

CPA TELEPHONE MEETING SUGGESTED GUIDELINES

TO THE CPA TELEPHONE MEETING CHAIRPERSON AND BOARD OPERATOR

Thank you for chairing a CPA telephone meeting. The telephone meeting is a safe place for CPA members to come and listen and/or share their experience, strength and hope with one another. As a trusted servant to CPA, giving up your time and energy is a great way to meet other members and experience the joy of service. It is suggested that you be a member of CPA for a minimum of six months when you assume this service role. Before leading for the first time it is recommended these guidelines be reviewed with a more experienced CPA member to answer questions and offer support to you.

These guidelines are suggestions and were created to help new leaders through the process of chairing a telephone meeting. Keep in mind that each group has its own meeting format and these guidelines are intended to supplement that format. You will find helpful hints for leading a successful telephone meeting, especially for people who call in for the first time and are unfamiliar with telephone meetings. We hope this helps to answer your questions so you can feel confident in this service position. This page can be printed out for easy access during a meeting.

Helpful hints for a successful meeting

- Before you begin, call from a quiet location.
- Try to arrive a few minutes before the designated start time so others don't have to wait and the meeting can begin promptly.
- When possible, ask for volunteers to help with the meeting tasks prior to commencing the meeting.
- Start promptly at the hour that the meeting is scheduled.
- If it is a literature meeting, when possible, select a reading prior to the meeting and announce to everyone what book you will be reading from.

Introductions

Most formats ask members to announce their name, where they live and whether they live with chronic pain and/or chronic illness. For the sake of time, you can ask members to please hold any personal comments for when they share rather than when they introduce themselves. If two people share at once, ask one to share and welcome them and then ask the second person to share and welcome the second person. It is important for the chairperson to acknowledge each member so that they know they're being heard and welcomed.

Sharing

It takes time to get ready to share as members contemplate what was read or shared and then organize their thoughts to share with the group, and finally unmute their phones so they can be heard. The process of a member preparing to share can take a few seconds or minutes. Allowing time for the members to go through this process sometimes creates silence on the line, which is to be expected. Sometimes there is a longer silence which should be allowed as members can take some time to think about what and whether they want to share. Silence also gives time for quieter members to become ready to share. It can also be helpful during a silence to ask for 5 minutes of quiet meditation before resuming sharing or accepting double dipping. Another option is to re-read the reading or ask for a volunteer to find a new reading.

When a member identifies themselves as wanting to share the Chairperson can say "Go ahead" or "OK" or "I hear you." After a share a simple response such as "Thank you" or "Thank you for your share" is enough to let the person know that

they were heard. Refrain from specific comments of any kind or expressing exuberance about a share. Commenting after somebody shares is considered cross talk. As the leader, it is especially important that you set the example. It is important to be welcoming but neutral so that some people don't think their share is not as good as someone else's share. Simply say thank you for your share in the same tone of voice for every person. You can then ask who would like to share next.

Although the Chair will have the help of a timer, it is also important that the Chair keeps an eye on the time as the meeting progresses. It is the Chair's responsibility to keep the meeting progressing and to help any member who is disregarding the timer and talking longer than their allotted time to recognize their time is up and they need to make room for the next person. The Chair also needs to leave time, about 5 or 10 minutes near the end of the meeting, to ask if newcomers would like to share before the meeting closes.

Timekeeper

During the reading of the format a volunteer will be asked to be Timekeeper. The usual share is for 3 minutes but if the meeting has a small number of people the Chair has the discretion to extend the time limit to 4 minutes or more. The Timekeeper will come in at the end of the share and say something like "Time" or "Gentle time."

Fellowship time

After the meeting is over the Chair can ask the newcomers if they have any questions or need any phone numbers. Other members can also ask for phone numbers. People can also look for sponsors or cosponsors and make other announcements, enjoy fellowship, or share if they didn't have a chance to share during the meeting

The attitude of a Chair

The Chair brings a warm and welcoming attitude to the meeting. You're never alone when you chair. Not only is Higher Power there, but you can enlist a "chair buddy" or more experienced member to walk with you through the meeting. If you are stuck, feeling unwell or aren't sure what to do, it's always encouraged to ask for help. Other members are happy to do this.

Business meetings

Ideally, each meeting will have a separate Chair who leads the business meetings. It isn't your job to chair a business meeting, although you are free to chair one if the group asks for a volunteer.

Meeting challenges

We bring kindness and understanding to others, especially during shares. We encourage members to practice self-care when others share and if they become triggered, a member can lower the volume on the share or leave and come back. It's important to let newcomers or people with different cognitive abilities open up to the group and find their way. We all practice principles before personalities.

But if a member goes over time consistently, brings outside issues into their share such as political or religious viewpoints, becomes argumentative or abusive, and doesn't respond to the Chair's suggestions, the Chair may step in and calmly read from the appropriate section from the format guidelines. The Chair may also choose to read one of the

following sections from Tradition Ten in Our Common Welfare, which states "Chronic Pain Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the CPA name ought never be drawn into public controversy."

"Practicing Tradition Ten also means we are mindful when things are going on in the world that truly affect our hearts and minds. Outside the meetings, we can support any cause and state our opinions as strongly as we need to. But we need CPA to be CPA, and we will lose our way and our singleness of purpose if we get involved in outside issues in the meeting rooms."

"We want and need comfort and understanding. However, if there is controversy, our meetings will not be a safe place for our recovery. We need to be free from dissension and avoid angry confrontation, and this applies both to outside issues and to conflicts that may arise within our meetings. No matter how strongly we feel about a particular issue, we are mindful to speak to one another with mutual respect."

If the member continues to question the intervention, the Chair may also calmly invite the member to speak to him or her during fellowship. At that time the Chair can explain further or invite the member to call them and talk to them privately on the telephone.

If none of these interventions work, and the member continues disruptive behavior, the Chair or the Board Operator may step in and mute, drop, or if necessary, block someone from the telephone conference for the duration of that meeting (if this has been incorporated into that group's format).

Board Operation

There is a separate instruction sheet explaining the practical technology of how to run the board available to Board Operators.

The Board Operator should respect the anonymity of CPA members. The Board should only be used to mute someone if there is background noise or, when necessary, to deal with a disruptor. The Board should not be used to call on someone to introduce, to share, to volunteer, or to speak in any way. The Board should not be used to announce someone's presence during a meeting or in fellowship. In addition, the Board Operator does not need to announce the number of people present at a Business Meeting. Members attending a Business Meeting will introduce themselves if they wish to vote.

Meeting Announcements and Meeting Issues

Meeting announcements are limited to practical information such as meeting days, times, telephone numbers or Zoom Id's, changes in scheduling and announcements of business meetings and special events and workshops. They can also include asking for volunteers for service.

Meeting issues are brought up in business meetings, although a member can call for a group conscience on an issue. Usually, the group conscience will be held after the meeting closes, but before fellowship begins.

Resource Suggestions

On the public CPA website (chronicpainanonymous.org), click on the menu that says Resources. You will find separate sections for brochures, for conference-approved and non conference-approved books, for meeting materials and for public information. You can familiarize yourself with these materials as needed.

If you go to our Phone Intergroup Website for CPA members, www.cpaphoneig.wixsite.com/mysite, and click on the Phone Meetings tab, you will find meeting times matched with their formats. The formats are similar, but may be

different from each other, since each meeting is self-determined. If you click on the format for each meeting you can download the format and, if you want, print it out for yourself. If you do not have access to the internet, you can ask someone to mail you the format.

Welcome everyone to the experience of chairing a meeting. We hope you will find it a fulfilling service.

Evelyn from NYC/December 2021