

Tips for Committee Chairs

Always have an agenda.

As Chair, ensure your agenda is strategic.

This means you understand what should be first, second, third, and why. You know areas that need to have more discussion, and which are contentious. Usually you want to deal with the less important items first.

Put tentative times by each item.

That way every one knows how much time they have to formulate their ideas.

If you can, circulate the agenda *before* the meeting.

This is really effective. If you have points under each item, even better. You start to get people to think about the item before they arrive.

Always go into the meeting with an outcome or goal in mind.

Before the meeting, you will have a plan to ensure that, at the end, the committee will have resolved X, formed a group to discuss Y, etc. Having a focused approach keeps every one working. As Chair, you do not need to share this private agenda with the group.

After each agenda item, summarize what was said.

Members really like this; it keeps them involved. It also helps keep people organized and following along with the agenda.

At the end of the meeting, summarize the key points.

This means you need to jot down notes so you can do the high level summary at the end.

Try to have action items and delegate work.

People like ownership of items, and having a tangible way to contribute to the committee's business. Ensure they can report back to the group their accomplishments and that the group will respect their contributions.

Treat members like guests in your home.

Welcome them, say good-bye to them. Acknowledge their efforts.

If there is conflict, welcome it.

This means you will get better discussion, ideas and energy. The Chair's job is to get the best thinking out of the group.

Some members like to dominate. You have to let them have the floor, but then you have to move them off their soap box.

You may have to interrupt. Be sure to thank them, ask if others have an opinion. If you do not interrupt them, they will take over the meeting. It's okay to interrupt people as long as you're doing it with a view to moving the committee in a positive direction.

As Chair, do not take sides. Your job is to facilitate.

You might have an opinion but as soon as you express it, you have emotional chaos. It would be like a general going into battle and becoming a soldier but still trying to be a general – inappropriate.

If there is a hot issue, have a pre-meeting or post-meeting.

Be it a telephone call, email or an in-person meeting, your goal is to try to get more information. As a Chair, it's important for you to get clarity on why something is contentious and also to support members. Members appreciate the chance to be heard by the Chair, even when it doesn't change the result of the discussion.