

Council and Committee Handbook



Guide to Effective Association Leadership

PREFACE

Thank you for giving of yourself: your time, your ideas, your problem solving skills and your professional knowledge. Volunteerism is what makes ABHP a strong, dynamic and member driven organization. In return, we hope your involvement as an ABHP volunteer will be a rewarding and satisfying experience. It is a chance to do something important for your profession while also learning, growing and making new friends.

The purpose of this Council and Committee Handbook is to provide you with background about councils and committees in general and some guidelines that will make your role as a volunteer member more effective and significant. Although the Council and Committee Handbook make reference to Committees, it is all applicable to all of ABHP Councils as well.

The Challenge of Committee Participation

A committee can be one of the most productive tools that an association has to work with. Whether you are chairing a committee or are a committee member, you face the challenge of getting involved in the work the committee was formed to accomplish.

Your contribution and your participation on the committee will determine its success or failure. If you participate, get involved, and encourage others on the committee to do so, the committee will be successful. Enthusiasm is contagious.

The findings of a committee have a direct impact on the decisions made by the officers and the board of directors of the association. The energy you put into your work on the committee has a direct influence on the direction your association takes.

This booklet presents guidelines that should make your term on the committee more productive. It is based on experiences of those who have served on many committees and have identified certain factors that make them work. Use their experiences and add your own to them as you discover what works for you.

“Effective committees don’t just happen. They are a combination of the right individuals, a mission, good leadership, [and] good support work.”

Functions of a Committee

The primary function of a committee is to contribute to the efficient operation of an organization. In most cases, a committee is concerned with the communication of information and with assisting the leadership in the decision-making process by providing needed information. In order to accomplish these tasks, there are two types of committees that are usually formed by associations and professional societies.

Two Types of Committees

Standing committees perform a continuing function necessary for the on-going operation of the association. They operate indefinitely and are usually provided for in the constitution or bylaws of the organization. Some examples might be the membership committee, the finance or budget committee, the nominating committee, and the executive committee.

Special or “ad hoc” committees are generally formed to accomplish a specific objective. Their existence stems from a new or current problem or project that the association is facing. The association may form a special committee to consider or handle a single subject. When the project is resolved, the information is gathered, or the project is completed, the committee will disband. The life of the special committee may be no longer than a few days, or may span a considerable period of time, according to the nature and complexity of the situation.

The planning and operation of both types of committees is similar in some respects and considerably different in others. Because the special committee is usually faced with finding the resolution to a single problem, it often requires more preparation and study before the meeting than a standing committee does.

For example, a finance committee operates continuously, year after year, and directs its attentions to the normal fiscal requirements of the organization. A special committee might be formed for the purpose of establishing a special chair at a university, or to study the need for a dues increase, and would function only until it has accomplished its task.

There are projects that are not appropriate for a standing committee to undertake. Certain tasks, like establishing policy, defining goals, and formulating proposals necessary for long-range planning, involve consideration from all areas of the organization. For a standing committee, such as finance, to assume such a job would deter it from its primary function. Further, the committee might not encompass a broad enough viewpoint to accomplish such a task. The job would be better suited to a special committee of members who can consider the problem, set up a plan or course of action, implement it, and dissolve.

Both types of committees, standing and special, are important and necessary to an organization and should be used appropriately.

Guidelines for Chairing a Committee

Even with capable members on the committee, a firm goal to achieve, and the support of the association Executive Committee or staff, a committee without strong leadership will be handicapped. During your term as chairman of the committee, the most consistent help will come from the association executive and staff or management team. To a great extent, your ability to work with them will determine your success as head of your committee and a leader in your association.

The association executive and staff or management team are familiar with the operations of the organization, and as the head of a committee, you should seek their assistance in selecting committee members, setting objectives, and reviewing the work and communications of your committee. By keeping the association staff and management team informed and familiar with the committee's activities and progress, they will be able to advise you on problems and procedures and can point out possible pitfalls.

The success you achieve as head of the committee will largely depend on your ability to preside and guide the meetings of the committee to a definite goal. The following guidelines should assist you in reaching that goal.

- Always start the meeting on time and work with a definite agenda.
- The reason for the meeting should be stated at the beginning briefly and clearly.

- Make sure committee members get all the information relating to an issue, both pro and con.
- Keep a low profile while taking charge of the direction of the meeting.
- Review the committee's objectives relative to the objectives of the association.
- Keep the meeting moving; interest lags when action lags. Get as much participation as possible. Keep responses short; get to the point.
- Speak clearly. If you can't be heard, you can't exercise control.
- Insist on order.
- Talk to the group, not to individuals.
- Make sure that each individual taking the floor talks clearly and audibly. Sum up what the speaker has said, entertain discussion, and obtain a decision.
- Control aimless discussion by recommending further study.
- Retain control, but don't stifle free comment. Invite constructive criticism and even disagreement. Ask for support. Clarify issues by obtaining a consensus, then move on.
- Don't argue with the individual who has the floor. Ask questions if you disagree, but remember that as presiding officer you should remain neutral.
- If you have a comment, ask for the floor as a participant.
- Make sure adequate minutes are kept of each meeting and that they are distributed to each committee member.
- Check at the end of the meeting to see if members feel that all relevant subjects have been adequately covered.

"Each committee must have the proper balance of experts in the field and of those who are interested in learning more about the field."

Choosing Committee Members

The make-up of certain committees may be provided for in the constitution or bylaws.

More often, though, the chief elected officer, consulting with the chairman of the committee, appoints the committee members. Regardless of the method used for selecting committee members, it is important that the association management team or executive and staff be involved. With the management team or staff assistance, the capabilities of individuals being considered for committee membership can be examined, and any additional background information needed can be gathered.

When choosing members for a committee, try to have a good mix of mature, successful, experienced members and members who are new to the profession. The newer members will bring fresh ideas and insights to the committee; experienced members will provide guidance and perspective.

One way to arrange the committees is to put the mature, experienced members on committees concerned with broad policy making and to place the younger, less experienced members on committees with high visibility. Younger members will be much more likely to perform in a position that puts them on display.

Here are some guidelines on effective committee operation:

Committee Members:

- should be appointed because they are either knowledgeable about or interested in the committee's area of activity.
- should know who the committee chairman is.
- should know what the specific responsibilities of the committee are.
- should know what the association's practices, policies, and procedures are.
- should know what the responsibilities of the association management team and staff to the committee are.
- should know what the past performance of the committee has been.
- should know what the reporting procedure to the board of directors is.
- should establish only realistic, attainable goals.
- should give recognition to the committee chairman and other members of the committee.
- should get involved and participate.

Preparing for the Committee Meeting

Preparation for the committee meeting is essential to its success. Laying the groundwork for the task the committee has to accomplish is a function that begins with the chairman of the committee and is then carried on by the members, both before and during the meeting.

An agenda needs to be drawn up and sent to all members of the committee. It should include all topics to be discussed at the meeting and should also include the date, location, starting time, scheduled breaks, and anticipated adjourning time. Any supporting or background material to further explain or detail the items on the agenda should also be included.

Select the time and place for the meeting. The chairman of the committee and the management team or staff should determine the time and place that will get maximum participation from the members.

Facilities need to be arranged. After the when and where are taken care of, all the details of the meeting room have to be planned. The following is a list of physical requirements that should be kept in mind when planning for the meeting.

- The meeting room should be comfortable for the group that will meet in it— not too large or too small. It should be located in a place as convenient to all the members as possible.
- If directional signs are needed, arrange for them. If in a hotel, post the meeting name and room on the lobby directory. Also post the name of the meeting outside the meeting room.
- Make sure before the meeting begins that lighting and ventilation are adequate. Check the temperature. Find out who to call if any of these conditions should change.
- Based on the size of the committee, determine what seating arrangement and table size and shape are best suited. For a small committee, round or oval tables work well.
- Keep these points in mind when determining seating arrangements: Don't place talkative friends next to each other or directly across the table; unless you want a confrontation, don't place hostile persons next to or across from each other.
- Chairs should be comfortable, particularly if the meeting will be lengthy.

- Notepads, pencils, water, and glasses should be provided.
- If a blackboard is needed, make sure chalk and an eraser are also provided.
- When audio-visuals are to be used, make sure there is someone present who can operate the equipment. If projectors are needed, ask that an extra bulb be provided. Check that the screen is at the proper distance from the projector. Test microphones before the meeting if they are going to be used.
- If all the members of the committee don't personally know each other, consider using name cards in front of each seat and/or badges for each person.
- Be sure to provide sufficient beverages for morning and afternoon breaks. Have a selection available, including coffee (regular and decaffeinated), tea, and soft drinks.
- Avoid serving heavy meals before or during the meeting to help members stay alert.
- Keep extra copies of the agenda and supporting material available.

'. . . the basic purpose of a committee . . . [is] to determine through its collective wisdom, which is usually superior to that of any one member, the best solutions to a problem.'

Guidelines for Committee Members

The role a committee member plays is an important one. The success of the committee depends on the contributions made by each member of the committee. Consider the following suggestions as you approach your role in committee participation.

- Study the agenda carefully before you come to the meeting. Ask for clarification if any items are unclear. Review the supporting material.
- Stick to the agenda during the meeting. Bring up new business only at the appropriate time.
- Determine what the exact purpose of the meeting is and decide in advance how and what you will contribute to it.
- Keep your replies short and to the point. You are there to seek information, not deliver an oration.
- Speak in a voice everyone can hear. Wait until you have the attention of all the

committee members before you begin your remarks. The presiding officer should insure that a desirable atmosphere exists.

- Speak to the entire group, not just the person sitting opposite you.
- Repeat remarks if you think they weren't heard.
- If your remarks are lengthy or involved, sum them up at the end of your discussion. Someone may have forgotten your objective before you've finished.
- Don't hesitate to comment, criticize constructively, or disagree. Know your subject and ask for support from members who believe as you do.
- If you disagree with the speaker, make your comments at the proper time.
- If you have a comment, ask for the floor rather than joining in aimless group discussion. If what you have to say is a genuine contribution and really does make a difference, don't let it get lost in confused conversation.
- There may be dissenters on some subjects. Ask them to summarize their convictions in a direct statement. This permits a more thorough examination of an idea that could be highly constructive when completely understood.
- Hurriedly passed motions usually don't receive the consideration they deserve. Better to table them until the next meeting, when they can be discussed in detail, than to pass a motion you might regret later.

How a Committee Meeting is Structured

Following is the generally accepted sequence, or order of business, that is observed for a meeting.

1. Call the meeting to order
2. Roll call (sometimes omitted)
3. Minutes of the previous meeting
4. State the purpose of the meeting
5. State briefly the program for the meeting

6. Discuss and resolve agenda items as they appear
7. New business
8. Adjourn the meeting

Committee Size

The size of the committee is primarily determined by its purpose and the nature of its work. If prompt action is essential, it is best to limit the number of committee members. A smaller group takes less time to organize, can communicate more rapidly, and will be able to act faster.

A larger group, on the other hand, will allow more diverse viewpoints to be heard, although it will usually require longer doing so. A larger group will be able to solve a greater variety of problems because the number of skills available will increase proportionately with the group's size.

Some associations appoint corresponding members to their committees. A corresponding member does not usually attend committee meetings, but does receive all committee mailings, and is asked to respond in writing to the materials, offering comments or suggestions.

Conclusion

Committees perform a necessary function in the operation of associations. They provide a cross-section of experience and knowledge and allow for continuity of thought and cooperation. Committee work serves as an excellent training ground for future association leaders. The opportunity for an individual to participate in committee work, and the challenge it provides, enhances the feeling of belonging, and of playing a significant role in the association, and increases loyalty toward the organization.

The suggestions made in this booklet are a starting point. The quality and quantity of your participation will determine how rewarding and productive your term on the committee will be.

Conceptions . . . and Misconceptions

Committees are the backbone of an organization.

Comment: The committees of an organization function to gather information, study issues, reach a consensus, and make recommendations to the individuals responsible for making the final decisions. Given the size and complexity of today's associations, without the input of committees, the decision-making process would probably grind to a halt.

We started with into alternate plans at our committee meeting, and we've narrowed them down

to eight. – The Readers Digest. August 1975

Comment: One of the outstanding benefits of committee work is the generation of fresh, good ideas. Each member of a committee brings unique insight to a problem, and helps to broaden the base of potential solutions. An association, then, can choose among a maximum number of solutions, rather than settling for the “lesser of two or three evils.”

. . . vital as the individual is, in an association the primary element is not the single person but a group – a committee.

Comment: Participation in the committee process offers a double benefit. The decision making ability of the whole is almost always more capable than the ability of any one of its members thinking alone. And, participative decision making encourages maximum support for new ideas—each member of the committee becomes a disciple for the decisions made by the committee.

A committee is a group that succeeds only when it is composed of three members, one of whom happens to be sick and another absent.

Comment: A committee of one is not a committee. In order to meaningfully fulfill its function, a committee requires consistent, active participation from all its members.

Whatever their assignment, their purpose is to study and discuss issues and problems and then make recommendations.

Comment: The primary function of a committee is to contribute to the efficient operation of an organization. A committee contributes by keeping the association leadership informed, by discussing and studying issues facing the organization, and by recommending courses of action.

. . . for long-term effectiveness, an association must have strong committees and the recognition of that fact by both members and staff.

Comment: The only justification for a committee is a need to accomplish some purpose. Members of a committee must clearly understand what their purpose is, and should focus all of their energy on accomplishing it. The efforts of the committee, then, must be recognized by the management team, staff and officers. But no committee exists in a vacuum—members of the committee need to listen to and carefully consider advice from staff and officers, so that the decisions they make will be viable in the framework of the organization as a whole.