

DB
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CHAIRING AND MANAGING A DEBATE

Below are some general guidelines about chairing a meeting aiming at encouraging discussion and debate. They might be adapted to decision making meetings.

1. Before the meeting

- documentation/information to be distributed in advance and easily accessible (web) including agenda, objectives, time, duration, speakers; essential documentation to be available in the meeting room;
- chair and possible panelists to be familiar with the substance and with the expected participants;
- seating arrangements to be defined, both at the podium (if any) and at the floor;
- preparatory meeting between chair, panelists and secretariat to take place the day before the meeting to discuss/finalize debating strategy;
- chair to have prepared introductory remarks to guide the discussion. Sometimes draft recommendations could be prepared in advance, to be amended during the session and used for concluding the meeting.

2. Starting the meeting

- the meeting to start on time, or when at least half of the expected participants are in the room;
- chair or MC (or facilitator if any) to introduce him/herself and speakers;
- chair to present introductory remarks or formal statement;
- chair to invite comments from specific speakers/panelists or open directly the debate.

3. Panelists (in case there are)

- panelists should have been asked to prepare written documentation on their oral presentations (to avoid people taking too many notes) to be distributed towards the end of their presentations;
- chair to ensure that panelists stick to their time allocation by imposing strict control over the first panelist (school teacher tone). Audience will always support a tough chair;
- chair not to summarize statements of panelists but to highlight only one or two key ideas after each panelist as "thought-provoking" for the forthcoming debate;
- chair to favour more than one row of presentations. Short sequences create more lively exchanges.

4. General Debate

- chair to define clearly the rules of the game in terms of duration of interventions, way of giving the floor, interruption of "out of subject" interventions, etc.
- chair to clarify what is expected from the debate and how it will be recorded/used, etc.

- on controversial/difficult matters, chair to select carefully those who are asked to speak (among possibly many candidates) to avoid trouble-makers while encouraging/respecting different opinions, provided they are properly articulated;
- chair to observe a reasonable gender and geographical balance among speakers;
- chair to give the impression that progress is being made and new ideas are emerging from the debate itself, not from individual views;
- if possible, chair to have identified beforehand a few participants and agreed with them that they will be given the floor at particular moments of the discussion to introduce specific ideas/comments;
- from time to time, chair to open a new chapter of the debate indicating that some points already raised don't need to be repeated;
- chair to give the impression that he/she always controls the situation (sense of humour appreciated) and knows where the discussion is going;

5. Concluding the meeting

- chair (or facilitator if any) to give a brief but well-structured overview of what has been achieved, highlighting both consensual ideas/recommendations and divergences of opinion and putting the meeting in an historical perspective (vis-à-vis previous and future meetings for instance);
- chair to finish on time and announce when minutes/proceedings will be available;
- chair to congratulate participants in general and some VIPs or outstanding speakers in particular;
- chair to express personal satisfaction/enjoyment on time well-spent.

6. After the meeting

- have an informal drink or a formal reception;
- assess the meeting with organizers/colleagues in terms of process and outcome (to improve future meetings);
- ensure swift reporting/publicity (secretariat);
- send "thank you" letters to key participants (secretariat);
- congratulate supporting staff and colleagues;
- feed the outcome of the discussion into the work of relevant organizations.

