

Serving on Committees and Boards 101

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Outline

- Terminology
- Brief outline of your role on a committee
- What you may need to know before you say “Yes”
- What to expect at meeting
- Building relationships
- Life after your term expires
- Evaluation

A brief guide to committee terminology

Agenda: An agenda provides details of the items of business to be considered at a meeting.

Apologies for absence: Members who are unable to attend a meeting are normally expected to give their apologies to the Executive Office (by email or phone) as soon as possible before the meeting.

Constitution: A committee's constitution sets out its functions, reporting line, membership, Chair, quorum and frequency of meetings.

Chair: Describes the person who is elected or appointed to chair a committee.

Motion: A motion is a formal proposal for discussion and action.

Other business: Some agendas include an "Other Business" item at the end of the agenda to allow members to raise matters not otherwise included on the agenda. If "Other Business" is used at all, it must be restricted to very minor matters which do not require prior consideration' for example, matters of information.

Quorum: The quorum for a committee meeting is the minimum number of members required to make the meeting valid. If a meeting is inquorate, it cannot make decisions on behalf of the committee. It can only hold discussions and make recommendations for later confirmation or rejection by the committee.

Resolution: A resolution is a decision reached through a vote at formal meetings (that is; when a motion is passed).

Sub-committee: A sub-committee is one appointed by a larger committee to undertake a specified task. Some committees have standing sub-committees which deal with specific tasks which arise annually.

Getting Started

Committees are the traditional way to evaluate and deal with institutional problems, concerns or needs. Many institutional changes cannot be made without some committee's approval. Most of the information we will cover in this training can be applied to:

- Formal Committees
- Subcommittees
- Boards
- Informal Task Forces
- Working Groups
- Advocacy Groups
- Departmental Meeting

Not all strategies will be appropriate for all committees or all individuals. You'll want to pick out those that make sense to you and with which you are comfortable.



What role do individual members perform?

Individual Committee members are not directly responsible for managing project activities, but provide support and guidance for those who do. So, individually, Committee members should:

Knowledge

- Understand the aim, strategy and intended outcomes of the project;
- Appreciate the significance of the project
- Be genuinely interested in the project and the outcomes that are intended;
- Be an advocate for the project by doing what they can to promote its outputs;
- Have a broad understanding of project management issues.

Actions:

- Ensure the strategy that is planned matches the aim of the project;
- Consider how they will know if the aim of the project has been achieved;
- Review the progress of the project against the milestones set;
- Consider ideas and issues raised;
- Provide guidance to the project team;
- Help balance conflicting priorities and resources;
- Foster positive communication outside of the Committee regarding the project's progress and outcomes;
- Actively promote the outputs of the project;
- Contribute to the evaluation of the project, both the process of developing and implementing the project, and its actual impact on its intended audience.

Who's on this committee?

Members are selected based on their individual knowledge and skills that they bring to the Committee, there can be some confusion and conflict in the accountability of members. **The first responsibility of members is the achievement of the project's success,** and secondly to their organization. This should be made very clear at the outset. Similarly, members who have expertise in a particular area should avoid taking a narrow view of their responsibility on the Committee – they are on the Committee to contribute to the entire project.

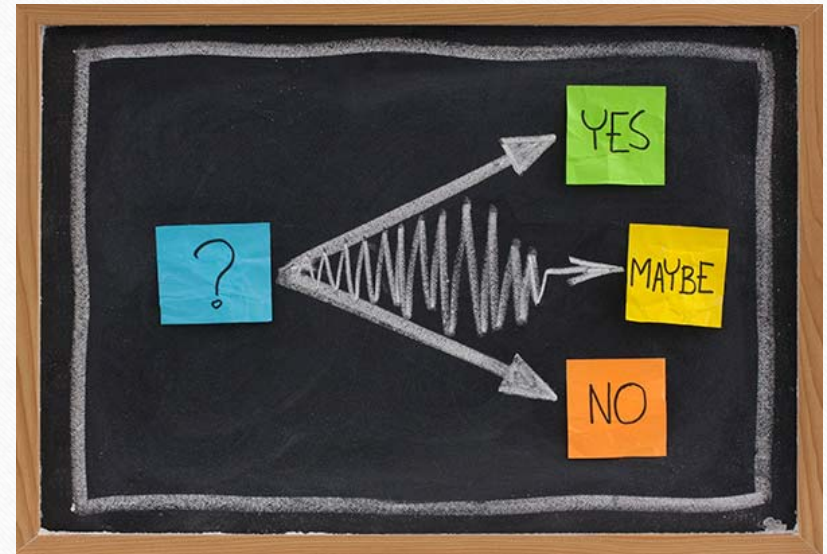


Before You Say “Yes”

Activity:

Answer the following questions:

- What do you want to accomplish *for yourself* by being on the committee?
- What do you want to accomplish *for the institution* by being on the committee?
- Are you are interested in the subject matter?
- Will membership further your Leadership/Career Plan?
- Who else serves on the committee?
- How much power does the committee have to actually influence the institution? (Generally institution-wide committees have more status and power.)
- Does this committee have a bad reputation -- is it non-productive or disorganized, etc.



“How Can You Obtain This Information?”

Ask Questions

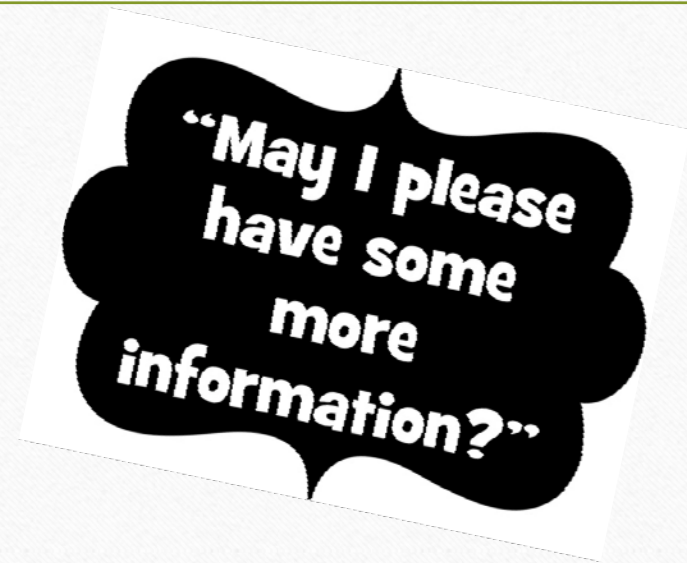
You should know and be able to articulate the following:

- What are the Committee's objectives-- long and short range?
- What has the committee accomplished in the past?
- How does the committee operate?
- How often will the committee meet?
- What are its strengths?
- What are its weaknesses?
- How much time is involved in committee membership?
- Do members serve on subcommittees as well?

Other questions you may have:

How many students/women/people of color serve on the committee?

Being the first or only ... is sometimes difficult.



Keep in mind that you don't have to say "yes" to every invitation to join or volunteer for a committee.

It's okay to say "no", although you may want to keep the door open for another time.

After You've Accepted Your Committee Membership

- Become informed about the committee: Its vital for you to be able to participate (in an informed manner) in conversation.
- Ask for a set of the previous years handouts, reports, minutes etc., and *read them*. Be sure to thank the whoever, after you receive them.
- If possible, have lunch or meet with several of the members (including those you with whom you might disagree).
- In addition to the questions listed previously, ask questions, such as:
 1. Who are the more productive and powerful members?
 2. If there are subcommittees, ask what they do and which ones are important.
 3. Do they have any advice for you?
 4. Is there anything you need to know in advance?
 5. Does this committee act in a very formal manner (strict Robert's Rules of Order) or informally?



What Should I expect?

Before each meeting

At least a week before the meeting the Chair should circulate documents for the meeting to all Committee members. These should include:

- An agenda, indicating the time planned for the meeting, so that members can allow sufficient time to attend and participate;
- Minutes of the last meeting, including an action list, ideally updated with any information at hand about actions completed or in progress;
- A progress report on the status of the project since the last meeting;
- Any other documents to be considered at the meeting.

At the meetings

The Chair will conduct the meeting according to the agenda, ensuring that all members are encouraged to provide input throughout the meeting and that any decisions or recommendations are adequately resolved and agreed to by the members.

It's important to check through the list of action items from the previous meeting, confirming action taken and issues resolved, and agreeing how to progress any actions that aren't completed.

After each meeting

As soon as possible following the meeting, a copy of the minutes of the meeting should be circulated to all members. At a minimum, the decisions and action points should be circulated as soon as possible after the meeting. This is important both for ensuring that the minutes accurately reflect the decisions and discussions of the meeting, and to get members moving on the actions they have agreed to implement. Members are more readily able to recall what was discussed at the time and ensure that any important issues or comments raised during the meeting have not been inadvertently overlooked.

Building Relationship

1. *Build relationships one at a time.* Fortunately or unfortunately, there are no short cuts.
2. *Be friendly and make a connection.* This may seem self-evident, but a friendly word or smile can make someone's day. Try to find something in common: all of us want to have close connections with our fellow humans.
3. *Accept people the way they are.* You don't have to agree with them all the time in order to form a relationship with them. No one likes to be judged.
4. *Be persistent.* People are often shy and suspicious. It takes a while to win trust. You can almost always form a relationship if you stick with it.
5. *Acknowledge good work.* Acknowledge committee members when they have been particularly effective by calling them, sending an e-mail, or a note.
6. *Do good work and know your stuff.* Don't simply rely on your own expertise to carry you through the speech. Seek out information to support your arguments and gain credibility.
7. *Enjoy people.* If you genuinely enjoy people, others will be attracted to your attitude. People will more likely want to be around you.
8. *Ask people questions.* People love to talk about themselves and about what they think. If you ask people about themselves and then take the time to listen attentively, they can become your fast friend.
9. *Tell people about yourself.* People won't trust you unless you are willing to trust them. Tell them what you genuinely care about and what you think.

Your First Meeting

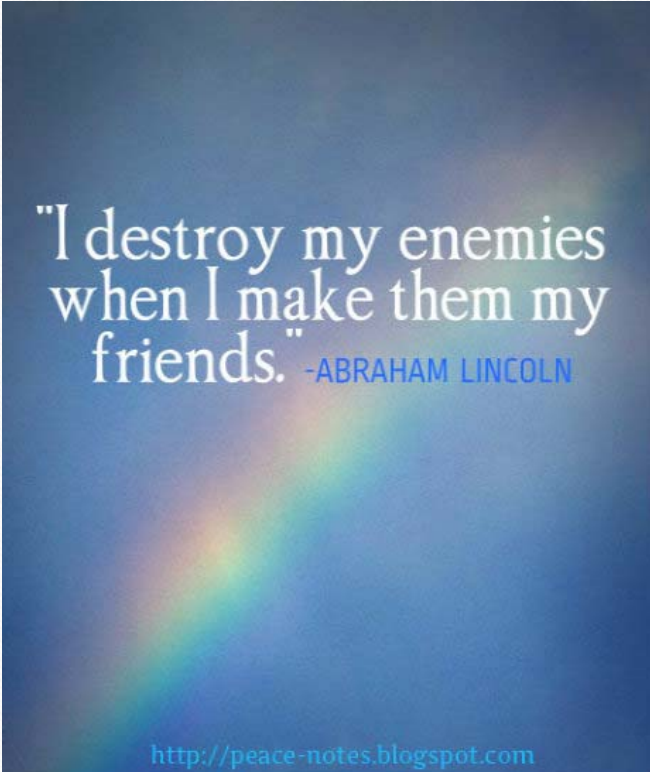
- **Be on Time.** If possible be early
- **Observe where people sit** -- sometimes people have preferred seats and you don't want to take their "traditional" place. Often but not always, the more powerful people sit closer to the Chair.
- **Observe the meeting dynamics:** Whose suggestions are adopted more often than others, who is questioned for their opinion, who gets called on more often? Who are the individuals who bring the group together by coming up with workable compromises?
- **Take notes and be attentive.** Your notes might also include items for follow-up such as getting more information, calling someone, etc.
- **Follow-up when needed.** If you are puzzled by any of the committee's actions or if you need information and do not want to take the committee's time, ask someone individually at the end of the meeting or in a subsequent phone call, e-mail or note.



Dealing with People Who Disagree with you

Often there are people on a committee (or in life) who are opposed to the things you hold near and dear to your heart. If you are dealing with controversial and emotional issues there may be some people who will not be pleasant to deal with.

- Try not to view them as enemies. Keep in mind you never know when they may support you on an issue you care about.
- If possible, find ways to praise them such as “You and I disagree a lot, but I really feel you were very fair on this issue.”
- If appropriate, have lunch and pick the person’s brains by asking for advice.
- If someone treats you badly, acknowledge it using “I” statements.



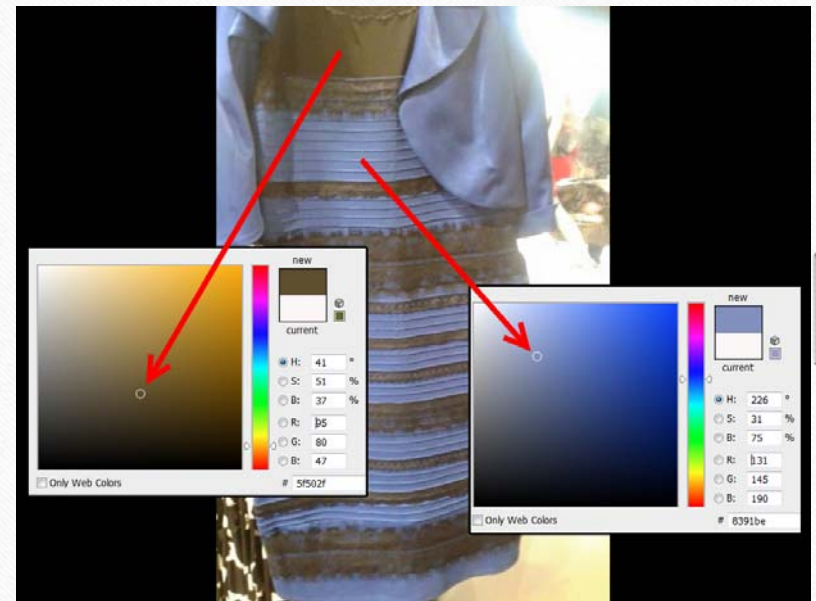
"I destroy my enemies
when I make them my
friends." -ABRAHAM LINCOLN

<http://peace-notes.blogspot.com>

When controversial discussions arise:

When a group has discussed something for 20 minutes or more and can't come to closure, it often means that the group lacks critical information or is too emotional to make a decision. What to do?

- **Assess whether it is a lack of information or too much emotional involvement.**
- **If you realize that information is lacking, you can raise it with the group, whether you are the chair or a member, such as, “It’s hard for us to make a decision without knowing how much this will cost. How can we get this information [can the person who introduced the subject find this out, or do we need to set up a committee to obtain this information]?”**
- **If the group is too emotionally invested, it is time to table the discussion or else refer it to a sub-committee. Discussing something for longer than 20 minutes in a group is rarely productive. You’ll notice that the same arguments will be raised, perhaps even more vehemently, individuals will become more entrenched in their positions, and no new information will be added.**



For Additional Strategies

- **Whenever you attend a meeting, observe and try to figure out the strategies other people are using and whether they are successful or not.**
- **Talk to others about what strategies they found to be successful in working with committees or departments.**
- **If you are trying to get something through a committee or through the department, talk to appropriate members of the group as well as other knowledgeable people for advice on the best strategy.**



What should I do once my term is complete?

Career Development Services
CSU Channel Islands
One University Drive, **Bell Tower 1548**
Camarillo, CA 93012

Main: 805-437-3270

Fax: 805-437-8899

Email: career.services@csuci.edu

Hours of Operation

Monday – Friday: 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.



(maybe this can be an option for slide 22 in your presentation?)
Finding a Committee

The link below provides a good resource for the different committees out there, eligibility information and information on how to let people know you are interested.

<http://www.csuci.edu/studentaffairs/university-committees.htm>

- Have a voice in how your student fees are allocated
- **Make decisions on policy and planning**
- **Make a difference for students and alumni**
- **Help to award scholarships to students**
- **Advise on food services on campus**

There are so many different opportunities out there!

Any Questions

References

EMPOWERING YOURSELF AS A COMMITTEE MEMBER

Bernice R. Sandler

Senior Scholar

Women's Research and Education Institute

www.bernicesandler.com

202 833-3331

Law and Justice Foundation of NSW