



Thoughts on Great Committees

Committees should be appointed when the job is too large for one person.

Committees help define an issue, resolve a complex problem and involve group members. Committees should come from your needs.

Committees and tasks should relate to the strategic plan – the plan drives WHAT you will do and HOW you might be organized to achieve the CAMP's GOALS.

By looking at the CRITICAL ISSUES you face this year – it gives you leverage to expand and engage more people in the work (and joy) of camp.

If you adopt a STRUCTURE for each committee that has a clearly defined purpose, a scribe and champion it will help you keep on track and help accomplish your goals. The champion is the leader who facilitates and keeps the process moving.

If you compare a good book to a healthy organization, the contents of the book can be likened to the activities of an organization. But without the binding (executive, board), the table of contents (purpose, mandate) and the chapter headings and pages (committee chair and members), the activities would have no direction, no meaning.

Just as chapter headings and pages are essential in the writing (and reading) of a good book, so too are committees, their chairs and members vital to the health of an effective organization!

Signs of a Good Committee Functioning Well

- Purpose of the committee is clear to all.
- Careful time control: length of meetings, as well as development of overall committee time path.
- Sensitivity within to each other's needs; good communication among all members.
- An informal relaxed atmosphere.
- Good preparation on part of the chair and members.
- Interested, committed members.
- Minutes are complete and concise.
- Periodic self assessment of committee's performance.
- Recognition and appreciation are given to members so that they feel they are really making a contribution.
- The work of the committee is accepted and makes a valuable contribution to the organization.

Should Boards Have Committees, And If So, Which Ones?

Much of the decision-making work of many nonprofit boards is managed through committees. Committees can also serve as an important mechanism for actively involving all board members in the agency's work, and for board leadership to emerge. One long-time nonprofit CEO commented, "When a board member remarks to me that the board isn't engaging substantive enough issues, that's a sign to me that he or she hasn't been involved enough by their board committee. "

Do all boards need committees?

Most boards have committees because smaller groups can work more efficiently and less formally. (The number of committees should be limited so that individual workloads can be kept manageable^¾ if board members sit on two or three committees, their time is spread too thin for the committees to be effective.) Committees can play a helpful role in building teamwork among larger boards. While they require more administrative management from the staff and board president, they also divvy up tasks and expertise efficiently.

Increasingly, some boards are choosing not to have any committees at all. In some cases, work can be more efficiently performed by individual board members working directly with staff (such as the treasurer working directly with staff on financial affairs). In other cases, an ad hoc committee or task force is formed to complete a particular task within a few months. Many board members feel more comfortable signing on to a temporary, ad hoc committee than to a permanent standing committee. In addition, assigning responsibilities to individuals rather than to committees may result in fewer meetings and more efficient work.

What is a board committee supposed to do?

The role of a board committee can be to prepare recommendations for the board, to decide that a matter doesn't need to be addressed by the full board, to advise staff and/or in some cases, to take on a significant project. For example, a detailed review of the cash flow situation may take place on the Finance Committee, which then recommends to the board that a line of credit be established. Although the full board is responsible for the decision they make, board members rely on the diligence and thoughtfulness of the Finance Committee in making the recommendation. In another example, the fundraising committee will develop a fundraising strategy which is brought to the board for approval. Anyone on the board can object, and the board can still reject the plan or ask the committee to revise it. Over time, committees gain the confidence of the board by doing their work well.

Can people other than board members serve on committees?

In some organizations, board committees are comprised only of board members. In other organizations, committees have both board members and non-board members. For example, a Latino organization may have a site relocation committee comprised equally of board members (who are all Latino) and non-board members (some of whom are Latino and some of whom are not). Having non-board members on committees invites specialized expertise, from people who may not have time to serve on the board, or individuals who may be inappropriate for full board membership.

Board Committee Job Descriptions

It goes without saying that there is no one-size-fits-all committee list for boards, or what the responsibilities or activities should be for each committee. In the last issue of the Board Café, we discussed when boards should have committees (if at all!), and how some boards make effective use of committees. In this issue we offer committee job descriptions for 15 committees, but your own organization will construct the committees that are appropriate for your own situation, and use these descriptions as a reference for your own committee job descriptions. Unfortunately, the list has resulted in an extra-long issue of the Board Café. We hope you don't mind having a long issue once in awhile . . .

Fundraising Committee

The Fundraising Committee's job is not simply to raise money. Instead, the Fundraising Committee is responsible for overseeing the organization's overall fundraising and, in particular, the fundraising done by the board. To accomplish this, its responsibilities are:

- To work with staff to establish a fundraising *plan* that incorporates a series of appropriate vehicles, such as special events, direct mail, product sales, etc.
- To work with fundraising staff in their efforts to raise money
- To take the lead in certain types of outreach efforts, such as chairing a dinner/dance committee or hosting fundraising parties, etc.
- To be responsible for involvement of all board members in fundraising, such as having board members make telephone calls to ask for support, and
- To monitor fundraising efforts to be sure that ethical practices are in place, that donors are acknowledged appropriately, and that fundraising efforts are cost-effective.

Finance Committee

The Finance Committee (often called the Budget and Finance Committee) tasks are:

- To review budgets initially prepared by staff, to help develop appropriate procedures for budget preparations (such as meaningful involvement by program directors), and on a consistency between the budget and the organization's plans
- To report to the board any financial irregularities, concerns, opportunities
- To recommend financial guidelines to the board (such as to establish a reserve fund or to obtain a line of credit for a specified amount)
- To work with staff to design financial reports and ensure that reports are accurate and timely
- To oversee short and long-term investments, unless there is a separate investments committee
- To recommend selection of the auditor and work with the auditor, unless there is a separate audit committee, and
- To advise the executive director and other appropriate staff on financial priorities and information systems, depending on committee member expertise.

Board Development Committee

In some ways the most influential of all the committees, the Board Development Committee (sometimes called the Nominating Committee or the Committee on Trustees) is responsible for the general affairs of the board.

While the specific tasks of this committee vary greatly from organization to organization, they usually include some or all of the following responsibilities:

- To prepare priorities for board composition
- To meet with prospective board members and recommend candidates to the board
- To recommend a slate of officers to the board
- To conduct orientation sessions for new board members and to organize training sessions for the entire board, and
- To suggest new, non-board individuals for committee membership.

Program Committee

The Program Committee is often comprised of board members who are most familiar with the approaches and operations of the organization's programs. (Some boards feel that the organization's program--its "products"--should be overseen by the whole board.) Depending on its make-up and programs, this committee's most common responsibilities are:

- To oversee new program development, and to monitor and assess existing programs
- To initiate and guide program evaluations, and
- To facilitate discussions about program priorities for the agency.

Other Board Committees

Executive Committee

Sometimes an organization with a large board forms an Executive Committee, which is a smaller group that meets more frequently than the full board. Some Executive Committees are comprised of the board officers; others include committee chairs; and some choose other configurations, such as the board officers and the Fundraising Committee chair. A risk with Executive Committees is that they may take over decision-making for the board, and other board members will feel they are only there to rubber stamp decisions made by the Executive Committee.

Audit Committee

The role of the Audit Committee encompasses interviewing auditors, reviewing bids, recommending selection of an auditor to the board, receiving the auditor's report, meeting with the auditor, and responding to the auditor's recommendations. For many organizations, the annual audit is the only time the organization's financial systems are reviewed by an independent outsider, and as a result the auditor's report is an important mechanism for the board to obtain independent information about the organization's activities. On smaller boards, the functions of the Audit Committee are managed by the Finance Committee.

Personnel Committee

The functions of the Personnel Committee include drafting and/or revising personnel policies for board approval, reviewing job descriptions, establishing a salary structure, and annually reviewing staff salaries, and reviewing the benefits package. In some organizations the board's Personnel Committee also acts as a grievance board for

employee complaints. Because difficulties can arise if many less serious complaints are brought directly to the board rather than to the staff person's supervisor, it is preferable for the personnel committee to act only on formal written grievances against the executive director or when an employee formally appeals a decision by the executive director to the board.

Public Policy Committee

Organizations whose mission includes Public Policy or education may create a Public Policy Committee that stays informed on relevant matters and brings proposals to the table for a board position or an organizational activity. For example, a Public Policy Committee might draft a written position paper related to pending cuts in welfare funding or propose that the board join a coalition of neighborhood nonprofits protesting the closure of a park.

Management Oversight Committee for geographically distant boards

Boards where the members are geographically distant from one another have a difficult time keeping in touch with the work of the staff. The board may only meet twice a year or quarterly, and much of the contact among board members may be through e-mail or just with the staff. To ensure financial and legal oversight in between board meetings, some boards establish a Management Oversight Committee (MOC), which meets every 6 weeks and where two of the three members live near the office (the out-of-state member participates by phone). This committee has finance, audit, legal and personnel responsibilities which might be done by separate committees if the organization were larger and working in only one city. The MOC provides a report on the organization's operations to each board meeting.

Temporary Committees

Some committees are convened on a temporary basis to address a specific, single event or issue. Often called ad hoc committees, they meet for a few months and then disband once their task is completed. Commonly used temporary committees and their designated tasks include:

- Site Committee: To work with staff to evaluate the existing location and consider a move to a different location, to review a new lease, or to weigh the feasibility of purchasing a building.
- Special Event Committee: To coordinate the board's assignments on a particular event, such as an annual dinner.
- CEO Transition or Search Committee: To seek a new executive director, including recommending guidelines and a search process to the board, to take steps to help the new executive succeed. Some search

committees hire the new executive director, while other search committees present a group of candidates to be evaluated by a different committee or the whole board.

- Merger Committee: To pursue a possible merger with another organization, and to bring information and recommendations back to the full board.
- Planning Committee: To lead a strategic planning endeavor (the planning committee may consist of both board and staff members).
- Special Issue Committee: To investigate an unusual problem or opportunity, such as negative publicity in the newspaper, deep staff resentment against the executive director, an unusual grant opportunity or a possible joint project with another organization. Setting up a Special Issue Committee to research the situation and report back to the board ensures that decisions are based on adequate information.

Five Ways to Run a Great Meeting

by Helen Wilkie

Yes, you *do* need an agenda

We all know formal meetings need agendas, but what we often don't realize is the value of an agenda to *any* meeting - even a short, informal one.

The agenda helps you, as the meeting leader, as well as the others attending. Make sure everyone has a copy of the agenda well before the meeting.

By listing the discussion topics, you organize the meeting in your mind and force yourself to consider how you will conduct it. Ask the participants to submit items for discussion, thus preparing everyone for what is to come and lessening the chances of unexpected, last-minute items that pull the meeting off course.

Give each item a time frame, so that everyone knows the approximate time the meeting will end. Then stick to it.

Tell them why they are there

Open your meeting with a brief, clear statement of the purpose of the meeting.

By using words like discuss, consensus, inform, decide, consider, let you know, ask your opinion, you will tell the attendees what you expect of them. If you don't know the objective of the meeting, you won't know whether or not you reached it.

Start with the most important items

There is a tendency to begin regular meetings with routine items - ' to get them out of the way ' . The trouble is, by the time you have covered these items, which often get much more discussion than they warrant, there is usually not enough time left for the important subjects.

Try turning things around. Put the items requiring serious discussion or decisions at the beginning of the agenda, and work back to those needing little input from the group.

When the major items have been dealt with, tell the meeting how much (or how little) time is left and invite routine reports, etc. Stop the meeting at the scheduled time, and even if you haven't covered everything, the items not discussed will be the least important ones.

Summarize frequently

>One of the greatest enemies of meetings is digression - either by the leader or the group. As the leader, you can keep everyone on track and the meeting moving along by frequently summarizing what has been said.

When the discussion threatens to derail, interrupt with a reference to the specific point under discussion and sum up what has been agreed. You can then continue on the same track or decide to move on to the next point.

Take notes

Either take notes yourself or ask someone in the group to do so. This doesn't mean you must write up formal minutes of every meeting. What you need is a brief record of what was discussed, what was agreed and - most importantly - actions that are to be taken by individuals.

The notes should be typed and distributed to all attendees as soon after the meeting as possible. Practical meeting notes will ensure that important follow-up actions don't slip down a crack.

Useful Criteria for Structuring Committees and Task Forces

- ❑ **Size:** As with the size of the board, committees should be large enough to provide sufficient critical mass to maintain momentum and small enough to ensure that all members will be able to participate. Each board committee should have at least three board members.
- ❑ **Staffing:** Each committee may have staff assigned to provide information and, possibly, to serve as secretary to the committee. Staff roles in committees should be clarified to avoid misunderstanding and resentment.
- ❑ **Membership:** Ideally, every board member will be prepared to serve on at least one committee. Committees can also have non-board members as participants. Involving non-board members expands the expertise and volunteer time, and it allows for participation by people who are not prepared to take on full board responsibilities. Committees are a good testing and training ground for potential board members.
- ❑ **Duration:** Committees may either be standing (permanent) or *ad hoc* (temporary). *Ad hoc* committees – task forces – are disbanded when they have completed their assignments.
- ❑ **Charges:** Each group should have a specific charge (task, purpose, commission), as well as a time frame for completing that task. In addition, job descriptions for members and chairs also help define the committee’s work and expectations.
- ❑ **Chairs:** Committee chairs set the tone for committee work, ensure that members have the information they need to do their jobs, and oversee the logistics of the committee’s operation. As the committee’s link to the board, committee chairs frequently consult with and report to the board chair and the full board when indicated.

Committee Chairs and Members

Role of Committee Chairs

- Set the tone for committee work, ensure that members have the information they need, and oversee the logistics of the committee.
- Report to the full board on committee decisions, policy recommendations, and other committee business. Work closely with chair, chief executive, and other staff.
- Assign work to committee members, set meeting agendas, run meetings, and ensure distribution of minutes and reports.
- Initiate and lead the committee’s annual evaluation, a process in which committee members review their accomplishments in relation to committee goals and reflect on areas of the committee’s work that need improvement.

Role of Committee Members

- Must make a serious commitment to participate actively in the committee’s work, including substantive participation in committee meetings and discussions.
- Should volunteer for and willingly accept assignments and complete them thoroughly and on time.
- Must stay informed about committee matters, prepare themselves well for meetings, and review and comment on minutes and reports.
- Should get to know other committee members and build a collegial working relationship that contributes to consensus.
- Should be active participants in the committee’s annual evaluation.

First Meeting of the Committee

- Start on time
- Set deadline to adjourn
- Tentative agenda
- Call to order.
- Announce purpose of meeting.
- Appoint a secretary to maintain records of the committee's action or recommendation.
- What is our job?
- Discuss committee assignment and encourage group participation as to what may be probable solutions or what additional information is needed.
- Setting priorities - goals.
 - What additional information is needed?
 - List actions necessary to solve the committee assignment.
 - Are there other programs or projects we should consider?
 - Has someone else or another organization had a similar experience?
 - Is there a success story in another organization on a similar problem?
 - Is a staff resource person needed to advise the committee?
 - Finally, identify priority issues, actions, or projects by exact name and agree upon a time schedule for completion of each.
- Implementing priority activities.
 - Each project or activity is assigned/delegated to an individual or small sub- committee to implement.
 - Set report dates to report progress on each assignment.
- Agree upon date and time of next meeting.
- Adjourn.
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- Committee Report

Name of Committee: _____

Key discussion Points _____

Recommendations and/or Points for Further Discussion:

Names of Committee Members Attending Meetings:

Date: _____ (signed) _____ Chair

MEETING PERSONALITIES and MEETING TIPS

THE GOOD GUYS

The Initiator - He gets things started. He can offer ideas and solutions. But he can have a large ego and require recognition for what he/she contributes

-Try to involve them early on any issue

-Think of them as the right side of your brain, the creator, the intuitive side

The Orienter - Can refocus the attention of the group. Their weakness is their failure to explore. Approach them before the meeting regarding what you want to accomplish.

The Facilitator - They clarify without offending. They ask questions and distinguish arguments. Look for them when there is a deadlock.

The Reconciler - Often older and wiser than other meeting partners. Been around the block. Make sure they're involved and appreciated.

The Supporter - Gives words of encouragement for all. Though not necessarily a leader, they find what's positive. Has trouble with hard choices. They don't like responsibility and is very comfortable being a supporter.

THE BAD GUYS

The Aggressor - Questions everything. Criticizes ideas and attacks people personally. Wants attention. Sees problems but seldom offers solutions. Really wants to be part of the process. During a meeting, seat them next to a strong ally.

The Playboy - Disinterested. Engages in side discussions. Remains uninvolved.

Mr. Know it All - They think they know everything. Manipulates conversation and seeks control. Best controlled by seeking their advice prior to the meeting. Can't let him play the heavy.