

Establishing Professional Relationships with Staff



Student Resource

For the purpose of this document, "committee" refers to any governance or decision-making body with membership from both students and staff. This may include, but is not limited to: working groups, steering groups, councils, and boards.

As a student representative your relationship with academic staff will be different to the one you may have as a student. It is important early on that you are provided with a clear understanding of the requirements of your role on the committee and what is expected of you.

You will be attending the same meetings where you will be working collaboratively towards solutions and are on equal terms in decision-making.

Initially this may require some adjustments but remember your voice and input as a student is valued. Both academic staff and student members of committees have a common goal to improve the student experience and the operations of the University.



Keep in mind: Students and staff perspectives may come from different angles. Be respectful of various viewpoints but be true in representing your views and those of students generally.

Tips to get you started:

- Try to **communicate** with the committee chair you will be working with, soon after your appointment as a rep.
- Read the **Terms of Reference** for the committee/ working party and seek out clarification if need be. This includes when and how often meetings will be held.
- Committees will vary in their **purpose** and **structure** so try to be across these early on. What is the scope of the committee and what type of issues and information does it deal with?
- Be **professional** and **reliable**. That is, be punctual to meetings, follow up actions that have been set and stay informed.
- Ask questions of staff as they will have greater **experience**.
- Ensure you know the established means of communication with the staff you are working with. **Respond promptly** to requests or inquiries.

Engaging and Connecting with other Students



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Depending on the scope of your role you may be required to gather the thoughts and feedback of your peers to provide to your committee. If you are unsure whether this is expected of you or not it is worth checking with the Chair of the committee if your role is not clearly defined in a Terms of Reference.

If your involvement requires you to provide a representative voice of students generally, then you will need to establish your own profile and engage with your peers to understand their opinions, needs, and concerns on various matters.

You will need to collect and collate information from your peers, which means being accessible and approachable. You can do this by either engaging with them actively or passively. Most likely, you will use a combination of both approaches to be successful.

Tips for effective focus groups

- **Get the word out:** Make sure students are aware of when and where the focus group is meeting and give plenty of warning to allow for students to attend. Ask for RSVPs so you know how many people to expect on the day.
- **Get help:** Ask staff for any resources or assistance they can provide to support you, including room bookings or advertising that the focus group is happening.
- **Your audience matters:** Ensure that within the group of students invited to attend a focus group that there is a variety of perspective and diversity of voices. Determine those who may be most impacted by an issue. Provide background information before the session.

Active engagement Ideas:

Face-to-face, informally on campus. This will raise your profile, give you a feel for your peers' opinions and is a great starting point.

Email is a great mode to inform students about forums, focus groups, surveys or events. It also allows students to touch base with their reps at any given point in time.

Focus groups can be a helpful and efficient means to collect student input. Students can be brought together to discuss major changes or relevant issues and garner suggestions. If you want advice and support on organising a focus group you should contact the USASA Student Voice team.

Passive engagement Ideas:

While passive engagement may not give you an immediate insight, when planned well, this method of collecting student perspectives can provide robust **evidence and data** to present to committees.



Examples include **surveys** and **polls**.

Work with university staff to find an effective means of reaching larger groups of students and share your ideas with your committee.



Meeting Etiquette and Procedures

For the purpose of this document, "committee" refers to any governance or decision-making body with membership from both students and staff. This may include, but is not limited to: working groups, steering groups, councils, and boards.

Attending meetings is likely to be a large part of your role as a student representative. Meetings provide the platform for the discussion of ideas and issues, and most importantly are the forums for decision making. It allows you the opportunity to voice your perspective as a student and/or the thoughts of other students as well depending on your role.

Meeting Procedures

If you don't have much experience being on committees, don't be too concerned as you will soon become familiar with the procedures and protocols expected. You should also receive some form of induction before your first meeting, but if not, don't be afraid to contact the committee Chair and ask some questions, including:

- How does the committee run? When are agendas sent out? Can I suggest agenda items?
- What is the schedule and length of meetings?
- How and who do I inform if I cannot attend a meeting?
- How often (if at all) am I expected to give a report? How can I request this opportunity?
- How can I access minutes and any required pre-reading?
- How and who can I communicate [with] between meetings if I have any questions?

Meeting Etiquette

- Make sure you have carefully read the agenda and any minutes prior to the meeting and highlight items that are especially relevant to students.
- Make notes on the points you want to make; bring clearly formatted and expressed documents to table as support and evidence if required.
- Do the required reading and stay informed.
- Gather student input and feedback. It is their perspective you are representing.
- Speak confidently and respectfully. Make sure you go through the Chair and listen carefully to others' viewpoints.
- Make sure you follow up on any actions assigned to you.
- How and who can I communicate [with] between meetings if I have any questions?

More tips:

- **Don't check your phone:** Keep it off and away. If you're using it to view the papers, make sure vibrations and sounds are turned off.
- **Stay interested:** Look at the person speaking or the visual aids. Staring out the window or at your phone isn't a good look.
- **Get there on time:** Arrive early if you can (not too early) and make sure you have brought everything you need.
- **Avoid side conversations:** Don't speak when someone else is presenting and avoid getting in off-topic conversations with the person next to you.



Presenting to Committees

For the purpose of this document, "committee" refers to any governance or decision-making body with membership from both students and staff. This may include, but is not limited to: working groups, steering groups, councils, and boards.

There may be occasions where a presentation is the most effective way of putting forward an idea or a set of findings to a committee.

This may be something that the committee has asked of you, or alternatively this may have been a suggestion you raised at a previous meeting that the committee has agreed on.

Sometimes a point raised in a presentation may be disagreed upon by other members of the committee – don't lose heart. A difference of opinion can often be a good thing and can generate further discussion.

Your role when presenting is not to appease people, but rather to highlight and explore your own findings as it relates to the committee.

Consider your audience:

In some committees the membership will be quite diverse. Approach the use of slang or pop-culture references with caution, as some members may not be familiar with what you mean, and your message could be misconstrued or misunderstood.

It is great to imprint your personality to your presentations but be sure to keep it professional.

Tips for presenting online:

- Check with the meeting Chair prior to the meeting that you have **screen-sharing** capability and your audio is clear.
- Keep the **camera** always focused on eye-level.
- If your presentation is using PowerPoint or another visual aid, ensure the **content is engaging** and not containing large blocks of text.
- Ensure you have an appropriate **background**, either an office space or a professional background filter.
- If appropriate, encourage committee members to **use the chat** during the presentation to make it more interactive.

Nervous? Just remember...

- As a member of the committee your opinion matters as much as everyone else's.
- People want to hear what you have to say.
- Presenting is not mandatory but rather a unique opportunity to have the floor and allow the committee to hear student voices.



Navigating Diverse Opinions

For the purpose of this document, "committee" refers to any governance or decision-making body with membership from both students and staff. This may include, but is not limited to: working groups, steering groups, councils, and boards.

The more diverse the committee the larger the pool of ideas and opinions that can be represented. Although this is overall a good thing, there are obstacles that must be managed to get the best out of a committee.

While some committees will have a code of conduct and rules outlined strictly in their Terms of Reference, others may not.

What is ok:

- **Disagreeing** with the a point or idea that has been raised based on its merits.
- **Seeking clarification** about why an idea has been dismissed, or why an idea was adopted in the first place.
- **Providing clarification** or updated information if something is incorrectly presented as a fact.

What isn't ok:

- **Dismissing** ideas based on **personal attributes**, such as age, gender or ethnicity, but also job title or apparent role on the committee.
- Making **accusations or comments** about someone's **physical or mental health**, even if you think it provides context.
- Using **discriminatory language** or making comments that could be interpreted as racist, sexist, ageist or discriminatory towards a particular person or group.

More tips:

- The loudest voice in the room does not always represent the consensus of the committee.
- Decisions made during committees will often impact a large demographic of students and staff.
- Speak up on your committee if you feel there are particular cohorts whose perspectives are not being considered.
- If you notice that particular voices are not being listened to (either on your own committee or more broadly) you can address this with the Chair.



Note: These tips are not just for you but for all members on the committee. If you see someone else exhibiting unacceptable behaviour, raise it with the Chair after the meeting. If your concerns are about the Chair, you can contact the USASA Student Voice team for advice.

Managing Conflicts of Interest



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For the purpose of this document, "committee" refers to any governance or decision-making body with membership from both students and staff. This may include, but is not limited to: working groups, steering groups, councils, and boards.

A conflict of interest may arise where the direct or indirect personal interests of a committee member are competing against their obligations to the committee.

A real or perceived conflict of interest should be avoided where possible and always declared. If you are unsure on whether you have a conflict of interest on a particular item, it is worth clarifying with the Chair of the committee in advance of the meeting commencing.

The three types of conflicts of interest:

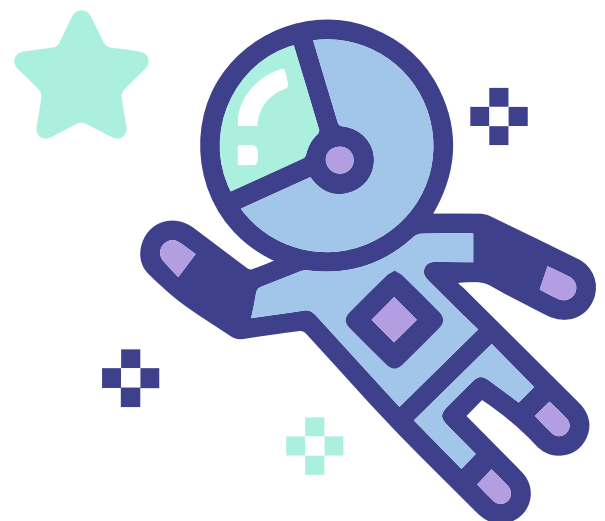
- **Actual:** where you would immediately stand to benefit from a decision.
- **Potential:** where you may stand to benefit from a decision in the future due to personal interests.
- **Perceived:** where it could appear to a reasonable person that your personal interests could influence your responsibilities (whether or not they actually do).

Declaring a conflict of interest

- The best practice to avoiding any conflict of interest is to notify the Chair immediately. This is one of the reasons why it is so important to read the committee papers prior to the meeting taking place.
- To ensure your conflict of interest does not sway other members of the committee, any informal discussions on the item beforehand should be treated with caution.
- When it comes time to discussion or voting, remind the committee again of your conflict of interest so that they can determine whether any steps should be taken.

Examples:

- If you personally stand to financially benefit from a decision made.
- If an item will benefit a direct connection to you, e.g. the committee decides to hire a vendor for an event and your uncle owns the business.
- If you are voting on whether the committee should support a government initiative, you have an affiliation with a political party or activist group.
- If you are working for a rival institution or provider (e.g., working at Flinders University but studying and sitting on a committee at UniSA).



Benefits of being a Student Representative



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In addition to ensuring your voice is heard in University decision-making, being a student representative offers great opportunities and experiences to develop personal and professional skills that will be useful when applying for jobs, scholarships, or other positions.

These skills include:

- Increased **confidence** through public speaking, committee meetings and presentations
- Rhetorical skills by using **persuasive** language to construct compelling arguments
- Critical thinking and **problem-solving** by analysing data and information before making judgements
- **Interpersonal skills** such as empathy and active listening skills by interacting with peers and decision-makers
- Decision-making skills and developing **sound judgement**
- Understanding **governance processes**
- Organisational and **time management** skills

It is important that you keep a record of your experience and aim to continually develop your skills and knowledge and look for opportunities to do so.

Helpful Hints:

- Ask for **constructive feedback** from your peers and the committee you are working with.
- Make a list of the **skills** and knowledge that you feel you have developed well and those that you would like to develop further.
- Look for professional learning and **development opportunities** to expand your skill set.
- Seek out a **mentor** who can offer you advice and feedback. Find out what experiences and opportunities they have found useful and rewarding.
- Keep an **updated resumé** that tracks your experience and clearly demonstrates the skills and knowledge you have developed with concrete examples.
- Keep a file of any **certificates** or acknowledgement received.
- Be open to **new experiences** and opportunities to enhance your expertise.



Managing Confidentiality

For the purpose of this document, “committee” refers to any governance or decision-making body with membership from both students and staff. This may include, but is not limited to: working groups, steering groups, councils, and boards.

While you are participating in University governance and decision-making, from time to time items will be raised that are confidential and/or sensitive in nature. Learning how to manage confidentiality is also a skill that you need for your career beyond University. In carrying out your roles, you must make sure that you do not disclose or discuss information with anyone who is not authorised to know it. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are upholding the standards of integrity and confidentiality that are appropriately expected in each situation.

Confidentiality in Governance

Transparency, accountability, and openness are important principles in governance, but there are many situations where upholding confidentiality is appropriate and may even be required by University policy or by law. For example, personal details of students or staff members, employment contracts, academic records, sensitive data, and commercial proposals are all examples of information that is confidential. Confidential information will usually be labelled specifically, and some decision-making groups always have an expectation of confidentiality.

As well as protecting personal and commercial privacy, confidentiality encourages open and frank discussions in meetings. The ability to talk through ideas without prejudice enables more authentic discussions. Even if a meeting discussion isn't marked as explicitly confidential, it is a matter of professional courtesy to treat opinions and ideas voiced by committee members discreetly and avoid sharing information outside of a professional context by engaging in gossip or having discussions in public places.

Breaches of confidentiality can occur when someone willfully reveals information to an unauthorised third party, but is also possible to breach confidentiality by mistake.

Data Integrity and Privacy

Part of managing confidentiality also includes making sure that you are a good custodian of documents and that you deal with materials in a secure way. It also means ensuring that you attend any virtual meetings from private locations where you will not be overheard.

You should never leave confidential documentation in places where unauthorised people can find them. Printed materials should be stored where only you can access them, and digital materials should be password protected and never accessed on shared devices.

Even if the people who might be able to hear are not interested in the information, e.g. your parents, housemates, or your kids, it is good professional practice to avoid this. You should never virtually attend a confidential meeting in a public place such as the student lounge or computer pools.

Good practice:

- Plan ahead and ensure you can attend virtual meetings from a private place where you won't be overheard.
- Remove files from your devices when you no longer need them and dispose of physical copies securely.
- Ask yourself, “would I have access to this information if I was not a member of this committee?” If no, it is probably confidential. If you're not sure, ask the Chair.

Things to avoid:

- Never discuss confidential information with or within earshot of someone who is not authorised to know it.
- Never send confidential papers to public printers.
- Never gossip about confidential matters.

Glossary of Governance Terms



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Please note these are general definitions and there might be variations to the language used in whatever decision-making group you are part of. If you are unsure of the specific meaning of a word, you can ask the Chair to clarify.

Abstention: When a person elects not to vote on a particular decision, despite having voting rights. An abstention does not count for a vote in favour nor a vote against. An abstention is usually recorded in the minutes.

Agenda: A list of items to be discussed at a meeting. An agenda is sometimes also referred to as the "order of business", as it is usually followed in the order that it is written out. You should expect to receive an agenda and, where appropriate, supporting documentation prior to the meeting taking place.

Apology: Notice in advance that a person will not be present in a meeting. If someone says "I will be an apology for next month's meeting" it means they will not be attending. You should always provide an apology in advance if you know you cannot attend.

Chair: The person who presides over a meeting. They conduct the formalities of a meeting (such as declaring it open and closed), follow the order of business set out in the agenda, and facilitate discussion. The process of running a meeting can also be called chairing.

Committee Secretary: A member of the committee whose role it is to record the Minutes of the meeting and send out the agenda and papers.

Consensus: When everyone generally agrees on a certain topic.

Delegation: When a group or individual assigns its decision-making power to someone else. Groups with higher authority will often delegate power to sub-committees to carry out specific duties on their behalf. Delegation is commonly used to share responsibility and workload in governance processes; however, the delegating group remains ultimately responsible for any outcomes.

Ex-Officio: An individual who is a member of a committee because of their job role, not because they specifically nominated to be a member. For example, the Vice Chancellor is an ex-officio member of the Governance and Nominations Committee because the policy states that the Vice Chancellor will be a member. If the Vice Chancellor were to leave the position the new Vice Chancellor automatically becomes a member of the Committee and doesn't have to nominate for the position.

Governance: This term describes the way that something is governed, as well as the range of processes that cause governance to be enacted. These may include the principles, values, and rules of organisation that cause it to achieve its goals, mission, and business. At UniSA, governance is achieved through the setting of policy, procedures, and guidelines, as well as through a hierarchical network of decision-making Boards and Committees that ultimately report to the University Council.

Handover: A handover is when someone who is leaving a role passes information that is relevant to the role to their successor. For example, if there is a student representative working on a special project of the University who graduates, they might prepare a written handover or meet with their successor to pass on the knowledge and information needed to take over the role. Handovers are not always possible, but they can ensure that progress is not lost when personnel changes. However, a handover is rarely an adequate substitute for comprehensive induction processes and mentorship from senior group members.



Minutes: A written document outlining the details of a meeting. As a rule, minutes include the time, date, and location of a meeting, who was in attendance or absent, and a summary of the discussions and decisions made in that meeting. Minutes are usually recorded by the person acting as the Committee Secretary, and they are distributed to committee members after each meeting. It is also customary to approve the previous meeting's minutes at the next meeting to give members the opportunity to correct or affirm anything attributed to them.

Motion: A formal proposal of decision put before a meeting. This might include a proposal of an action to take, but it might also indicate a formal declaration affirming a position or opinion by that committee. Motions occur in formal decision-making settings, and usually require a "mover" to make the proposal, and a "second" to demonstrate wider support.

Policy: "Policy" may refer to the range of rules that govern the internal conduct of an organisation's affairs, but it may also refer to a specific type of governance instrument. Policies are often accompanied by written "procedures", which outline how the policy must be enacted.

Proxy: When a member of a decision-making group nominates another person to fill their role on a temporary basis. This can include casting votes on their behalf. Not all decision-making groups recognise proxies, and this should be clarified through the Terms of Reference of that group if you are unsure.

Quorum: The minimum number of members present for a meeting to be considered valid. This is a common consideration in governance bodies because it ensures that decisions and discussions made by a committee have received enough input from members of that group in order to consider it a decision of that committee. It is also a check and balance to ensure that proceedings do not go ahead if particular people are not present.

Standing Orders: The rules that govern the conduct of meetings. Not all decision-making groups have official standing orders, but if you are a member of a group that has them you should become familiar with them so you understand the expected processes and what rules you need to follow during meetings.

Starring: When meeting agendas are very long and contain numerous written supporting documents (such as reports for noting or papers outlining some decisions), the chair may elect not to verbally discuss each agenda item. If an item is "starred", it will be discussed during the meeting.

Terms of Reference: A document that sets out the scope, structure, and limitations of a decision-making/ advisory group as established by a higher authority. The newly established committee is bound to follow the directions of the Terms of Reference and the higher authority has the power to amend them or disestablish the group. The Terms of Reference will usually set out the roles of members and will be your first port of call when examining the purpose of a committee. All members should be familiar with the Terms of Reference to ensure they are acting within its powers and intended spirit.