

Basic Chairing Practices – Opening the Meeting

Pre-Meeting Preparation and Opening Strategies

There are several important factors that a person should consider prior to chairing a meeting and there are a number of strategies that can be used to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of meetings. Some of them are discussed below. Before considering these ideas, you may wish to complete the Planning Meeting Questionnaire to evaluate how effectively you chair meetings. [elf-reflection Quizzes Page](#).

Chairperson’s Role and Responsibilities: The major responsibility of the chairperson is to try to help the group reach its objectives in an effective and efficient manner. In addition to helping the group achieve its common goals, the chairperson encourages the group to develop a sense of commitment to each other. Thus, the chairperson endeavors to facilitate individual contributions so that the group benefits from its work together.

In helping the group reach its goals, the chairperson:

- encourages people to contribute to the discussion and treat each other in a respectful manner,
- monitors the pace and progress of the meeting,
- guides people to make decisions in a collaborative manner,
- summarizes the progress that has been made at key points during the meeting, and
- reviews the potential next steps that the group may wish to take at the end of the meeting.

Pre-meeting Preparation

Consider the Potential Participants: If possible, know the name, position, and role of each of the participants. In small groups that meet on a regular basis this may not be a problem; however, it would be more challenging in large meetings where the chairperson may not know the majority of the people involved. In such cases, it is important to try to understand the interests and positions of the different groups that might be attending the meeting in order to plan appropriate chairing strategies.

Review Agenda and Potential Group Processes: Carefully reviewing the agenda and identifying a variety of group process options that might be required can be a helpful practice. If the meeting is an important one or it is likely to involve contentious issues, then it is especially important to consider the most optimal process strategies to use. For example, motions that are put forward may be tabled, a Working Group might be formed to gather more information before dealing with the issue, or simply calling a break in the meeting may allow people to address the issue more productively.

Opening the Meeting Strategies

Welcome Participants: Starting the meeting on time and warmly welcoming those in attendance can set a collaborative and professional tone for the discussions to follow.

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Review Agenda : Early in the meeting, the chairperson should review the agenda and briefly clarify the purpose for holding the meeting. By identifying the expected outcomes and reviewing the reasons for holding it, the Chairperson helps the participants to understand what is expected of them and how they might contribute to the meeting.

Dealing with Latecomers: When a person arrives late to the meeting, the Chairperson should acknowledge the person's presence; however, the meeting should continue without the latecomer being updated on the discussion that has taken place. However, it may be necessary to update a latecomer, if a decision will be made related to the discussion that the person has missed. The key objective is to reinforce punctuality.