

Best Practices for Committees

March 2012

This is intended to be a living document reflecting the collective wisdom of the Grinnell Faculty. In January and February 2012 the FOC gathered suggestions for the initial draft from over twenty-five faculty members of various ranks and disciplines. In March 2012 the FOC organized these suggestions into this initial document and posted it in the hopes that it will serve as a helpful tool to support faculty and as a springboard for ongoing discussion and mentoring among the faculty on intentional committee practices. We encourage faculty to continue to share their ideas for updating this document with the Chair of FOC so that it can truly be a living document of ongoing self-reflection.

Best Practices for Meeting Participants

- Be on time and let the chair know beforehand if you are leaving early - it might affect the order of the agenda.
- Bring copies of agenda and related materials circulated before the meeting.
- Read agenda and related materials before the meeting.
- Stay focused on agenda item.
- Share relevant information you have from your role as a representative of or to the committee (e.g., of division, to executive council, etc.)
- Be civil, listen to your colleagues, and be willing to change your position.

Best Practices of Committee Chairs

Scheduling Meetings

- Use [Doodle](#) or other meeting scheduling services for other meetings.
- Send [Outlook request](#) and reminders and attach relevant agenda and documents to request. It makes it convenient to find materials one needs for the committee meeting and puts it on the calendar of those who rely upon Outlook.

At Beginning of the Year

- For ongoing meetings, set schedule at the beginning of the semester / year.
- Set up schedule of main agenda items and deadlines and discuss at first meeting (knowing that new items will need to be added).
- Start with introductions. Make all feel welcome and valued.
- Review the Charge to the committee and the committee report from the previous year.

Planning Meetings

1. Have a clear agenda and stick to it.

- *Only* meet when there is a clear and relevant agenda with specific tasks that cannot be handled over e-mail.
- Agenda items should *only* include items that the committee has clear authority to do and should be specified as:

Action items - e.g., items requiring a decision of the committee. **These should be first on the agenda**

Non-action items - e.g., when input has been requested by a person with the authority to make a decision.

- The agenda should state the start and stop times of the meeting and indicate how much time will be allocated to each agenda item.

2. Who to invite / delegating roles

- Before the meeting, designate a committee member (other than chair) to take minutes.
- Identify and invite people with critical information or authority needed in order for the committee to carry out agenda items.
- When possible have support staff help with scheduling meetings, taking minutes and follow-up tasks.

3. Preparation for meeting

- Send out essential materials and agenda in advance (as pdf files). Give people enough time to read it and assume they do. Don't spend meeting time reviewing it.
- Avoid an overload of material - send out what is essential and provide focus for reading.
- If you anticipate disagreement on a main agenda item, speak with committee members individually before the meeting to clarify sticking points and possible resolutions.

Running Meetings

1. Role of Chair - To be an active leader in facilitating the committee's process.

a. Frame the discussion:

- Make clear the issue to be addressed.
- Make clear the role, purpose, and authority of the committee on the issue at hand.
- Clarify at the start of the meeting how action items to be completed at that meeting will be achieved (e.g., ballot vote, consensus, etc.).

b. Clarify

- Articulate consensus as it develops.
- Clarify different options and lead discussion about these options.
- If disagreement develops, try to clarify the core issues and interests of the disputants, which may be helpful for finding resolutions.

c. Make effective use of time.

- Cut off discussions not on topic or steer it back to the agenda.
- If it is difficult to find a solution (e.g. settle on final wording), appoint a sub-group. Make sure everyone is comfortable with the group appointed.
 - Use technology for collaborative drafts, such as [Google docs](#), which keep track of revision history.
- If consensus cannot be reached on an issue, determine when there has been enough discussion and take a vote.

d. Ensure inclusion.

- Check in with less vocal and underrepresented participants (including staff or student members in a majority faculty committee, untenured faculty members).
- At end of meeting go around room and let everyone get in a quick last word.

e. Summarize main points of meeting, review action items and delegate follow-up.

2. Minutes and Other Documents

- All decisions and recommendations should be recorded in the minutes.
- Ensure that the minutes are clear and organized to set a solid path for the next meeting.
- Have committee approve minutes at the beginning of the next meeting.
- Make the minutes available to all current and future committee members.
- Date all documents and include page numbers.
- Plan and prepare end-of-year report which summarize actions and recommendations.

After Meetings:

- Facilitate communication between committee and other appropriate structures on campus, both "up and down": e.g., to the deans, to those represented by the committee, etc.

At the End of the Year:

- Prepare end-of-year report and provide to the next year's committee.
- Review and update the committee description and update with FOC.
- Consider whether this committee could be disbanded or subsumed by another entity.
 - Non-Standing Committees: Have a sunset clause. Re-evaluate necessity of committee on a scheduled basis (are there essential agenda items still to be done?)
 - Ad Hoc Task Force: Disband once work is completed.