

**Transportation Association of Canada**

**Meeting Facilitation Manual**

August 2011

## OVERVIEW

The Transportation Association of Canada is a national association with a mission to promote the provision of safe, secure, efficient, effective and environmentally and financially sustainable transportation services in support of Canada's social and economic goals. TAC is a neutral forum for gathering and exchanging ideas, information and knowledge on technical transportation issues.

Much of the work of the Association is conducted by its many councils, standing committees, task forces and project steering committees. Hundreds of volunteers serve on those committees and it is through that work that TAC makes a significant contribution to the development of transportation research, technology and practice in Canada and the world.

When committees work effectively, they can provide valuable insight and advice to the Association and its members; they link the Association to attitudes and concerns of its members; and they can serve as important training ground for future leaders.

Volunteers want to know that their committee work is valuable and is making a difference. Committees that do not work effectively will find it difficult to accomplish their goals; members may become frustrated and disengaged.

Recognizing the importance of its committees and its dedicated volunteers, TAC's Board of Directors recommended that information be provided to assist Committee Chairpersons and other Executive Members as they conduct meetings. The material provided herein is intended to assist TAC's committees better meet their objectives through more effective meetings and improved decision making processes.

The information has been compiled from other sources, including the *Guide to Effective Committees* (Canadian Society of Association Executives, 2007) and the Meeting Facilitation Manual of the Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators (2006), as well as TAC's own committee and council support documents.

## **TAC COMMITTEE MEMBERS ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES: AN INTRODUCTION FOR MEMBERS**

As a member of the Transportation Association of Canada, and especially as a volunteer on one of TAC's many councils and committees, you will be part of the national network that helps shape Canada's highway transportation system. With nearly 100 years of history, TAC has a legacy about which you can be proud and a promising future that you can help build. Together, we can contribute to improving our economy, the environment and our collective social well-being.

TAC – *your* Association – is known for the technical excellence of its products. TAC does not set standards, but it is the preeminent national transportation organization in Canada that delivers technical guidelines and best practices that are referenced in most jurisdictions across the country. Volunteers are key to that work.

As part of the Association and as a committee or council member, you will have the opportunity to communicate with and work with other professionals in your field, share information on emerging issues and stimulate research and development. We welcome your involvement and believe that you and your organization will also benefit greatly from your participation.

### **Council and Committees**

TAC councils and committees provide neutral fora where both public sector and private sector interests can be raised in constructive, non-partisan and non-confrontational discussion.

Councils are intended to represent a cross-section of transportation stakeholders and membership is by invitation or designated position. Meetings of councils are typically held twice a year, in the spring and in the fall in conjunction with the TAC Annual Conference. Interested TAC members, who are not council members, may attend council meetings as observers.

Standing committees are established under the auspices of the councils, with Board approval, where subjects require in-depth discussion or analysis. TAC members may join any standing committee that could benefit from their expertise, subject only to limitation due to over-representation from a particular sector or region. Interested TAC members, who are not standing committee members, may attend standing committee meetings as observers.

As well as providing a forum for discussion and information exchange, standing committees identify research needs and priorities, disseminate research results through the organization of conference sessions, panel discussions and workshops, and recommend and review papers for presentation in TAC conference sessions. In discussing research needs and priorities, standing committees may also recommend approaches to address those needs. Approaches can include undertaking a project to develop a research report, a synthesis of practice, or a national guideline. In some cases, standing committees may establish subcommittees to focus on issues of particular interest.

Standing committees generally meet twice a year, in the spring and in the fall in conjunction with the TAC Annual Conference. From time to time, standing committees may hold additional meetings. Members are expected to attend meetings as often as possible, to contribute to discussions, and to participate in decision-making by voting during meetings or electronically when issues arise between meetings. More information about the roles and responsibilities of standing committees members as well as of executive members is included later in this handbook.

From time to time, additional groups may be established to address new or emerging topics that are not already identified within the mandate of existing councils or committees. For the purposes of this document, a committee by any other name is still a committee.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Council and Committee Members**

As a council or committee member, you will be part of a group of professional peers that share your specific interests in the transportation field and will have the opportunity to inspire leading-edge information sharing and creation on emerging issues and to stimulate research and development. You can expect to:

- Be part of discussions on emerging issues, technologies, research needs and priorities and other matters that may be discussed during council/committee meetings (subject to conflict of interest guidelines).
- Participate in decision-making (for example by electing an executive committee, reviewing minutes and draft documents, and voting during meetings or electronically between meetings).
- Receive information in support of meetings (agenda, background information, minutes, etc.).

As a council or committee member, it is also expected that you will:

- Attend meetings.
- Come prepared to participate in discussions.
- Review guidelines for conflict of interest and declare yours whenever necessary.
- Volunteer, whenever possible and practical, to assist with committee work.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Council Chair and Executive Members**

TAC councils are managed by an elected executive, generally comprising at least three members: a chair, a vice-chair and a past chair. Each office is generally held for two years.

The TAC Secretariat provides support for Council activities, including acting as secretary during meetings and teleconferences, drafting reports on Council activities for approval, and distributing information to the membership as needed.

Council Chair:

- Chairs meetings
- Reviews conflict of interest guidelines with members
- Reports to TAC Board of Directors

- Liaises with other Council Chairs
- Delegates responsibilities to Secretary, other Council members as necessary
- Sets date and times for Council Executive meetings

Council Executive:

- Prepares/approves agenda for meetings
- Reviews/approves report from Council to Board of Directors
- Acts on behalf of Council between meetings
- Refers any requests for official TAC positions to TAC's senior management
- Conveys recommendations of council for conference sessions/panel discussions/workshops to TAC Secretariat
- Coordinates the development of panel discussion and workshop programs
- Ensures abstracts and full papers submitted for the council's conference sessions are reviewed with comments provided to TAC Secretariat

**Roles and Responsibilities of Standing Committee Chair and Executive Members**

Standing committees of TAC are also managed by an executive, generally comprising four members: a chair, a vice-chair, a past chair and a secretary. Each office is generally held for two years.

The TAC Secretariat provides support to standing committees by distributing information to the membership as needed.

Standing Committee Chair:

- Prepares agenda for meetings
- Chairs meetings
- Reviews conflict of interest guidelines with members
- Reports to oversight Council
- Presents projects proposed by standing committee for Council approval
- Liaises with other Committee Chairs
- Delegates responsibilities to other Committee members as necessary

Standing Committee Vice Chair:

- Conveys recommendations of standing committee for conference sessions/panel discussions/workshops to TAC Secretariat
- Coordinates the development of panel discussion and workshop programs

Standing Committee Secretary:

- Prepares minutes of meetings and submits draft to Secretariat for distribution to membership
- Takes attendance during meetings and reports to TAC Secretariat

Standing Committee Executive:

- Reviews/approves agenda for meetings

- Ensures abstracts and full papers submitted for the committee's conference sessions are reviewed with comments provided to TAC Secretariat
- Periodically reviews committee terms of reference and recommends revisions as necessary
- Informs TAC secretariat about meetings needs
- Acts on behalf of Committee between meetings
- Refers any requests for official TAC positions to TAC's senior management

## MEETING FACILITATION: TIPS FOR CHAIRS

The person chairing a meeting is in a position to significantly affect its productivity. The Chair's challenge is to create an appropriate balance between three main entities: people, issues and time. If one entity receives more attention than another, problems may surface. For example, if the Chair tries too hard to accommodate people, progress may be slow and minority views may control the meeting. If the Chair is too forceful and focuses on closure (issues) and efficiency (time), members may be frustrated, resentful and disengaged.

To create the appropriate balance between people, issues and time, the Chair's primary skills are listening and facilitation. This means the Chair does less talking and more listening and that s/he facilitates decision making and does not impose decisions on the group.

The Chair has the following duties during meetings:

*Deciding who speaks next:* Going by those who raise hands first and not by those who raise voices first (establishing a speakers' line up, if needed); intervening if members "barge in" without permission to speak or if they interrupt one another.

*Establishing decorum:* Encouraging civility and mutual respect; intervening if members use offensive or improper language, if they discuss personalities, or if they speculate on the motives of individuals ("Can we please speak about the issues, not the people").

*Keeping the meeting on track:* Reminding members of what is currently on the agenda; intervening if there are digressions.

*Managing time:* Facilitating collective decisions on the meeting's time frame, and if needed, on time limits on speeches; giving updates on time ("As we agreed, discussion of this proposal will end at 10 AM. It is now 9:50"); enforcing speaking time limits; asking (at appropriate times) whether anyone has something to add to the discussion and, if not, proceeding to closure.

*Educating and advising:* Offering procedural options to achieve results; identifying points of consensus, suggesting motions be offered if necessary, or working groups be formed to pursue further discussions.

*Creating balance:* Asking dominant members to give priority to those who have not spoken; creating opportunities for quieter members to enter the discussion ("Does anyone who has not spoken have something to add? How about you, Chad?").

*Seeking inclusiveness:* Reminding members that some participants may be working in a second language and may need encouragement to join discussions; suggesting a "buddy system" so that those who need assistance in the meeting language can sit with another participant who may be able to "translate" or summarize key points as the meeting progresses.

*Ensuring clarity:* Explaining the overall purpose at the start of the meeting; opening each agenda item by briefly explaining its nature and how it is set to unfold.

*Encouraging listening:* Minimizing back and forth arguments and encouraging members to hear one another prior to forming a rebuttal; discouraging the instinctive dismissal of unusual ideas or ones that did not work in the past.

*Questioning:* Listening for ambiguities, missed points, generalizations and misunderstanding, and raising appropriate questions (“*I must say I am puzzled by a few of the points made. For example: ----- . Am I missing something?*”)

*Re-directing:* Shifting the discussion from complaints and accusations to constructive channels; encouraging members who oppose something to propose an alternative.

*Summarizing:* From time to time, briefly repeating key points and concerns raised, and highlighting (in concise point form) apparent areas of agreement and disagreement.

*Facilitating closure and follow up:* Articulating the proposal being considered, ensuring that it is understood, and then assessing consensus informally or by raising hands; facilitating the assignment of follow up duties (not to the first volunteer but to the most qualified person or perhaps to a new member); confirming that the secretary is able to record the decisions made.



## PLANNING AND PREPARATION

### The Purpose of Meetings

Effective meetings should be more than information exchanges – they need to focus on creative thinking, problem solving and decision making. Meeting planning is therefore more than organizing a series of information items and managing time as participants present their reports. Good meeting planning looks at process as well as content.

### Meeting Planning Principles

Most meeting agendas simply delineate topic items against a time frame. However, a good meeting session plan should also specify the process that will underpin and support the various agenda items.

It is important to review any planned meeting from the participants' perspective. What will they be doing during the session? If the main activity is sitting and listening, the meeting plan should be revised to provide more variety and opportunity for participant involvement.

A good meeting plan requires the following components:

- Clear meeting outcomes stated in concrete terms. These should specify what needs to be achieved at the end of the meeting such as increased awareness of an issue, agreement on an approach, action steps to accomplish a goal, etc.
- A strategy for climate setting to set the tone and context of the meeting. The first ten minutes of a meeting are the most important as participant attention is high. This is where the Chair should state the meeting objectives and emphasize their importance, ensure all participants have been introduced, draw backward linkages to previous meetings or relevant events, and preview the agenda.
- A facilitation plan to ensure productive dialogue around the various agenda items. Every agenda item should be matched with a facilitation strategy. Decision-making methods described later in this document may guide your facilitation strategies.
- A detailed time frame along with a realistic time management strategy. The Chair should decide in advance what items should be deferred in a time crunch. The key to effective time management is to identify blocks of disposable content that can be eliminated or deferred if time runs short and prepare supplementary discussion activities to use if there is extra time.
- A summary and closure activity. The last five minutes of a meeting are an important part of the meeting as participants prepare to move on to the next activity. This is the point where the Chair should ensure strong forward linkages by recapping decisions made and confirming action items.

## FACILITATING TELECONFERENCES

Teleconferences can be an efficient way of transmitting business and are used extensively by TAC project committees. Here are some tips for teleconference Chairs:

1. The principles of meeting planning covered in this manual also apply to teleconference. They must have clear meeting outcomes, a climate setting phase, a facilitation plan, a detailed time frame and a strong closure activity.
2. It is important to be realistic when choosing the teleconference technique. If the issues to be addressed are difficult or contentious a face-to-face meeting may be required. In any event, the maximum length of a teleconference should be 90 minutes and a shorter time is preferable.
3. The Chair should model and enforce good teleconference etiquette by:
  - Encouraging promptness. Calls patching in after a conference has started can be just as disruptive as late entrances to face-to-face meetings
  - Introducing people when they sign on (Roll call)
  - Ensuring participants state their names prior to speaking
  - Keeping comments short. With a 60 minute teleconference with 12 participants, the average air time per participant is only 5 minutes
4. Use participant names frequently, solicit input from all participants and avoid letting one participant dominate the discussion. It is easier to lose energy on a phone conversation than in person.
5. If necessary, coach participants on the proper use of equipment.
6. Systematically track participant input on each item. A sample form you may find helpful appears on the next page.
7. If polling for response to a document, ask those “not in favour” to identify themselves and seek a reason (if not already evident in the discussion).
8. Ensure a strong closure. Teleconferences should not “go out with a whimper” as time runs short and participants sign off. Ensure good time management, specify follow-up activities and make closing statements before this occurs. Refer to the next steps, next meeting and meeting minutes.

**Sample Chair's Teleconference Tracking Form**

	<b>Participant A</b>	<b>Participant B</b>	<b>Participant C</b>	<b>Etc.</b>
Agenda Item 1				
Agenda Item 2				
Agenda Item 3				
Agenda Item 4				
Etc.				

As people speak, you may find it helpful to place check marks in the appropriate cells.

## PROBLEM SOLVING AND DECISION MAKING

TAC committees make lots of decisions, and the way that stakeholders are involved in these decisions often determines the success or failure of an initiative. The chart below indicates some of the advantages and disadvantages of the various decision-making methods.

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
<u>Autocratic</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fast</li> <li>• Few resources required</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low commitment of group members</li> </ul>
<u>Minority</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efficient use of resources</li> <li>• Experts assume ownership of the decision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Majority may ignore, micro-manage, or not participate in implementation</li> </ul>
<u>Majority</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional</li> <li>• Accepted</li> <li>• Fast</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Divisive, win-lose</li> <li>• Can lead to conflict, lack of commitment</li> </ul>
<u>Unanimous</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High member commitment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hard to achieve</li> <li>• May suppress some issues</li> </ul>
<u>Consensus</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High degree of member involvement</li> <li>• Leads to quality decisions</li> <li>• High probability of implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time consuming</li> <li>• Requires facilitation skills</li> <li>• May cause frustration</li> </ul>

The autocratic method involves a decision being made by a Chair or other meeting participant with little consultation with other participants other than to ask questions for clarification. This can be an appropriate method to use in an emergency situation, when a short time frame exists, when the decision falls within a person's specialized expertise, or when a decision is already a "fait accompli" and participant involvement would not have any influence.

Minority decision making occurs when a decision is entrusted to a small group or sub-committee. This makes good use of member expertise, but difficulties can arise when a sub-group brings a recommendation back to the meeting table and other participants do not accept it or insist on revisiting the entire process. This can sometimes be avoided by asking a group to only develop a partial solution - such as analysing options - and then leaving the final decision to the main group.

Majority decision making (taking a vote) is a simple and well understood method of making a decision and is frequently used in meetings. Unfortunately it can also be very divisive and lead to hostility and resistance by participants who are outvoted.

Unanimous decision making will develop high member commitment. However, achieving unanimity is difficult and time consuming and may result in weak or watered down decisions as issues are suppressed in the interests of unanimity. Many decisions made by TAC committees do turn out to be unanimous, but unanimity is not always necessary and should not be pursued for its own sake.

Consensus decision making leads to the highest level of compliance and commitment to implementation. However, it can be time consuming and frustrating and should only be used for key decisions. The approach works best when the problem to be solved is not structured and when several “right” answers are acceptable. Consensus should only be sought when each group member will be strongly affected by the decision and when high commitment to action is important. Working to achieve consensus on unimportant or arbitrary decisions is a waste of committee time.

Regardless of the method of decision making employed, it is important that participants are aware of it and have agreed on it in advance.

### **Consensus Model**

The term “consensus” is frequently used as a synonym for other forms of decision making. (“The ayes have it so we have consensus” or “Everyone supports this idea so we have consensus”). However, consensus has a very specific meaning.

A consensus based decision is one in which every participant either agrees with the decision, or disagrees but is prepared to go along with it. A decision based on 60% consensus may be more likely to be successfully implemented than a decision passed by a 90% majority vote. In the former case the 40% not in favour of the decision will be prepared to live with it, whereas the 10% who were outvoted in the latter case may (consciously or unconsciously) undermine the decision or sabotage its implementation.

To achieve consensus in a TAC meeting, Chairs need to ensure the following:

- Each committee member understands the issue
- Each participant has an opportunity to contribute to the process
- All contributions are heard and understood
- Each participant accepts the decision, or members who continue to have doubts express their willingness to try the decision for a stated period of time
- Each committee member commits to the necessary implementation action

### **Agreeing to Disagree**

Sometimes it is not possible to achieve consensus on an item and further efforts to do so will risk disrupting the meeting. In these cases the best approach is to “agree to disagree” and “park” the item until later in the meeting. The issue can be revisited later in the meeting when progress has been or deferred to a subsequent meeting. If possible, participants should at least agree on the resolution strategy to be used to address the area of disagreement.

## EVALUATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

TAC committee Chairs may want to spend some time at the end of meetings to briefly identify meeting effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

The Stop/Start/Continue exercise is a good way of gathering quick feedback on meetings. Participants answer the following questions:

STOP	What should we <u>stop</u> doing at our meetings because it is not working or creating problems?
START	What should we <u>start</u> doing because it is not presently being done and would really help us be more effective?
CONTINUE	What should we <u>continue</u> doing in our meetings because it really works and we don't want to lose the benefits of this practice?

Information can be gathered through cards completed by participants, blank sheets of paper or on flip chart paper.

The Chair may also choose to do a group evaluation of the meeting by facilitating a brief debrief discussion using “structured rounds” or some other facilitation technique. A key question to ask is “Did we accomplish our desired outcomes? If not, why not?”