

The Role of a Chairperson

As part of their Committee or Board of Trustees, most organisations have a chairperson. They make sure that meetings run well and effectively and often act as the main spokesperson and figurehead for the group.

As chairperson you have a number of important roles within the organisation.

Planning meetings

- Take a lead in planning the meeting with the secretary, other committee members and/or staff members
- Draw up the agenda, making sure that it is not too long and that important matters will be discussed first
- Make sure that you understand what is involved in an issue and what decisions have to be taken
- Make sure that all the right information will be available at the meeting, or sent out before it if needed

Chairing the meeting

- Start on time and try to keep to time throughout the meeting
- Ask for apologies from absent members
- Welcome any new people and get everyone to introduce themselves.
- If there is a guest speaker, introduce them to the meeting
- Ask if there is anything not on the agenda that people would like to discuss, and add it into any other business if there is any
- Sign the minutes of the last meeting as a true record
- Introduce each item on the agenda, giving some background and what decisions may need to be made
- Allow everyone to have their say but you can and should move people on
- Before moving on, make sure that everyone understands the issues and the decision that is being taken
- Don't allow the use of jargon or initials unless they are fully understood by everyone at the meeting
- Make sure that any decision reached is allowed by the group's constitution
- If a decision is reached, make sure it is clear who is taking responsibility for an action on and when it is to be done by
- At the end, thank people for coming, agree on a date and time for the next meeting and declare the meeting closed

After the meeting

- Meet with the secretary to help produce the minutes
- Complete any tasks that you offered to carry out
- Support other members with their tasks if necessary
- Follow up on any decisions made and be ready to report on progress to the next meeting
- Prepare for the next meeting

Representing the organisation

The chairperson often represents the organisation to the outside world, including attending meetings and events, fundraising activities and acting as a figurehead. The chairperson may also be the person who speaks to the press on the organisation's behalf.

Roles of a Chairperson

Working with staff

If you employ people the chairperson makes sure that staff are properly supervised and will probably hold regular meetings with at least some of them. The chairperson may take part in the recruitment of staff by being a part of the interview process.

General management

The chairperson may support the general management of the organisation. This varies from being one of the cheque signatories and signing letters through to overseeing the work of the organisation.

If an urgent decision or action needs to be taken between meetings, the chairperson may be allowed to take this on behalf of the committee. However, this should not happen too often, must be genuinely urgent and must be reported to the next available committee meeting. In critical cases, the Chair should inform the committee by email or a letter.

Leadership not control

The chairperson is expected to provide leadership to the committee and to the paid and unpaid staff.

However you should never:

- ✗ Take on every task yourself – committees run best where tasks and responsibilities are shared
- ✗ Dominate meetings – maintain control but stay flexible
- ✗ Make it impossible for staff to do their jobs by undermining their roles or being too controlling
- ✗ Outstay your welcome – some organisations can become too reliant on their chairperson. The organisation may want to consider a maximum time the chair can serve before standing down.

Training

VODA runs a range of training for committees and committee members through its regular training programme - contact us for more information or visit www.voda.org.uk/training.