

How To Serve As Route Chairperson (60)

The Route Chairperson fills one of the most important roles in your route and is probably the individual with the most influence over the route's success. More so than with other leaders, the Chairperson is the one to ensure that route members are supportive of a shared vision and that the various activities of the route are all aligned to this vision. There are also many organisational responsibilities assigned to the Chairperson, which will make the effective functioning of the route as an organisation possible.

This Guide covers the responsibilities of the Chairperson. It is essential for the route Chairperson to familiarise himself or herself with this Guide so that he or she can fill the position as an effective leader. And the Guide is also good reading for other route leaders and members, since it will give them a good understanding of what the role of the Chairperson should be and what support they could be offering the route Chairperson.

This Guide offers should be read together with other Guides covering the various leadership positions.

Why the Chairperson has a key role

There are many reasons for your route to assign the responsibility of route Chairperson to the best possible candidate. Much will depend on the capacity of the Chairperson – both in terms of his or her leadership abilities and the time he or she can allocate to route activities. Having said this, leadership does not entail getting overworked in doing everything that needs to be done, nor sitting back and enjoying the status of recognition.

The Chairperson's role is simply to ensure that the route's objectives are met through the collective efforts of the members and employees (when staff are appointed by the route). It is an all-inclusive responsibility that involves almost every aspect of the route activities.

While the route may expect support and guidance from Open Africa, it should not be expected that leadership and direction will come from outside of the route. The Chairperson along with the Executive Committee members should provide such leadership. This does not imply that the route cannot rely on the Open Africa Head Office to offer help! But it does imply that the route leaders, and specifically the Chairperson, should be seeking such help when needed.

You are coming together in the route to achieve your shared objectives with building and promoting a destination route that will bring more economic activity to your area, which will lead to growing local tourism businesses and will improve in the quality of life of your local communities. It is the task of the leaders, specifically the Chairperson, to ensure that the bigger ideas are reflected in the route's activities and that these activities lead to positive results.

The Chairperson's duties

The Chairperson (of the Executive Committee, voluntary association, Board of Directors of a nonprofit company, or the Trustees of a trust) is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the route achieves its overall objectives and that the plans made for the current period are implemented successfully.

When staff members are employed, and specifically when a chief executive or route manager is appointed, many of the organisational responsibilities that the Chairperson initially took responsibility for, will be assigned to this person. However, most routes will have to grow substantially to get to

the point where such appointment becomes feasible, so in most cases it would not be something to take into account soon.

The route's founding document (constitution, memorandum of association or trust deed) will specify what the Chairperson's formal obligations are. These are important aspects of the Chairperson's role, but the responsibilities go far beyond those formally listed in the founding document. It is important for the Chairperson to study the founding document, to understand the document's general intentions and the tasks and/or responsibilities specifically assigned to the Chairperson.

But we should look beyond the narrowly defined tasks included in the founding document.

Broadly speaking, there are three areas of responsibility for the Chairperson:

- Outward representation of the route as an organisation.
- Internal leadership in keeping the members involved and the Executive Committee working.
- Duties in maintaining the route as a well-functioning organisation.

Let's look at these separately to identify the detailed tasks and responsibilities associated with each. In listing these, it should be noted that the specific context of the route and the provisions in the founding document may direct the route to assign responsibilities differently.

Outward representation

Represent the route

During the initial period of establishing and building up the route, there will be a need for many meetings with other parties, which is the responsibility of the Chairperson to take charge of. When the route starts function well, it will

become a key player in the development of the local economy and will have to interact with various other parties that are also involved in the development of the local area such as business associations, government departments, development agencies and community organisations. It is the responsibility of the Chairperson to represent the route in its interactions with these external entities.

The route may also receive invitations to attend events, speak at conferences or address the media. The Chairperson should fulfil these tasks, or assign another members if he or she is not available.

It is also the responsibility of the Chairperson to represent the route at Open Africa.

Community relationships

Your route will only be able to succeed if there is substantial local support for what you are setting out to achieve but, as with any other organisation, there will be instances where misunderstandings may arise or where other local organisations may have expectations of the route that cannot be fulfilled. The Chairperson needs to stay in touch with other local organisations and, if there are any local organisational forums, it will be the task for the Chairperson to represent the route there.

Internal leadership

Meetings

The Chairperson is responsible for determining the date and venue of Executive Committee meetings and membership meetings, and is responsible for creating the agendas for these meetings. Ideally, the agenda for a meeting should be compiled before the meeting – perhaps a week or so – and should be distributed to those who will attend so that they can prepare for the meeting.

Most organisations follow a standard agenda format consisting of:

1. Present and apologies
2. Minutes of the previous meeting
3. Matters arising from the previous meeting
4. Reports
5. Financial report
6. New matters
7. Other matters and announcements
8. Next meeting

At the meetings, the Chairperson will be responsible for facilitating the proceedings. The name of the position of Chairperson refers to the “chair” of the person taking charge of a meeting, and this is exactly what the Chairperson is expected to do – to manage the proceedings at the meeting in such a way that views and opinions are heard, decisions are made, people are kept accountable, and the agenda is completed.

Mediation

The Chairperson should intervene when disagreement emerges between members working together on route projects, or when friction between members arise owing to issues outside of the route activities but that affect the route.

In some instances the involved individuals may approach the Chairperson themselves, or other members may bring the issues to the attention of the Chairperson. When such disagreement or friction is noted, the Chairperson needs to act quickly by consulting with all the relevant parties to develop a good understanding of what is at stake and to offer the parties guidance in finding a way forward that will be to the benefit of the route as a whole.

If it is an issue of substance, it may be required to also involve other Executive Committee members in the consultations

and discussions.

Organisational functioning

Functioning of the Executive Committee

Leading the Executive Committee is one of the most important tasks of the Chairperson, since a well-functioning Executive Committee will allow the route to achieve good results. The role of the Chairperson is not only to facilitate Executive Committee meetings, it is also to support individual Executive Committee members in fulfilling their duties. This does not entail doing the actual work alongside them, but rather ensuring that each Executive Committee member is able to deliver what is expected of their portfolios.

Regular meetings and adherence to good meeting practices are essential components of a well-functioning executive. It is generally required that the Executive Committee meets at least once a month and that each Executive Committee member reports on their achievements and responsibilities at these meetings. It is also considered to be good practice to keep minutes of meetings, or at least a record of decisions and assigned tasks, so that the Executive Committee can refer back to what was covered and/or promised at the previous meeting.

Co-ordinate key committees

The Chairperson will not be involved in all the route's committees and project teams, but key committees or projects may deserve the Chairperson's attention as member of that committee or project. However, it may also be appropriate for the Chairperson to be the Co-ordinator or chairperson of such committees or projects, should it be relevant to the route's medium-term prospects and long-term sustainability. However, it may be advisable to encourage other route members to step into the role of Co-ordinator of projects and subcommittees, so that the route develops leadership capacity beyond that of

the Chairperson.

Monitoring projects

The implementation of projects should be assigned to project teams, reporting to the executive through a project coordinator. However, it is the responsibility of the Chairperson to ensure that the impact of these projects are measured, and that the project teams are functioning effectively so that he or she can intervene to resolve challenges should a project team or committee not function as it should.

Discipline

The route founding document and the Open Africa Charter define clear guidelines for members to adhere to. When members do not follow these rules, procedures will have to be initiated and a process of hearings and/or disciplinary measures will have to follow. If not otherwise defined in the founding document, it is the task of the Chairperson to take charge of such situations, or to assign such task to another route leader.

Use of this Guide

This Guide will help you understand the role of route Chairperson. It does not provide you with detailed instructions on the requirements of your founding document. This is why it is important to read this Guide along with the route's founding document (constitution, memorandum of association or trust deed).

Other Guides and Case Studies

These Guides and Videos in the Open Africa Route Toolkit will also be of use:

- Guide: [How To Lead Your Route](#)
- Guide: [How To Have Effective Meetings](#)

- Guide: [How To Serve As Treasurer](#)
- Guide: [How To Serve As Secretary](#)
- Video: [Ken Blanchard On Situational Leadership](#)

Other resources

- Robert's Rules of Order: www.robertsrules.org