CHAIRING A MEETING

What is chairing a committee?

Chairing meetings is one of the many roles of the committee chair, and one that is often the most public and exposed. The wider roles of the committee chair are covered in the role profile document.

Preparation

Being a good chair of meetings starts with preparing an effective agenda for the meeting and being clear about what the meeting is intended to achieve. The form this will take will depend on the size, length and purpose of the meeting. The committee secretary will usually prepare a draft agenda for you to comment on, but you may wish to highlight key issues that you wish to discuss in advance of that. Preparation in advance is key and enables staff to produce any needed materials in a timely manner. Often setting clear timelines of when agenda/documents might be agreed are helpful.

Together with the committee secretary you will want to agree that the number of items on the agenda is manageable, that the meeting flows in a logical order (within any constraints imposed by external speakers or visitors), that it will help achieve the objectives that have been set for the committee and that members will be clear what is expected from them. This last can be achieved either from proposals written onto the agenda or from the way in which you introduce an agenda item.

Particularly in shorter, more focussed agenda, you may also want to timetable particular items. This is harder to do reliably with longer agenda.

The first item on all meetings agendas will be conflicts of interests. This will be included in the chairs brief and the committee secretary will discuss this matter with you prior to the meeting. At the pre-brief You will be given a schedule of individual conflicts that members of the committee have declared.

A conflict of interest is a set of circumstances that creates a risk that an individual’s ability to apply objective judgement or act in one role is, or could be, impaired or influenced by a secondary interest.

All members must complete a ‘declaration of Interest’ form. Members will be responsible for notifying any changes in their registrable interests within fourteen (14) days of the change occurring to ensure that the register is kept updated.

At the start of the meeting you must ask members to identify any interests relating specifically to the agenda items being considered and declare these, if not already declared.

Further guidance on what might constitute a conflict of interest and the process for recording such conflicts is set out in the BMA conflicts of interest policy

It is also important to consider the layout of the room. Room layout should not just be set by the number of people required, but by the purpose of the event and what you want to achieve? Different layouts make facilitations of different kinds of debate and discussion easier. Identifying how you would want to address an agenda item in advance enables the booking of appropriate rooms and facilities to enable this to take place. Important also to consider resources needed ie microphones, facilitators, IT.

Key factors to consider are: –Where is the centre of attention – Do people need to interact with each other? –Do you want people in groups without moving people around?

Refer to the room layout guidance for reference: Room layouts
On the day

Read through the agenda and accompanying papers again to make sure that you are completely familiar with the material. Often a chair's brief is provided by secretariat containing key or relevant information related to any items.

Make sure that you are aware of any actions arising from the minutes or for the reasons why actions noted in the minutes have not been done. This should help avoid getting bogged down in debate on past decisions. For minute items not elsewhere on the agenda, you might want to report on the actions taken on the agenda itself to avoid further debate.

Review the agenda with the Committee secretary either in person or through the Chair’s Brief that they will provide. Be clear who, at the meeting will be providing any reports written onto the agenda. Ensure anyone providing a report is aware and has appropriate resources to deliver this if via a presentation for example.

If you have a Co-Chair agree with them which part of the day or which agenda items each of you will chair.

Agree the committee secretary’s role in helping you manage the meeting, ie by telling you when time is nearly up, if people are trying to speak, advice on standing orders, managing any conflict etc. Ensure you have delegated responsibility appropriately for keeping lists of speakers etc. Ensure you flag in advance fashion when closing debate or reaching the end of an allocated time slot for discussion. Summarise findings thereafter to aid both with minute taking and clarity for members.

In the meeting

A good chair will:

• speak clearly and succinctly;
• be sensitive to the feelings of members and encourage participation, especially from those who don’t usually contribute - it is worth noting that there is evidence that indicates that women are more likely to participate in a discussion and ask questions if the first point in a debate is made by a woman;
• whilst you are allowed to have a view you should seek to chair the debate impartially. If you wish to take a particularly active part in a debate you may wish to ask another committee officer chair that item;
• start and finish on time;
• Seek to avoid repetitive contributions to debate. You may want to announce that speakers should limit themselves to new points and that you will curtail debate should no new points be made. Larger meetings will have speakers slips, which are particularly helpful if you have a proposition for debate so you can ensure a balanced discussion without taking all possible speakers.
• show interest in member’s viewpoints;
• Ensure that members of the Committee treat each other and, particularly, staff with respect. Bad behaviours should be tackled as soon as they happen to avoid them happening again. If a discussion is getting particularly heated and unproductive, you may wish to ask the Committee to take a break; and
• ensure decisions are taken and if necessary summarised for the record at the end of each agenda item.
During the meeting

At the start

- Start the meeting by welcoming any new members and members joining via VC/TC, and explain how you will deal with any questions or comments.
- Make any necessary introductions. In smaller meetings you may want to go around the table and ask people to introduce themselves. You might want to make a point of introducing the staff present. If the committee has elected deputy chairs, you should introduce them at the meeting, outlining their responsibilities.
- Receive apologies for absence.
- Check for conflicts of interest on the items on the agenda.
- Ensure that additions or amendments to previous minutes are recorded and sign them as a correct record.

Control

- Maintain control. Set out any time limits. Be clear on who should be speaking next.
- **Do not forget those remote participants.**
- Allow flexibility and freedom of expression.
- Keep to the agenda.
- Ensure quorum is present for any key decisions.
- Ensure time is used effectively.
- Ensure decisions are summarised for the minutes.

Coax

- Ensure full participation.
- Draw out quieter members and discourage those who are monopolising the meeting.
- Be prepared to highlight issues that no-one else will, and to be the one who always has to ask the awkward questions.

Compare

- Weigh up contributions impartially in summing up.
- All points in favour of a point should be summarised against all points not in favour.

Clarify

- Ensure everyone understands what is being discussed.
- Summarise.
- Ensure that if jargon and abbreviations are used, all present understand them.

Handling conflict

- Clarify your objectives and keep to the facts;
- Encourage everyone to understand the different points of view clearly and objectively;
- Consider any mutually beneficial alternatives
- Keep the tone neutral and impersonal;
- Overall – use the agenda to control

Decision Making
• Ensure that decisions are taken in the context of the organisations strategy, and that they are recorded, together with who is going to implement them. Summarise the decision.

Guide

• Remember that above all you are there to guide the meeting.
• Steer members to work harmoniously and purposefully as a team.
• Keep an eye on time.

At the end of the meeting

• Agree or highlight, the date for the next meeting - it is usually best to set dates for the year’s meetings well in advance.
• Agree what special items will be put on the agenda of the next meeting and what work needs to be done, by whom etc.

After the meeting

• Ensure that the minutes are checked and sent out in good time after the meeting.
• Review actions with the committee secretary, any potential changes to the business plan and how they will be managed.
• Provide advice to the committee secretary on how actions and any handling points will be followed up.

Support

Often chairs feel they must solve all problems and issues but it is not always possible, and on occasion this can be intimidating. Remember there is a wealth of support available to you outside of the meeting, discuss matters with your (HoCs) head of committee secretariat/(SPA) senior policy advisor.

Refer to the website for additional support schemes:

• Elected members induction pack
• BMA leadership programme
• Women in leadership
• Committee mentoring programme
• Video and teleconferencing
• Counselling support

Training provided to chairs

• BMA media training
• BMA leadership programme
• BMA valuing difference programme
• BMA negotiation training
• BMA mentor training

Committee Services 2018