

Chapter 6

THE IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE COMMITTEES

This chapter addresses the following topics:

- ❑ Overview: Why Committees Are Essential
- ❑ Constructing Effective Committees
- ❑ Importance of Strong Leadership
- ❑ Running an Effective Committee Meeting

OVERVIEW: WHY COMMITTEES ARE ESSENTIAL

Committees are the operating system of an association. Committees involve members in the development and delivery of [services](#), represent member opinion in decision-making, and help serve member needs through interaction. They also offer the opportunity for group problem-solving and can be a forum for presenting multiple points of view. Committees are also the training ground for future leadership and an arena where emerging leaders can test and refine their skills and abilities. For these reasons, committee effectiveness is critical to chapter operations.

CONSTRUCTING EFFECTIVE COMMITTEES

Effective committees don't just happen. They are carefully planned and constructed to have a balanced representation of members, a clearly defined mission or objective and work plan, a dedicated chair, and competent staffing. Paid staffing is a real asset if you can afford it, but if you can't, make sure the people assigned to committees are conscientious and will complete what they've committed to accomplishing. Following are some of the key elements of making those things happen.

Types of Committees

There are two basic types of committees—standing committees and special committees. Standing committees serve an ongoing, continuous function and operate indefinitely. Their function usually deals with organizational and operational procedures, or with specific permanent features of chapter programs. A special committee, often referred to as an ad hoc committee or task force, is assembled with a specific purpose in mind and a specific time frame.

Committees can also be classified by purpose or function into one of four categories:

- Administrative
- Project
- Study or problem-solving
- Liaison

Selecting the Right Size for a Committee

The purpose and the nature of its work determine a committee's size. Here are some things to consider when determining the most appropriate size for your committees:

- If you need a prompt outcome, keep the size of the committee small. Smaller committees take less time to organize, can communicate more effectively, and can act more quickly.
- Create a larger committee if participation of a wide variety of members would be beneficial. Larger committees usually enable the chapter to hear more viewpoints and opinions, and to get more thoughtful recommendations. Because of their size, larger committees have more members to promote the value of a program or activity. In addition, the larger the group, the less likely all the work will fall to one or two people.
- Base the number of members on a committee on the segments of your membership that need to be represented.
- Use a small committee when seeking administrative direction.

For example, think in terms of large groups for a conference committee, and a smaller group for nominating work. There is no magic number for the size of a committee. However, a committee of 10 to 15 members will be able to split into smaller groups (if necessary) to accomplish the objectives of the committee. This size will also allow the committee to meet, make recommendations, and reach decisions as a quorum.

What Committees Do You Need?

The mission of every chapter is different. The following are committees a typical ASHE chapter may want to implement. Those that are critical for effective operations are noted as * and those recommended by ASHE are indicated with ++.

Education Committee*—This committee is responsible for developing, promoting, conducting, and monitoring the educational/training efforts of the chapter.

Finance Committee*—This committee monitors the investment of association funds, reviews and negotiates contracts and recommends their acceptance to the board, approves fees to be charged for services, establishes an accounting system, and oversees the annual financial audit. The role of this committee will vary greatly depending on whether paid staff exists.

Membership Committee*—This committee is charged with the development of new members for the chapter, promoting retention among existing members, and identifying new member services and programs to enhance the value of membership. For some chapters, this group may also be responsible for the development and distribution of the member newsletter and/or directory. (Where that is not the arrangement, this would be handled by the Publications Committee.)

Awards and Recognition Committee++—This committee oversees whatever award programs are in place, continually reviews the awards programs for currency, and suggests new ways to increase member recognition.

Bylaws Committee++—This committee is responsible for reviewing the association's bylaws for compliance with the national organization. If bylaws changes are required, the bylaws committee formulates them and submits them to the chapter's board for approval prior to submission to the membership. In addition, this committee may be responsible for, maintaining the records of the association, including pictures, legal records, and information pertaining to leaders' positions and volunteer involvement.

Codes and Standards Committee++—This committee is charged with an ongoing review of all codes and standards relating to health care to keep members of the chapter apprised of pending code changes. This group can also be actively involved in efforts to modify codes and standards, as appropriate, and may assist ASHE in reviewing codes and standards changes.

Conference Committee++—This committee is responsible for conducting the annual trade show and major educational activities of the chapter (separate from the ongoing continuing education requirements of the group). Because of the significant financial impact of this activity on most chapters, this committee has a critical stake in the group's financial health.

Nominating Committee—This committee is charged with developing the slate of officers for the coming year and may also be involved in recommending committee appointments. Typically, this committee consists of the past president, current president, president-elect, and one ex-officio.

Publications Committee or Public Relations Committee—This committee seeks to create attention for and awareness of the chapter, its members, and the profession they represent. In addition, this committee would be responsible for the development of the chapter member

directory, newsletters, press releases, and other publications. Other areas of responsibility might include sponsorships, advertising, and promotion.

Defining Responsibilities

The areas of accountability for each standing committee within the chapter should be defined. The very process of clarifying each group's role establishes what results the organization expects from the committees' efforts and eliminates the possibility of having several groups claim the same territory as their own (i.e., you don't want the education committee undertaking the work of the membership committee).

IMPORTANCE OF STRONG LEADERSHIP

Defining the Role of Committee Chair

The overall success of a committee can often be directly linked to the effectiveness of the committee chair. Since this individual is ultimately responsible for planning the work of the group, conducting meetings, maintaining records and appropriate information about their decisions, ensuring actions are taken, and evaluating results, it's no wonder so much depends on their effectiveness. The following checklist will help you determine whether a potential candidate would be a good committee chair.

Does your candidate...

YES NO

		Communicate effectively? This important ability allows a committee chair to work with their group, the governing body, and related groups.
		Have a record of active participation and interest in the association's objectives? Have they served on the committee before and do they understand its charter?
		Have a willingness to listen? A good committee chair must be open-minded and encourage free expression of ideas among committee members.
		Have the ability to inspire and the presence to command respect?
		Have the ability to control a group without dominating it with their own personal agenda?
		Have at least a basic knowledge of parliamentary procedure? See Robert's Rules .
		Operate as a self-starter, without having to be pushed, prodded, or reminded of commitments?
		Command respect within the industry?
		Have an understanding of the dynamics of group process and how a committee functions best?
		Have knowledge of the subject area that is the committee's purview?
		Have the ability to think and act in terms of the association's overall goals and objectives?
		Have the skill to create the right atmosphere for productive committee work?
		Have the time and resources to carry out the assignment? Good intentions are not enough.
		Have a clear understanding of the position and the role of association management and the need to work closely with the organization's governing body?

For the committee to be effective, the new chair needs a thorough orientation to their new role. That includes determining the committee's work agenda, clarifying governance roles—who does what, why, and how; what sort of checks and balances exist; the responsibilities and expectations of the chair (including outlining their duties); and complete background information. Background information should include the committee roster for the current and previous year, minutes from past committee meetings, background on the committee's accomplishments and activities, a list of members of the chapter's governing body (as well as ASHE's governing body), and key contacts. It may also be a good idea to conduct an annual committee orientation planning meeting for all incoming committee members.

Making Committees Effective

Once you've selected the committee's leader, make sure they communicate the obligations of committee participation to potential committee members. Committee members need to clearly understand exactly what a position on the committee entails, including the time commitment, job duties, meeting times, and so on. Without understanding this up front, people who are willing to serve may not be positioned to serve well.

If your chapter has paid staff working on a committee, they should play an active role, not simply act as recording secretary. However, too much staff involvement may reduce the value of the committee and de-motivate volunteer members. If there is too little staff involvement, committees may drift aimlessly and be less effective. An appropriate staff role is to answer questions, offer suggestions, and raise questions, as needed. They provide assistance in completing work without taking on the role of an active committee member, so that committee members can focus on the bigger picture.

RUNNING AN EFFECTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

Meeting Preparation

Advance work is the key to successful meetings. Solid coordination between staff and committee chairs is essential to making the necessary arrangements that will lead to success.

Suggestions for running a successful meeting:

The Agenda

This is an often overlooked and undervalued element in designing a successful meeting. The agenda sets forth the work of the meeting and must be managed carefully to ensure that the number of items to be addressed doesn't exceed the time available for discussion. If a topic is important enough to add to the agenda, it is important enough to allocate sufficient time. In addition to the topics to be covered, the agenda should include the date, room, site, starting time, scheduled coffee and lunch breaks, and adjournment. It should also note who is responsible for leading the discussions on each topic presented.

Selecting the Right Location

There is no prescribed set of rules for selecting a location. The degree of urgency, availability and location of members, social facilities, and other scheduled meetings play a role, as do such elements as traditional meeting sites, costs involved, and ease of access. A location away from members' offices tends to focus participants' attention on the committee work at hand rather than offering business-related distractions. Don't hold a brief meeting at a distant location where travel time takes more effort than the meeting. Some chapters have chosen to use periodic telephone conferencing in place of face-to-face committee meetings. Carefully select agenda items for conference calls since some subjects, such as planning or brainstorming, don't lend themselves to conference calls. Also make sure you check out the costs involved in advance—these types of calls may be more expensive than you think.

Schedule Meetings

You want to do this as far in advance as possible so participants can keep their personal schedules clear. Determining availability in advance is a desirable courtesy, but it can get complicated when more people are involved. Ideally the chair should select a date at the previous meeting. Once a date has been established, notify committee members of the decision. If committee members are expected to lead discussions or make presentations, they need that information as far in advance as possible. A good committee chair doesn't surprise anyone with last minute requests.

Physical Arrangements

Although they may seem very simple, physical arrangements need to be spelled out in great detail. Leave nothing to be assumed. In working with a hotel, the committee chairs need to make sure the catering manager knows the room setup, breaks, food needs, audiovisual needs, and other equipment requirements. Put the details in writing and arrive early enough to reset the room or change the food order if the hotel got it wrong. There is nothing more disruptive to an effective meeting than having the hotel reset a room or deliver coffee service after the meeting has started.

Checklist for Committee Meeting Management

A new committee chair will find the following checklist invaluable as they set out in their new role.

- Start on time.
- Make sure everyone is introduced by name and role.
- List the objectives of the meeting.
- Review the background material.
- Encourage participation by all, which includes talking judiciously and succinctly and listening carefully.
- Assign tasks prior to the start of the meeting, such as note takers and timekeepers.
- Remember that members of a committee are well informed in some areas and not in others.
- Keep the meeting moving and on task.
- Summarize major points during the session.
- Pay attention to interpersonal dynamics that may affect the meeting outcome.
- Talk to the group as a whole. Avoid speaking only to one person for any length of time.
- If energy flags or interest wanes, take a break.
- Solicit opinions and experiences, especially in areas of disagreement.
- If you are losing the group's attention, ask a question or shift the meeting pace.
- Try to draw out silent members. Direct questions to them or solicit their opinions.
- If someone dominates a meeting, direct thought-provoking questions to them, ask for their cooperation, or give them a special assignment.
- Adjourn on time. If you must run over, ask the group's permission to do so or solicit their input in how to change the agenda to end on time.

What Goes in the Minutes?

While minutes from committee meetings are not legally required, doing so is helpful to members who are unable to attend and provides clarity on decisions taken and direction set. The approval of committee meeting minutes can be done by mail or at the start of the next committee meeting.

Committee minutes shouldn't be lengthy and cumbersome, but they should record significant discussion and decisions that were reached. Include the date, time, and place the meeting occurred, as well as the presiding officer's name. List those present, those absent, and others in attendance. Report the decisions reached and whatever follow-up actions and deadlines were agreed upon. Formal motions and their passage or defeat should also be recorded, along with a brief summary of the discussions that lead to the decisions. Don't spend a lot of

time attributing comments to individuals; rather, provide a high-level overview of the direction. If a next meeting is set, make note of it.