



Secrets of effective participation

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So here you are: you have been selected by your National Committee or an organization in liaison with the IEC to participate in IEC work. And while you may have already taken part in standard setting or conformity assessment activities back home, contributing to this kind of work at the global level may be new to you.

### **How to gain prominence and influence**

All organizations give the appearance to newcomers that an inner circle is running things. That's normal, no matter whether the group tries to keep power to itself or is open and genuinely ready to listen and share. Basically: it takes time and effort to get to know new people<sup>1</sup>.

It also takes time to learn how things are done in a group and you probably need to gain a certain amount of recognition to increase your impact on the process.

The aim of this pocket guide is to give you general pointers that can accelerate your learning curve and hopefully increase the efficiency of your participation.

Some of these tips may seem obvious to you, others may come as a surprise. Let us know if they are helpful and we would love to hear about your personal tips further into the process: [communication@iec.ch](mailto:communication@iec.ch).

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<sup>1</sup> "How to Win Friends and Influence People", Dale Carnegie, 1990



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# 1. Participate actively and regularly

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## **You have no voice when you are not there**

While you don't need to attend or participate in all meetings, teleconferences, e-mail exchanges 100% of the time, try not to miss important meetings or activities.

## **Show respect, be timely**

Try to reply to emails from your group in a timely manner. Inform the chairman or convenor in advance when you are not able to attend.



## **Be early, leave late**

Come early to meetings to be able to network and interact with others. The best contacts happen during breaks, meals and other informal activities. That's often also where you have the opportunity to informally clarify your position, set aside differences and learn about the points of view of others.

## **Be visible**

As a newcomer your best bet is to sit upfront, even in the first row. You hear better and you are seen. If there are less than 20 people in attendance this rule can be ignored. Once you have built some contacts, you may want to sit with them.

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### **Participate in working groups and special task forces**

Volunteer for working groups and special task forces that match your core competence. Often that's where the real work and influencing gets done.

### **Be prepared**

- Read the agenda and the accompanying documents before the start of the meeting.
- Exchange points of view within your organization or mirror committee in your National Committee to get broader insights and to understand different viewpoints.
- Reach out and discuss contentious topics outside, preferably in advance of meetings to get a sense of the position of others. This can facilitate negotiation and lead to easier consensus building.

### **Be helpful**

Within reason, volunteer to assist with tasks that match your core competences. This can include e.g. helping to rewrite or verify a draft for consistency and clarity. However, don't volunteer if you can't follow through: not delivering what you promised could damage your reputation.



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## 2. Build contacts and respect

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### **Get to know the people**

During breaks and informal gatherings, try to move around and get to know different people and their view points. This may come in handy later on, when you have to negotiate with them. It is always easier to find common outcomes with somebody who you have met and come to respect on a personal level.



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### **Develop friends and mentors**

Introduce yourself to others, be friendly.

Build contact with people who are knowledgeable and respected by the group. Ask relevant questions and if needed seek their help to get up to speed with the group's work.

### **Watch and listen...contribute but don't be pushy**

Build respect by contributing your expertise to the group without imposing your point of view. Know your limits and strengths.

Be reasonably assertive and don't try to push and repeat your arguments, unless the outcome is absolutely fundamental to you. Know that you may risk all the good-will and respect you have built; so it better be worth it.

Never, ever lose your temper or treat others with disrespect.

### **Learn the rules**

Get familiar with the working procedures of your Technical Committee and how rules are enforced. This will allow you to better make your point.



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# 3. Getting your points across

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## Talking but not getting heard?

International consensus building is not “business as usual”. Often there are significantly different positions between countries or individuals that need to be resolved to arrive at an International Standard that can be adopted if possible everywhere without change.

More often than not English is not the first language of experts sitting around the table; mentalities and thought processes can be very

different too. So how can you improve your chances of getting heard?:

- If you are fluent in English: talk slower than you normally would. Make short sentences and avoid complicated words.
- If English is an issue for you: consider teaming up with somebody for whom it is the mother tongue to submit co-authored proposals or formulate arguments.





### **Avoid acronyms**

Your company's acronyms may not be understood by every participant in the room. Likewise newcomers may not understand some of the acronyms developed by the group. As a result not everybody may be able to participate efficiently in the meeting.

Be considerate in your use of acronyms.

Learn acronyms that have been standardized by the group before you join the meeting.



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# 4. Reaching consensus

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In the IEC reaching consensus implies that all substantial objections have been overcome. How do you do this speedily while allowing sufficient time for discussions, negotiations and resolution of significant technical disagreements? And last but not least, how can you as an individual successfully contribute to this process?

## **Overcoming barriers**

Sometimes not being heard has nothing to do with language and everything with political positions and differences in mentalities and cultural approaches. Try reaching out to “opponents” in informal settings and get to understand what motivates their point of view. This can help you develop strategies to overcome substantial objections.



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### How good is good enough?

Sometimes you may find that a discussion has not reached far enough, that the outcome is not up to your personal standard. Remember, at the end of the day, the National Committees take the decision and many experts will have the opportunity to comment on the work. If your concern is real, it will be brought up.

### Agree to disagree

Pick your points – don't speak up on every issue unless you have solid arguments founded in your professional expertise.

If discussions or decisions don't turn out in "your" favour, don't hold a grudge. Make a reasoned choice of where you really put up a fight.

If a topic is really important to you and your stakeholders, identify allies or find out during informal meetings how to overcome major obstacles to reach a common point of view.



When discussing different positions respectfully, all parties have an opportunity to express their opinion. In the IEC these points-of-view are generally recorded in the minutes and can help you demonstrate that you voiced a concern even if your argument didn't win.

Remember, this isn't always an easy process but the benefits gained from developing IEC International Standards and seeing them implemented far outweigh short-term issues. Now it's over to you.





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