

Roles and Responsibilities of Office Bearers

The Role of the Chairperson

The Chairperson is a part of a small team made up of the Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer. The Chairperson's aim is to utilise the interests, release the potential energies of all members, and to support the committee to develop a common view of its purposes and shared responsibility for leadership - a stimulator, not a dictator.

In selecting a Chairperson, what are we looking for?

- to get things done - a record of being a consistent worker who completed a job, is hardworking
- to make decisions - is fair and even-handed to all members of the group, persuasive
- to stimulate and inspire others, enthusiastic, good-humoured
- has a background knowledge of the group's aims, and how committees function

Some people find it more useful to look at qualifications for the position in this way, the chairperson:

- has confidence in other members
- wants to release the potential energy of the group
- is more interested in the group than their own feeling of personal importance.

These qualifications suggest that committees can work better if they operate democratically, with democratic leadership and with members really sharing in making decisions and carrying them out.

The ideal chairperson is someone who can:

- work with people
- stimulate people rather than browbeat them
- help the group use all the abilities and experiences its members possess
- encourage members to use the new abilities they develop as they work together.

How can a Chairperson fill these expectations?

- ❖ By putting everyone at ease and making sure that all members have a say.
- ❖ By being sensitive to members, encouraging quieter people to express an opinion, and by controlling the over-talkative or aggressive personalities in a friendly and firm way
- ❖ By making sure that a speaker has a chance to complete what they want to say without being talked down by other members. Overlong speeches need to be closed in a respectful way.
- ❖ By discouraging over-emotional language, personal abuse or accusation, while trying to maintain a reasonable, calm and friendly atmosphere.
- ❖ By using formal meeting procedure, allow the business of meetings to be completed, for example, calling for motions to wind up long discussions.
- ❖ By making sure that everyone has a chance to share in the achievements of the group, and actively participate in tasks and projects.

Four important qualities of a good Chairperson are **impartiality, firmness, tact and common sense**.

Other useful qualities are **courtesy, patience and tolerance**

General Duties of a Chairperson

The Chairperson is the public representative of the Network to the community. The Chairperson should be aware of and sign all documents that set out policy or have financial implications for the group.

Before a Committee or General Meeting the Chairperson should:

- consult beforehand with the Secretary on all the business to be discussed at meetings
- supervise and to prepare, together with the Secretary, the agenda for the meeting
- check all reports etc. to accompany the agenda and minutes are sent out to members in sufficient time before the meeting
- check the minutes of the previous meeting and sign for accuracy
- be acquainted with reports, correspondence, business etc, to be presented the meeting
- work with the Secretary to ensure that tasks between meetings are completed.

During the meeting

- open the meeting, check for quorum,
- conduct the business of the meeting according to the order of the agenda paper unless it is altered with the consent of the meeting
- confine discussion to the item actually before the meeting and to see that it is dealt with and settled before passing on to the next,
- allow free and, if necessary, formal debate,
- give all those wishing to speak an opportunity to do so, to see that their remarks are addressed to the Chair and to allow no private discussion or personal matter to be introduced in a negative way,
- say who is to speak, if two people should speak at the same time - The Chairperson's decision on such points is final,
- make every effort to let any meeting over which she/he presides understand the reasons for and purpose of his/her rulings,
- close the meeting when all matters are attended to.

The Ethics of a Chairperson:

Chairpersons should not force their own point of view on the meeting but should help it be expressed, discussed and agreed upon or not.

It is better for a Chairperson to make a wrong decision firmly than either to waver before making up their mind or to keep changing their rulings.

If the Chairperson desires to place some factual information before the organisation in her/his official capacity, she/he should do so before calling on the mover to initiate the debate.

A Chairperson's reputation for impartiality can be speedily undermined if he or she does from the Chair any of the things that should be done from the floor, such as speaking to motions in a general meeting, or nominating members to some office. If they feel sufficiently strongly about a matter they should vacate the Chair temporarily.

Leaving the Chair:

The Chairperson must leave the Chair whenever they are affected, for example during an election they are contesting, or during discussion of motions either censuring or congratulating them, or dealing with dissent from their rulings.

The Role of the Secretary

The Secretary needs to be a practical person who will pay attention to detail and likes to get things done. The Secretary will need to work closely with the Chairperson. The Secretary is an official member of the Committee, has the right to vote and has a number of responsibilities:

- organising and following up meetings of the Network
- looking after the overall administration of the Network
- dealing with correspondence of the Chairperson's signature
- contacting other members to follow-up tasks needing to be done
- keeping website details up to date including member profiles and links.

The SAMN Secretary has these tasks and a Minute Secretary takes the minutes of the meetings. This relies on the assistance of other members (six throughout the year). While the Minute Secretary takes the Minutes, it is the Secretary's job to check accuracy and circulation to members.

Duties of the Secretary

Before the meeting:

- make sure a place is available for the meeting,
- make sure the Minutes of the previous meeting are written up and circulated to all SAMN members including the date, place, time and Agenda of next meeting,
- settle the items of the agenda with the Chairperson and circulate to all members,
- keep all the documents that may be needed at the meeting in a folder, and have any reports or information ready which may have been asked for at the previous meeting.

At the meeting:

- be at the meeting ahead of time with correspondence and other necessary papers, including access to the Terms of Reference, a current membership list and previous meeting minutes to check past decisions,
- assist the Chair with any information required, including giving advice on the consequences of the Correspondence items or other documents.

After the meeting:

- check the Minutes forwarded by the Minute Secretary as soon as possible and submit them to the Chair for approval prior to circulation to all members ,
- write letters, secure information or take any action on matters decided by the meeting,
- if action is to be taken by anyone else, check that they know they are meant to do that job, and when the result is needed

Duties of the Minute Secretary

- make a note of those present and also of all apologies,
- see that a quorum is present before any business is done,
- read the minutes of the previous meeting and obtain the Chair's signature
- take notes of the business of the meeting for the minutes,
- write up the Minutes for circulation and forward to the Secretary within 7 days of the meeting

Hints for Minutes Takers:

- don't write down every word - listen for key words or phrases
- try to capture basic ideas and the essence of what people say
- write as clearly as possible
- abbreviate words, use initials to save time circle key ideas, statements or decisions
- underline highlights and differentiate important ideas
- use stars, arrows, numbers
- note 'Action' beside motions or decisions requiring specific tasks
- note who is responsible for the action
- speak up when the action is too fast !

The Role of the Treasurer

The Treasurer has the responsibility of reporting the state of financial affairs to SAMN members. This is usually done by way of recommendations, based on the written reports and financial statements presented to the Committee. The Treasurer may delegate the carrying out of some of the following tasks, but the responsibility remains with the Treasurer.

The Treasurer is responsible for:

- the proper handling of the finances of the organisation, but not for the actual raising of money,
- collection of memberships and fees, and issuing receipts for every amount received,
- paying these and all other money into the bank,
- keeping the duplicate pay-in slips in proper date order so that the entries may be checked later (by an auditor) with the statement provided by the bank,
- paying all accounts,
- maintaining a file of accounts and relative receipts for record and audit purposes,
- keeping proper books, or seeing that they are kept,
- keeping a watch on the expenditure,
- presenting details of all payments in retrospect,
- ensuring that all cheques are signed strictly in accordance with the authority given in the Terms of Reference; usually there are at least three members authorised to sign cheques - the Treasurer, the Secretary, and the Chairperson. **Note:** *If a committee member is to receive a cheque from SAMN, her/his signature should not appear on that cheque as one of the co-signers*
- keeping the committee regularly informed of the financial position - income, expenditure, comparison with budget,
- preparing a statement for audit at least once a year and for presenting the audited accounts to the Annual Meeting.