
4	Governance policies, procedures and practices				
5	Financial planning, budget and investment decisions				
6	Business growth and diversification				
7	Family and non family employment decisions				
8	Family employment policy				
9	Family and next generation education and training				
10	Dispute / conflict resolution				
11	Philanthropy and social responsibility				
12	Family event coordination				

## Template for Meeting Minutes

Objectives		
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>Meeting Commencement Time:</b>	<b>Location:</b>
<b>Meeting Attendees</b>	<b>Member Attendees:</b>	
	<b>Non Member Attendees:</b>	
<b>Absent Members (if any)</b>		

Meeting Minutes		
<b>Agenda / Topic</b> (Aligned with the agenda shared with members prior to the meeting)	<b>Discussion</b> (Brief summary of the key discussions during the meeting)	<b>Action Items (if any)</b> (Tasks, responsibilities, and follow-up actions)

Meeting Adjournment Time:	
<b>Name of Meeting Attendees</b>	<b>Signature of Meeting Attendees</b>
<<to be filled by member attendees>>	<<to be filled by member attendees>>

The following items may be included as attachments in the distributed meeting minutes:

- Materials / slides presented during the meeting
- Documents submitted for approval / review
- Action items tracker from previous meetings
- A summary list of productive ideas and discussions from the meeting that remained inconclusive (e.g., brainstorming session with family members)

## Family Meeting Code of Conduct

Even though the preparations for family meetings might be timely and efficient, it is essential for either the entire family or the designated chairperson of the family meeting forum to establish a set of ground rules or guidelines. These fundamental guidelines, are obligatory for every family member to adhere to during the family meeting. They establish a foundation of trust, consistency, and encourage meaningful, efficient discussions. Presented below is a collection of general protocols that family businesses can tailor to suit their specific requirements.

- **Participants should be punctual and adhere to the meeting agenda.**
- **Discussions should be treated with strict confidentiality.**
- **Use of mobile phones should be limited during active discussions**
- **Differing opinions should be welcomed, but criticism should be presented in a constructive manner. A temporary recess may be declared by the chairperson in cases of bad behavior.**
- **Only one person should speak at a time to ensure clarity and prevent confusion and side conversations during meetings should be avoided.**
- **Participants should treat each other professionally, keeping personal differences out of business relationships.**
- **Participants should exhibit commitment to active and attentive listening, valuing each person's input and perspective.**
- **Participants should come prepared to the meetings by reviewing materials and agenda items beforehand.**
- **Participants should avoid lingering on matters and compile a roster for potential future discussion.**
- **Chairperson or meeting secretary should allocate specific time limits for each agenda item to ensure efficient use of meeting time.**

## Family Meeting Membership Considerations

As family businesses expand and evolve, larger and more intricate family structures may necessitate the implementation of limitations and boundaries on membership for family meetings. Use the table below to establish membership prerequisites or evaluate the eligibility of different family members for distinct types of meetings.

S.no	Key Membership Related Themes to Consider	Committees					
		Family Assembly	Family Council	Next-Generation Education Committee	Conflict Resolution	Recreational Committee	Charitable Committee
1	Age restriction						
2	Educational / qualification requirements						
3	Desired experience / skills						
4	Level of involvement in the management of the family business						
5	Generational proximity to family business owners						
6	Ownership of shares						
7	Next generation representation						
8	Level of time commitment required						
9	Ethical and professional conduct						
10	Alignment with the vision, mission and strategic goals of the family business						

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