

Basic Chairing Practices

Basic Chairing Practices: During the Meeting

The ability to chair meetings effectively increases with experience and deliberate practice. The following practices have been shown to be particularly useful during the course of a meeting.

- ✓ **Firmly Chair the Meeting:** Expect and encourage an open-minded attitude. If a group does not exhibit this behaviour, time should be spent developing a set of group guidelines that encourage people to do so. As much as possible limit interruptions, try to ensure that as many people as possible have an opportunity to share their ideas.
- ✓ **Use a Speakers List:** If many people want to contribute their ideas, it is wise to keep a Speakers List so that participants are confident that they will each have an opportunity to speak in turn. As people indicate that they wish to speak, the Chairperson should acknowledge the request in a non-verbal manner and simply write the name of the person down on the Speakers List.
- ✓ **Use a “Parking Lot”:** In order to keep participants focused on the agenda, it is wise for the Chairperson to ask people who bring up interesting topics that are not relevant to the discussion to allow them to be placed in the “parking lot”, which simply is a flip chart or note pad with topics that will be addressed at a future time.
- ✓ **Summarize the Discussion:** At appropriate times, it can be very helpful if the Chairperson summarizes the key points that have been made to keep the meeting moving forward. Using a digital or paper flip chart, can be especially helpful when the discussion involves complex issues, or a variety of alternatives/perspectives have been suggested.
- ✓ **Relinquish the Chairperson's Role to State Strong Positions:**
If as a Chairperson, you feel strongly about an issue, it is wise to allow another person to chair the meeting or at least the part in which you will be stating your position. In doing so, you are indicating a deep respect for the role of the Chairperson and the need to allow everyone at the table an equal voice.

Maintaining Positive Interactions:

- ✓ **Nurture Creative Ideas and Insights:** When new ideas or novel suggestions are made, try to ensure that people are ‘gentle with new ideas’. Very often, new or novel ideas are blocked before people have an opportunity to actually explain them.
- ✓ **Encourage Warmth and Positive Relationships:** Acknowledge and thank people for their contributions. Remind others of the value of being positive and supportive.
- ✓ **Encourage Action Recommendations:** Meetings become productive when the discussions lead to specific actions on the part of those involved. When required, members should be prompted to make recommendations by the Chairperson. A simple way to do so is by asking the question: "Are you recommending...?"
Very often, such prompts encourage participants to make suggestions or recommendations that can move the discussion or meeting forward.