

TSSU Guide to Being the Best Chair of the Century – and Beyond



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What am I for?

- To ensure the meeting time is used effectively. To enable people's views to be heard. To guide discussion toward practical action.

I thought we were non-hierarchical. Why is there a chair?

- Your power and responsibility is temporary, and fully accountable to those attending the meeting.
- Your responsibility is to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute, working against any hierarchies that may exist – e.g. hierarchies of knowledge, familiarity, or personality.

What are rounds?

- If the meeting has rounds, this is an opportunity for each person in turn to provide a personal update, which does not have to relate to the agenda.
- Rounds are not typically minuted.

What is a speakers' list?

- It is a list kept by the chair to keep track of upcoming speakers. The chair has the ability to amend the list, in order to hear a range of views and not allow some voices to dominate.
- If you are altering the list, you need to inform the room of what you are doing and why. This is important as it allows the room to ultimately decide how they want the meeting run.

What is a BIRT? What is a BIFRT?

- BIRT stands for Be It Resolved That. BIRTs should prescribe a course of action, the

clearer the better. They help ensure accountability in union actions.

- BIFRT stands for Be It Further Resolved That. BIFRTs are additions to BIRTs. They represent new but connected ideas and resolutions stemming from previous BIRTs.

What can I do to make the meeting efficient?

- Always be alert to how much time is left, and how many items there are to cover.
- You may set a time limit on how much time will be spent on one or more of the items. This is a particularly good idea if the item is likely to drag out otherwise.
- Even if the meeting is currently running below the allotted time, stay focused on pacing and deter attendees from filling the remaining minutes just because they can.

What else do I need to know?

- Please don't feel apologetic in exercising these responsibilities. You're not being mean by doing these things, you're allowing the meeting to run successfully, which helps the union do its work better.
- Pay attention! People could put their hand up at any time to ask a question or contribute to a discussion.
- Look out for people monopolizing the meeting. Be alert to marginalized individuals being spoken over or ignored. Try to invite participation from everyone.

How do I begin?

- Sit where you can see everyone clearly.
- Start the meeting at the designated time.
- Ensure someone (not you) is taking minutes.
- Provide a land acknowledgement.
- Feel free to declare your pronouns.
- Tell everyone they can add, remove, or reorder items on the agenda.
- Inform attendees how they can contribute to the meeting e.g. getting on a speakers' list; proposing, seconding, amending and voting on BIRTs and BIFRTs; 'I call the question' i.e. asking for a vote to be initiated; 'Point of information' i.e. wanting clarification.

How do I chair discussion?

- First, announce the item number and title, and ask if anyone would like to speak to it. If a BIRT has been proposed, the first and second person should begin.
- The goal of discussion is to assign people tasks outside of the meeting, and/or to ascertain the union's position on an issue in the form of a BIRT (Be It Resolved That).
- If a discussion is heading BIRTwards, or it's meandering and would benefit from focusing on a BIRT, state the importance of doing this.

How do I use a speakers' list?

- You can announce there will be a speakers' list at any point.
- Take a list of people who have indicated their intent to speak. Call on those names in the order you prefer – typically, this will reflect the order they raised their hands.
- However, you may wish to prioritize some speakers over others, e.g. if someone has remained quiet while others have provided

lengthy contributions, perhaps it's time to hear them speak.

- Alternatives to speakers' lists can be used to encourage discussion e.g. a 'round' where everyone is free to contribute in turn.

How do I conduct a vote?

- First, someone needs to propose a BIRT. As chair, you may ask for someone to do this, but you may not propose one yourself.
- BIRTs should be repeated (and possibly refined) for the benefit of the minute taker and everyone voting on it.
- After someone has motioned the BIRT, another person (not you) needs to second it.
- After the BIRT is seconded, declare the meeting is open to discuss it prior to voting.
- Invite contributions that are both for and against the motion.
- Before calling for a vote, reread the BIRT.
- You can suggest whether to vote on all parts of the BIRT (i.e. the BIRT and any BIFRTs) as one vote, or if each part will be voted on separately. If there is disagreement, call for a vote on this question.
- In any order, ask people to vote for:
 - In favor – supports the BIRT or BIFRT
 - Opposed – against the BIRT or BIFRT
 - Abstain – neither for nor against. This only affects whether the vote is unanimous, not the outcome of the vote.
 - Ask anyone if they would like their voted noted – i.e. their name will be recorded in the minutes, noting their position.
- As chair, you vote only to break a tie.

How do I know when to move on to a new agenda item?

- Check there are no further questions or discussion on the current item.
- If a vote has already been taken, or if you judge that a broad range of views have been heard, or a designated time limit is up, feel free to move to the next item. Explain your decision to the meeting.
- If people still want to continue on the current item, you make the judgment as to whether enough time has been spent on it.

How do I ensure respectful conduct during the meeting?

- Stay alert to people putting their hands up throughout the meeting, so that a well-run speakers' list can be maintained.
- If people are not respecting the chair's facilitation, feel free to call them out on it. Your role is to ensure the meeting is well-conducted.
- If anyone ignores the speakers' list by speaking out of turn, re-affirm its existence and importance. They may say "I'll quickly address that," or "One more thing," but you decide who speaks. You can do it!
- If you are not respecting others, it is the right of other participants to tell you. If they do, pay attention and adjust accordingly.

How do I make it end?

- If it looks like the meeting will run over, you may: call for a vote on remaining items to be tabled for the next meeting; cut short the amount of time allotted to remaining items; call for a vote extending the end time (provided the room is available).