

TO THE POINT

Committee Roles and Responsibilities



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Updated 12/13/10

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2. COMMITTEE ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

2.01 GUIDELINES FOR ALL COMMITTEES

The main function of a committee is to contribute to the economy and efficiency of the association. Its purpose may be to act, to investigate, to study, or to develop and recommend ideas for policy/procedures. Whatever its task, a committee is expected to submit written reports of its progress. In the case of some committees, completion of the task signals the end of the committee's role.

Guidelines for a successful committee include:

- Establish an informal and comfortable atmosphere.
- Insure that committee members understand the committee's task.
- Allow ideas and opinions to be freely discussed.
- Blend individual personalities to enhance the work of the committee.
- Discuss the agenda and specify the items that are tasks to be accomplished.
- Meet at times when all members can be present.
- Begin and end meetings on time.
- Record the work of each committee meeting.
- Distribute reports of the previous meeting to each committee member prior to the next meeting.
- Report recommendations or decisions that are representative of the committee as a whole.

Guidelines for committee members include:

- Understand the purpose and objectives of the committee.
- Be receptive and open to all ideas.
- Be familiar with the mission and activities of both CEC and your unit.
- Keep yourself updated on the committee's subject area and remain alert to new developments that may influence committee decisions.
- Be prepared to attend and participate in all committee meetings.
- Express yourself; enjoy the give and take of committee discussions; remember to respect the views of others.
- Complete assigned tasks and come prepared to make a real contribution—the time goes fast!

Guidelines for effective committee meetings include:*

- Don't neglect the physical setting. Make sure the meeting is on neutral ground, that the room is quiet and without distractions, and that the room is well-ventilated (poor ventilation causes drowsiness) and well-lit (poor lighting causes headaches).
- Don't let the committee get too large. As the size of the group increases beyond seven members, quiet members become more reticent. It also becomes increasingly difficult to get recognition for individual contributions.
- Pay attention to seating arrangements. Ideally, everyone should be able to see everyone else.
- Begin and end the meeting with an item that unites the group. This creates an atmosphere of goodwill. If the group does not reach a decision by meeting's end, refer to past accomplishments.

*Reprinted from Fundamentals of Association Management, American Society of Association Executives; Washington, DC.

- Plan your agenda carefully. Put items needing mental energy, bright ideas, and clear heads high on the agenda. The early part of a meeting tends to be more lively and creative than the end of the meeting. Hold back on items of great interest or concern to everyone until you've handled other business, as these items are apt to take up a great deal of time, and the built-in interest will assure liveliness toward the end of the meeting.
- Handle clashes deftly. When a clash of ideas becomes a clash of personalities, turn to a neutral member to dilute the confrontation.
- Learn to control the gabbers. A talkative person can be controlled by suggesting that he write a report to share with the committee or by picking up a phrase that he used, repeating it, and then calling on someone else to save the discussion. (For example: "Inevitable decline in attendance, that's very interesting, Jane. What do you think about the issue, Frank?")
- Ask the opinions of the most senior committee members last. This will foster discussion. If their ideas are introduced too early, they may stifle discussion.
- Choose the strongest advocates of the solution when making any assignments. They will work hardest to prove it was the right decision.
- Get a verbal commitment from each assignee. This commitment made in front of the entire group leads to a greater degree of follow-through.
- Do not ignore the social dimension of a work group. Be sure to schedule a refreshment break.
- Volunteers need rewards, too. These can vary from intangible rewards (such as social rewards of belonging, prestige and esteem in increased visibility and responsibility in your organization, or satisfaction of using new skills) to tangible rewards (such as letters of commendation, certificates, plaques, dinners, or other social affairs).

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2. COMMITTEE ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

2.02 COMMITTEE CHAIR

The chair is responsible for conducting the business of the committee.

Guidelines for the Committee Chair:

- Fully understand the purposes of the committee and its place in the structure of your unit.
- Remember that your job is to help others accomplish things on behalf of CEC, as described in the purpose of your committee.
- Consider these leadership styles to get the committee's job done:
 - A. Directing – Provide specific instructions and closely supervises task accomplishment.
 - B. Coaching – Continue to direct and closely supervise task accomplishment, but also explains decisions, solicits suggestions, and supports progress.
 - C. Supporting – Facilitate and support committee members' efforts toward task accomplishment and share responsibility for decision-making with them.
 - D. Delegating – Turn over responsibility for decision-making and problem-solving to committee members.
- Develop meeting agendas.
- Chair committee meetings efficiently, following established procedures and a detailed agenda.
- Facilitate the decision-making process by summarizing what has been discussed at the meeting and moving the committee toward consensus.
- Complete any unfinished projects of the committee.
- Follow established timelines for your unit committee reports.
- Follow up on committee recommendations that require action.

A good committee chair:*

- Is punctual.
- Allows enough time for the group to get well acquainted.
- Encourages participation in the discussion.
- Focuses on the objective.
- Avoids being an expert, but does take part in the deliberations without being too aggressive.
- Summarizes decisions from time to time.
- Maintains objectivity.

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2. COMMITTEE ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

2.03 TYPES OF COMMITTEES

What committees should your unit choose? The response to this question will vary according to the specific needs of your unit and the structure you choose to establish through your bylaws. Units normally use two major types of committees—standing and ad hoc—as well as a special type of committee designed to organize and efficiently operate the unit, the executive committee.

Standing Committees:

- Are stipulated in the bylaws of the unit.
- The duties and jurisdiction are identified in the bylaws.
- Are permanent and integral components of the structure of the unit.
- Are assigned certain areas of work to be done on a continuing basis, with the committee membership subject to change as administrations change.
- Report to the board; the chair is frequently a member of the board.

Ad Hoc Committees:

- Are created according to the bylaws of the unit.
- Can be authorized by the adoption of a motion from the assembly of the unit.
- Are established to perform a particular assignment or task within specified time parameters.
- When the task is completed, the committee is dissolved.

Executive Committee:

- Can be created only by provisions in the bylaws.
- Consists of members of the board, usually the officers and other appropriate board members.
- Is small to enable it to take action between meetings of the board. It operates on behalf of the membership and is responsible to the board for any action it takes.
- Keeps minutes of its meetings, but these do not need to be circulated to the board.

Typical Needs for Committees

The need for specific committees may vary between units according to their bylaws. However, certain committees tend to be selected as standing committees for ongoing activities, while other ad hoc committees are more temporary in nature and are appointed for a limited period of time. Not every unit may have all of the following committees, nor will every possible committee be active, yet these are some typical unit patterns.

Standing Committees:

- Accessibility
- Awards and Honors
- Bylaws and Policies
- Exceptional Children's Week
- Finance
- History
- Membership
- Newsletter
- CAN/Governmental Relations
- Program

Ad Hoc Committees:

- Conference Site Selections
- Fund Raising
- Hospitality
- Professional Practices
- Special Events
- Student Issues
- Topical Workshops
- Nominations

Executive Committee:

The executive committee is the core of the unit. The executive committee may be composed of different members in different units, but in most cases it consists of all elected officers of the unit and committee chairs. The following positions may be considered for the executive committee providing your unit's bylaws permit them. Your bylaws may also include other positions as needed.

- President
- President Elect and/or Vice President
- Past President
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Membership Chair
- Faculty Advisor

2. COMMITTEE ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

2.04 TYPICAL STANDING COMMITTEES AND THEIR ROLES

The standing committees frequently named in the unit bylaws include membership, program, history, newsletter, publicity, and nominations. Other committees included may be governmental relations, finance, and constitution and bylaws. These committees have specific purposes which foster viability of the unit. They also serve as training grounds for future officers.

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE: This committee is chaired by the Membership Chair and is composed of members who represent the various components of the professional community from which your membership is drawn. A system for using the membership lists available from CEC Headquarters should be developed to follow-up with those members who have let their membership lapse and to contact new members. (See TO THE POINT Section 4.0—Membership Development for more information.)

PROGRAM COMMITTEE: This committee is established to provide the unit with ongoing programs designed to meet the needs and interests of the membership. Needs and interests can be identified through a needs assessment, surveying the board, contacting a random sample of the membership, or deciding how current trends in the field may be used in programming. The Program Committee should provide programs of varying formats, ranging from a speaker, panel presentations, workshops, mini-conferences, audio-visual presentations, and social events in order to reach out to all types of members. Local, state/provincial, and international resources should be utilized to enhance the activities of the unit. (See TO THE POINT Section 3.0—Unit Activities for more information.)

PUBLICITY COMMITTEE: Publicity is a vital link in the life of the unit. The purpose of this committee is to inform members, nonmembers, other agencies and organizations, and the general public about the ongoing activities of the unit. Publicity helps recruit members and increase attendance at functions provided by the unit. This committee should consist of members who are representative of the unit, both geographically and professionally. Schools districts, private schools, not-for-profit agencies, and related support services for exceptional individuals should be informed of all of the programs and other activities of the unit by receiving the newsletter. This committee provides the Newsletter Editor with updated and corrected mailing lists of important contacts for the unit. Flyers and posters can be distributed to schools and agencies announcing upcoming events of the unit. Contacts with newspapers can be established to publicize meeting announcements as well as feature stories about CEC and activities of the unit. Time on radio and television can be accessed via public service programming. All of the activities can be accomplished if the contacts are developed and fostered by this committee. (See TO THE POINT Section 3.0—Unit Activities for more information.)

NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE: This committee, usually chaired by the Newsletter Editor, works to keep the membership informed of the activities of CEC at the international, state/provincial and local levels. The newsletter is the link to all members of the unit and is a vital means for maintaining interest in the unit and its activities. The committee has the responsibility for determining publication and mailing costs for the newsletter, determining suitable formats, and arranging for production and distribution of the newsletter. A system should be established for acquiring material for the newsletter. All members should be encouraged to contribute. (See TO THE POINT Section 1.12 for information on the duties of the Newsletter Editor and TO THE POINT Section 5.10 for information about ordering your membership list.)

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE: The charge of this committee is to prepare a slate of nominations to fill anticipated officer vacancies for the coming administrative term. This committee has a serious obligation to perform, and should nominate those individuals who are the most qualified. The committee should investigate the members' qualifications for the office, interview the prospective candidates, consider the needs of the unit when considering various candidates, and select a list of candidates for nomination that can work well with each other.

GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE: This committee advises the board and the membership about governmental activities of executive, legislative, and judicial levels of government which impact on the lives of exceptional individuals in the schools and society as a whole, and any activities which CEC is taking/recommending as a result. This process is facilitated by CEC Headquarters, which supplies information to the Children and Youth Action Network (CAN) Coordinator who then reports that information to the state, province or division board and the governmental relations committee members. Through dissemination at the board level, unit representatives on the board disseminate the information to their individual units to help facilitate action. (See TO THE POINT Section 3.08 for more information on CAN and political activity.)

FINANCE COMMITTEE: This committee serves in an advisory capacity to the board regarding matters pertaining to budget and finance. These include, but are not limited to, areas such as: (a) the year's program plan, (b) the budget required for carrying out that plan, (c) fund raising activities, (d) membership recruitment and, (e) review of the unit's expenditures. The work of this committee serves to assure that the unit works within the limits of its available income and helps devise financial resources to assure the continued financial stability from one administration to another. (See TO THE POINT Section 3.10 for more information on fundraising.)

CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS COMMITTEE: This committee recommends revisions and updates to the constitution or bylaws as needed. The committee can call on the members for suggestions or act as a group separately from the membership. When considering revisions, it is necessary to keep in mind the governing documents of the organization. The committee then submits a report of suggested changes, giving the reasons for each proposed change. The report of the committee is made available to the membership and notice given as to when action will be taken on the revisions. At the time of action, the suggested committee revisions are open to amendment from the membership.

HISTORY COMMITTEE: This committee is established to preserve and translate the history of the unit. It works with each administration and collects all material to preserve the archives. As the committee changes, it is critical to make sure that all documents and other pertinent material are passed on to the next committee chair. An appropriate means to store this material should be established. A filing system can be developed, scrapbooks and/or photograph albums can be kept, or notebooks with divider pages can be used to keep material. Periodically and systematically, the archives should be sorted and then housed in an appropriate place. Both university and college libraries as well as historical societies have an interest in the preservation of such documents. Where these documents are stored, and with whom they are stored, should be known to the membership. (See TO THE POINT Section 1.17 for information about the unit Historian, and 5.13, Guidelines for Unit Archives.)