

Subud USA Chair/Vice Chair Guidelines for Local and Regional Groups (Rev Nov 2007)

Forming a Committee

The first job a chair has to tackle after being tested and voted in is to form a committee. In most groups and regions the vice-chair is also been tested and voted in, but this is not universally true. Many committees are comprised of a chair, a vice chair, a secretary, and a treasurer. In regions with smaller membership (often in spite of large geography), it is sometimes challenging to find people who are both willing and able to fill these positions. If the chair ends up feeling unsupported and forced to act autonomously, many problems can arise as a result of the chair acting without getting feedback, support, and input from regular committee meetings.

If your bylaws don't disallow it, there are many ways to solve the problem of a too small or inactive committee. Adding additional "committee members at large" who have voting privileges in the meetings without specific titles can often bring in participation by members who might otherwise not be willing or interested to participate in the committee meetings. This can be especially helpful at the regional level to bring in participation from members in multiple centers so that these centers feel that they have some representation at the regional level. Having a bookkeeper (who may or may not be on the committee) can allow a member to take on the role of treasurer without having the burden of learning how to do the bookkeeping chores and learn all of its rules, and not have to deal with checks, receipts, voucher forms, etc. At one point in time in the Rocky Mountain Region the chair was also the bookkeeper and there were two vice-chairs! Several regions currently have regional councils which are comprise of the regional committee, the center chairs, and some regional helpers.

Preparation of the agenda

It is the job of the person presiding over the committee meeting to be sure that an agenda for the meeting is prepared and distributed to the expected attendees at a least a day or two prior to the meeting. The chair may, in some cases, request help from the secretary in typing and distributing the agenda. For most members these can be distributed by email. It is important to have some open-endedness in the agenda (e.g., a slot for New Business). Committee members should send a list of any items that they feel need to be discussed to the chair far enough in advance of the meeting that the topics can be added to the agenda prior to distribution. Remember to put the reading of the minutes from the previous meeting and a review of actions items (see below for the meaning of this term) at the start of the agenda.

Committee Meetings

Having regular committee meetings is the cornerstone of a successful committee. Efforts should be made to have these at least once a month, more often if something pressing needs attention. Members of the committee should submit concerns or topics that they would like to be discussed at the meeting to the chair as far in advance of the meeting as is practical. At the regional level it is not uncommon for committee members to be very geographically scattered, but fortunately modern technology makes it easy to arrange for phone conferences. These meetings should be presided over by the chair or, in his or her absence, the vice-chair.

Helpers

Most committees include helpers as non-voting participants in the committee meetings. On the national level, national helpers are always invited to be present at committee meetings. This both assists in communication between the committee and the dewan of helpers, as well as allowing the committee to hear what the helpers feel the impact of certain motions, topics, and/or ideas might have on the helpers, the ease and ability of members to do latihan, or the well being of the members with respect to the kejiwaan side of the Subud organization.

Managing Committee Meetings

While it is important to have some open-endedness in the agenda (e.g., a slot for New Business), at the same time it is the chair's job not to let the meeting wander far off-topic. It is also important that the chair not allow any one or two individuals to do most of the talking and in particular not allow anyone to ramble on for ten or more minutes, unless this person is giving a pre-arranged presentation that is expected to last that long. In many cases it is a good idea to have a time keeper to limit any one person's comments to a certain length of time (say, five minutes), and it is often advisable and usually important to put a time limit (say, one hour) on the meeting, unless the agenda is very large or difficult.

Action Items

One of the primary purposes of any committee meeting is to make plans regarding actions that need to be taken care of outside the meeting. Unfortunately, the "belling the cat" principle can often arise: the whole committee agrees that something needs to be done but no one volunteers to do it. So it is important that before the conclusion of the meeting that these "action items" be reviewed, and attached to each of them, the name of the person who will be making sure these get done. The person who is taking the minutes should be sure these are clearly listed in the minutes.

Voting

It is not enough just to discuss a subject and reach consensus on it. A formal motion should be proposed, seconded, and a formal vote taken. If the motion results in action that needs to be taken outside of the committee meeting, an action item should also be created and listed by the secretary to be read by the secretary at the end of the meeting.

Minutes

The first item on the agenda should always be the reading of the minutes of the last meeting. If it is unclear at the start of the meeting, it should be figured out who is going to take minutes for the current meeting. Brief reports from those who agreed to be responsible for action items should be given right after the reading of the minutes.

Harmony and Disputes

As Bapak told us, "Harmony is more important than being right." Maintaining a harmonious, cordial, and friendly atmosphere in meetings can sometimes be one of the greatest challenges for a chair. It is probably the single most important job of the chair. It is particularly important that the chair not get drawn into arguments and in particular not to trump differing ideas with his or her personal opinion. If disputes or disagreements arise during the meeting, especially if there is a lot of emotion accompanying these disputes, it is often helpful to table motions or topics and refer the matter to the helper dewan for clarification and testing. If any one member becomes angry and goes on a tirade, the chair may want to put a time limit their expression of grievances and plan to meet with them and any other related parties after the formal meeting to iron out hurt feelings, disappointments, etc. These informal meetings can often be very necessary in maintaining a sense of harmony and inclusion among the members of the committee.

Helper-committee latihans

The helpers and the committee should schedule regular latihans to be exclusively attended by the helpers and committee. If the members are not in the same locale, these can be done simultaneously at various locations, including at members' own homes. The frequency of these latihans may vary from group to group but from a practical point of view, once a month is probably a reasonable minimum.

Subcommittees

Subcommittees can be an excellent tool to accomplish action items, especially if they are large or involved (like hosting a regional congress). Any group member can chair a subcommittee. The subcommittee chair should report directly to the local or regional committee for whom they are working.

Chairperson's Responsibilities (some duties are often delegated to other members)

- 1) Provide organizational channels to meet the needs of the center or region.
- 2) Provide a forum for members' ideas, wishes, criticisms, etc.
- 3) Provide for and make arrangements for maintenance of a suitable facility for the practice of the latihan kejiwaan with assistance from the committee or a subcommittee.
- 4) Organize and, if appropriate, preside over regularly scheduled meetings for the committee, committee and helpers, and general membership. A general or specific agenda should be prepared.
- 5) Review the finances of the center or region.
- 6) Organize and/or oversee all fundraising, both by donation and special event.
- 7) Actively participate in center or regional activities.
- 8) Act as a liaison and/or representative with other levels of the Subud organization.
- 9) Participate in regularly scheduled latihan with the committee and helpers.
- 10) Act to unify thoughts and feelings in committee and membership meetings to facilitate harmonious action.
- 11) Encourage the center or region to participate, at some level, in wing activities.

Vice Chairperson's Responsibilities (some duties are often delegated to other members)

- 1) Aid and assist the chairperson in carrying out his or her responsibilities.
- 2) Assume the responsibilities of chairperson in event of absence.
- 3) Take on an over-seeing role in areas assigned by the chairperson.
- 4) Accept duties as assigned by the chairperson and committee.
- 5) Actively participate in center activities.
- 6) Participate in regularly scheduled latihan with the committee and helpers.
- 7) Encourage the center or region to participate, at some level, in wing activities.