
Guidance on chairing meetings

Introduction

Chairing effective meetings is one of the most important roles of a committee chair, and the one that is the most visible. A significant amount of committee business is conducted at meetings, and it is the chair's role to ensure that:

- elected members, who are representing their constituents, have the right information to make the right decisions
- the meeting is accessible and inclusive
- committee members are engaged and involved
- behaviours reflect BMA values.

The key functions of a chair are preparing for a meeting, conducting a meeting and following up actions, including debriefing. This guidance covers these key functions.

Please see associated guidance: [committee chair role profile](#), [co-chairing arrangements](#), [chairing virtual meetings](#) and [guidance on meeting room layouts](#).

We strongly recommend attending the effective [chairing training developed](#) specifically for BMA committee chairs and secretariat staff.

Preparing for the meeting

Chairing effective meetings starts with the chair working in partnership with the committee secretariat to clarify the purpose of the meeting, what business will be covered and to develop an agenda accordingly. It is important to:

- start preparing for meetings as early as possible
- agree a plan for preparing and signing off the agenda and supporting papers
- agree when the agenda and papers will be sent to attendees.

The committee secretariat will usually prepare a draft agenda for you as a starting point, but you may also wish to highlight in advance the things that you would like to see on the agenda.

Together with the committee secretariat you should devise an agenda that is manageable in the time allotted for the meeting and that flows in a logical order. You will want to take account of, for example, whether an item is likely to be controversial, and whether there are any external speakers and realistically how long their presentations and Q&A will take. For each item on the agenda it should be clear what is expected of meeting attendees – is the item for decision, information, discussion, feedback or simply to note.



You may want to timetable items, but this is harder to do reliably with longer agendas and you will need to be flexible at the meeting itself.

You will need to be clear on who is attending the meeting, how attendees will be introduced and whether anyone has any particular needs. You will also need to ensure that the meeting can be accessed remotely and that the way the agenda is structured takes account of those using VC (video conferencing) or telephone. For example, if you want break out groups that will need some detailed planning if it is to work effectively.

You will also need to think about the location for the meeting and to ensure it fits with the purpose of the meeting. For example, a cabaret style layout may suit a meeting where you want more problem solving; whereas a more formal layout might better suit a debate. A cabaret style arrangement can help members feel more involved and build relationships between members and was recommended in the Romney report.

The secretariat can advise on logistics and the use of supporting technology such as microphones and software to help encourage debate, as well as whether a facilitator might be appropriate for all or part of the meeting.

Before your pre-brief with the secretariat and/or your co-chair, deputy chair or other committee officers as appropriate, read through the agenda and supporting papers again to make sure that you are completely familiar with the material. The secretariat will prepare a chair's brief for you, usually in the form of an annotated agenda, to guide you during the meeting and to act as an aide memoire.

Make sure that:

- you know who's attending the meeting and how to make introductions correctly
- you are familiar with the committee standing orders
- you are on top of any actions arising from the previous minutes and the reasons why any actions noted in the minutes have been taken forward in a different way than members might expect or have not yet been actioned. This should help avoid debate on past decisions and move the meeting forward
- you are clear on who will be providing any reports on the agenda. Ensure that anyone providing a report is aware of the agenda and has the right facilities to deliver their presentation
- you have noted any relevant conflicts of interest and how to manage them at the meeting (these will be discussed with you at the pre-brief)
- If you have a co-chair, you are both clear on which part of the day or which agenda items each of you will chair
- you and the committee secretariat have agreed their role in helping you manage the meeting – ie by prompting you when time is nearly up, noting and pointing out people who wish to speak, providing information and advice on standing orders, helping you to manage any conflict
- you are clear who has responsibility for keeping lists of speakers.

Conducting the meeting

At the beginning of the meeting you will need to:

- welcome everyone, particularly new members and members joining remotely
- make introductions – some committees invite everyone to introduce themselves. This may not be feasible for a very large committee meeting in which case you could introduce new members, external speakers and guests, chief officers and committee officers and their roles, and members of the secretariat
- remind members of the BMA behaviour principles, which are: be professional; respect others; be representative; be accountable; and be kind
- receive apologies for absence
- check for conflicts of interest with the items on the agenda
- ensure that additions or amendments to previous minutes are recorded and sign them as a correct record
- describe the purpose of the meeting.

During the meeting you will need to:

- describe the purpose of each agenda item
- manage communication – for example, one conversation at a time
- explain and manage time limits for speakers
- use inclusive language
- deal appropriately with poor behaviour
- intervene when this is called for
- summarise and close conversations
- agree and record decisions and actions.

An effective chair will:

- speak clearly and succinctly
- be sensitive and encourage participation, especially from those who may not usually contribute – for example, there is evidence that women are more likely to participate and ask questions if the first point in a debate is made by a woman
- include members participating remotely to ensure they can contribute to agenda items
- chair the debate impartially. While you can have a view, if you wish to take an active part in debate you may wish to ask another committee officer to chair that item
- 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 so you can ensure a balanced discussion
- show interest in member's contributions
- ensure that members of the committee treat each other and, particularly, staff with respect. **Poor behaviours should be challenged immediately.** If a discussion is getting particularly heated and unproductive, you may wish to ask the committee to take a break
- ensure decisions are taken and summarised for the record at the end of each agenda item
- start and finish on time.

At the end of the meeting you will need to:

- 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 and by when.

Following up the meeting**Once the meeting has taken place you will need to:**

- hold a debrief with staff and review the effectiveness of the meeting
- Check the minutes and actions and ensure they are sent out in good time after the meeting
- review actions with the secretariat, agree priorities and any potential changes to the business plan
- provide a steer on how actions and any handling points will be followed up
- deal appropriately with any misconduct at the meeting.

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