

Success

by Design

Building Strong Organizations... Strong Communities

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Effective Committees

Committees are often the working force at the heart of an organization. Effective organizations are often directly related to effective committees.

Why Committees are Used?

They are used to save time at general meetings. Matters can be discussed and reviewed in detail by a committee and recommendations brought to the general meeting. The work of the organization becomes more efficient.

The specialized skills and interests of members are used to their full advantage.

More members get involved in the detail work of the organization. Responsibilities are shared according to skills and interests of members.

New or inexperienced members can gain valuable insight into the organization and develop confidence by serving on committees.

Type of Committees

There are two basic kinds of committees:

Standing – committees are created by the standing orders, rules, by-laws, or regulations of an organization. They function on a permanent basis. Examples of common standing committees would be finance, nomination, education, etc.

Ad Hoc – committees are appointed for a specific purpose on a short-term basis. An example is organizing an educational event.

Purpose of Committees

Many organizations have too many committees, often with unclear responsibilities. You should be able to answer the following before any committee is established:

- What's the purpose and authority of this committee?
- What are the responsibilities and specific tasks of this committee?
- What are the time limits on this committee?
- What type of reporting to the organization is expected?
- How are members picked for this committee?
- What's the budget of this committee?
- What's the term of office for members? How do we fill vacancies?
- What resources does this committee have and what will it need to complete its task?

The committee's terms of reference should be written and included in the organization's policies or recorded in a motion. These terms of reference are available to all organization members.

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Committee Membership

Selecting committee members is the best way to ensure that you get the people with the right skills, interests and commitment to the task. Three to seven people is a good size for most committees.

The committee chair should be selected with careful consideration. The chair isn't necessarily the technical expert of the committee. It's more important that the person works well with others, can organize effectively, can motivate others, keeps people on task and has good communication skills. Other responsibilities of the chair include preparing and presenting committee reports, ensuring a successor is groomed to assume the chair's role in the future, setting agendas, calling meetings and ensuring that all members have the opportunity to contribute.

Committee Reporting

Committees are directly responsible to the organization that created them. The committee chair usually reports to the general meeting. Reports should be concise, but should show that a full discussion was held and all options were considered. The organization should never feel that the committee missed something. The committee should present specific recommendations.

Reports that are for information only don't require a motion. If a committee wants to bring ideas, actions or recommendations to the members through their report, the committee chair should say, "By direction of the committee, I move . . ."

Making Committees Work Effectively

Committees work efficiently and effectively when the following questions can be answered with a "yes" response.

- Is the purpose of the committee clear to all members?
- Does the committee recognize it's time commitments both in the overall project and at meetings?
- Is there good communication among members?
- Are members and the chair well prepared?
- Are minutes clear and concise?
- Does the committee evaluate its performance?
- Are members recognized and appreciated?
- Is the work of the committee recognized as making a valuable contribution to the organization?

Summary

A committee is really a work unit of the organization. It's the best way to take work and break it into meaningful and manageable chunks. Effective committees remove time consuming detail from organization meetings. They allow more people to be involved and expand the support base of the organization. Committees build commitment of members to the organization.

Bibliography

1. Humphries, Susan. *Effective Committees*. Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, 1989.