

SAEM Guide for Effective Committees and Task Forces

Revised July 2005 after Board Review

I. Background

A. Types of Committees

SAEM is governed by an elected volunteer Board of Directors (BOD). Committees and task forces are established to assist in this governance. Standing committees are designated to make policy recommendations to the board, to undertake long-term assignments, and to carry out the work of the association. Task forces and other special committees may be appointed by the President or President-Elect to address specific issues. The information below applies to all SAEM committees and task forces, unless specific exceptions are made by the BOD.

B. Establishment of Committees

Each year the President-Elect of SAEM appoints the membership and leadership of the committees and task forces of the association. The exceptions include the Nominating and Constitution and Bylaws committees, which have elected members. The President-Elect consults with current and incoming committee chairs, staff members, the Board of Directors (BOD) and others in making these important selections. These selections and notification of members are usually made prior to the Annual Meeting. Every effort is made to appoint one or more resident member(s) to each committee or task force. Each appointment is for one year and, typically, one half to two thirds of the committee members is reappointed each year to provide continuity while also creating opportunity for other members to serve. Members generally serve on one committee or task force at a time. The chair is usually selected from the previous year's committee membership and, typically, will not serve more than three consecutive terms.

C. Size of Committee

SAEM committees vary in size from less than 10 to more than 20 members. Most members who volunteer through the Committee Interest Form process are assigned to a committee. Larger committees, eg. Program, Undergraduate, commonly have several assignments and often delegate objectives to subcommittees.

D. Committee Administration

1. *Chair and central office staff liaison.* The committee chair and staff liaison from the central office, working in partnership, are responsible for facilitating the work

of the committee, providing oversight, and ensuring timely communications within the committee and between the committee and the board. The staff liaison also provides logistical support for the committee's work.

2. *Board liaison.* Each committee or taskforce has a board member appointed by the President-elect who serves as its liaison to the board. This person serves as a contact and resource person for the committee chair and staff liaison, as well as a resource to the BOD regarding the committee's activities. The Board liaison should be included in all communications and activities of the committee. (See Guidelines for Being an Effective Board Liaison)
3. *Committee reports.* The committee chair and staff are responsible for keeping leadership and appropriate staff fully informed of committee activities. A written status report of the committee's assignments is provided to the BOD at regular intervals. These are usually requested in advance of the BOD's meetings in September/October, March and May, and should be available to the BOD one week in advance of the scheduled meeting.
4. *Committee charge/objectives.* The committee charge is usually defined by its annual objectives. These objectives are developed by the President-elect, BOD, sitting chairs, and incoming chairs in the months before the Annual Meeting, finalized in March/April, shared with the new Chairs in April/May, and published in the May/June Newsletter. They outline the committee's scope of activity for the upcoming year. The committee chair and staff liaison are responsible for keeping the work of the committee focused on the objectives and aligned with the organization's strategic plan. At the conclusion of each year, the chair and staff liaison are expected to make recommendations to the President regarding future work of the committee. Although the majority of the objectives are assigned at the beginning of the committee's working year, there are opportunities to modify objectives with the permission of the BOD. This may include new objectives, or deleting/rephrasing current ones.
5. *Committee responsibilities.* Committees are directly responsible to the BOD. Committees may not commit to expenditure of funds and may not express opinions or represent positions in the name of the association, unless specifically authorized by the BOD or Executive Committee. In proposing a program or activity that may involve expenditure of funds, committees must submit a SAEM Proposal Form, including a program description and budget, to the BOD for consideration.
6. *Meetings.* Because SAEM does not provide travel support for members to attend committee meetings, committees are encouraged to meet in conjunction with SAEM meetings.

7. *Member responsibilities.* Members are expected to fully participate in committee activities by attending meetings and conducting business by telephone, email and written communications. Members are expected to act in accordance with what they believe to be the best interests of SAEM. They are also expected to publicly disclose and actual or perceived conflicts of interest and not vote on such items.
8. *Use of email list-serves for committee functions and duties.* Each committee and task force will be supplied an email list-serve. This service is for SAEM committee and task force related activities only. Basic elements of courtesy and professionalism are expected in pursuing the committee or task forces function via the list-serve. The information contained on the list-serve is not to be distributed to a wider audience (individuals, other organizations) without the expressed permission of the SAEM Executive Director or Executive Committee. Violation of these guidelines will result in removal of the Chair, Committee members, or list-serve altogether, as deemed necessary by the BOD.
9. *Committees structure/Use of Titles.* The Committee Chair shall be allowed to structure the committee as deemed appropriate. This may include specific assignments, subcommittees, working groups, etc. The Board does not recognize separate titles (e.g. Vice-Chair) for any member of the Committee other than the Chair.

II. Operational Issues

A. Working with the Central Office Staff Liaison

Basic Function

The central office staff serve as a liaison resource to the chair and members of the committee. The staff assists the chair in facilitating committee discussions and activities, which address the committee's charge. They work with the chair to ensure that all committee work is consistent with the organization's goals and objectives.

Responsibilities

- Assists with the orientation for each new committee chair, and assists the chair in providing orientation for committee members.
- Works with the chair to develop a work plan.
- Works with the chair to develop agendas and conduct effective meetings of the committee.

- Provides administrative support for planning and execution of all committee meetings.
- Drafts reports of committee meeting for review and approval by the committee chair.
- Works to ensure that the work of the committee is carried forth between committee meetings.
- Facilitates communication of committee activities, including requests for action and/or proposed policies, to the President and BOD.
- Reports to the committee on decisions of the BOD, Executive Committee, or other association committees, which impact the committee's activities.

B. Committee Chair Position Description

Basic Function

The committee chair guides the committee in its work as outlined by the annual objectives and dialogue with the President-Elect.

Responsibilities to staff/BOD

- With staff, develops a work plan for the year.
- With staff, develops agendas and conducts committee meetings.
- Approves reports of committee meetings before their distribution.
- Reports to the committee on decisions of the BOD or Executive Committee that affect the committee's work or activities.
- Where appropriate, makes policy recommendations to the BOD.
- Each committee member to assist the President-Elect in committee appointments for the following year.
- Makes recommendations regarding future objectives for the committee, and the broader interests of the Society.
- Keeps the board liaison informed of progress or problems.

C. Committee Member Position Description

Basic Function

Reports to the committee chair. Actively participates in the work of the committee; provides thoughtful input to the deliberations of the committee; focuses on the best interests of the association and the committee rather than on personal interests; and works toward fulfilling the committee's goals.

Responsibilities

- Reviews all relevant material before committee meetings. Makes contributions and voices objective opinions on issues.
- Attends committee meetings, responds to communications from the chair.
- Carries out individual assignments made by the committee chair.
- Treats other committee members with respect allowing their views to be adequately expressed.

D. Other Operational Issues

Work Products of the Committee

All manuscripts, position statements and educational products and services produced by a committee are prereviewed by the board liaison prior to submission to the BOD. This prereview may recommend editorial changes for the Committee to consider prior to submitting to the BOD. The BOD liaison is expected to preview the document for the BOD prior to it being considered for approval. All manuscripts and position statements must have BOD approval prior to submission for publication as a product of the Committee. SAEM, through the BOD, will maintain all rights to and will approve the release and distribution of all educational products and services.

Surveys

The use of surveys by a committee or task force requires approval of the BOD. Their history in the Society is one of mixed success. Surveys can be problematic and poorly received by the membership. Proposed use of a survey must be carefully considered and logically explained as the BOD will only approve methodologically sound instruments that address significant national issues related to the Society's mission. The results of the survey and any related manuscript must be submitted to the BOD for review and approval.

III. Serving as the Committee Chair

A. Qualities of an Effective Chair

1. *Communications skills*

- Demonstrates ability to communicate with committee members, staff, and other groups.
- Is willing to listen.

2. *Participation*

- Demonstrates active participation and interest in SAEM.
- Commands respect from within academic medicine.

- Has knowledge of the subject in which the committee is involved.
 - Thinks in terms of SAEM goals and specifically assigned objectives.
3. *Leadership*
- Commands attention and inspires others.
 - Demonstrates ability to create a positive work atmosphere.
 - Controls without dominating.
 - Able to appropriately delegate responsibility.
 - Understands how the committee fits in to the larger work of SAEM.
4. *Administrative skills*
- Willing to take the initiative in communication and completing the task.
 - Demonstrates ability and willingness to carry out responsibilities.
 - Able to effectively delegate authority.
 - Supports orderly procedures for conducting work.
 - Understands the role of the staff.

B. Specific Procedural Responsibilities of the Chair

- Attends and presides over all meetings.
- Accepts and supports the committee's charge and objectives for the year.
- Plans committee meetings and agenda with staff.
- Maintains records and relevant information on committee work.
- Evaluates committee efforts and communicates accomplishments to the committee and the board.
- Forms subcommittees when necessary to achieve the work of the committee.
- Responds in a timely manner to queries from committee members.
- Prepares progress report for the BOD as requested, usually at scheduled times in advance of the BOD meetings.

C. Starting Out

- Make early contact with committee members.
- Send a welcome/orientation letter or email.
- Provide the committee with its charges and goals, in the context of SAEM strategic plan.
- Provide a draft calendar of planned meeting dates or calls.
- Review prior accomplishments of the committee so that the work to be done can be put into context.
- Some Chairs may wish to solicit agenda items or feedback on the objectives provided to them by the President-Elect. Note that any change in the objectives

must be approved by the individual (President-Elect or President) responsible for their initial development or distribution.

D. Setting the Meeting Agenda

- Provide an agenda sheet with beginning and ending times for the meeting, the meeting room number, and the agenda of topics to be discussed or acted on.
- Carefully look at the sequence of items. Start the meeting with topics that will unify the committee; this sets the stage for working together. Early in the meeting is a good time to discuss difficult topics when participants have energy and clear heads. Build in breaks at logical places, at least every hour. End the meeting with topics that are likely to produce a positive result; people like to leave meetings feeling that they are part of a productive team.
- Make every effort not to have an agenda with too many items. Provide sufficient but not too much time for each topic. Some chairpersons like timed agendas; others do not. A good approach is to show key times on the agenda, such as breaks and lunch. Having these "markers" lets members know the general pace of discussion the chair anticipates for the meeting.
- Provide written background information for each agenda item as appropriate. These materials are important in developing written proposals for the BOD.
- Identify the person who is presenting or responsible for each item if different than the chair.

IV. Managing a Well-Run Meeting

A. The Chair's Role in the Meeting

- Be a facilitator of meetings; don't dominate it. The committee belongs to the members of SAEM, not to the chair.
- Guide, mediate, probe, and stimulate discussions. Let others generate and debate ideas; committees are not formed to validate the thinking of the chair or staff.
- Encourage a clash of ideas, but not of personalities. Good decisions are made when committees examine all sides of an issue, but prevent members from making the debate personal. Emotional discussion of an idea is good, but an emotional reaction to a person is bad. When emotions are too high, return the floor to a neutral person, seek a purely factual answer, or take a break.
- Prevent one-sided discussions. Try to let everyone speak before giving folks a second chance to have their say.

- Deal with dysfunctional behaviors. Don't let a person who is blocking constructive discussion ruin the committee meeting for everyone else. Strategies for dealing with this behavior include confronting the person privately in a caring manner, pointing out the effects of the behavior, and suggesting alternative behaviors.
- Keep discussions on track; periodically restate the issue and the goal of the discussion. Feel free to redirect the group back to the topic at hand.
- Monitor participation; control talkative members and encourage the contributions of silent members. At times, one may need to specifically call on silent members to solicit their input. If necessary, put a time limit on the debate.
- Be sensitive to the feelings of members. Look for visual and verbal cues to determine if a member is not happy with the discussion, and then actively manage the situation.
- Consider calling on the least senior members first to express their views; discussions tend to "close down" after senior members express strong views.
- Seek consensus, but unanimity is not required. Sometimes an idea is compromised by trying to get every last person to completely agree.
- Close the meeting by noting achievements. Describe the "next steps" for the Committee as a whole, and individual members.

B. Tips for Presiding over a Meeting

- Open the meeting on time.
- Announce the business to be conducted.
- It is often useful to have the agenda with time lines on an easily viewed flip chart or the like. As you work through the items they can be checked off showing progress and it helps keep things on schedule.
- Recognize members who are entitled to talk; discourage disruptions.
- Restate the issue to be voted on before calling for a vote, and explain the consequences of the vote.
- All important issues should be voted on; don't make assumptions about the feelings of committee members.
- Announce the results of actions taken and explain the follow-through to be taken and by whom.
- Help expedite business. Don't let discussions drift or go on too long.
- If the committee is tasked with identifying problems and solutions, this should be done separately. Avoid discussing solutions until all of the problems have been defined. If the number of problems is excessive, organize them in a rank order to assist the committee's ability to focus.

- Stay with the agenda. Seek the full committee's agreement to change the agenda once it has been announced.
- Close the meeting on time; if extending the time if necessary, the committee should agree.

C. Parliamentary Procedure

- Committees are not required to operate using parliamentary procedure; but the principles of parliamentary procedure are useful and should be employed when necessary. The need for this will depend upon the size of the committee and how well it works together.
- The reason to use parliamentary procedure is to expedite business, maintain order, and to ensure fairness.
- The principles of parliamentary procedure include courtesy, rule of the majority while respecting the rights of the minority, impartiality and taking one item of business at a time. It allows both sides to be adequately heard without interruption.

V. Periodic Reporting to the BOD

A. Written Report of the Committee Meeting

- Include the date, time, and place of the meeting. Note the chairperson's name, members present, and other people in attendance.
- If the committee is charged with accomplishing specific tasks/objectives, it may be helpful to organize the document according to task, noting the progress and current status of each item. This helps the reviewer easily understand the committee's activities to date.
- Note all formal motions and passage or defeat. Formal motions should include the name of the person who introduced it.
- Note all decisions reached, including motions passed and follow-up actions to be taken, with deadlines for implementation.
- Include a brief summary of discussions. Do not attribute individual comments to members.
- Provide information on the time and place of the next meeting.
- Under some circumstances, legal review of the meeting report may be required before distribution to committee members.
- Distribute the report to all committee members, including those who did not attend in a timely manner, preferably within two weeks of the discussion.

- In most instances, meeting reports do not require formal approval by the committee. A good approach is to send the meeting report out immediately after the meeting with a statement to contact the chair or staff liaison if errors are noted. The committee may choose to approve the minutes/meeting report at the beginning of the next meeting.

B. Sample Report to the SAEM Board of Directors (Please submit at least one week in advance of the scheduled BOD meeting)

Date:

Instructions: The purpose of this report is to keep the BOD up to date on key committee work and progress. Do not exceed one page, front and back. This report is not intended to be exhaustive.

If an individual board member so requests, he or she will be provided the full written reports of the meetings of a specific committee.

1. Committee name:

- Chair
- Members
- Staff Liaison
- Board Liaison

2. State the specific committee charges and goals for current year.

3. List any key prior accomplishments.

4. Key accomplishments for this year. This may be done by restating the charges with a brief discussion of the committee's work in that area.

5. List specific policy recommendations to the board. Include fiscal impact if any.

6. Future meeting dates

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