Administrative Division Primer on Effective Meetings

Committee and advisory board chairs are among the most crucial individuals to NACADA's success, as many of our grassroots initiatives to support academic advising arise from the work of these vital member groups.

An important responsibility as a chair is conducting effective meetings of your group while cultivating community within your group to facilitate your committee or advisory board work. With that in mind, allow us to share some guidelines for use in face-to-face meetings at the annual conference and online throughout the year. Even if your committee or advisory board work can largely be conducted over email, there is value in being intentional about those times when your members engage face-to-face, in person or online to conduct the business of your group. And remember, your NACADA Executive Office liaison is your partner in this process. Lean on your Liaison to help you make your interactions with your committee or advisory board be of service to the achievement of your charge and goals.

Thank you for all you do in support of NACADA and academic advising.

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Administrative Division Representatives

Four topics we would like to address regarding the conduct of meetings are:
- The basic **responsibilities of the chair** (or his/her designee) of a committee or advisory board;
- **Best practices** for conducting an effective meeting;
- Addressing **common meeting problems** that may arise;
- Tips for getting the most out of virtual meetings.

Responsibilities of the Chair

Your responsibilities as chair of an effective meeting can be summarized as what you do before, during, and after the meeting.

Before the Meeting (Preparing for the most effective use of your group's time together):
- Identify the purpose of the meeting, including decisions that must be made or action that must be taken during the meeting, and state the purpose at the top of the agenda. Your purpose statement should start with an action word, and could look something like "Identify work priorities for the coming year," or "Review and update XYZ…," or "Decide how to obtain feedback or data from XYZ…"
- Assemble an agenda. This framework guides the meeting and helps focus the group's work toward achieving outcomes. Your agenda items might include items such as "Report on…," "Identify members to serve on a subcommittee that will…," or "Create a list of possible ways to address XYZ."
- Schedule the meeting and invite all attendees using your group's listserv or an electronic meeting scheduler.
- Share the agenda and any materials that attendees should review in advance of the meeting.

During the Meeting (What you can do to increase the group's productivity):

- Start the meeting on time and avoid waiting for others to arrive. You may want to schedule 10 minutes for members to chat before the meeting starts.
- Briefly review the agenda to focus attention on the work at hand, making it clear what decisions or actions are expected during the meeting.
- Keep the discussion on track and focused on the agenda items. With much to accomplish, it's easy for involved, committed members to veer from the agenda. You might try saying something like "We're getting off topic and need to move back to XYZ," repeating the issue or question at hand. To make sure unrelated but important issues aren't forgotten, try keeping a "parking lot" on a separate sheet of paper to record such issues; you can then refer to it when creating the agenda for subsequent meetings.
- Encourage participation and try to get/keep everyone involved. You might begin the meeting by asking a question each person can answer, such as "What would you like for the group to accomplish this year?" and give each person a chance to participate.

After the Meeting (Ensuring follow-through and accountability for putting ideas into action):

- Distribute minutes to all attendees in a timely manner, including the time, date and location; who attended; key points raised and decisions made; motions and voting results if votes are taken; and who is responsible for each follow-up action.
- Keep the agenda, minutes and supporting information together so that they can be referred to if questions arise.
- Ensure that the agreed-upon actions are taking place with a friendly reminder email or phone call to the individual/s or a meeting focused on progress reports.

Best Practices for Meetings

- **Clarify the purpose and goals of the meeting**. Before you schedule a meeting, make sure you identify decisions that must be made or actions that should occur as part of the meeting. One way to do this is to imagine the meeting has been held and ask yourself what you expect will have happened. When you assemble your agenda, ask yourself whether the aims of the meeting will be accomplished if the agenda items are completed as planned.
- **Create an agenda that supports the achievement of the meeting's goals.** You can ensure that all important issues are given adequate attention by getting input on the agenda from two or three of the group members, or by an email from the chair asking for agenda items. Each agenda item should start with an action word, such as review, discuss, decide, complete, etc. Consider spending some time at the end of each meeting identifying key items for the next meeting's agenda.
- Allow adequate time for topics and arrange them on the agenda in order of importance to prevent running out of time for the big action items. Some ways to schedule adequate time include estimating the number of people likely to attend and estimating the total time needed for everyone to make, say, a 30-second comment on each topic as a starting point; factoring in time for any presentations, documents or voting that will be involved; and considering the likely level of agreement on each agenda item, allowing more time for topics that may generate disagreement.
- **Get into the habit of starting meetings on time.** It may require a change of practice at first but will become more comfortable and expected over time. Consider scheduling 10 minutes before the start of the meeting for people to touch bases and chat.
- **End meetings on time.** Common causes of meetings that run over the time allotted include not managing meeting time well, not dealing with high-priority items at the outset, underestimating the time required for discussion and action, and too many items on the agenda for the time scheduled. Strategies for ending on time include starting the meeting on time, making sure to

- state an end time in the agenda, or asking someone to serve as a timekeeper. If time still runs short, you can ask the group if they are willing to extend the meeting time by 15 or 30 minutes to complete the task at hand, with everyone's concurrence.
- **Make a tangible record of key discussion items or solutions using a flipchart or projector**. This helps people focus on the items and discourages rehashing. Be sure to write big and use dark colors so that your record is readable; use self-stick notes or 3 x 5 cards to add ideas if space gets tight.
- **Ask members to evaluate the effectiveness of the meetings periodically,** including whether the priority items are being accomplished, and whether the group generally starts and ends on time, stays on topic, includes all members in discussion and decision-making, and follows through on action items.

Addressing Common Meeting Problems

- **Does the group struggle to make decisions?** Contributing factors are having unclear goals and outcomes, sidetracking on peripheral issues, and low-impact consequences of not making a decision. To help the group make decisions more efficiently, try prioritizing more clearly, writing agenda and action items that convey what is expected, or restating the initial question or purpose of the discussion. Ask whether any of the alternatives presented are supported by data or whether specific information is needed to decide.
- **Is collaborative problem-solving stifled by a particularly outspoken member?** Dominant personalities often have good ideas that deserve consideration. As a leader, try redirecting these energies in a constructive way so that all can participate in decision-making.
- **Are some of the group members reluctant to speak up?** You can engage all members by asking a question early in the discussion that anyone can answer and soliciting responses round- robin style; giving people 5 minutes to brainstorm silently and write down their ideas to contribute to the group discussion; breaking into pairs or small groups for the initial discussion of an issue; or visually recording all brainstormed ideas to emphasize the importance of everyone's contributions and encourage inclusive discussion.
- **Do issues emerge for rehashing after a decision has been made or a course of action taken?** Make sure to keep meeting minutes, decisions and documents together for later reference; repeat the decision made at the end of discussion or voting so that all are aware; and make sure all voices are heard in the decision-making process so that actions are not pushed through by dominant members and brought up again later as others begin to speak up.
- **Are immediate issues dealt with at the expense of addressing larger issues**? Consider structuring your meetings to not bypass the top concerns by including strategically important (but not necessarily urgent) issues on the agenda; inviting individuals with responsibility for aspects of the larger issues to attend and provide a broader understanding for discussion; or utilizing a group development activity to introduce, facilitate and discuss more difficult issues.
- **Does low attendance slow down the group's decision-making and implementation processes?** Ask for ideas from both attenders and non-attenders for ideas to boost attendance; make meetings productive events where real work gets accomplished and time is valued; and stress the importance of attendance in all group communications, emails, agendas, etc.
- **Is lack of follow-through slowing down progress?** Create written action plans; set deadlines for the steps needed to accomplish goals; or identify point persons to ensure that action items move forward.

Additional Tips for Virtual Meetings

With the videoconferencing and teleconferencing capabilities offered to us through the Executive Office, your committee or advisory board is well-positioned to meet not just at the annual conference but throughout the year. Virtual meetings, whether videoconference or teleconference, are a lot like meeting in person – you still need to start the meeting on time, define the meeting objectives, etc. – but they do require a few additional skills. Try some of these best practices to get the most out of your virtual meetings:

- If you are the leader, **pay attention to time zones** when scheduling a meeting. NACADA members participate in virtual meetings from many different time zones. One option is to alternate who stays up late or gets up early when meeting with people in other countries. Additionally, be aware of time-of-day effects, such as crossing a lunch hour, keeping someone late after work or asking them to arrive extra early.
- **Construct an agenda that encourages participant input.** People may start to get distracted after 10 or 15 minutes or after three or four presentation slides; you can keep them engaged by utilizing questions, online idea generation, etc., more frequently than you might in a face-to-face meeting.
- **Distribute the agenda and any needed materials beforehand**, and set the expectation for participants to review the information in advance.
- Whether you are the chair or a participant in the meeting, **allow enough time before the videoconference starts to test the conferencing system,** including volume and video. Also, take a look around your environment and minimize distracting glare, uneven lighting and background noise.
- Avoid the temptation to multitask by turning off your cell phone and other devices, staying out of email, and refraining from texting.
- Remember that most NACADA videoconference meetings are recorded. Avoid comments or expressions that could cause embarrassment.
- **Introduce participants who may not know each other** and take note of other speakers so that you can address them by name.
- **When possible, keep your microphone muted** to minimize background noise and audio interference.
- **Look into the camera as often as possible** for the effect of looking directly at participants.
- **Maintain a positive and engaged demeanor**. The best advice is to concentrate on what each person is saying and listen attentively.