

AA District 2 Chairing Meetings Workshop, Part 1

Facilitator Guide (45 Minutes, Single Panel): The Chair's Job

Workshop Overview

This workshop prepares members to chair AA meetings with confidence. It covers the responsibilities of a chairperson for speaker and topic meetings, how to keep a meeting focused on the Solution, and how to handle crosstalk, outside issues, and disruptive or unsafe situations. It is built from the District's Chairing Meetings Guidelines and features a single 3-person panel discussion, giving members a chance to hear directly from experienced chairs about the calls they've had to make in the moment.

Total run time is 45 minutes. All times below are elapsed time from the start of the workshop and can be shifted to match your actual start time. Because of the shorter format, there is no scheduled break, so plan to start on time and keep segments tight. The presentation segment below includes the full details from the District's Chairing Meetings Guidelines, so if you're running tight on time, it's fine to read it at a brisk, conversational pace rather than word-for-word.

Roles and Responsibilities

Give each person below their own copy of this guide, highlighted to their section, at least a week before the workshop.

Role	Responsibilities	Who / How Many
Facilitator (MC)	Opens and closes the workshop, keeps the schedule on track, delivers the short teaching segment, and hands off to the panel moderator. Should know the Chairing Meetings Guidelines well.	1 person
Panel Moderator	Introduces the three panelists, asks the prepared questions, manages time, and opens the floor for audience questions. Can be the same person as the Facilitator.	1 person
Panelists	Members with real chairing experience, ideally people who've handled a disruptive member, a crosstalk moment, and an outside issue derail. Send them the panel questions a week ahead so they can reflect rather than script an answer.	3 people
Resource Table Volunteer	Sets up and staffs a table with the Chairing Meetings Guidelines handout and AA literature for anyone who wants to look or take a copy.	1 person
Timekeeper	Optional if the Facilitator wants a dedicated person. Gives a quiet warning before the panel segment ends, so it doesn't run long.	1 person, or the Facilitator doubles up

Materials and Room Setup

- Sign-in sheet and name tags at the entrance
- Chairs arranged so the audience can see the panel table clearly, plus a small table and 3 chairs at the front
- Wall clock or visible timer for the Facilitator and Timekeeper
- Printed copies of the panel questions for the moderator and each panelist

- Printed Chairing a Meeting Quick Reference (see below) as a handout
- Resource table: Chairing Meetings Guidelines, The 12 Steps and 12 Traditions, Alcoholics Anonymous (the Big Book)
- Notepad or index cards at each seat, if you want to collect audience questions in writing

Run of Workshop

Time	Segment	Length	Lead
0:00 to 0:05	Welcome and Opening Frame	5 min	Facilitator
0:05 to 0:25	Presentation: The Chair's Job (full guideline walkthrough)	20 min	Facilitator
0:25 to 0:40	Panel: Chairing in the Room	15 min	Moderator + 3 Panelists
0:40 to 0:43	Audience Q&A	3 min	Moderator
0:43 to 0:45	Closing Reflection and Wrap-Up	2 min	Facilitator

Resources

- Chairing Meetings Guidelines (District document)
- The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions
- Alcoholics Anonymous (the Big Book)

Pre-Workshop Checklist

- Recruit 3 panelists with real chairing experience, at least 2 weeks out
- Confirm the Facilitator and Panel Moderator (these can be the same person)
- Send panelists their questions 1 week ahead so they can reflect, not memorize a script
- Reserve the room and confirm seating for the audience, plus a small panel table up front
- Prepare the Chairing a Meeting Quick Reference handout
- Print this guide for the Facilitator and Moderator, and print the panel questions for each panelist
- Set up the resource table with the Guidelines, Big Book, and 12 and 12
- Prepare a sign-in sheet and name tags if needed

Workshop Format

Welcome and Opening Frame (0:00 to 0:05)

The facilitator opens with the Serenity Prayer, if your group uses one, then welcomes the room and frames the topic.

Hello and welcome, everyone. Thank you for being here today. Chairing a meeting is an honor, not a chore, and it comes with real responsibility. You've probably chaired a meeting, are thinking about it, or just want to

understand what your own chairperson is doing up there and why. Whatever brought you in, you're in the right place.

Tonight we're going to talk about what a chairperson actually does: choosing a speaker or a topic, keeping a meeting on the Solution, and handling the moments that get uncomfortable, like crosstalk, outside issues, or someone who's had too much to drink walking through the door.

Here's how this workshop goes. We've got a short presentation, one panel discussion with people who've sat in the chair themselves, and time at the end for your questions. Let's get started.

Presentation: The Chair's Job (0:05 to 0:25)

The facilitator delivers this teaching, grounded word-for-word in the District's Chairing Meetings Guidelines. Read it in your own words if you're comfortable, but don't cut the detail; the specific scripts are what make this useful.

Why the Newcomer Comes First

To be a chairperson, secretary, or lead for an AA meeting comes with certain responsibilities. We'll call it all chairing tonight. Chairing is an honor, and it should be treated as such. Don't take the responsibility lightly.

You've surely heard that the newcomer is the most important person in the room. We demonstrate that fact, not by allowing someone to share about something they know nothing about, but by making sure they hear a message of hope, a message about the solution of the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

If you're worried that meetings will start to feel repetitive, or that speakers start to sound cookie-cutter, remember the newcomer hasn't heard it as often as you have. Alcoholism and the solution, the 12 Steps of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, have not changed since the book was published in 1939.

Speaker Meetings

Choose, or select another member to choose, an appropriate speaker. Call the speaker a couple of days before to remind them. Have an appropriate backup speaker in case the speaker cancels.

Select someone who has a sponsor, has completed the 12 Steps, and sponsors others. Your speaker should be willing to dress up a little. Guys should wear a tie or a tucked-in, nice shirt. Women should wear something business casual.

Introduce the speaker by first name only. While the speaker is at the podium, try to step aside or sit in the audience.

When the speaker has finished, thank them profusely, but reserve personal comments for private conversations later.

Topic Meetings and Discussions

Choose an appropriate topic from AA-approved literature, or select someone in advance to choose it. Don't let the audience choose the topic. That ensures topics stay appropriate and encourages discussion of the Solution: getting a sponsor, doing the 12 Steps with a sponsor, sponsoring others.

Gratitude is a lovely idea, but the newcomer is not likely to relate to it yet. Acceptance is part of one of the many stories in the Big Book, but it's better changed to Surrender, as in Steps 1 through 3, as a meeting topic. While the acceptance story is wonderful, it is not part of the Program of Alcoholics Anonymous, and shouldn't be studied and glorified as though it were.

Avoid multiple topics. Try to help your audience stay on the selected topic.

Quiet or Low-Attended Meetings

What if you've got a topic meeting and only 5 attendees, and 3 of them are newcomers? Have a Quick-Speak Topic Meeting. A Quick-Speak Topic Meeting is when the sharers become mini-speakers.

Non-newcomers share at length about how they got a sponsor, did the Steps, and now sponsor others. If you don't have quite that much time, have each share on only one aspect, for example, how you get your sponsor, John, and move on down the line of non-newcomers.

Or pick a topic from the first 164 pages of the Big Book and have a Quick-Speak Meeting using the Big Book as the source. Our message should always be the same: get a sponsor, take the Steps, sponsor a newcomer.

Controlling the Meeting: Timeliness

The chairperson assures that the meeting begins and ends at the designated times. No exceptions, except of course by two or three minutes at most.

It can be awkward for the chair when meetings are large, and not everyone has the opportunity to share. Nevertheless, the chair must stop the meeting and could say, I'm sorry that not everyone got a chance to share. If you need to talk, please get with one of us afterward. We'd love to talk with you.

If it is moments into overtime and there appears to be no end to the current speaker's talking, the chair should gently cut them off with a statement such as, "I'm sorry, we're out of time," and then end the meeting. Remember that the opportunity to talk with other AA members after the meeting is especially important to newcomers. This opportunity is missed when a meeting goes too long, and members have to leave.

Each group is autonomous under Tradition Four and may decide, via a group conscience, the time frame for each meeting and may extend it within reason when needed. It is suggested, however, that a maximum time be selected and adhered to.

Managing the Meeting

In sharing at topic meetings, members should stick to the Solution. When members are sharing inappropriately, it is the chair's responsibility to gently cut them off and say, thanks for sharing, John. Please stay after the meeting so we can get with you. Who would like to share next? Don't give them an opportunity to respond to you, but check with them after the meeting to make sure someone is with them.

Crosstalk is when people talk specifically to another person during the meeting, offering direct advice, corrections, or similar comments. It's best to say, I'm sorry, but we don't have crosstalk in our meetings. If you don't know what crosstalk is, see me after the meeting. Do not wait until they have finished; cut them off gently. Do not use the term crosstalk without offering to discuss what it is at a later time.

The same goes for a pontificating old-timer. If the Solution is not being discussed, but rather some long story about an AA picnic, cut off the old-timer gently by saying, "Thanks, John." Great story. I'd love to hear more about it later. Does someone have something they'd like to share?

The chair can share at any time between other shares. If you have a comment, make it. You don't need to introduce yourself as an alcoholic again; you've already done so at the beginning.

Make sure that what you share adds to what has been shared, and wouldn't be considered feedback or crosstalk, unless what was shared is really out there. When someone says something really out there, you'll need to bring the focus back to the Solution. Share something appropriate to that. Don't be afraid to remind everyone of the topic.

Traditions Four and Ten

Tradition Four concerns group autonomy and allows each group to set its own rules for meeting procedures. In its long form: With respect to its own affairs, each A.A. group should be responsible to no other authority than its own conscience. But when its plans also concern the welfare of neighboring groups, those groups ought to be consulted. And no group, regional committee, or individual should ever take any action that might greatly affect A.A. as a whole without conferring with the trustees of the General Service Board. On such issues, our common welfare is paramount.

Tradition Ten concerns the handling of outside issues in the group or its meetings. Outside issues include religious beliefs, political opinions, moral judgments, and opinions regarding lifestyle choices, race, socioeconomic status, or any type of prejudice. In its long form: No A.A. group or member should ever, in a way that implicates A.A., express any opinion on outside controversial issues, particularly those of politics, alcohol reform, or sectarian religion. The Alcoholics Anonymous groups oppose no one. Concerning such matters, they can express no views whatever.

Handling Trouble

Although most meetings are calm and orderly, uncomfortable situations occasionally arise. A member may express strong opinions on outside issues that make attendees feel unwelcome, attacked, or slighted. They may be unruly and loud, perhaps even threatening. Or perhaps someone is disruptive and clearly drunk.

These situations can and should be handled firmly, with order restored, so that all members feel comfortable and safe. Simply state, we don't have any opinions on outside issues here in the Middletown group. Who would like to help us with today's topic?

If a member is drunk and loud, the chair may ask a secure member of the same sex to take him or her outside for a talk, instructing that they are welcome as long as they sit and listen without creating a commotion. All of our members are here to hear the solution and stay sober, so we are respectful of each other. Many a wet drunk has sat through a meeting without incident. They are certainly welcome.

However, if someone poses a clear verbal or physical threat in the meeting, stronger action will be required. The chair should interrupt the speaker, asking them to sit down and allow others to speak. He or she may be asked to leave until they can calm down. Some members may want to follow the member out and give them a phone number.

In a clearly volatile situation, the chair must consider the safety of the group and themselves and have someone dial 911. Members are at risk when trying to handle violent attendees who may be under the influence. We do not take the law into our own hands.

That's the job in full. Protect the newcomer's experience, protect the Solution-focused conversation, and protect the room's safety. Now I want to bring up a few people who do this every week. I'll turn it over to (insert name) to introduce our panel.

Panel: Chairing in the Room (0:25 to 0:40)

Three panelists with real chairing experience. The moderator briefly introduces each panelist, then reads this framing before working through the questions below, leaving room for panelists to build on each other's answers.

Thanks. Tonight, we've got three people who have actually sat in the chair and had to make these calls in real time. I'll introduce them, and then we'll work through a few questions together. Feel free to jump in and build on what the others say.

- Tell us about a time you had to redirect a topic meeting back to the Solution. What did you actually say?
- How do you decide between a speaker meeting, a topic meeting, and a Quick-Speak format?

- Walk us through the last time you had to interrupt crosstalk. How did the room react?
- What's your approach when someone brings up an outside issue, like politics, religion, or something similarly controversial?
- Have you ever had to handle someone who was intoxicated or disruptive? What did you do, and would you do it differently now?
- How do you close a meeting on time when someone's still sharing, without it feeling harsh?
- What's the hardest part of chairing that nobody warns you about before you do it?

Add or remove questions as time permits.

Invite questions from the audience during the last few minutes, or move directly into the Audience Q&A segment below.

Audience Q&A (0:40 to 0:43)

The moderator keeps all three panelists up front to field audience questions.

Let's open it up to the room. All three panelists, please stay up front. Who has a question?

Closing Reflection and Wrap-Up (0:43 to 0:45)

Facilitator returns to the podium.

Thank you all for coming. We hope you leave with a clearer sense of what the chair actually does, and a little more confidence the next time you're the one up front.

Before we close, let's do a quick reflection together. Think about the last meeting you attended. Was the chair protecting the newcomer's experience? Was the meeting kept on the Solution? If you've chaired before, what's one thing from tonight you'd do differently next time?

Here's a quick reference to take with you. Regarding crosstalk: I'm sorry, but we don't allow it in our meetings. For outside issues, we don't have opinions on outside issues here. For running long: I'm sorry, we're out of time. And if things ever get unsafe, don't handle it alone. Get help, and call 911 if needed.

Chairing a meeting isn't about running a tight ship for its own sake. It's about making sure the person who walked in, scared, hears exactly what they came for: that there's a solution and that it works.

Thank you again to our panelists and volunteers for making tonight possible. We have the Chairing Meetings Guidelines available at the resource table if you'd like to take a look.