

You've made it, so what now?

Part 1



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There's work to be done

- The appointment won't be good for you or the committee if you aren't prepared to do the necessary work.
- Make sure you can generally go to meetings.
- Do your homework. Have all the facts and always read your business papers/agenda, highlighting issues and seeking background information prior to each meeting.

'The workload can be quite daunting. I often say it is like having a second job. The Academy is really a small business and requires the same skills as those I require for running my own business, such as budgeting, the ability to read balance sheets and profit and loss statements, cash flow management, staff management, negotiation skills, communication, public speaking, assertiveness, planning etc.'

Judy Galloway

'If you just put in some hard work it is amazing how quickly you can become a really important part of that committee.'

Clare Petre

Vision, aims and objectives

Have a good knowledge of the vision, aims and objectives of the organisation and/or committee

- If not provided, ask the secretary of the committee for a resource kit about the committee, including: names and details of other members; terms of reference; previous minutes and annual reports; timetable of meetings; administrative details such as sitting fees; expenses and other relevant papers.
- Talk to the secretary about current issues facing the committee.
- If you are replacing someone on the committee, ask them to talk to you about their experience, the issues as they see them and the 'politics' of the committee—for example, how the committee works, dominant members, informal 'factions', major issues, any significant disputes, the style of the chairperson, anything you should particularly watch out for.

'One of the positive aspects of sitting on a board is that you become part of a group and that group has a common purpose—to do the job well.'

Angeline Oyang

'All your decision making—your allegiance—must be to the aims of the organisation. If you do not agree with the aims, you should not be on the board... you have to leave a bit of baggage behind when you are sitting around the board table and say, "OK, I might be particularly interested in this aspect of the work, but I have to actually look at the organisation as a whole".'

Judy Henderson

Asking questions

'Dumb questions'

Don't be afraid to ask 'dumb questions'. It's not only important for your learning, but you'll often find you ask the questions other committee members also want to ask.

'I may have lost the plot but ...'

'This may be a dumb question but ...'

'I may be missing the point here but ...'

You'll often be surprised at how many heads nod in agreement at this point!

'Another ploy I have used as a new committee member is to say, "Look, I have given myself permission in the first two meetings to ask dumb questions", and then everyone says, "Oh no, there is no such thing as a dumb question", but you have announced that you are going to do that right up front, and it is very easy after that to do it.'

Clare Petre

Jargon and acronyms

Don't be afraid to ask for clarification—you'll pick up the jargon in a frighteningly short time!

Contributing to meetings

- Speak up when you know you can add to the debate and protect the value of your contribution.
- Be assertive rather than aggressive—strong in your views but not hectoring.
- If you want an issue to be followed through or acted upon, move a formal motion. Don't rely on things being done. Move the motion and monitor the action.
- Most committees work by consensus, but don't be afraid to ask for your dissent to be recorded if you disagree with what you think is a very important issue.
- Clarify the status of the information you obtain as a result of your committee membership. Some will be confidential to the committee, at least until the group makes a decision or completes its business. Some will be useful for dissemination in newsletters and at meetings.
- Consider the comments and suggestions made by other members, listen to what is being discussed and choose when it is appropriate to offer information.

Responding to draft papers

- Always respond promptly or within the deadline, making your comments clear and legible.
- Phone the secretariat to clarify any points in a draft or to make verbal comments.
- Even if you haven't time to write anything, let the secretariat know whether you generally favour or oppose the position, or question any particular points about the draft.

Visits and outside meetings

Always attend them—they can be very informative about the environment in which the committee is working, and expose you to a range of situations and people with relevance to the committee's work.