

## Christy Bryant, Leadership Development Consultant

### Guidelines for Effective Committees

Although there are no recipes for being an effective committee, there are basic guidelines that can help committees work efficiently and effectively. Feel free to adapt them to your specific need, add to them, delete some, modify some, or make up new ones to suit your committee and situation.

The responsibility for the work of the committee is shared by all members. All members should identify with the committee and its goals. If the committee fails, it's both the individual's fault and the committee's fault. Following are some guidelines for consideration:

- There should be a clear understanding of the accountability of the committee to the board of directors. This begins with the written committee function that describes what the board expects from the committee. There should be an effort to link the committee description with relevant language back to the club's strategic plan. The committee leadership, with input and feedback from the members, should develop the supporting work plan for their specific committee as it aligns with the club's strategic goal. The work plan should contain objectives incorporating measurable outcomes, and these measurable outcomes would be the basis for regular reporting of the committee to the board and membership as a whole.
- Decisions should always be agreed to by the committee. They are not made by the leaders, any individuals, or any clique. All important policies should be decided by the committee. The committee should have a voice in its own goals and the techniques that should be used to accomplish them in support of the overall organization's goals. Make sure to provide orientation for new committee members.
- Methods used should allow as many committee members as possible to participate. By frequently asking questions of committee members, you are able to bring out the minority and individual opinions. Provide regular and appropriate recognition to active committee members. The chair should also seek out unproductive committee members to find out what is getting in the way of performance and then devise strategies to overcome those barriers.
- Be flexible in rules, agenda, and in all procedures. Establish a plan for activities, but always be flexible when you find that you need to. Make sure that committee members receive an agenda in advance of meetings and have all of the information they will need to complete their work.
- Make sure all committee members are active. Provide opportunities for everyone to contribute. Let committee members try a variety of tasks, encourage a risk-free atmosphere where no one fails, and consciously provide for the skill development & participation of all members.
- The committee should continually evaluate its progress. This may be done by evaluation sheets, process reports, suggestion boxes, etc. The important point is that it should be done often, briefly, and well.

**Committee Membership**—Attention to the selection of committee members is the best way to ensure that you get individuals with the right skills, interests and commitment to the task. It is the role of the club President to recruit committee chairs. This should be done with careful consideration. The chair isn't necessarily the technical expert of the committee. It's more important that the person works well with others, can organize effectively, can motivate others, keeps people on task and has good communication skills. Other responsibilities of the chair include preparing and presenting committee reports, setting agendas, calling meetings and ensuring that all members have the opportunity to contribute and are groomed to assume future leadership roles.

**Committee Reporting**—Committees are directly responsible to the organization that created them. The committee chair usually reports to the membership at the club meeting. Reports should be concise, but should show that a full discussion was held and all options were considered. The organization should never feel that the committee missed something. The committee should present specific recommendations. Reports that are for information only don't require a motion. If a committee wants to bring ideas, actions or recommendations to the members through their report, the committee chair should say, "By direction of the committee, I move . . ."

**Evaluating Committee Meetings**—At the end of each committee meeting, the chair can ask for written or oral comments about the session. Immediate feedback can be solicited on how well the meeting achieved its purposes, if members stayed on task, and if

anything can be done to improve effectiveness of future committee meetings.

**Summary**—A committee is a work unit of the organization. It's the best way to take work and break it into meaningful, manageable chunks. Effective committees remove time-consuming detail from organization meetings. They allow more people to be involved expanding the support base of the organization. Committees build commitment of the individual members to the organization.

Visit the District Three website for a reprint of this and other articles, under the Leadership Development link on the District Consultants page. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

*Christy Bryant* [christybryant@windstream.net](mailto:christybryant@windstream.net) §