

LEADING CHURCH COMMITTEES

AN EFFECTIVE CHAIRPERSON

“An effective chairperson provides initiative, coordination, and collaborative leadership for their committee, working with others to plan and implement programs and activities to help the church fulfill its mission.”

RESPONSIBILITIES

- Check-in with members regarding their assignments prior to each meeting.
- Contact someone to lead the devotional exercise at the start of the meeting.
- Create a detailed agenda for each meeting and send 48 hours in advance.
- Prepare the meeting space by arranging chairs, adjusting the temperature, printing copies of the materials, and providing refreshments (if these will be part of the meeting).
- Be prepared for each meeting by completing your assignments.
- Lead each meeting (be the established leader) and help the committee keep on task without too many digressions.
- Be prepared to open and close the meeting with prayer.

PRIOR TO THE MEETING

- **One Week in Advance:** Check in with people who took on responsibilities at a prior meeting to ensure they will have their task completed and be ready to report.
- **Seventy-two Hours in Advance:** Send out an email to invite people to the meeting with date, time, location, and purpose.
- **Forty-eight Hours in Advance:** Send out a reminder email with a copy of the agenda and any other information or documents committee members will need.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND

When considering who should attend a meeting of your committee, there are the following people:

- **Ruling Elders** assigned to the committee;
- **Staff Members** assigned to the committee;
- **Other Members** of the committee.

But also consider inviting the following people, depending on the business to be conducted at the meeting:

- **Experts** – People who possess necessary knowledge and can provide input;
- **Stakeholders** – People who will be impacted most by the decisions made;
- **Sponsor(s)** – People openly encouraging and supporting the project.

THE FIRST MEETING OF THE YEAR

Orient committee members to the work of the committee and to the working style the committee will adopt:

- Help them to understand the purpose and responsibilities of the committee
- Help them to understand how the purpose and responsibilities of the committee fit into and make our congregation more effective in our mission together
- Help them to build community among committee members by helping the people in the group get to know one another
- Help them to understand the ground rules by which the committee will work together and practice accountability with one another.

GROUND RULES FOR PURPOSEFUL MEETINGS

To ensure good use of our time, we will follow these procedures:

- At least two days prior to the meeting, I will check-in with the committee chairperson and provide an update on the status of my assignments.
- We will begin and end our meetings on time.
- We will follow an agenda so that all necessary work will be covered.
- We will include a brief time in each meeting for scripture reflection and prayer.
- We will set timelines for projects, assigning responsibility so all tasks are clear.
- We will set aside additional time for long-term thinking and planning, including possible activities to build community.

GROUND RULES OF BEHAVIOR

In operating as a committee, we will exhibit the following behaviors with one another:

- Hold one another in prayer for our common work.
- Respect one another's ideas and opinions.
- Follow through with commitments we have made.
- Keep in confidence what is shared in confidence.
- Speak the truth in love and kindness.
- Make decisions within the committee meetings (not outside of meetings).
- Make decisions by consensus, making sure each team member has had a say, each person has been heard, and a group decision has been made.

COVENANT FOR HEALTHY DISCUSSIONS

- **Affirm Inherent Worth & Value** - "We are all created in the image of God."
- **Listen to Understand** - "Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger."
- **Take Responsibility** - "Speak for yourself and honor your commitments."
- **Make Room for Others** - "Have an open mind, accepting heart, listen generously."
- **Embrace Ambiguity** - "Be comfortable with uncertainty and multiple possibilities."
- **Preserve the Integrity of Stories** - "Maintain confidentiality and integrity."
- **Take Risks** - "Be courageous, get involved, lift your voice, and allow others to also."

A CONGREGATIONAL COVENANT FOR ALL GROUPS

- Foster a caring community: We will act with kindness, empathy, and compassion.
- Celebrate our differences: We will set aside our individual agendas and look for common ground so as to find the "we" in our journey together.
- Encourage trust and respect: We will nurture a safe and supportive atmosphere, respectfully address concerns, seek productive resolution of conflict when it arises, and help others in that process.
- Support our community and leadership: We will participate in and provide support to our community as well as our committees and leaders. We will share the work of advancing our congregational vision and goals.

IS THIS MEETING NECESSARY?

If there is some doubt as to whether to have a meeting, the meeting probably isn't necessary. Meeting just to meet is a drain on time, energy, and morale. Clarify the meeting goals, the agenda, and assign the amount of time expected for each item.

There is a better way to plan and conduct meetings that will allow each member of the committee to:

- Value the time of the meeting,
- Be effective with their work, and

- Work in partnership with each other to accomplish something more than any one member could on their own.

MEETINGS ARE NECESSARY FOR...

- Making important decisions,
- Monitoring and allocating funds,
- Discussing issues or concerns related to your area of ministry,
- Starting a project and needing input and buy-in from key stakeholders
- Finishing a project and needing to evaluate the results

IMPORTANT THINGS TO CLARIFY

Meetings are most effective when we understand:

- Why we are meeting;
- What is each person's role on the team or committee; and
- What's expected of those who are involved in the meeting.

This means that there are a few things that need to happen **BEFORE THE MEETING** takes place. The members of the committee need to have:

- An understanding of the reason or purpose the committee has been established;
- A clear job description or list of tasks for which they are responsible;
- An understanding of the reason or goal of this particular meeting;
- A detailed agenda to help set expectations and show the structure and rhythm of the meeting.

THE PRE-MEETING CHECK-IN

Most of the work takes place outside of the meeting rather than during the meeting. Between the meetings, the committee chairperson should check-in with each committee member to see if they have completed their assigned tasks.

- **ASSIGNMENTS NOT STARTED** - If the task has not been started, keep it in the "Assignments" section of the agenda. When there's no progress, there's no update.
- **ASSIGNMENTS UNDER WAY** - If they are currently working on their task, add a note of the current progress to the agenda in a section called "Updates." Do they have a question that needs to be answered? Add it to the note.
- **ASSIGNMENTS COMPLETED** - If their task is complete, add a note regarding the results to the agenda in "Updates." Ask the person if they're ready to take on the next task and discuss what it might be. Add the new task to the agenda in a section called "Assignments."

With this check-in taking place between the meetings, the chairperson is building the agenda along the way. They're keeping in touch with what's being accomplished and what's stuck. And they're in the position to help with the task that's most in need. By avoiding having these discussions during the meeting, you reserve time for the important things that need the attention of the whole team.

TIPS FOR ENSURING THE SUCCESS OF A MEETING

- Send out the agenda at least 48 hours in advance and ask everyone to come prepared to discuss items needing review, input, and edit and any important decisions needing to be made.
- Include only task-oriented items on the agenda.
- Focus the meeting on the tasks at hand and minimize the time spent on other items. Collect input and answer questions that are specific to the tasks at hand.
- Ask each member of the team to solve the problems, complete the task, or devise the plan between the meetings and bring those recommendations to the following meeting. You'll check in with them along the way.

- As the chairperson, spend time each month supporting the members of the team and helping them succeed. Avoid taking on additional tasks, so you can support and equip them to accomplish their tasks.

USING A CONSENT AGENDA

A *consent agenda* is a section of the meeting agenda that bundles noncontroversial, informational, or routine items that do not require debate and are adopted by one unanimous vote.

Key Characteristics:

- Developed and circulated ahead of time.
- Items must be routine and not need discussion.
- Any member may pull an item for separate consideration without needing a second or explanation.
- Designed to streamline meetings.

Typical Items: approval of minutes, routine, noncontroversial committee reports, information updates, standard financial statements, and housekeeping actions (e.g., annual approval of a recurring contract).

USING AN OMNIBUS MOTION

An *omnibus motion* is a single motion that groups together several independent, routine, or noncontroversial action items so they can be adopted in one vote.

Key Characteristics:

- Still considered regular business.
- Any member may request that any individual item be removed for separate consideration.
- Items are listed separately in the agenda or in accompanying materials, but handled under one motion.

Typical Uses: approving several committee recommendations at once, and approving minor actions that do not need debate.

THE DIFFERENCE

- A ***consent agenda*** is a formal agenda category recognized by best-practice governance; an ***omnibus motion*** is simply a parliamentary tool used within a section of regular business.
- ***Consent agenda*** items are expected to be non-debatable; ***omnibus motions*** may include items that could be debated if pulled out.

BEST PRACTICES

- Use a ***Consent Agenda*** every month for routine actions and reports.
- Use ***Omnibus Motions*** sparingly, when several actionable items belong together but still merit inclusion in the normal business section.
- Always allow any member to request separation without challenge or explanation, maintaining transparency and trust.

A TYPICAL MEETING AGENDA

- **Call to Order and Open with Prayer**
- **Short Devotion:** Scripture reading and time of reflection
- **Grounding:** “The mission of this committee and the purpose of this meeting”
- **Approve the Agenda:** if necessary, take action on the Consent Agenda
- **Updates:** Assignments Not Started, In Progress, and Completed
- **Input and Decisions:** Plans for Review, Input, Edit; Decisions and Feedback Needed;
- **Assignments:** What do we need to do and who is responsible?
- **Summarize the Meeting and Plan for Next Meeting**
- **Motion to Adjourn and Close with Prayer**

MEETING TAKE-AWAY SHEETS

Meeting Take-Away Sheets are a great way to ensure all members of the committee are on the same page once the meeting is over. Five Sections of the Meeting Take-Away Sheets are:

- What was discussed?
- What was decided?
- Who needs to know what was decided?
- What actions need to be taken and who is responsible?
- What do I need to follow up on?