Committees That Work!

October 23, 2017

This session:

- Committee structures
- What makes a good committee
- Effective committee meetings
- The use of committee charters
- Best practices for great committees
What is a committee?

A committee is a body of one or more persons appointed or elected by an assembly or society [or Board] to consider, or investigate, or take action in regard to certain matters or subjects, or to do all of these things.

- Robert’s Rules of Order

What is a committee?

A committee is a group that keeps minutes and loses hours.

- Milton Berle, Comedian and Actor

A committee is a cul-de-sac down which ideas are lured and then quietly strangled.

- Sir Barnett Cocks,
  Clerk of the House of Commons
Committees: where good ideas go to sleep
...or worse

We were chosen to be on the committee!
Why form a committee?

Committees make effective and efficient use of time and resources by having the right small group

- investigate issues and identify pros and cons of various options
- develop proposals for action
- implement decisions as delegated

Board Responsibilities

- Duty of Care
- Duty of Loyalty
- Duty of Obedience
Committee Structure

- **Standing Committees**
  - Deal with ongoing issues
  - Last indefinitely

- **Ad Hoc Committees**
  - Created to accomplish a specific objective
  - Within a specific timeframe
  - Disband when work is done

Committee Structure

- Unique to each organization
- Simple and flexible
- Bylaws (less is more)
- Limit number of committees to only those needed
  (supplement with ad hoc committees/task forces)
Committee Structure

Types of Committees

- Board Committees
- Organizational Committees

Board Committees

- Help do the work of the Board (governance)
- Take on policy and strategic work
- Help the Board fulfill its oversight and policymaking roles
- Report to the Board
Committee Structure

*Organizational committees*

- Help do the work of the organization (operations)
- Work on issues that usually are part of the staff’s responsibility
- Help in program implementation.
- Work with staff or (for small orgs) take on role of staff
- Report to the staff

What makes a good committee?

- Purpose
- People
- Process
Purpose

- Why is the committee being created?
- What is the relationship to the organization’s mission, strategies and priorities?
- What is the benefit to the Board and organization?
- What are the committee’s goal(s)?

Process

- Clarity about role
- Specific objectives and deadlines
- Annual schedule of meetings
- Agreed-upon committee norms
- Job descriptions for members
- Orientation for new committee members
Process *(continued)*

- Committee reference book
- Thorough, timely information to members -- and to Board
- Tie the work back to the organization’s mission
- Regular review of committee performance and structure

People

- Diversity of skills, knowledge, perspective
- Size – not too small, not too large
- Recruitment - Why me?
- Opportunities for learning, leadership
- Everyone participates but no one is overloaded
People (continued)

- Operate as a team
- No more than 2 committees per person
- Recognition – individuals and group
- Celebrate accomplishments
- Remove deadwood

People: Committee members

*Qualities of effective committee members:*

- Commitment to mission
- Time to invest
- Understanding of committee’s role
- Interested in work of committee
- Ability to compromise
- Responsible
- Strong work ethic
- Excellent interpersonal, communications and listening skills
People: Committee Chair

Qualities of an effective committee chair:

- Leadership
- Diplomacy
- Enthusiasm
- Ability to involve all committee members
- Respect and solid relationships
- Deep understanding of committee’s work and relationship to organization
- Organizational skills (or someone to delegate to)

Committee Meetings

If I die I hope it’s during a meeting because the transition to death would be so subtle
Committee Meetings

- Clear objective(s)
- Future-focused
- Well-crafted agenda
- Start and end on time
- Brief and focused
- Use parking lot for off-topic discussions
- Conclude with a summary and next steps
- Maintain complete and accurate minutes (avoid unnecessary information)
Committee Meetings

Tips for productive committee meetings:

- Name tags
- Materials in advance – no reports read at meetings
- Identify objectives for each agenda item
- Send reminders
- Talk to people in advance to gain consensus

Tips for productive committee meetings (cont.):

- Heavy on discussion – time allocated based on the importance of each topic
- Most important items first
- Bring in experts – landscape
- Draw out people who haven’t participated
Committee Meetings

Tips for productive committee meetings (cont.):

- Cater to multiple discussion styles – silent starts, small group discussions
- Don’t tolerate windbags
- E.L.M.O.
- Be wary of decisions too easily reached
- Send summary documenting key decisions, responsibilities and deadlines

Committee Charters

Agreement in advance regarding:

- Purpose
- Goals an objectives
- Deliverables
- Membership
- Authority
- Responsibility
- Accountability
- Time frame
- Budget (if applicable)
QUESTIONS?

THANK YOU

www.dpforand.com  860-416-6491  debra@dpforand.com