

Committee Responsibilities

Committees are an integral part of successful organizations. Their purposes include: supplementing the work of the board and staff; engaging members; and developing leaders. The Committee Responsibilities guide clarifies responsibilities, authority, recommendations, smart practices, trends and risk avoidance.

Types of Committees

Standing Committees are identified in the bylaws and serve the duration of the year.

Subcommittees divide work amongst subgroups.

Task Forces and Ad Hoc Committees are appointed for a specific purpose. The committee disbands after completing the assignment. Because volunteers have limited time, consider using task forces or Quick Action Teams (similar to task forces but even shorter duration.)

Councils, Think Tanks, Brain-Trusts, Strike-Forces and Special Interest Groups are other committee names, often created to engage persons with similar interests, such as practice specialty, geography or ethnicity.

Chairs and Liaisons

Every committee needs leadership.

The **chair** should have the best understanding of the purpose of the committee and the immediate tasks. He or she sets the tone for achieving results and engaging volunteers. The chair should be able to communicate a clear vision and desired outcomes.

Use a **vice-chair or co-chair** for sustainability. The position supports the chair and may become next year's leader.

Committee liaisons serve as a resource and champion. A board liaison is the communication channel between the committee and board. The staff liaison is a link to management and resources.

Alignment in the Organization

Committees have a "fit" within the organization. Each has an explicit purpose often identified in the **governing documents** (bylaws, policies or committee purpose statements.)

Efforts of the committee should align with the organization's structure, strategic goals and resources. An org-chart will depict hierarchy and the relationship to the board and staff.

Trends in Committees

- There are no "sacred cows." Is the committee necessary?
- Elimination of standing committees in favor of task forces.

- Committees are all aligned with the organization's strategic goals.
- Technology use, on-line meetings and committee web portals.
- No silos. Committees should interface with other committees to collaborate.

Outcomes and Recommendations

Committees should produce results. For example, instance, creating new educational content, programs, publications, fund raising, a robust special interest section or enhancements in the organization.

Most efforts by a committee will require approval by the board. Recommendations should be in the form of a motion or resolution. A request to the board should be explicitly clear so that directors understand and approve.

When setting committee goals. Be realistic about what can be achieved. Break projects into monthly or quarterly steps.

Committee Resources

Resources take the form of time and money:

Finances - The annual budget may have allocations for committees.

Time - Consider the value of a committee meeting by multiplying the # of persons involved x the length of the meeting x \$50 hour wage/vale (minimum).

Information - "Read to Lead." Know the mission, by-laws, policies. strategic plan, budget and organizational chart.

Committee Want Ads

Consider breaking projects into smaller tasks and then advertising for members who have an interest but prefer short term commitments; another way to increase member participation.

Planning Meeting

Whether meeting in person, on-line, or by conference all -- there is a pattern for successful meetings.

Before - Plan for the meeting with adequate notice, an impactful agenda, and enthusiasm for achieving results.

During - "The devil is in the details." From room set up to having the information at hand for making decisions, preparation is critical. Try to avoid motions to delay ---

Or poor decisions because the committee didn't have needed information. The likelihood for success is set by the attitude and vision of the chair.

Meeting details

1. Meetings need plenty of notice to maximize participation ; consider setting a year-long calendar.
2. There must be a compelling reason to meet; postpone meetings if the purpose is not clear.
3. Create a written agenda of what needs to be accomplished; share the agenda and supporting documents with committee members in advance.
4. Involve the board and/or staff liaison. Their role is for support; not to run the meeting or serve as secretary.
5. Rules of order will help advance the agenda and maintain decorum.
6. Chairing the meeting is like conducting an orchestra. Try to engage each attendee, stick to the agenda, avoid distractions and sidebar conversations, and work towards consensus.
7. Meeting minutes are important to maintain accountability, reports, and to inform the board and staff.

8. Use technology when face to face meetings are difficult to plan. Collaborate on documents between meetings by using conference calls and shared online portals.
9. Set guidelines, such as meetings will start on time and information will be treated with confidentiality.

Meeting Guidelines

The committee chair may want to develop guidelines so that committee members know what to expect. For example:

- An agenda will be distributed at least 10 days in advance; it will frame our discussions; avoid meeting distractions and sidebar conversations.
- Prepare for meetings by reviewing advance materials.
- Meetings will start and end on time.
- Turn off digital distractions.
- If you arrive late, please refrain from voting until the next agenda item so as not to interrupt the flow of discussion of those who arrived on time.
- Minutes will document decisions and actions of the committee.
- Decisions of the committee shall stand; expressing dissenting opinions after the meeting is inappropriate.
- Respect new ideas and new people on the committee.