Managing Effective Committees  
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Developing Your Skills  
- Learn from experience  
  - Observe & note meetings you attend  
  - Hone your skills by volunteering to chair committees in “low risk” situations, such as outside university  
- Remember we all make mistakes – forgive others’, acknowledge your own  
- Use your research & teaching skills!  

Pre-meeting  
- What is the Committee supposed to do/accomplish?  
  - Understand the committee charge – purpose & outcomes, composition, time frame  
  - Establish the mission, and purpose of each meeting  
- Ask: Is a Committee needed, or is there a better way to achieve that purpose?  
- Do you have any influence on who the members are?  
  - Diversity of ideas is good  
  - Members should have respect for each other and for process and be able to be collegial  
  - Identify certain people who are overcommitted and find others instead.  
  - Certain expertise/viewpoints can be engaged in ways other than being member of committee  
  - Consider using a “pool” of people to fill a slot  
    - Have double people for the slots to fill  
    - Makes scheduling easier (just one from the pool)  
    - Makes keeping everyone up to speed and appropriately informed more difficult
• Responsibility is on the “pool” to inform each other – doesn’t always happen

• Agenda in advance
  o As appropriate, solicit agenda items well in advance of the meeting
  o Or set agenda yourself, if you are driving the topics
  o Distribute agenda 2-3 days in advance of meeting to allow time to review

• Background materials in advance
  o Provide pre-reads, but don’t bury members with too many or too long documents. Try to limit “required” reading to 5 pages.
  o Reminders re: what was accomplished at prior meeting, if helpful to the coming agenda topics
  o Arrange for outside guests when appropriate

• Prepare your members and prepare yourself to manage members
  o Meet with people in advance as needed
  o Meet those new to the committee
  o Approach those with non-helpful behavior to discuss
  o In case of individual with history of being less engaged in/not particularly helpful, let them know why they are on the committee/what role you hope they will serve
  o Approach those who can help you strategize re: useful content, process, outcomes
  o Enlist other committee members in managing difficult members and in helping the committee stay on the agenda.

• Plan “desired outcomes” in advance, as chair, and plan a strategy to get to those outcomes
  o What decision(s) need to be made? (Not what the answer will be)
  o Consider asking faculty members who are respected by their peers to chair meetings

• Schedule series of meetings far in advance
  o So all know timing needed for next steps
  o Cancel meetings if not needed for productive engagement

At the Meeting
• Lay ground rules. Monitor time.
• Pay attention to process
Begin on time otherwise people will expect lateness and will arrive late
- Ask everyone what they think – call on people
- Avoid letting small number of people from dominating the conversation
  - Rein in long-winded or disruptive members
- Raise hands, raise name cards, etc.
- Pause frequently and give opportunity for each member to engage
- Ask whether you need a committee meeting for each decision; trust is key
- Admit your mistakes
- Keep on task, on topic
  - Avoid tangents: if the tangent is on a good topic, acknowledge but suggest that a different setting is a better venue for it.
  - Don’t be dismissive, but redirect to another venue
- Managing Difficult People/Situations
  - Get people who fear each other or one another’s perspective together outside meeting, solicit theirs fears and try to get them to come to an understanding
- Managing Confidentiality
  - Oral agreement – build culture, give regular reminders about how to treat information heard in the room. Trust is key.
  - Written agreement – realistically, hard to enforce
- End meeting with:
  - Review of action items, and who is responsible
  - Review of next steps for next meeting
- Reflect on what went well
  - Sometimes worth creating a small group to discuss what worked at meeting/what didn’t. Or get individual feedback from those who attended.
  - Always, as chair, consider what could have gone differently to be more productive & effective?

After the Meeting
- Send meeting notes to all, invite people to correct them
- Send next steps
  - Notes of highlights, decisions, next steps from meeting
• Set up reminders and to-do list for yourself re: deliverables
• As needed, one-on-one reflections after to debug for next meeting and plan effective next meeting strategy
• Touch base personally with “no-show” members, especially if they hold a critical role or critical perspectives
• Depending on the topic or purpose of Committee, consider sharing public snapshots/drafts along the way for transparency, share draft thinking, and to solicit additional input
• Publish minutes