



Extending the Life of Committees

Bob Harris, CAE

Committees begin the year with enthusiasm. They receive assignments from the board and authority from the bylaws. An orientation and policies point them in the right direction.

Volunteer groups supplement the work of the board, vet ideas, engage members, and develop future leaders. They can tackle tough issues, create new programs and generate income.

They have a variety of names, each with similar purpose. Standing committees are identified in the bylaws. Others disband when their assignment is completed, called quick action teams, task forces, micro-tasks, project teams and strategic councils.

Momentum Wanes

Six months after getting organized, many groups lose momentum. The excitement has worn off. "Real jobs" and other priorities distract the volunteers.

Some committee chairs aggressively complete their tasks in the first months, leaving little to do in the second half of the year. Some committees quit meeting without anybody noticing.

Barbara Radke, president elect at the Conejo, Simi, Moorpark Association of REALTORS® offers, "CSMAR relies on our committees to achieve results. Losing a committee to a lack of understanding or motivation is harmful to our program of work."

Extending Committee Life

To avoid committee failure, consider these ideas:

- ✓ **Orientation** – Include committee chairs with the board's orientation. They should feel as part of the leadership. Provide essential documents such as strategic plan, bylaws, and policies.
- ✓ **Strategic Alignment** – Every committee should be aligned with goals in the strategic plan. A goal without work groups risks failure. Make it clear in the strategic plan how committees are essential to advancing programs and priorities.
- ✓ **Program of Work** – Track assignments and deadlines with a spreadsheet. Stretch the committee initiatives over 12-months. The program of work is built upon the board's strategic plan.
- ✓ **Performance Measures** – When assigning tasks include performance metrics. For example, increase membership by 3 percent or plan a quarterly webinar that produces net revenue.
- ✓ **Appointments** – Get the right people on the committees. While a call for volunteers may have been issued, the selected members should bring with them desire and determination. Get the right people in the right seats on the bus as the book *Good to Great* suggests.
- ✓ **Meeting Protocols** – Bad behaviors at meetings hampers enthusiasm to volunteer. Every meeting should have a well-crafted agenda. Start and end on time. The chair should orchestrate a relevant conversation, working to include all members. Agree that nobody speaks twice, or dominates the conversation, until everybody has had opportunity to speak once.
- ✓ **Preparation** – Preparation improves outcomes. Ample notice of upcoming meeting (set an annual calendar). Distribute the agenda and reports in advance. Set up a comfortable environment, whether virtual or in person.
- ✓ **Collaboration** – Committees should not work in a silo. Facilitate opportunities to cross pollinate ideas by meeting with other committees. Shared ideas increase motivation to achieve as a team.
- ✓ **Liaisons** – Appoint a liaison from the staff or board, or both, to guide and monitor the committee. The liaison will report if the work

group is losing steam or needs bolstering.

- ✓ **Meeting Minutes** – A sure way to find out if a committee is on track is to read their minutes. The IRS queries if this is a general practice. The elected president should know how committees are performing by reading their minutes.
- ✓ **Mid-Year Huddle** – Reconvene at six months as committee chairs and board to assess progress, celebrate successes, and tweak the second half of the year. A pep rally and check of accountability is always a good idea.
- ✓ **Making Recommendations** – Committee work usually results in recommendations for board
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consideration. It is discouraging if the board second-guesses the committee or demeans their efforts. Be certain recommendations are clear and understandable with facts to back up a motion, including economic impact.

- ✓ **Risk Avoidance** – By being aware of risks, the committee can avoid infractions. For example, committees don't have authority to contract or speak for the association. Discussions should be treated with confidentiality. Conflicts of interest should be disclosed.
- ✓ **Celebrate** – Recognize committee volunteers and herald their contributions to the organization.

Nearly all associations rely on committees. Keep them engaged the full year.

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Note: Bob Harris, CAE, provides free governance tips and templates at www.nonprofitcenter.com. March 2021 bob@rchcae.com

QR Code for the 2021 Board Orientation Workbook – free to save, adapt, share.

