

DAG Busy Governance Guide to Chairing

The chair leads the governing board and ensures that it fulfils its functions well.

1. **Delegate:** Don't do everything yourself, use your board. Make sure your agenda has governor initials indicating who will lead each item. If the majority of initials are yours or your headteacher's, spread the work around to make a point of ensuring every governor gets their initials on the agenda against an item at least once in every academic year. The more you model distributed leadership the easier it will be to find your replacement.
2. **Time is precious:** Make sure your agendas are timed. This will not only enable you to see how on target, behind or ahead you are in terms of finishing your meeting on time, you will also be able to use the agenda as a tool, perhaps restricting governors who are going over time by 'blaming' your agenda timings. Timings will also highlight for new governors which topics are allocated more time and more importance.
3. **Explain:** Your agendas should not read like a shopping list. Explain what you want governors to do, say whether it is a discussion, a vote, a paper or report to read or to bring.
4. **Arrange:** Group items on your agenda to reflect your key areas of activity, under headings such as procedural, strategic, or monitoring. This will provide a framework for your meetings and help your board's focus to stay off operational matters. It will also encourage discussion about what items are strategic when setting the agenda.
5. **Impact:** Some boards use an impact or 'so what' question at the end of the meeting and ask a different governor each meeting to summarise what the board has decided during that meeting that will directly impact on the pupils in their school. These impact statements can then be collated into an annual impact statement that boards can share with stakeholders (parents, pupils and staff) to provide evidence of their work across the year.
6. **The silent governor:** If you have governors who rarely participate in discussions consider working in groups. Rather than have one discussion with 12 people, where only the loudest or most confident have a voice, have 6 discussions with two people at the same time and then feed back to the main meeting.
7. **Challenge:** Encourage governors to challenge effectively and understand the difference between a question asking for information and challenge seeking justification. See [DAG Busy Governance Guide to Challenge](#)
8. **Vote:** If discussion of a contentious issue is going on and on, bring it to a vote. Ask before the vote for those who wish to abstain to make themselves known and then ask for those who remain to vote for or against. This ensures that each governor has to make their mind up beforehand and removes the temptation to wait and see how everyone else is voting.
9. **AOB:** Don't have any! But do make sure that all governors know how to get items for consideration into the agenda setting process.
10. **Once only:** Don't go over things in detail in the full governors meeting that have been covered in sub-committees or by nominated governors. If you have a governor who always wants to know more than the committee minutes provide, suggest they attend that sub-committee meeting.
11. **Training:** Make sure training and visits are an agenda item each meeting. Continue to encourage those who engage with training and support those that don't by finding out why. Remember that Chairs need to undertake specific training too.

12. **Won't Train:** If you have governors that think they don't need to be updated by training or can't physically get to venues, consider different ways to train - in house training and online training. Ensure that your training is recorded in the minutes.
13. **It's all over:** Start on time and end on time, if governors turn up late don't wait or they will always turn up late!
14. **Succession:** It is never too early to start considering who will be the next chair, consider whether the way your board works encourages others to take leadership roles. If the same people hold all the leadership roles then succession will stall. Work on developing a broad pool of leadership experience by allocating specific roles within committees and outside of committees and consider rotating the role of committee chair through the committee members. Try to create an expectation within your board that all governors will take leadership responsibilities.
15. **Relationships:** It is important that both the headteacher and the chair are clear about the nature of their roles and the document '[What governing boards and school leaders should expect from each other](#)' does provide a summary of the expectations of heads and boards. The document states that the school leader and the chair of the governing board should communicate regularly at mutually convenient times, while understanding that the chair is unable to take decisions on behalf of the governing board (except in very limited situations). The relationship between the headteacher and the chair should be close and supportive, but not exclusive. This key relationship can become distorted, perhaps exclusive, where decisions are taken before involving the board or at the opposite end of the spectrum even hostile, where these two key people rarely talk, neither approach is helpful to good governance. The Chair will need to promote and foster good working relationships between all members of the board to encourage effective governance.
16. **Chair's Action:** In normal times the advice would probably be to avoid this option at all costs. This type of action along with the chair having two votes when a board vote is tied can be deeply divisive. The guidance issued by The NGA makes the point that actions that cannot be delegated to a board member and therefore must be a board decision cannot be decided by chairs action. Following the pandemic boards should have developed their virtual governance to such an extent that board responses can be quite swift, this should remove the need for chairs action, but it still remains an option in an emergency.

See '[Role description for governing board chairs](#)' from the National Governance Association for more information.