



Making the Most of Committees

Committees are a vital element in a successful student organization. Wherever and whenever there is a task to be done that can't be handled by one or two people in a short period of time, a committee is likely to be formed. Big jobs can be made manageable by breaking them into smaller segments and assigning committee members to be responsible for those segments. The result is greater efficiency and a stronger group.

Committees are useful for a variety of reasons:

- They allow you to involve more people in the activities of the group. Rather than a select few officers doing all the work, involving members in committees gives everyone a chance to feel ownership of the group's projects.
- By selecting people to serve on committees who ran for office but weren't elected, or others who have good leadership skills who perhaps weren't interested in running for an office, your group can develop the talent and abilities of a larger group of student leaders and avoid overusing its officers.
- Committees allow groups to use the talents of group members to their best advantage by assigning them to committees where their

specialized skills can be utilized.

- Committee work is an excellent opportunity to train younger members of the group so they can gain experience that will enable them to serve as officers or chairs when they become upperclassmen.
- A committee can save time for the larger group by discussing and eliminating impractical ideas and selecting the most relevant, valuable ideas to recommend to the organization for action.



committees include membership, service projects, assemblies, spirit, and elections.

Special committees (often called ad hoc committees) are appointed for a specific purpose and once they have accomplished their goal, they disband. A committee for the King and Queen of Hearts dance would be a special committee that would plan and do the work for one event—the dance. Special committees are assigned specific responsibilities that should be practical, reasonable, and clearly stated. Special committees include:

- *Advisory committees* are formed to study a problem, and report back to the large group with facts, figures, and recommendations.
- *Coordinating committees* are convened to lay out a general plan or direction, to act as a liaison with other committees, or perhaps as an “umbrella” committee that coordinates the operation of special committees, such as the Homecoming Steering committee.
- *Work committees* have a specific job to complete or goal to reach.

Some committees perform many of these functions at different points. If your club was planning a social activity, a committee would be formed to plan and organize it. Committee members might brainstorm ideas, select the best ones to present to the large group, take the one the group liked best,

Types of Committees

Although there are many different purposes for committees, they all fall into three basic types:

Standing committees are defined in the bylaws as those committees appointed or elected for an entire year. Their work is not necessarily limited to one project. A committee appointed or elected for the school year to organize student recognition activities is an example. A standing committee might use several special committees throughout the year to handle each activity planned for recognition, but the standing committee would guide the overall effort throughout the year. Other typical standing

and plan it.

Executive committees are made up of officers, committee chairs, or an elected board. They plan large group meetings, initiate, and organize activities. Often this group recommends the formation of standing or special committees to carry out the plans it makes. The executive committee reviews major items and makes recommendations before going to the entire organization.

Forming a Committee

A committee will not work unless all the members know what they are supposed to do and are committed to getting it done. When forming a committee, the following questions should be answered:

- What is the purpose of the committee?
- What are its responsibilities and limitations?
- What are the specific tasks to be accomplished?
- When should the job be finished and what type of report is expected?
- Is there a budget?
- What is the role of officers and how is the membership of the committee to be decided?
- What is the term of office for members, method of filling vacancies, and method for appointing the chair?
- What is the authority of the committee?
- What resources are needed? What resources are already available?

Committee members may be appointed, selected from volunteers, or elected by the members of the entire group. The committee should be a congenial group, yet represent several points of view. Its size may vary based on the project and the scope of work to be accomplished; a committee decorating a hall for a dance will probably have more members than a committee that is investigating the cost of bands. Smaller groups often work more effectively—five to seven are a good workable number: large enough to represent a variety of opinions yet small enough to make meeting schedules possible. Although, in some situations it is better to have too many people on a committee than too few, as is the case with a committee assigned the job of cleaning up after a school rally.

Committee Chairs

Every committee needs a leader, usually called a chairperson or chair. The chair has the final responsibility for the success of the committee and must work with the members to decide WHAT has to be done, WHO will do it, WHERE it will be done, and WHEN it must be completed. The chair also needs to know and communicate how much authority the committee has. To achieve this, the chair should:

- Have a clear understanding of the goal and authority of the committee
- Communicate that goal to the members of the committee
- Schedule meeting times and places, notify members, and insist on attendance (a reminder phone call the night before can

be valuable)

- Establish an agenda and procedures for the meetings to ensure effective communication
- Appoint a committee secretary (or rotate the job of serving as committee recorder among the committee members) and ensure that a written record of each meeting is kept and final reports are produced as needed
- Delegate the work to committee members—appoint or elect a secretary or recorder, a treasurer if needed, and establish sub-committees for specific tasks
- Set deadlines for completion of specific tasks
- Follow up on progress of tasks
- Participate in committee discussions and encourage others to do so
- Be diplomatic: facilitate the group, don't dominate it
- Present reports to the general membership or executive committee.

Committee Reports

When a committee's work is done or a specific project is finished, a final report should be written and filed for future reference. Develop a standard form for chairs to complete and ask them to attach supplemental documentation such as letters sent or received, receipts, instruction sheets, custodial requests, publicity plans, and so forth. These committee reports will provide invaluable information to future officers and committee chairs as they undertake similar activities.