

Chairing a meeting

A good Chairperson needs to actually lead a meeting and take charge if folk go off on tangents. There is a fine balance to be found between letting everyone have a voice and being productive. So, to help those of you who are new to chairing, and to refresh those of you that may be in a 'chairing rut', here are our top tips for chairing a meeting:

Be Prepared

Someone else, probably the secretary, might well prepare the meeting's agenda and paper work but that does not mean that you can turn up and read it at the start of the meeting. If you are encouraging meeting attendees to come prepared, you must yourself have read the agenda, previous meetings minutes and any accompanying documents.

Use Agendas

Whether you are using traditional or action based agendas, make sure and stick to them. Be decisive about when the meeting needs to move on from an item, ensure a balance between having room for discussion and not letting one individual to dominate.

We know we keep going on about them – but really, action based agendas are great. Each topic is allocated a time, an action and a person, so if your meetings are often unfocused or unproductive, give them a go. You can find out more about Action based agendas and a template for one in the [resource section](#).

Approving minutes

Don't feel the need to read out the minutes from the last meeting page by page, not one will thank you and everyone *should* have read them before arriving. It should just be a case of addressing any outstanding actions from the previous meetings (many of them might be ongoing actions and be covered in the agenda items anyway) and then making/accepting any amendments that need to be made before approval.

Set the Pace

It is the chairs responsibility to set the pace of the meeting. If your using an action based agenda, this is going to be a simple task because each item on the agenda will have an allotted time frame.

Embrace the idea of working groups

If one item is dominating the meeting and no clear resolution can be seen then it may be useful to stop the discussion, quickly summarise it and arrange for it to be dealt with by either a sub-committee or working group. Be sure to set the parameters and powers of each working group. They should, for example, have at least one trustee involved and be reporting back regularly at meetings.

Dealing with tricky meeting participants

Discussion should allow everyone that wants or needs to, to have a voice. The Chair must ensure that discussions are constructive and sometimes that means asking people for ideas rather than opinions. If a topic is going to be contentious, you can always ask for people to submit their concerns in advance, summarise them and then open the floor to solution based discussion. This should mean that everyone who wanted to raise a concern did, but that the focus of discussion was on moving forward rather than, well, just moaning.

Wrapping up meetings

At the end of a meeting, the chairperson summarises what's been achieved and thank contributions and always attempt to end them on a positive note.