

**C** – The Role Of The Board In Developing Committees  
Committee Assignments  
Effective Use Of Committees

## **The Fundamental Role of the Board**

The board identifies the committees needed to support the work which is required and approves the terms of reference for each committee. The board model will have an impact on the extent of the committee structure and whether the purpose is solely to support the work of the board or to support the service delivery as well.

The Chair/President of the board invites someone to be committee chair or the chair is chosen by the committee members. Additional committee members are recruited from the community. Some boards consider committee membership as an opportunity for committee members to get to know an organization prior to nomination for a board position.

The board receives and responds to reports forwarded to it by the committees.

### **Purpose of Committees**

Committees perform **four** main functions.

1. Preparatory work leading up to board decisions - such as developing policy options and recommendations for the consideration of the board.

This is a function of committees in all four board models. However, board committees only do preparatory work in areas of board responsibility. In policy governance and policy boards, this is restricted to policy. In working boards and collectives, this includes preparation and recommendations on programs and operations.

2. Carry out tasks on behalf of the board in certain areas such as fundraising or community relations.

Policy governance and policy boards which delegate tasks to committees must establish clear parameters, as staff may take over the kinds of activities they are used to doing on their own. Working boards and collectives are more likely to have committees doing these functions.

3. Work with the staff to implement certain operations and activities.

This function exists only for committees of working boards and collectives.

4. As a training ground for future board members. This is most commonly a function of committees in policy and working boards. It is unusual in policy governance boards, as they have so few committees that few board members would be found in that way. It is redundant in collectives, as the members of the group are the board.

Note: Boards sometimes strike advisory committees, often at the request of a funding body. These committees are usually composed of individuals from outside the organization who provide advice and expertise in specific areas or on particular issues.

## Tips for Effective Use of Committees

1. *Use ad hoc committees where possible:*

This allows people to do useful work and be recognized for a valuable contribution, then move on in other directions. There is nothing which leads to the "lack of interest" syndrome faster than serving on a committee which isn't really doing anything. Short-term commitments often appeal to busy people with special skills or to people who are testing out their involvement and may get "hooked" into becoming full board members another time.

2. *Have other people besides board members on a committee:*

The chairman should be a member of the board, but staff, clients, professionals, interested local citizens, parents, and other organization members can provide valuable input into decision-making and the carrying out of programs through work with committees. This creates a real feeling of teamwork; and again, permits individuals to make personal contributions at their own level and allows them to grow within the organization.

3. *Develop a committee only for a specific reason:*

Design a committee to fill your needs and to help your organization realize its goals in an exciting and dynamic way. If you don't need the committee, get rid of it!

4. *Be sure that each committee has written terms of reference (a clear description of the purpose, the time frame, the authority and responsibilities)*

5. *Require regular reports to the board so you are up to date on the committee's work*

## Make Committee Assignments Realistic

When committees meet, the diversely talented group often gets fired up with enthusiasm, adopting a "we can accomplish anything` philosophy.

While this attitude generates a lot of motivation and excitement (which are both necessary for committee success), keep this attitude in check.

The reality is, committee members must go back to their jobs, their families and their day-to-day responsibilities. Enthusiasm might wane in the face of personal and professional commitments.

The lesson: Temper "in-the-moment" enthusiasm with a dose of reality by making committee assignments realistic and do-able.