

Factsheet

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Replaces OMAFRA Factsheet 94-015, *Effective Committees*

Effective committees can be one of the most important working forces at the heart of an organization as well as an extremely rewarding experience for those involved. This Factsheet outlines the why and how of committees, providing guidelines to help committees function well and achieve its goals.

Although the purpose and objectives of a committee may be clear and concise, other factors can influence whether or not the committee will succeed in accomplishing its task.

WHY ESTABLISH A COMMITTEE

There are several basic reasons to establish a committee that are common to all regardless of the tasks they are to complete. These include:

- sharing responsibilities
- involving more members
- using the specialized skills of members
- providing a vehicle where:
 - inexperienced members can gain confidence
 - matters can be examined in more detail
- allowing the parent body to complete its business more efficiently by delegating work to committees.

DETERMINING NEED

Unless the purpose of a committee can be stated in writing, the committee is probably unnecessary. If a committee is proposed, consider the following points in developing its terms of reference.

Terms of Reference

- Name – gives an identity and the general objectives
- Type – standing or ad hoc
- Nature of the committee – discussion, working, task force, etc.

- Purpose – a short description of why it was formed, including specific tasks and objectives
- Responsibilities and limitations – specific directives that define goals or tasks, and the relationship to any other overlapping activities
- Chairperson – someone skilled in chairing meetings, who will be responsible for determining method of appointing members as well as results
- Responsible to – designates the person or a chair who will receive the reports
- Authority – defines decision making or approval authority
- Timeframe, reporting, deadlines – duration, reporting dates, type of report i.e. at board meeting or written, final completion date
- Composition – number and title or type of individuals who will serve on committee, process for selecting members and filling vacancies, role of other directors, term of office
- Support – staff, volunteers, actual type of support provided
- Resources needed – budget, expenses, office space, files, etc.
- Communication with Board – how and when, usually through chair

The parent organization, usually through the executive, is responsible for defining the committee's purpose, limitations and responsibilities. Include these written terms of reference in the policies or bylaws or recorded via the motion that created the committee. Also record the names of members of

standing committees. All written reference to committees is then made available to members and readily accessible to the organization.

TYPES OF COMMITTEES

There are two kinds:

1. **Standing** — created by the standing orders, rules, by-laws or regulations of an organization. They exist and function more or less on a permanent basis, e.g., finance, education, nomination, etc.
2. **Ad Hoc** — appointed for a particular purpose on a short-term basis.

Both types of committees may form subcommittees if the work loads are heavy or complex.

CREATING A GOOD COMMITTEE

Two key procedures to achieve the best committee are:

1. **Selection** — Selecting members is a critical first step to creating an effective committee. Carefully consider skills and interest. Size is also important — five to nine members is best in most cases.
2. **Orientation** — Taking time to adequately orient members helps start the committee on the right track. Provide information and clearly define:
 - committee purpose and expectations
 - structure, reporting procedure, roles and responsibilities
 - individual member’s expectations.

Committee Chair

The Committee Chair is key in committee work. Select this individual carefully. Choose someone who is interested in and can work easily with others. The Chair’s role is not necessarily one of bringing technical expertise to the group. Someone who is a good membership salesperson will not necessarily be good at chairing the membership committee. The Chair must be organized and know how to organize — both programs and people. He or she must know how to involve others — the experts and the workers — and to motivate them to do the work of the committee. Other responsibilities of the Chair include:

- preparing and presenting committee reports
- ensuring there is a successor being groomed to assume the Chair’s role
- setting agendas, calling meetings, soliciting input from all members

Given the importance of the chair to the success of a committee, it is important the parent organization be honest to prospective candidates about the amount of work involved. Enticing someone with “Take the job. There’s nothing to it” is unwise, unproductive and untrue.

REPORTING

Committees are directly responsible to the organization that created them. Reports, usually presented by the chair, should:

- be included as agenda items for general meetings
- list specific recommendations at the end of the report.
- be concise — otherwise the time saved by referring the business to a committee may be negligible.
- clearly indicate that full discussion was held and all options considered, otherwise the organization may suspect that the committee “missed something”. (See attached report outline.)

Motions dealing with the report are usually made by the committee chair and include:

- “to receive a report” — this is a common motion when no specific recommendations are made or no action is required/desired
- “to adopt a report — if the report is adopted recommendations become decisions of the organization and action is to be taken, The responsibility, both legal and otherwise, becomes that of the parent organization.

The organization must give the committee feedback, for example:

- receiving or adopting a report
- referring to another committee or individual for further action
- returning the report for clarification or further action
- postponing action
- declining the recommendations

A “thank you” or other appropriate form of recognition for a job well done, even though there may be criticism included in the report, is essential to motivate future committee effectiveness.

SIGNS OF A WELL FUNCTIONING COMMITTEE

- 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 and to each other’s needs, good communication amongst members.
- An informal, relaxed atmosphere.
- Good preparation on the part of the Chair and members.
- Interested and committed members.
- Minutes are complete and concise.
- Periodic self assessment of committee’s performance.
- Contributions are recognized so members know their work is appreciated.
- The work of the committee is accepted and makes a valuable contribution to the organization.

SUMMARY

- A committee is appointed when a job is too large for one person.
- Committees help define an issue, resolve a complex problem and involve group members.
- Successful committees plan ahead, usually as a result of the key role that the chair plays.

Committees, their chairs and members are vital to the health of an effective organization.

FIRST MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE

* start on time
* set deadline to adjourn

Tentative Agenda

1. Call to order.
2. Announce purpose of meeting.
3. Appoint a secretary to maintain records of the committee's actions or recommendations.
4. What is our job?
Discuss committee assignment and encourage group participation as to what may be probable solutions or what additional information is needed.
5. Set priorities — goals.
 - a) What additional information is needed?
 - b) List actions necessary to solve the committee assignment.
 - c) Are there other programs or projects we should consider?
 - d) Has someone else or another organization had a similar experience?
 - e) Is there a success story in another organization on a similar problem?
 - f) Is a staff resource person needed to advise the committee?
 - g) Identify priority issues, actions, or projects by exact name.
6. Implement priority activities.
 - a) Each project or activity is assigned / delegated to an individual or small subcommittee to implement. Agree upon a time schedule for completion of each.
 - b) Set report dates to report progress on each assignment.
7. Agree upon date and time of next meeting.
8. Adjourn.

COMMITTEE REPORT

Name of Committee: _____

Committee Assignment: _____

Key Discussion Points: _____

Recommendations and/or Points for Further Discussion: _____

Names of Committee Members Attending Meetings: _____

Date: _____

Chair (signed) _____

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