

Being an Valuable and Active Committee Member

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Once you have agreed to serve on a committee, you need to make sure you understand how the committee works, what it does and what you'll be expected to do as a member. It will do you no good and potentially great harm to agree to be on a committee and then do nothing.

Responsibilities of a committee member

- Know the committee's purpose
- Learn about the committee's activities
- Learn about the committee members: voting members, representatives from other committees/organizations; ex officio (non-voting members); staff
- Read recent meeting minutes and reports
- Attend committee meetings; inform the chair when you have a conflict
- Participate fully in all committee work
- Provide input on issues being discussed
- Fully and impartially consider other committee members' comments
- Actively contribute to reaching committee consensus

Before a meeting

- Read the agenda and materials
- Make notes of comments or questions you might have
- Disclose any conflicts of interest to the chair before the meeting
- Do any necessary background reading to become familiar with programs/activities
- Share the agenda with others if needed (representative from another group)
- Make notes of their comments/questions to present to the committee
- Contact the committee chair if an item needs placed on the agenda
- If responsible for a report, complete it and turn it in ahead of time
- Understand travel policies
- Keep records or receipts of expenses

During a meeting

- Make sure that you understand how the committee operates
- Listen and respect the views of others
- Raise your comments/questions clearly, giving reasons for your views
- Ask for information or clarification if needed
- Share your expertise and experience when appropriate
- Disclose any conflicts of interest when appropriate
- Consider your available time when accepting additional duties
- Consider the actions the committee and/or you need to take on projects
- Vote on items thoughtfully, giving clear reasons for negative votes

After a meeting

- Understand what items were for information only, for discussion only, or require further action
- Understand with whom you can share the discussions outside of the committee
- Know what tasks you were asked or agreed to do
- Follow-up on those tasks, keeping the committee chair and staff informed
- Turn in reimbursement forms promptly
- If you were not able to attend the meeting, you should contact the chair for a synopsis of what occurred at the meeting to ensure you remain an active member of the committee.

Committee Meetings

Committee meetings are normally relatively informal.

Often there is no need for formal motions and amendments. Decisions at committee meetings are usually made by consensus, not by vote. However, when new projects or substantial changes in projects are recommended, it is often wise to make a more formal motion and vote to make sure the specifics of the recommendation or changes are clearly stated and in the minutes and that everyone is in agreement with what is proposed.

The aim of most committee meetings is to obtain a genuine consensus of members' opinion and to develop projects or programs that will be of benefit to most of the interests represented by the committee members. Where unanimity on an issue is not achieved at a committee meeting, this usually is noted in the meeting minutes so that it can be resolved at a later time if needed.

A staff member is usually allocated to each committee. This staff member organizes the meetings, keeps the minutes, maintains the committee membership list and web site, distributes documents and drafts, manages the committee processes, and provides guidance on procedures and policies.

Committee minutes are drafted shortly after each meeting either by the staff member, chair, or appointed secretary and given to the chair to edit before being sent to the entire committee for confirmation of accuracy and approval.

Committee reports are likewise drafted by staff or the subcommittee in charge of the report and given to the chair for editing before being distributed to the entire committee for comment.