

How to Increase Your Effectiveness in Committee Representation and Leadership

Marianne Haughey, MD FAAEM and Loice A. Swisher, MD MAAEM FAAEM



Dear current and future EM leaders:

A challenge in emergency medicine and medicine in general is there are not enough women in leadership. A path to representing points of view particular to women, is to increase female membership and leadership in committees. There are local hospital committees, regional committees, and national and international committees available. They may be particular to emergency medicine or multidisciplinary. There is always work to be done, and joining a committee allows you to meet others with similar concerns and goals, across specialties and/or across geographic lines and allows communication among a diverse group of individuals. Once you have found a committee that has a mission worth your time and effort, there is a skill set needed to be an effective member and leader of a committee. These are not skills directly taught in any medical school curriculum.

Here are some bullet points to guide you:

- **The chair has responsibilities to help guide the committee. They should:**

- Identify the mission of the committee. This should be clearly stated and repeated. If there is no mission statement, the chair should take the time with the group to create it. The mission of the committee allows focus on the matters at hand and hopefully can limit tangents and distractions.
- Make sure all members know each other. The group should feel inclusive. All new members should be introduced and once a year it would be good to refresh all introductions. It may also be appropriate to do a round table quick introduction session at each meeting.
- The chair should set expectations for the group. If a member will be absent who should they notify and how? How will their contribution be measured? Set expectations for preparation and contributions. The chair should ensure members understand all voices should be heard during meetings, and no one person should dominate the conversation.
- The chair controls the agenda, and its distribution before the meeting as well as distributing any additional materials which will be required. Making sure this information is communicated in advance with plenty of time for the participants to review the material again helps support the members and allows them to fully participate during the scheduled meeting time.

- **Encouraging involvement:**

People join committees for different reasons. Some are passionate about the topics, some join out of a sense of purpose, some to make connections and find mentorship relationships, and some to build a CV. None of these reasons are bad reasons, but it will help the chair if they can get to know your members and their motivations. If someone is looking for a mentor/ mentee connection, a small group project with senior and junior members may lead to a more productive activity. If someone is looking to build a CV, perhaps there is a project that could turn into something publishable in the work the group is tasked with addressing.

Always consider grooming a successor(s) to take over as chair. It is good to have fresh leadership to have fresh ideas. There should be a plan for the chair to rotate off that position to allow another member to take over with a fresh perspective.

- **Logistics:**

There will often be staff or administrators assigned to the committee. It is essential that you understand their role and how they can help the work get done. Often they may not rotate off the committee as other members might do and may have more institutional memory than any one particular member.

It is also essential to understand the expectations of any overseeing board. Do they expect reports on a particular schedule? If so, when might those be expected? If the committee wants to make proposals, what is the route to do so? It is important to understand the "chain of command" involved in getting committee work moved forward once your group has signed off on an action item.

>>



● **Process: what is the process to produce an effective meeting?**

Planning the meeting schedule is imperative. Giving the group enough time to know when the meetings will be lets them adjust other aspects of their schedule so you can maximize attendance and involvement.

The agenda should be sent in adequate time for members to be able to review it. It should go out at least a week in advance. Topics include: the title of the meeting, approval of prior minutes, subgroup reports, old and new business. It should also include the date and time of the next meeting.

- Minutes need to be taken and submitted and distributed to the group.
- Action items should be listed with identified due dates and persons responsible for the tasks and clearly reviewed each session and included in the minutes.
- Stick to the time limits scheduled for the meeting. Start and finish at the predetermined times. Members will have other commitments and it is essential to respect everyone's time. Also always leave time for new business. New topics often crop up and there should be planned time to discuss them.

“A path to representing points of view particular to women, is to increase female membership and leadership in committees.”

“People join committees for different reasons. Some are passionate about the topics, some join out of a sense of purpose, some to make connections and find mentorship”

● **Communication:**

Communication about the work of the committee inside the group is paramount. During your meeting you will identify tasks to be addressed and deadlines for those tasks to be completed along with a point person in charge of accomplishing the task. That information should be shared post meeting so all on the committee, present or not, can be aware and involved. If the committee is a local hospital committee perhaps hospital email will be adequate. But there are other tech tools to help everyone communicate easily and in real time. Slack, Whatsapp, and Google Docs can all be used to get information into the hands of the members efficiently and quickly.

Meetings might be held in person, by Zoom or Teams, or by phone. All have advantages and disadvantages.

- The good work of the committee should be advertised. Others outside of the committee should learn of the work being done. There may be a general reporting session for all committees of a group, or there might be other ways of publicizing the work. It could be through group newsletters, email updates, or published work. By publicizing the committee work it also allows those who are not members to see what is being done and consider joining the group.

Enjoy your committee! ●

Women in EM Section Poster Pearls
www.aaem.org/aaem-online

AAEM Online

AAEM
 AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
 EMERGENCY MEDICINE
 CHAMPION OF THE EMERGENCY PHYSICIAN

Now available!

The advertisement features a laptop on the left with several red and blue arrows pointing towards the right. In the center, a poster titled "Flinging a Spotted Arm" is displayed on a grey easel. The poster includes a logo for "Einstein" and contains text and images related to emergency medicine. On the right, the AAEM logo is prominently displayed above the text "Now available!".