

1 *Guidelines for Chairing a Committee*

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3 Even with capable members on the committee, a firm goal to achieve, and the support of the
4 association staff, a committee without strong leadership will be handicapped. During your term
5 as chair of the committee, the most consistent help will come from the association executive and
6 staff. To a great extent, your ability to work with them will determine your success as head of
7 your committee and a leader in your association.
8

9 The association executive and staff are familiar with the operations of the organization, and as
10 the head of a committee, you should seek their assistance in selecting committee members,
11 setting objectives, and reviewing the work and communications of your committee. By keeping
12 the association staff informed and familiar with the committee's activities and progress, they will
13 be able to advise you on problems and procedures and can point out possible pitfalls.
14

15 The success you achieve as head of the committee will largely depend on your ability to preside
16 and guide the meetings of the committee to a definite goal. The following guidelines should
17 assist you in reaching that goal.
18

- 19 • The chair attends every committee meeting.
- 20 • Always start the meeting on time and work with a definite agenda.
- 21 • The reason for the meeting should be stated at the beginning briefly and clearly.
- 22 • Make sure committee members get all the information relating to an issue, both pro and
23 con.
- 24 • Keep a low profile while taking charge of the direction of the meeting.
- 25 • Review the committee's objectives relative to the objectives of the association.
- 26 • Keep the meeting moving; interest lags when action lags. Get as much participation as
27 possible. Keep responses short; get to the point.
- 28 • Speak clearly. If you can't be heard, you can't exercise control.
- 29 • Insist on order.
- 30 • Talk to the group, not to individuals.
- 31 • Make sure that each individual taking the floor speaks clearly and audibly. Sum up what
32 the speaker has said, entertain discussion, and obtain a decision.
- 33 • Control aimless discussion by recommending further study.
- 34 • Retain control, but don't stifle free comment. Invite constructive criticism and even
35 disagreement. Encourage a clash of ideas but not of personalities. Prevent one-sided
36 discussions. Ask for support. Clarify issues by obtaining a consensus, then move on.
- 37 • Deal with dysfunctional behaviors. Confront obstructionists privately in a caring manner
38 and suggest alternative behavior.
- 39 • Don't argue with the individual who has the floor. Ask questions if you disagree, but
40 remember that as presiding officer you should remain neutral.
- 41 • If you have a comment, ask for the floor as a participant.
- 42 • Control talkative members; draw out silent members.
- 43 • Be sensitive to member's feelings. Look for visual and verbal cues to determine if a
44 member isn't happy with the discussion.
- 45 • Check at the end of the meeting to see if members feel that all relevant subjects have
46 been adequately covered.
- 47 • Make sure adequate minutes are kept of each meeting and that they are distributed to
48 each committee member.
- 49 • At the first meeting of the year clarify with the committee who the voting members are.
50

51 *Preparing for the Committee Meeting*

52 Preparation for the committee meeting is essential to its success. Laying the groundwork for
53 the task the committee has to accomplish is a function that begins with the chair of the
54 committee and is then carried on by the members, both before and during the meeting.
55

56 **An agenda needs to be drawn up** and sent to all members of the committee. It should
57 include all topics to be discussed at the meeting and should also include the date, location,
58 starting time, scheduled breaks, and anticipated adjourning time. Any supporting or
59 background material to further explain or detail the items on the agenda should also be
60 included.

61
62 **Select the time and place** for the meeting. The chair of the committee and the staff should
63 determine the time and place that will get maximum participation from the members.
64

65 **A simple majority of the voting members** of the committee constitutes a quorum. A
66 quorum is required to hold an official meeting and before any official action can be taken.
67 However, an exception to this rule would allow a meeting to be held without a quorum
68 present. In this situation, the minutes of the meeting would have to be approved by a majority
69 of the voting members of that committee before any of the actions taken at the meeting
70 would be considered official and valid. This could best be done by mail ballot.

71
72 **Facilities need to be arranged.** After the when and where are taken care of, all the details of
73 the meeting room have to be planned. The staff will take care of the following physical
74 requirements when planning for the meeting.
75

- 76 • The meeting room should be comfortable for the group that will meet in it – not too
77 large or too small. It should be located in a place as convenient to all the members as
78 possible.
- 79 • If directional signs are needed, arrange for them. If in a hotel, post the meeting name
80 and room on the lobby directory. Also post the name of the meeting outside the
81 meeting room.
- 82 • Make sure before the meeting begins that lighting and ventilation are adequate. Check
83 the temperature. Find out who to call if any of these conditions should change.
- 84 • Based on the size of the committee, determine what seating arrangement and table
85 size and shape are best suited. For a small committee, round or oval tables work well.
- 86 • Keep these points in mind when determining seating arrangements: Don't place
87 talkative friends next to each other or directly across the table; unless you want a
88 confrontation, don't place hostile persons next to or across from each other.
- 89 • Chairs should be comfortable, particularly if the meeting will be lengthy.
- 90 • Notepads, pencils, water, and glasses should be provided.
- 91 • When audio-visuals are to be used, make sure there is someone present who can
92 operate the equipment. If projectors are needed, ask that an extra bulb be provided.
93 Check that the screen is at the proper distance from the projector. Test microphones
94 before the meeting if they are going to be used.
- 95 • If all the members of the committee don't personally know each other, consider using
96 name cards in front of each seat and/or badges for each person.
- 97 • Be sure to provide sufficient beverages for morning and afternoon breaks. Have a
98 selection available, including coffee (regular and decaffeinated), tea, and soft drinks.
- 99 • Avoid serving heavy meals before or during the meeting to help members stay alert.

102 *Committee Size*

103 The size of the committee is primarily determined by its purpose and the nature of its work. If
104 prompt action is essential, it is best to limit the number of committee members. A smaller group
105 takes less time to organize, can communicate more rapidly, and will be able to act faster.

106
107 A larger group, on the other hand, will allow more diverse viewpoints to be heard, although it
108 will usually require longer to do so. A larger group will be able to solve a greater variety of
109 problems because the number of skills available will increase proportionately with the group's
110 size.

111
112 *Choosing Committee Members and Consultants*

113 **Voting members** are nominated by individual members of the Board of Trustees and the chair of
114 each committee, selected by the president-elect, approved by the Board, and elected by the
115 House of Delegates.

116
117 When choosing members for a committee, try to have a good mix of mature, successful,
118 experience members and members who are new to the profession. The newer members will bring
119 fresh ideas and insights to the committee; experienced members will provide guidance and
120 perspective.

121
122 Committee Members:

- 123 • Should be appointed because they are either knowledgeable about or interested in the
124 committee's area of activity.
- 125 • Should know who the committee chair is.
- 126 • Should know what the specific responsibilities of the committee are.
- 127 • Should know what the association practices, policies, and procedures are.
- 128 • Should know what the responsibilities of the association staff to the committee are.
- 129 • Should know what the past performance of the committee has been.
- 130 • Should know what the reporting procedure to the board of trustees is (this is located in
131 the *MDA Committee Operating Manual*).
- 132 • Should establish only realistic, attainable goals.
- 133 • Should give recognition to the committee chair and other members of the committee.
- 134 • Should get involved and participate.

135
136 **Consultant members** of standing committees may be nominated by any member of the Board or
137 the committee chairperson, but their appointment is the responsibility of the president.

138 Consultants may be a dentist or a layperson. If a dentist, that individual must be a member of the
139 Michigan Dental Association.

140
141 The purpose for consultants is to provide expertise in the committee's area of responsibility.
142 Consultants, because of their specific knowledge, may come from outside the Association.
143 Consultants are strongly encouraged to attend all committee meetings and to provide expert input
144 into the deliberations and work of the committee. According to *Sturgis Standard Code of*
145 *Parliamentary Procedure* as well as MDA legal counsel opinion, consultants are not allowed to
146 vote on issues during committee meetings. Consultants may discuss, debate and provide opinions
147 and information on issues, however only committee members are allowed to actually vote.