



Better Late Than Never
Group of Narcotics Anonymous

Conroe, Texas

Meeting Chairperson
Responsibility Guidelines

Revised October 2020

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Purpose

This document is a training and reference manual for current and future Meeting Chairpersons for the Better Late Than Never (BLTN) Group of Narcotics Anonymous. We have included specific requirements and responsibilities for this position from our Group By-Laws plus advice on how to handle a wide range of common and less common situations that might arise during an NA meeting.

We recognize that volunteering as a Meeting Chairperson might be a first NA service commitment for our group members. We hope that the collective wisdom expressed in this document will make this a positive NA service experience and that our members will continue supporting the large number of weekly meetings in the BLTN schedule.

Who is a Meeting Chairperson?

The chairperson for a Narcotics Anonymous recovery meeting is an addict who is primarily responsible for maintaining an 'atmosphere of recovery' during the meeting.

There is a marked difference between being primarily responsible and being solely responsible. As members of NA, each of us is responsible. Not only for our own conduct at a meeting, but to help educate the less experienced members on how our meetings operate and what each member should do to help further our primary purpose. To make one person solely responsible for that task would set them apart from the group by making them an ultimate authority figure. See Traditions 2 and 12.

Why Do Meetings Need a Chairperson?

We give the chairperson the primary responsibility for maintaining order in our meetings so the NA message of recovery can be heard without obstruction. If any of us could talk whenever, as often, and for as long as we wanted, only those members with the strongest personalities would ever get a chance to share.

Desirable Qualities for a Meeting Chairperson

The responsibilities of the Meeting Chairperson are a serious matter. Suffering and recovering addicts are depending on us. When you volunteer to chair a meeting, please read these guidelines and try to follow them to the best of your ability. Experience has shown that the following qualities are valuable for a Meeting Chairperson:

- A working knowledge of the 12 Traditions of NA
- An active NA step program (you are working the steps with a Sponsor)
- The ability to be assertive
- The willingness to be patient and tolerant
- The ability to express yourself in a loving manner
- A willingness to keep and fulfill the commitments to open, chair, and close the meeting
- A willingness to hand off these responsibilities to another member at the end of your term

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How Do I Become a BLTN Meeting Chairperson?

At BLTN we use a simple sign-up system for our Meeting Chairpersons. The board in the back of our meeting room shows the current Chairperson for each meeting. If a slot is open, it is OK to sign up if you meet the qualifications and are willing to fulfill the time commitment and other responsibilities.

If you want to chair a particular meeting, it is best to speak with the current Chairperson for that meeting and express interest in taking over the meeting when a handoff is due.

Review BLTN Group By-Laws

The September 2020 revision of the BLTN Group By-Laws added specific sections covering the requirements, responsibilities, and removal for a Meeting Chairperson. It is important and useful for our Meeting Chairpersons to understand these provisions. These by-laws sections are presented and discussed in the following sections.

BLTN By-Laws Section 13 (a)

Philosophy: The Meeting Chairperson position and its associated responsibilities are often a first service commitment for NA members. The Group encourages as many members as possible to participate in this role.

Significance: Many BLTN members have identified a Meeting Chairperson responsibility in early recovery as a positive influence for staying clean. The By-Laws, this Guide, and our meeting format are written so that members can confidently lead our recovery meetings even when they are fairly new to the NA program of recovery. Other members have expressed a desire that a meeting chairperson not lead a particular meeting 'for life'. The By-Laws include specific provisions such as a maximum chairperson term limits to encourage more members to participate in this role.

BLTN By-Laws Section 13 (b)

Meeting Chairperson Requirements

- Minimum clean time of 90 days
- Familiar with the 'Chairperson's Responsibility Guidelines'
- Willing to hold position for 3 months minimum
- Willing to release position after 6 months maximum

Significance: These are the minimum requirements for our Meeting Chairperson. Note that specific training on this Guide is not a requirement, only familiarity with the document. Attending a training workshop is definitely recommended. The 6-month maximum term is a new requirement added in the September 2020 By-Laws revision.

BLTN By-Laws Section 13 (c)

Meeting Chairperson Responsibilities

- Leads the meeting following the format approved by Group Conscience
- Acts as a liaison between the group and the individual member by encouraging and assisting members during the meeting

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- Arrives 15 minutes prior to the meeting start
- Arranges for a fill-in Meeting Chairperson if unable to attend a meeting
- When ready to hand off the position, announces at the end of the meeting that the position is coming open and seeks volunteers
- Assists the incoming Meeting Chairperson on understanding the Chairperson's Responsibility Guidelines, the Meeting Format, and how to run the meeting. An overlap of two meetings is suggested for a handoff.

Significance: This section from our By-Laws is similarly intended to be a minimum set of responsibilities. This Guide document provides significant additional information on how to effectively fulfill these responsibilities. Note that the By-Laws specifically address how a handoff to a new Meeting Chairperson should happen. This was added in the By-Laws to make this a standard process known to all.

BLTN By-Laws Section 13 (d)

Removal for a Meeting Chairperson

- It is intended that a Meeting Chairperson will willingly hand off responsibilities to their successor at the end of their term.
- When necessary, a Meeting Chairperson may be removed by a majority vote of Group Conscience. Typical reasons for removing a Meeting Chairperson include:
 - Missing 3 or more consecutive meetings without arranging for a replacement Meeting Chairperson
 - Not following the approved meeting format or Chairperson's Responsibility Guidelines
 - Not maintaining order during the meeting
 - Consistently allowing the meeting to drift off-topic
 - Not effectively carrying the NA message
- A Meeting Chairperson removed by Group Conscience vote shall be prohibited from signing up as a Meeting Chairperson until either:
 - 6 months have passed since the removal vote
 - Group Conscience votes to reinstate Meeting Chairperson privileges

Significance: This section was added in the September 2020 By-Laws revision to clarify that our Group Conscience meetings are the vehicle for removing a Meeting Chairperson. It is not OK to simply erase someone's name from the board when they do not show up a few times for their scheduled meeting.

The first bullet point is important. Our Group Conscience does not intend to be involved in the normal changeout of Meeting Chairpersons. It should happen peacefully as one term ends and another volunteer is identified. In the second bullet point, Group Conscience retains the right to remove a Meeting Chairperson by vote when appropriate. In the third bullet point, when Group Conscience does get involved, there is a small penalty for a non-peaceful handoff. We impose a 6-month waiting period for resuming Meeting Chairperson privileges or we require that the member ask for a vote reinstating these privileges at a Group Conscience meeting.

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Before a Meeting

Arrive On Time

It is strongly suggested that the Meeting Chairperson be in the meeting room for 15 minutes before the meeting is scheduled to start. We want the Chairperson to be available in the room if a newcomer arrives for their first meeting or if a visitor from out of town finds our meetings. Both need a welcome and confirmation that they are in the right place.

Prepare a Topic

The Meeting Chairperson should have in mind a topic for discussion in the meeting. In our Group, we often read an excerpt from our NA literature and use this as the meeting topic. It is OK for the Meeting Chairperson to delegate another member in the meeting to select a topic.

Noon meetings at BLTN generally use the day's Just for Today as the meeting topic.

What if No One Shows Up?

Occasionally, rarely, no attendees show up for a scheduled NA meeting. It is suggested that the Chairperson remain in the meeting room for at least 20 minutes after the scheduled meeting start time in case someone shows up later.

What if Few People Show Up?

Our literature states that an NA meeting happens any time two addicts gather and talk. If a very small number of people show up for the meeting, proceed as normal. Even in small meetings we follow the meeting format and read all the readings. It is OK to end the meeting early if everyone has had a chance to share. Often these small meetings can morph into more of a discussion on one or more topics with people sharing more than once. Try to keep the discussion recovery related.

During a Meeting

Start on Time, End on Time

It is the responsibility of the Meeting Chairperson to start the meeting on time and end the meeting on time or as close as possible. An exception to the 'end on time' is mentioned above, when a meeting ends early after everyone has had a chance to share.

Meeting Format

The meeting format is the reading card the Chairperson uses to open the meeting, to address each of several standard topics during the meeting, and to end the meeting. Following a standard meeting format creates unity and consistency in our meetings. The BLTN meeting format is approved by our Group Conscience and we currently use the same format for all BLTN meetings. The expectation is that the Meeting Chairperson or meeting leader simply reads from the format.

If a Meeting Chairperson is new to BLTN or is unfamiliar with our meeting format, talk to an experienced member, a Trusted Servant, or another Meeting Chairperson. Familiarity with the meeting format is critical for effectively leading an NA meeting.

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Meeting Chairperson and Meeting Leader

The Meeting Chairperson is often also the leader for our recovery meetings, but this is not a requirement. The Chairperson can appoint a different person to lead all or part of the meeting. If the Chairperson selects someone else as the meeting leader, it is expected that the Chairperson will still be present at the meeting to assist the leader and ultimately to maintain order and an effective atmosphere of recovery.

It is not necessary for the meeting leader to meet all requirements from the By-Laws for Meeting Chairperson. The stated BLTN philosophy is to encourage as many members as possible to participate in leading our meetings. Appointing meeting leaders might give, for example, someone new in recovery an exposure to NA service by occasionally leading a meeting. Acting as a meeting leader might also allow a member to test-drive the Meeting Chairperson role without first committing to a minimum 3-month term.

Use of a Timer

BLTN Group Conscience has authorized the use of a timer for meetings with 12 or more people in attendance. Use the timer! It is the only method we have found effective in preventing members from monopolizing sharing time during meetings. The Chairperson can be the timekeeper or can appoint someone else in the meeting to keep track of sharing times.

When using the timer, we try to keep each person's sharing time to around 4 minutes maximum. We typically set the timer for 3 minutes and then 1-minute intervals from there. When the timer goes off first, this is a warning for the member to wrap up in about 1 minute.

The Meeting Chairperson should use some discretion on how and when or even whether to cut someone off who is sharing over their time limit. It can be confrontational at first, but this is an occasional necessary duty of the Meeting Chairperson. It is often helpful to follow-up with the over-sharing person after the meeting to ease any hurt feelings or to just provide a kind, listening ear if they still have something to share.

Open and Closed Meetings

Most of the BLTN meetings are open meetings. Attendance at these meetings is open to addicts and non-addict visitors. Closed meetings are only for addicts or people who think they might be addicts. The idea for closed meetings is that members might feel more willing to freely share if they know that only fellow addicts are listening.

Our current meeting format has the following statement which we read near the start of a closed meeting:

Closed Meeting: This is a closed meeting of Narcotics Anonymous. Closed meetings are only for those who have a desire to stop using. If there are non-addicts visiting, we thank you for your interest in Narcotics Anonymous. Please ask a member after the meeting for a schedule of open meetings in our area.

As this statement suggests, we do not intend to kick anyone out of our closed meetings. Talk to a non-addict visitor after the meeting and maybe give them a meeting schedule from our pamphlet rack. In closed meetings, it is traditional that only addicts can share but the Meeting Chairperson should use some kindness and discretion in enforcing this custom.

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Newcomers and Newcomer Meetings

Our literature states that the newcomer is the most important person at any meeting. Each of us was a newcomer to NA once and we each had our own experience with our first NA meeting. We encourage our Meeting Chairpersons to be warm and welcoming to a newcomer. First and foremost, we want the newcomer in their first meeting to hear a message of hope that recovery from drug addiction is possible.

The Meeting Chairperson has some flexibility in how to accommodate a newcomer into the meeting. It is OK, for instance even in a meeting planned as a literature study, to shift to a newcomer meeting as the primary topic for sharing and discussion. Or sometimes a planned recovery topic is introduced, and members are free to share on this topic or to share their experience, strength, and hope with the newcomer. The Chairperson should make sure that at least some of the meeting time is addressed to welcoming the newcomer to NA.

The Meeting Chairperson should collect contact phone numbers for a newcomer. We generally pass around a white booklet and a pen and have members add their name and phone number if they are willing. Men's numbers for men, women's numbers for women. Extra white booklets are stored in the literature cabinet if there are none on the desk.

Burning Desire

Our current meeting format gives meeting attendees an opportunity to share a burning desire near the beginning and the end of each meeting. The Meeting Chairperson has some flexibility in addressing a burning desire. Burning desires are important and should generally not be ignored. Incorporate the burning desire into the meeting topic or remind members during open sharing that a member has expressed a specific burning if anyone has experience to share.

Literature Study Meetings

Some BLTN meetings are scheduled as literature study meetings. It is the responsibility of the Chairperson for these meetings to keep the literature study flowing from week to week. Out of respect to those specifically attending these meetings to learn from our literature, it is also important to keep the sharing focused on the literature as much as possible. Perhaps save the last 10 or 15 minutes of the meeting for open sharing and burning desires and announce this plan before starting the literature study.

Sharing by the Chairperson or Leader

It is OK for the Chairperson or meeting leader to share during the meeting. It is also OK for the Chairperson or leader to NOT share during the meeting. Remember that the sharing time limits also apply to the Chairperson and the leader.

Seventh Tradition Basket Collection and Meeting Records

In the BLTN group, we pass the basket half-way through our meetings. Count the money and record the amount collected plus the number of people attending the meeting in the meeting log book. Give the money collected to the coffee bar attendant after the meeting.

People on parole or probation or in outpatient treatment may have an attendance paper to be signed that they have placed in the basket. Some forms request a contact phone number. Use the Conroe Club phone number that appears in the footer of the meeting format (bottom right)

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corner, same as this document). Blank attendance forms are available from the coffee bar if someone asks for one.

Keytags

The meeting format includes, near the end of the meeting, a section for passing out NA keytags recognizing clean time milestones. Extra keytags are stored in the literature cabinet if needed. The coffee bar attendant keeps the key to the cabinet.

Handling Disruptions During a Meeting

There are different types of disruptions, but we will address a few here and perhaps you will find some useful direction. A good rule of thumb is if the disturbance is brief and not very noticeable by the entire group, ignore it. If the problem is severe or persists, then you may have to address it.

Acts of Violence or Threats

This is where a member attacks another member verbally or physically.

- Announce a 5-minute break
- Approach the member in a caring loving way with another member's help
- Always be careful to protect the other members of the group
- Call the police if appropriate
- Work with the coffee bar attendant to document the event
- Future action will be taken to Group Conscience and the Conroe Club

The Side Talker

This is a member or members that carry on a conversation while someone else is trying to share. Not only are they missing out on the benefits of the meeting, but they may be preventing someone else from hearing as well. It displays a callous disregard for the feelings of the person sharing. If our members feel they are being ignored, even by just a few, it can inhibit their willingness to openly share about things that are important to them.

If you need to restore order to the meeting, one way would be to say, "Excuse me. We are trying to conduct a recovery meeting here. It would be appreciated by all of us if the other conversations wait until after the meeting is over. Thank you."

The Compulsive Talker

This is the member that has already shared at the meeting, but if left unchecked will talk 2, 3, or 4 more times before everyone else has had a chance to speak. Oftentimes this person isn't trying to be rude, but just doesn't understand good meeting etiquette. Usually it is someone fairly new in NA and they may just want to share their newfound enthusiasm. One good way to prevent this from happening is to begin with one member and ask that everyone take their turn sharing in a clockwise or counterclockwise rotation.

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If someone jumps in to talk for the second time, stop them immediately and say, “Excuse me _____, but everyone hasn’t had a chance to share yet. I’d like to ask you to wait until after everybody has finished, and if there is still time left, we will open the meeting up for additional comments.”

The Orator

The orator is the member that goes on and on when it is their turn to share at the meeting, using up much of the remaining meeting time at the expense of those who haven’t spoken yet or boring everyone to tears. Usually this person (and the rest of the group) would benefit if they listened more and talked less.

How long a person should share depends on the situation. How many people are at the meeting? Is time running short while some people still haven’t shared yet? Is everyone still listening and interested? Does this member have an important need to talk or do they just like listening to themselves? Unless things get really bad, it is best to avoid cutting somebody off. This doesn’t mean that you should never interrupt, but you do run the risk of hurting someone’s feelings when you tell them to “cut it short” in the middle of their sharing.

The BLTN meeting format specifically addresses the use of a timer to control this sort of long sharing. Use the timer!

A few specific suggestions:

- It’s best to take preventative measures, if possible, by saying, “We have a large meeting tonight, so if everyone could keep their comments a little shorter in length, everybody will get a chance to share. Thank you.”
- If it is getting late in the meeting you could say, “We’re running a little short on time, so I’d like to ask those who have not talked yet to keep the sharing brief. Thank you.”
- If you do find it necessary to cut someone off, try to be as polite and gentle as you can, while still being firm. You might try saying, “Excuse me _____, could you please try to finish up so everyone gets a chance to share? Thanks.” Then, after the meeting, explain to them why you interrupted and try to smooth any hurt feelings if there are any (make amends) by helping them to feel wanted.

The Endorser and The Critic

These two seem to be opposites, but they really are more alike than they are different. The endorser is someone that comes to a Narcotics Anonymous meeting and endorses entities outside of NA. Most often it is the treatment center they went through, another 12-step fellowship, or a particular religious or spiritual belief. It can be any number of other things as well. This person may make statements like this:

- I went to XYZ treatment center and they’re wonderful. My counselor says...
- I’m grateful to NA and ___A.
- Like it says in _____ (they begin to quote from a religious book or other non-NA recovery literature.)

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The critic, on the other hand, uses the NA meeting to vent their resentment at a particular place, thing, philosophy, or idea. Often it is the same subject that the endorser supports. The critic may make statements like:

- All treatment centers are after is money.
- I went to ___A before and they didn't do a thing for me!
- I don't want a thing to do with organized religion. I think they're a bunch of hypocrites!

These members both hurt NA unity by bringing up strong opinions about outside issues that others may disagree with. This disagreement could cause controversy in the meeting and divert us from carrying the Narcotics Anonymous message of recovery.

As Chairperson, you should try to keep the focus on the NA message. One effective way to do this is by explaining why we don't have opinions on outside issues or endorse outside enterprises as stated in our 6th and 10th Traditions. Possible interventions include directly interrupting the person sharing, addressing the issue in front of everyone when they are done sharing, or simply talking to the individual one-on-one after the meeting.

The Anything-Under-The-Sun Talker

This is someone who begins rambling on any number of subjects, none of which are the chosen topic. Unless their commentary is extremely short, or they seem incapable of doing any better (e.g. mental illness, newcomer, etc.) it is a good idea to interrupt them and say, "Excuse me _____, the topic for this meeting is on _____. Would you mind keeping your sharing focused on this topic for the benefit of the group?"

The Gossip and The World-Saver

These two are closely related. Both use the forum at the meeting to talk about other people's problems rather than themselves. The gossip, although more rare, probably does more damage than the world-saver because their intent has more malice attached.

The world-saver may bring up the "problem" at the beginning of the meeting or focus their discussion on someone else when it is their turn to share. As Chairperson, you can either form a topic focusing on our OWN recovery (live and let live, acceptance of God's will, powerlessness, etc.) or you can ask that members stick to topics that focus on THEIR experience, strength and hope, not someone else's.

NEVER get into a topic of "solving someone's problem" that isn't at the meeting. Example: "My sister's husband gets loaded and takes all her money. What should I tell her to do?" ... "She should throw him out!"

This may be an extreme example, but any time we begin focusing on someone else's recovery, or lack of, we cease to focus on our own. In Narcotics Anonymous, we don't claim to be able to solve the world's problems or even all of our own. We don't give advice or solve problems. We share our experience, strength, and hope.

Our message is: Just for today, you don't have to use. You can find recovery from active addiction through Narcotics Anonymous.

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Someone that is Still Using at the Meeting

If you suspect someone is high, you may ask, "Have you used any mood or mind altering drugs in the past 24 hours?" If they say no, accept that as true. If they say yes, you can say, "It may be in your best interest to just listen today."

If the person is disruptive, upon being asked to be quiet, it is possible (but not likely) that they could become argumentative. **DO NOT GET INTO AN ARGUMENT OR LONG DEBATE WITH SOMEONE WHO IS STILL USING!** If all they want is the last word, then let them have it. You are there to chair a meeting and find recovery, not win arguments. If it seems the meeting will be continually disrupted, then you may have to ask them to leave. When doing so be sure to make them aware that they are welcome back whenever they want help.

Moment of Silence

You also have the right, as does any member, to ask for a moment of silence to reflect on our primary purpose. This usually solves a lot of the problems in a meeting.

In Summary on Handling Disruptions

These are just a few examples of what could come up during a meeting and suggested ways to handle them. If something else works better for you, use it. When faced with any problem situation at a meeting, our experience has shown that confronting with love and concern is always the better approach.

Other Topics

Type of Meeting

Most of the meetings at BLTN are speak-up meetings where people voluntarily share on the selected recovery topic. The Meeting Chairperson can select a different method for managing the open sharing portion of the meeting. Some commonly used options are:

- The meeting leader can call on people directly and ask them to share
- Around the room: starting with one person, ask people to share in turn as they are seated in the room
- Round robin: after a person shares, they select the next person to share
- Ask-it basket: attendees are asked at the start of the meeting to write down recovery-related questions. The meeting leader selects these questions at random from the basket, and members are asked to share an answer.
- Spiritual principles: The meeting leader prepares a list of spiritual principles and attendees select one principle to share about during the meeting. The spiritual principles can be written on slips of paper in a basket or on objects like popsicle sticks.

Major changes to the type of meeting should be discussed and agreed at a Group Conscience meeting. These changes might include switching from an open meeting to a closed meeting or changing from an open discussion meeting to a literature study or speaker meeting.

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Meeting Chairperson Workshops

The BLTN group periodically hosts workshops for formal training of Meeting Chairpersons. We review this document in detail, go through our meeting format step by step, and ask and answer many questions related to the Meeting Chairperson role. Formal training is not a requirement, but it is highly recommended. The training sessions are usually suitable for people new to the Meeting Chairperson role and for members with experience in this role.

Group Conscience Meetings

The BLTN Group has monthly business meetings called 'Group Conscience Meetings' to manage the business of the group. These meetings are the proper format for raising suggestions on improving the way we run our meetings or for any other concerns related to the group. Talk to any of the Trusted Servants listed on the board at the back of the meeting room or simply show up to the Group Conscience meeting. All group members are welcome at these meetings.

NA Literature

The BLTN group re-sells NA books at-cost to our members. If someone contacts you wanting literature, direct them to the coffee bar attendant who takes care of these sales. The books are stored in the locked literature cabinet in the NA meeting room. The coffee bar attendant keeps the key.

NA pamphlets in the racks are free for anyone who wants them.

Conroe Club Rules

Following are the current rules for our facility, the Conroe Club. Violation of these rules should be reported to the coffee bar attendant, an NA Trusted Servant, or an officer or board member for the Conroe Club.

- No physical abuse against another individual
- No verbal abuse against another individual
- No firearms allowed on property
- No animals allowed in building, except for service animals
- No children allowed unattended
- No terroristic threats against another individual
- No drugs (including alcohol) or paraphernalia allowed