

# 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 an advocate 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, bylaws, policies, strategic plan, budget and organizational chart.

*"Some committees keep minutes and waste hours."*

## Committee “Want Ads”

Break projects into smaller tasks and then *advertising* for members who prefer short term commitments; another way to increase member participation. Seek out subject matter experts.

## Planning Meetings

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.

**After** – Distribute a summary report or minutes. Follow up and promote accountability. Use technology and opportunities to connect in between the face-to-face meetings.

## 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<sup>1</sup>.
8. Use **technology** when face to face meetings are difficult to plan. Collaborate on documents between meetings by using conference calls and shared on-line portals.
9. Set **guidelines**, such as meetings will start on time and information will be treated with confidentiality.

## Risk Management

Committees are an extension of the board of directors and thus appear as representatives of the organization. Generally they DO NOT have authority to speak for the organization, expend funds or sign contracts.

**Apparent Authority** arises when a board chair, though *not* granting actual authority, permits a leader or committee to behave as if they had authority. Authority rests with the organization’s chief elected officer (and his or her spokespersons) and should not be usurped by a committee.

<sup>1</sup> The IRS asks on Form 990 if committees with authority keep meeting minutes.

**Antitrust Violations** occur when two or more persons from the same industry or profession discuss and agree on suppliers, processes, prices or operations. Stop any conversation that would affect how business is conducted because of collusion among competitors.

**Copyright** laws must be respected. Be sure copyrighted materials are not mistakenly used when creating training curriculum or newsletter articles. Committee original works should belong to the organization, not the committee. [©]

**Financial safeguards and insurance** should be in place for all projects and events.

**Public Records** in most organizations are limited to IRS documents. Respect confidentiality!

**Conflicts of Interest** should be disclosed at the first meeting of the committee and throughout the year.

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- **Board Responsibilities**© LAMINATED
- **Strategic Planning Guide** © LAMINATED

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