

Committee Purpose Statements

Committees should be guided by a purpose statement or committee description. Frequently the board reviews the committees to consider their need and alignment with the strategic plan and year ahead. From there, short descriptions are adopted for each committee. The statements may be documented in a policy manual or "guide to committee responsibilities."

Seldom do committees start by asking, "What should we do?" Their work should be framed by a purpose statement and further defined by current-year assignments made by the board or its chief elected officer.

Committees are intended to supplement the work of the board of directors and staff. They do not have authority to speak for or contract for the organization. Seldom should they take on a "life of their own" whereby they create their own bylaws and hope for a bank account.

Standing committees are identified in the bylaws and serve for the duration of the current term. Ad hoc committees, task forces and others are appointed to complete a specific assignment and disband upon completion.

Seldom are committees, their chairs and members appointed to serve perpetually. Their appointments terminate with the election year and the incoming chair-elect or board makes new assignments.

Alignment

Most organizations seek alignment between their strategic goals and the committees. For instance an organization with five goals in the strategic plan may have 5 to 10 committees to advance the goals.

The trend is to reduce the number of committees, especially standing, because they require oversight and volunteer time is limited. They are being replaced by short term volunteer workgroups, for instance quick action teams, strike forces, brain-trusts and micro-tasks.

There is an expectation that committees will produce results. For example, creating content for a new educational course, a model position paper, or a valued member benefit, etc.

There is no use for a group that meets without an agenda or designated purpose. Volunteers are quickly dissatisfied by attending meetings that have no value.

Descriptions

Committee descriptions might be found in the organization's bylaws or policies. These descriptions are provided as a framework for informing committees.

Executive Committee – Authorized by the bylaws and responsible for making decisions in the interim between board meetings. Composition usually includes the elected officers plus one or two key leaders – for example, the immediate past president or the paid executive as an ex-officio position. The committee should be careful not to usurp the authority of the board or to appear to scheme; transparency is key.

Finances – Oversees processes and policies that guide and protect financial resources, including investments. It is often chaired by the elected treasurer. In some organizations it doubles as the audit committee responsible for interfacing with the independent CPA reviewing the finances.

Public Relations – Supplements the staff in branding, messaging and public relations efforts. Where members are not experienced in effective PR, this committee is often supplemented or replaced by a PR consultant.

Membership Growth – Focuses on recruitment and retention. Often considering missing segments of membership and creating campaigns for growth (may be combined with Member Benefits and Services.)

Member Benefits and Services – Considers the portfolio of member benefits, return on investments compared to dues paid, and monitors the “member experience.” It may review affinity-endorsed benefits, and seek a meaningful benefit or service that acts as a “golden handcuff.”

Government Relations – Often the most active committee, it has responsibility for identifying issues, developing positions, influence and engaging members through grassroots efforts.

Technology – With the evolution of technology it is difficult for staff to entirely monitor needs and opportunities. There is continuous need to invest in the technology that supports organizational functions and outreach. Millennials are often a driving force on the technology committee.

Education and Training – Ensures the quality and promoted diverse delivery methods to increase member competencies and compliance. May be tied to official continuing education requirements or maintaining educational designations.

Conference and Expo – Frequently a large portion of an organization's budget is related to an annual conference. The committee works through the year or longer to ensure a relevant, respected annual conference and trade show. The oversight of the committee might warrant appointment of subcommittees for

assistance.

Awards and Scholarships – Makes recommendations for awards and recognitions and handled the process for selection with integrity.

Ethics – Positioned to handle complaints that may arise from consumers or between members. Based upon having a code of ethics or conduct. As a result of hearing complaints and concerns, may confidentially transition the problems into educational classes to help members comply.

Young Professionals – Composed of young and emerging professionals with an interest in having a voice and taking on special projects.

Past Presidents – An opportunity to engage past presidents with special projects assigned by the current board.

Board Development – Frequently a nominating committee is responsible for identify a slate of qualified board candidates and ensuring the election process is maintain with integrity. The charge of a nomination committee has expanded to include nominations, board evaluation, and an orientation process.

Affiliates – A method for engaging associate members involved in the organization but not as “regular members.” Gives them a voice so their needs may be met and opportunities afforded for greater support and involvement.

Bylaws - Responsible for reviewing and maintaining the governing documents and for recommending amendments. Often chaired by the elected secretary. Precaution: Appoint the committee as needed to avoid a bylaws committees making change for the sake of change. May be supplemented with an attorney consultant to ensure compliance with law.

Strategic Planning – Responsible for the process for developing a strategic plan. Committees work may be extended by a role in monitoring and reporting on the plan’s progress and key performance metrics.

Fund Raising – If the organization relies on grants and gifts, there may be a committee charged with fund raising to supplement regular streams of income.

Every organization is unique, relying on diverse committees to advance the strategic plan and supplement the work of board and staff. Without purpose statements to frame their work, committees are likely to have mission creep.

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Note: Bob Harris, CAE, provides governance tips and templates at www.nonprofitcenter.com.

