

Chairing meetings

Some groups don't have a formal chairperson – however even small meetings need direction and organisation. You can rotate who takes responsibility for this role to provide balance and development opportunities for all. If you do decide to have a rotating chair ensure you agree collectively what is expected and agree at the end of each meeting who will chair the next one.

What makes a good chair?

The purpose of having someone to chair a meeting is to ensure that the meeting runs smoothly and efficiently. They should:

- Ensure all agenda items are discussed
- Ensure everyone's views are heard
- Clear decisions are reached
- Meeting starts and finishes on time

They should never use their position as an opportunity to promote their view to the exclusion of others or to dominate the meeting.

Agenda

This is very important to a successfully run meeting. An agenda is a list of topics you want to discuss at a meeting. As well as helping you plan it is a useful way of making sure you cover everything you need to at the meeting. As part of the agenda it is often helpful to consider the time you will allocate to each subject.

Before the meeting

Preparation is just as important as the actual meeting itself. Consider:

- What is the purpose of the meeting?
- What results do you need to get from the meeting?
- What will be the central discussion points?
- Should there be any external speakers?
- Do you need to gather more information to inform the discussion?
- Should someone prepare an introduction?
- What information might it be useful to share in advance?

At the start of the meeting

Ensure everyone feels welcome and able to contribute. To help this ensure:

- Everyone has the agenda and any additional information in advance.
- Introduce yourself and others at the start of the meeting. If it is a small meeting, ask everyone to introduce themselves.
- Reiterate the purpose of the meeting and what outcomes you need – don't assume everyone knows.



Running the meeting

Every meeting needs its own ground rules and it can be useful to set these at the beginning of a meeting with agreement from the group. Some ground rules could include:

- Don't interrupt other people
- Stick to agenda items
- Don't talk amongst yourselves
- Respect other peoples views – don't groan if you don't agree!
- Keep contributions to the point
- Start and finish on time
- No phones

During the meeting the char has four key responsibilities:

1) Get through the business on time

- Have a clear agenda with timings
- Introduce each agenda item.
- Never assume people know what you are talking about.
- Clarify key issues and why discussing them.
- Keep an eye on the time – move items if necessary.
- If people try to raise other agenda items out of place, acknowledge their contribution but reinforce that it will be discussed later in the meeting.
- Stop side conversations as soon they start: politely and firmly.
- Explain why you are making decisions, for example “I am going to give that discussion another 5 minutes and then draw to a close”.

Remember – don't use it as an opportunity to impose your views, listen to everyone, ensure everyone contributes, don't be under-assertive – you have been given a role and you need to deliver.

2) Involve everyone

You need to make sure you restrain those who are prone to over talking and draw out points from those who are quieter in meetings. Ideally you want an atmosphere where there can be genuine debate and discussion. Top tips:

- If lots of people are trying to contribute make sure you have acknowledged them so they know you know that they want to contribute.
- Ask open questions to draw out further contributions.
- Stop people interrupting others, acknowledge their contribution but ask them to wait till after the current speaker has finished.
- Make sure people giving controversial or unpopular views aren't intimidated and feel confident to express their thoughts.



3) Reaching decisions

- Listen carefully and jot down key points
- Bring people back to the decision that needs to be made regularly throughout the discussion
- Try and pull together points of agreement and agree a way forward.
- If there are different points of view try to summarise them concisely and present the options to the group.
- Before moving to the next agenda item confirm what has been agreed and any actions or owners and timescales.
- Don't assume silence means agreement.

After the meeting

Reflect on how the meeting went – did you reach all the decisions you needed to? If not have you agreed how and when you will reach them? Ask for feedback and suggestions on how to improve the meeting.

4) Dealing with difficult people

- Remind people of the meeting rules
- Be firm and consistent
- If discussion becomes heated – summarise key points on both sides then move focus away from the individuals by asking for other people's thoughts.
- If someone keeps repeating the same point, assure them their point has been heard and turn the discussion back to the group.
- If someone is continually critical, ask them their ideas about how they would approach the situation.
- Ask the groups' opinion – "Do people want to spend more time on this discussion or move on to the next topic?"