

# Strategies for Chairing Gender-Inclusive Meetings

To yield the best outcomes and build a positive, productive environment, it is important that parliamentary meetings are inclusive, allowing for all participants' contributions to be heard and valued.

When meetings are male-dominated, women participants may be at a disadvantage as a result of internalized negative biases and stereotypes that are a product of our socialisation. For example, women are traditionally viewed as relationship-oriented, nurturing, expressive, and warm, while men are traditionally seen as dominant, self-oriented, assertive, ambitious, and the public voice on issues. These ideas can manifest in harmful ways in work environments and minimize women's voices.

**Male parliamentarians who are allies for gender equality can identify and proactively prevent and correct these problems. Below are some practical strategies for conducting meetings that promote equitable participation.**

## Why is this important?

Studies show that women are...

- More likely to be **interrupted** by both men and women.
- More likely to be asked to **take on tasks** that can interfere with their participation in meetings (coordinating refreshments, recording minutes); they are seen as **selfish** if they decline to do so, whereas men who decline are seen as busy.
- Thought to **speak more** than men in conversations even when they do not.
- Perceived to be **less competent and less helpful** if they speak more often than their peers; whereas men who speak more often are seen as more competent and more helpful.
- Less likely to have their contributions seen as **valuable**.
- Perceived as forming a **larger part** of groups than they do



## Scheduling and logistics

- Hold meetings at times that are less likely to interfere with caregiving and family responsibilities and take decisions there, rather than in informal settings or outside of regular work hours.
- When organizing community meetings (e.g. with constituents) request a safe and accessible location and time and advertise relevant services (e.g. what disabilities can be accommodated, if childcare is available, etc.).
- Fairly divide administrative tasks necessary for meeting preparation and proceedings – such as note-taking or preparing refreshments – among participants or the coordinating group. Where appropriate, encourage everyone to be responsible for their own notes or refreshments.



## Agenda preparation

- Invite participants to contribute to developing the agenda so that everyone is more likely to feel ownership and take part in the discussions.
- Alternate who chairs the meeting, or assign different participants to lead the discussion during various moments on the agenda to guarantee wider participation.



## Shared meeting space

- Consider gender balance and diversity when inviting speakers to present or witnesses to testify before a committee in order to bring a variety of perspectives to discussions.
- Ensure that everyone has physical space in the room, is visible to the chairperson, and can see audio-visual supports and/or resource materials.



## Respectful and participatory conversations

- Model gender-sensitive language and communication free of gender stereotypes.
- Establish collective guidelines for meetings, which could include a stipulation to prohibit interruptions.
- Interject if an interruption occurs to invite the first speaker to finish their point, and speak privately to individuals who frequently interrupt to bring the issue to their attention.
- Pay attention to individuals with a pattern of speaking less and invite them to offer their thoughts.
- If agenda items generate particular interest, ask each participant for their thoughts or implement a time limit on contributions to provide equal speaking opportunities.



## Highlighting women's contributions

- Repeat good ideas and attribute them to their original owner, and acknowledge who inspired your thinking when building on previously shared points.
- If an idea is repeated without credit being given, say something like "It sounds like you agree with what Ms. Green said a few minutes ago."



## Wrapping up

- Consider taking decisions by consensus if women are out-numbered in the room as this gives more weight to individual voices that may be otherwise marginalized.
- Distribute responsibility for "action items" in a way that does not resort to traditional stereotypes.
- Send a follow-up note after the meeting to circulate minutes, inviting corrections or additions before the final document is shared; welcome additional feedback on the meeting and its outcomes via email or in person.

### References

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