GUIDE FOR COMMITTEE MEMBERS, COMMITTEE CHAIRS AND STAFF LIAISONS

Getting Involved

The Challenge of Committee Participation

A committee can be one of the most productive tools with which an association has to work. Whether one is chairing a committee or is a committee member, he or she must embrace the challenge of getting involved in the work the committee was formed to accomplish.

A committee member's contribution and participation on the committee will determine its success or failure. If committee members get involved, participate, and encourage others on the committee to do the same, the committee will be successful. Enthusiasm is contagious.

The output of a committee has a direct impact on the decisions made by the leadership of the association. The energy a committee member puts into the work of the committee has a direct influence on the direction and success of the association.

Functions of a Committee

The primary function of a committee is to contribute to the efficient operation of an organization, and, ultimately, to the fulfillment of the association's vision and mission. In most cases, a committee is concerned with the communication of information about its work and with assisting the leadership in the decision-making process by providing needed information.

. . . 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 or challenge.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Should be appointed because they are knowledgeable about or interested in the committee's area of activity.
- Should know who the committee chair is.
- Should know what the specific responsibilities of committee members are.
- Should know what the association's practices, policies, and procedures are.
- Should be familiar with the association's vision, mission, and strategic objectives.
- Should be familiar with the committee's mission, goals, and strategies.
- Should have a copy of the association's antitrust compliance policy and review it regularly and abide by it.
- Should understand the responsibilities of the association's staff to the committees.
- Should understand the reporting procedure to the board of directors.
- Should understand the working relationship with other committees.

- Should maintain regular communication with his or her company's representative to the board of directors.
- Should establish only realistic and attainable goals.
- Should give recognition to the committee chair and other members of the committee.
- Should get involved and participate.

Committee Participation

Committee members are asked to:

- Study the meeting agenda carefully before coming to the committee meeting and 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 in advance how and what they will contribute to the committee meeting.
- Keep replies short and to the point. Seek information, do not deliver an oration.
- Speak in a voice everyone can hear. Wait until one has the attention of all the committee members before speaking. The committee chair should ensure that the individual speaking has the floor.
- Repeat remarks if it is clear they were not heard.
- Sum up remarks of a lengthy discussion. Someone may have forgotten the speaker's objective before he or she has finished.
- Comment, criticize constructively, or disagree. One should know one's subject and invite support from other members who believe similarly.
- Make comments at the proper time when contributing the what the speaker is saying.
- Ask for the floor rather than joining in an aimless group discussion. If what one has to say is a genuine contribution and really does make a difference, it should not get lost in a confused conversation.
- Ask dissenters 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 by members.
- Not hurriedly pass motions as they usually do not receive the consideration they deserve. It is better to table them until the next meeting, when they can be discussed in detail, than to pass a motion members might regret later.
- Respond to emails from the chair or staff liaison as requested.

Effective committees don't just happen. They are a combination of the right individuals, a mission, good leadership, [and] good staff work.

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Even with capable members on a committee, a firm goal to achieve, and the support of the association staff, a committee without strong leadership will be handicapped. The most consistent help for the committee chair will come from the association staff. To a great extent, a chair's ability to work with the association staff and leadership will determine his or her success as head of the committee and leader in the association. The success a committee chair achieves will largely depend on his or her ability to preside and guide the committee to a definite goal.

The following guidelines should assist committee chairs with running productive meetings:

- Always start the committee meeting on time and work with a definite agenda that has been sent to committee members in advance. Committee members should receive all the information relating to an issue, both pro and con.
- Following the call to order and introductions review the association's antitrust compliance policy with counsel and attendees, ensure all have a copy, and that all agree to abide by it.
- Periodically review the committee's charge relative to the objectives of the association.
- Speak clearly. If you can't be heard, you can't exercise control. Make sure that the individual taking the floor speaks clearly and audibly. Sum up what the speaker has said, entertain discussion, and obtain a decision.
- Make sure adequate minutes are kept of each meeting and that they are distributed to all committee members. (The GA staff liaison is responsible for drafting the minutes.)
- Guide, mediate, probe, and stimulate discussions. Let *others* thrash out ideas; committees are **not** formed to validate the thinking of the chair or staff. The committee belongs to the association, not to the chair.
- Encourage a clash of ideas, but not of personalities. Good decisions are made when committees examine all sides of an issue, but don't let members personalize the debate. Emotional discussion of an idea is good, but an emotional reaction to a person is bad. When emotions are high, return the floor to a neutral person, seek a factual answer, or take a break.
- Keep discussions on track; periodically restate the issue and the goal of the discussion.
- Monitor participation; control talkative members and draw out silent members. Deal with dysfunctional behaviors. Don't let a person who is blocking constructive discussion ruin the committee meeting.
- Use well-placed questions, seek points of information and clarification, and periodically summarize to keep the discussion focused.
- Keep the group focused on the central question and moving toward a decision. Call on the least senior members first to express their views; discussions tend to "close down" after senior members express strong views.

- Seek consensus, unanimity is not required. Sometimes an idea is compromised by trying to get every person to completely agree.
- Close the meeting by noting achievements. Check at the end of the meeting to see if members feel that all relevant subjects have been adequately covered.
- Understand the association's bylaws as relates to voting and committee policies.

How a Committee Meeting is Structured

Following is the generally accepted sequence, or order of business, which is observed for a meeting:

1. Call the meeting to order ***on time***.
2. Take attendance.
3. Review the minutes of the previous meeting.
4. Discuss and resolve agenda items as they are listed.
5. Ask for any new business items.
6. Adjourn the meeting ***on time.***

Committee Chair responsibilities

- With the association staff liaison, the committee chair develops a work plan that will allow the committee to discharge its responsibilities effectively and efficiently for the year. He or she assists with planning agendas for committee meetings to accomplish the committee's goals.
- The committee chair and staff liaison are responsible for keeping leadership and appropriate staff fully informed of committee activities.
- The committee chair works with association staff to ensure that the work of the committee is carried out between meetings. He or she maintains records and relevant information on committee work to interact knowledgeably with committee members and association staff.
- In addition to the general committee charge, which outlines the committee's scope of activity, the board of directors may charge the committee with specific work. The committee chair and staff liaison are responsible for keeping the work of the committee focused on the charge and aligned with the association's strategic plan. At the conclusion of each year, the chair and staff liaison are expected to make recommendations to the association leadership regarding the future work of the committee.
- Committees may not commit to expenditure of funds and may not express opinions or represent positions in the name of the association, unless so authorized. In proposing a program or activity that may involve expenditure of funds, committees must submit a program description and budget to the executive director for inclusion in the association budget for approval by the board of directors.

- The committee chair and staff liaison are responsible for keeping committee members fully informed, with timely reports on all committee meetings and committee work.

Qualities of the Effective Committee Chair

Communication skills

- Demonstrates ability to communicate with committee members, staff, and other groups.
- Demonstrates willingness to listen (communication is not solely talking).

Participation

- Demonstrates active participation and interest in the association.
- Has knowledge of the subject in which the committee is involved.
- Thinks in terms of association strategic priorities and goals.

Leadership

- Commands attention and inspires others.
- Demonstrates ability to create positive meeting and work atmospheres.
- Controls without dominating.
- Understands how the committee fits into the larger work of the association.

Administrative skills

- Demonstrates willingness to take the initiative.
- Demonstrates ability and willingness to carry out responsibilities.
- Supports orderly procedures for conducting work.
- Understands the role of the staff.

Parliamentary Procedure

Committees are not required to operate using parliamentary procedure; however, the objectives and principles of parliamentary procedure should be employed. The objectives of parliamentary procedure include:

- Expediting business.
- Maintaining order.
- Ensuring justice and equity for all.
- Accomplishing the objectives for which the group is organized.

The principles of parliamentary procedure include:

- Courtesy and justice to all.
- Rule of the majority while respecting the rights of the minority.
- Partiality to none.
- Protection of the absentee.
- Taking one item of business at a time. (Refer to GA Bylaws for policy on voting.)

Voting

Voting is as specified in the GA Bylaws.

> *Every Regular Member of the Association shall be entitled to no more than one (1) vote at any Board of Directors meeting, committee, or subcommittee meeting. Any action may be taken by the Board of Directors or by any committee or subcommittee at any meeting where a quorum is present upon a three-fourths (3/4) majority vote of those voting, unless otherwise provided by statute, the Articles of Incorporation or these Bylaws; provided, however, that two (2) or more negative votes will nullify any proposed action of the Board or committees. Regular and Associate Members may be represented at any Board of Directors or committee meeting by delegates authorized by the official member of the Board of Directors.*

Robert's Rules of Order is the standard for introducing and managing motions. The committee chair and staff liaison will provide necessary guidance when conducting any committee meeting.

STAFF LIAISONS

Staff liaisons serve as an informed resource person to the chair and members of the committee. He or she assists the chair in facilitating committee discussions and activities which address the committee's charge. The staff liaison works with the chair to ensure that all committee work is consistent with the association's goals and objectives.

The Role of the Staff Liaison

- Provides thorough orientation for each new committee chair and assists the chair in providing orientation for new and continuing committee members each year.
- Works with the chair to develop a plan of work that will allow the committee to discharge its responsibilities effectively and efficiently for the year.
- Works with the chair to develop agendas and conduct effective meetings of the committee.
- Ensures legal counsel is present at committee meetings.
- Provides administrative support, including but not limited to, planning and on-site execution of all committee meetings.
- Drafts reports of committee meetings for review and approval by the committee chair for distribution to the association leadership and committee(s).

- Works with the committee chair, other committee members, and association staff to ensure that the work of the committee is carried forth between committee meetings.
- Facilitates communication of committee activities, including requests for action and/or proposed policies, to the executive director and board of directors.
- Reports to the committee on decisions of the board of directors, executive director, or other association committees which impact the committee's activities.
- Serves as a valuable resource to the committee, not simply a recording secretary. Note that too large a staff role reduces the value of the committee and reduces the motivation of volunteers. Too small a staff role often results in the committee's drifting aimlessly and operating ineffectively.
- Is thoroughly familiar with all aspects of the committee's work, including the scope of work, subjects under discussion, and association policies related to the committee's work.
- Answers questions, offers suggestions, and raises questions.
- Is fully informed on the association’s antitrust compliance policy and actively works to ensure committee members equally understand it and abide by it.

Orientation of the Chair by the Staff Liaison

- Determine the committee's work. Review the committee's charge and goals for the year and link them to the association's strategic plans. Review committee projects and programs as well as assignments of individual committee members. Develop with the chair a program of work for the year. Identify the level of staff assistance needed.
- Clarify governance issues, if applicable. Review and clarify the bounds of the committee's activity and authority. Review the association's bylaws and relevant association policies, practices and procedures that affect the committee.
- Note where the work of other committees may overlap with or affect the committee.
- Clarify the chair’s role and duties and emphasize the importance of this position.
- Clarify the role of the staff liaison in relation to the chair.
- Determine the process to be used during the year for managing the committee's work.
- Provide the following background information: a committee roster (and perhaps the previous year's); minutes of previous committee meetings; background on recent committee activities and accomplishments; and a list of the board of directors, key staff, and other people with whom the chair is likely to interact. (Most of this information is listed in the Member section of the GA web site.)

AGENDA

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

MINUTES

- Include the name of the committee, date, time, and place of the meeting. Note the chair's name, members present, and other key people in attendance.
- Note all formal motions and passage or defeat.
- Note all decisions reached, including motions passed and follow-up actions to be taken, with deadlines for implementation.
- Include a summary of discussions. Do not attribute comments to members, except possibly where formal motions are introduced (attribution for motions is not required).
- Provide information on the time and place of the next meeting.
- Distribute the report to all committee members and legal counsel within thirty days of the meeting.
- Except for regularly scheduled spring and fall committee meetings, meeting reports do not require formal approval by the committee. A good approach is to send the meeting's report out immediately after the meeting with a statement to contact the chair or staff liaison if errors are discovered.