

Effective Chairing Guidance

Written Guidance

Effective chairing

SPP is a broad church, deriving much of its strength from the diversity of its membership. Inevitably, for the chairs of SPP's committees, this diversity is a fantastic resource but it does require some extra thought. How best to encourage the widest expression of views, to bring in the voices that may be valuable but hesitant, then reach a consensus, in an often time pressured context, is not always intuitive or straightforward.

Our aim is to create an environment where all committee members can voice their opinions, whilst the necessary outputs are able to be agreed collectively.

This guidance note aims to support chairs with an effective and inclusive approach to the running of meetings. Nothing here is intended as a hard line – all chairs will have their own styles and ways that are particularly effective for them. This note should be seen as comprising complementary suggestions, some of which may be additive.

Getting to know your Committee

Acknowledging the constraints on the available time that chairs have, and often best as an objective to be shared with deputies, the more that relationships with individual committee members can be built, the better for its effective functioning.

- Where time allows, can you offer a one-to-one introductory meeting with members (in particular, new ones)? Understanding the individual personalities on the committee, including who may need more encouragement, may be useful.
- In relation to neurodivergence, sensory differences, health conditions or disability, inviting committee members to feel they can share with you any particular needs or preferences they have for group working. Learn how members need to receive, and interpret, information and how they would prefer to approach issues and to contribute. Consider any adjustments that can be made that would help to better include committee members.
- The use of mini-bios for committee members may help your awareness of areas of expertise, informing where you encourage specific contributions. These could also note any adjustments needed, as agreed with the committee member. It might also be useful to include here how to pronounce people's names.
- Meet in-person as regularly as your committee has genuine appetite for, to strengthen bonds, whilst not excluding those who need to join online for whatever reason. Note that in-person meetings can often be harder for those who join online to participate in, compared with fully online meetings. Also agree with those joining online how you will include them. For instance, should they use the 'hands up' feature in Teams when they wish to speak? And how will that be monitored?
- Where appropriate, encourage members to build stronger relationships by asking groups to work together on key issues, beyond just consultation responses.

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It may be useful to arrange a wider, more strategy-focussed agenda for the committee, at a quiet time. This can ensure that everybody has a chance to feed into discussions and ideas and that any assumptions committee members might have can be aired and tested.

Creating open and engaged discussions

Our aim is an open and collaborative culture, encouraging effective contributions and engaged discussions. Differing communication styles, group think and seniority bias (the tendency to be more influenced by the opinion of a senior figure) are challenges that will likely be faced.

In practical terms, people informally report to us that the main barrier to wider contributions in meetings is that people can be hesitant because of personal confidence. In larger groups particularly, they do not want to say something 'silly' or risk being shot down. Some of the tactics below may help with this, as well as regular verbal assurance from the chair that we actively welcome contributions that may not fit with the 'group view'.

- Ensure that papers and agenda continue to be circulated in good time before the meeting. Agendas should set out a clearly defined purpose and intended outcome in advance of meetings.
- Clarify how to pronounce people's names in advance of meeting.
- Ask in advance for different people to lead on agenda items in areas they are expert in.
- Where you can, encourage other members to share their views before you share yours.
- Encourage the use of sub-groups where appropriate, to give other members more experience, in this context, in leading discussions and building confidence in speaking up.
- Give verbal permission to members to:
 - send thoughts before the meeting on agenda items, for you to feed into the discussion in an unattributed way.
 - privately message the Chair or an SPP staff member in the meeting, who can share views sent without attribution (at present, Teams does not make one-to-one messaging easy – but as long as you have a Teams account, you can find the person's icon on the screen, click on their name, then the chat icon will allow private one-to-one messaging).
- Encourage use of the hands up feature in Teams to ensure everyone gets the opportunity and space to contribute.
- If the meeting is hybrid, ensure those joining online can follow the conversation and can participate fully.
- Invite what may seem a basic or 'what if' question to aid understanding and open-up issues for debate.
- Encourage counter views if you feel that strong voices are dominating.
- Agree how members can challenge unhelpful behaviours or question apparent biases in a de-personalised way.
- Be aware of your own behaviours and likely biases and aim to manage these in your chairing style to encourage contributions during discussions.
- Provide opportunity to email and/or speak after the meeting.

Encouraging feedback from your Committee

- Openly invite your committee to give ad hoc feedback to you if they so wish.
- Where time allows, consider including, a short 'review of the meeting' discussion at the end, as an opportunity for direct and timely feedback from all attendees.

- Touch base in an ad hoc way with committee members outside of meetings, to ask what is working and less so.
- An annual effectiveness questionnaire for committee members may be a useful step.
- We recommend that you share this guidance with your committee members and discuss with them how two-way support might optimally work. This can be wrapped in to your 1:1s, if you proceed with these.

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