



CONDUCTING AN EFFECTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING - QUICK TIPS

Committees, boards and other similar groups are appointed to complete a task. In some cases the task can be accomplished in a single gathering of the committee, in other cases several meetings may be required. Work can be accomplished efficiently or the process can drag on for a seemingly interminable time. More often than not the difference between an efficient and inefficient process is determined by the person responsible for chairing the meeting. Here are some thoughts that may be useful for the individual charged with leading the work of the committee.

Have a Clear Understanding of the Goal at Hand

- For standing committees created by the unit's governing documents (by-laws, articles of association, etc.) the purpose of the committee is typically outlined in those documents. Examples might be a promotion and tenure committee, or a courses and curriculum committee responsible for recommending action on proposals to existing courses or new offerings.
- Special committees are typically appointed by the unit leader or, in the case of faculty governance, by the faculty chair. In this case there should be a charge letter that outlines the expectation(s) of the committee and a desired date of completion.

Preparation is Key

- Prior to the first meeting the chair should spend time planning the work of the committee, including points of discussion and necessary reference/background material. If possible reference materials should be distributed to the members before the first meeting.
- In some cases the work of the committee can be completed in a single meeting and only a simple agenda is required.
- More often the work will require multiple meetings and it is critical that the chair develop clear objectives of the work & decisions that will be made at each convening of the committee. It is beneficial to build a consensus for the work schedule at the first meeting.
- It is the responsibility of the chair to establish the time and duration of the initial meeting.

At the First Meeting...

- It is important that a record of deliberations and decisions be captured in minutes, and to that end a person should be assigned that responsibility. Optimally, that work would be done by a staff person but if one is not available then a member of the committee should be asked to assume the responsibility. The minutes should be factual and without bias. In the absence of agreed minutes committees have a tendency to rehash previous conversations endlessly especially if a member sees this as an opportunity to reverse a decision.
- The nature of the final goal should be clearly defined at the first meeting. If it is to be a report it is useful to determine who will actually write the report, as well as the review process to be employed prior to finalization.
- At the first meeting it is important that the chair clearly establish himself/herself as the moderator in charge of the deliberative process.





- In this and following meetings the chair must take responsibility for managing the discussion, insuring that all members have an opportunity to present perspectives and, if appropriate, arguments for a particular decision. Although sometimes difficult, it is essential that the chair prevent a single or multiple voices from “taking over” the discussion and, in so doing, silencing dissenting voices.

Don't Waste Time!

- Subsequent meetings should occur as expeditiously as possible. Lengthy lapses between meetings usually result in overly long reviews of previous work with little forward progress. There is a task - get it done!
- The chair should begin each meeting with a concise review of previous decisions and a statement of the work to be accomplished in the current meeting.
- If a written report is to be prepared it is entirely appropriate for the drafting process to begin during the interval between the first and second meetings and continued apace thereafter. Thus, when the points to be discussed are finished, the report will be ready except for review.
- Some leaders prefer to receive the final report only in written form, while in other instances the report recipient may wish to meet with the chair or even the committee as a whole to discuss the results.

At the Final Meeting...

- Final meeting of the committee should simply be a review of the draft report and revisions necessary to insure clarity of the report. The time for reassessing decisions has passed.
- The draft report should be made available to committee members well in advance of the final meeting.
- In this final meeting it is important to determine if there are significant dissenting voices and if so it may be appropriate for those members to draft a brief minority opinion as an addendum to the report.
- Be sure to thank the committee members for their time and efforts.

