

Committee Skills



Every community organisation (most are Associations) has a governing body, a group of people which manages its affairs. This is most commonly referred to as the management committee. However your own group may use a different name, such as executive committee or steering group.

What is a management committee?

A typical community association ranges in size from a handful of members to a membership of a hundred or more. Legally it is an unincorporated association and it may also be a charity. Its governing body, the group of people which runs its affairs, is commonly referred to the management committee.

Most community association have a constitution (or set of rules). A section of this defines the management committee, including its size and how often it should meet.

Who sits on the Management Committee?

The committee is drawn from members of the association and is elected by them, usually at an annual general meeting (AGM).

Associations often have officers, such as chair, secretary and treasurer, and they too are part of the management committee. They may be elected by the full membership at the AGM or by the committee at its first meeting, according to the constitution. Although the officers carry out particular jobs in the association, they have no more legal or financial responsibilities than other committee members.

The committee may also invite other people to serve on the committee (known

as co-opting). They may be members of the group but can come from outside, and are generally co-opted because they have particular skills or knowledge.

A very small group may meet informally and have no elected committee.

Many associations with modest aims and activities run very successfully like this. In this instance, the entire association is the 'management committee' and everyone is responsible for the group's affairs.

What do individual members do?

Although every committee member shares responsibility, this does not mean that each member has to do everything. The job of members is to ensure that someone does each task and reports back to the committee. The tasks may be done by committee members, members of the group or people from outside. The most important thing is that the committee should work together and take joint responsibility.

Responsibilities of committees

In carrying out its job, the committee has to take account of good practice and the law. These responsibilities can be broken down into:

1. Running the group and meetings

Arrange regular committee meetings and general meetings of the association. This is most often the task of the Chair and Secretary. The Annual General Meeting (AGM), which includes the election of the committee, is often the most important of these.

The Secretary is usually responsible for taking minutes of meeting which record decisions and tasks clearly.

It is vital to brief new committee members. Many newcomers are thrown in at the deep end and given no idea of how the

group works or what its aims are. It is not uncommon to find individual committee members who are unaware that they are part of a management committee with responsibilities.

The constitution will set out things such as how often meetings should take place or who is entitled to attend.

Although a group can run successfully without a constitution, it is advisable for every group to have some written rules. These rules can be very basic, but the association will run more smoothly if everyone is clear about the aims of the group, how it works, and who does what.

2. Keeping the group on track

It is important to review the association's activities – ensuring it is doing what it was set up to do and that its money and resources are used well.

Ideally, everything which the Association decides to do will help it achieve its aims. However it is easy to get side tracked. For example, raising money may become the main activity rather than the means to an end. It is a good idea for the committee to have a regular look at what the group is doing and assess whether it is achieving its aims.

In a larger group, it may be useful to have a systematic way of collecting information on its activities - this will make it easier to assess whether the group is on track.

If the association receives a grant it will almost certainly need to have reliable information to be able to report to a funder on how the grant was used.

3. Finances

Every committee member is responsible for making sure that the association accounts for its money properly. It's not just the responsibility of the Treasurer even though they deal with the money on a day-to-day basis.

If lots of people are handling money or the association takes in regular amounts of cash, it is a good idea to write some basic rules to ensure that everybody does the same thing and that the money is properly looked after. (Petty cash)

The association must keep proper financial records so that:

- If it receives grants, committee members can make sure that it spends the money as it said it would in the grant application
- To prepare financial reports for each committee meeting
- To prepare end-of-year accounts, and have them examined if required by the constitution or charity law (Some associations are also charities).

4. Fundraising

One of the most important tasks of the committee is to work out a basic budget and decide how they will raise the funds.

Fundraising is not separate from the association's activities. The committee need to have a clear idea of what the association will do in the coming year in order to work out how much it needs and if applying for grants to be able to describe that work and demonstrate the need for it. It is important to try and involve everyone on the committee or in the whole group in planning and fundraising.

5. General organisation

Insurance policies

Some insurance, such as employers' liability insurance if the association employs staff, are a legal requirement.

Depending on the association's activities other insurances may be a good idea and some may be required by a landlord or funder. There are a number of brokers

which specialise in arranging insurance for charities and other community organisations.

Equal Opportunities/Equality

The committee should look at ways of trying to ensure that the association is open and welcoming to everyone in the community who wants to get involved.

It may help to write a policy for the association, but the important thing is what is done. If the association is applying for grants, most funders will ask you to show that you are concerned about equal opportunities and many will ask for a written policy.

6. Legal liability

Take legal or other advice when in doubt. It is the role of CCVS to help associations.

Committee members can be held personally liable if the association gets into debt or has other legal problems. If there is no management committee, then every member of the association is liable. However, it is rare for individuals to face action and there should be no problems so long as the committee does everything it can to run the association responsibly.

It is possible to take out indemnity insurance to cover committee members if action is taken against them individually. However, this insurance will not be valid if the committee fails to run the association properly and responsibly so this type of insurance may not be good value for money.

7. Managing events and activities

The committee may also need to take health and safety, safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, employment, data protection, public health and hygiene and equality legislation and practice into

account in organising activities, events and managing premises.

Summary of what a committee must do:

- Keep records of your meetings (Minutes)
- Keep a record of money received and spent (Accounts)
- Ensuring the activities are planned and financed
- Promoting good practice in all its activities
- Act responsibly within the law and fulfil the association's legal duties
- Ensure that you treat all members fairly (equal opportunities) and that no one is hurt by the Association's activities (Duty of care)
- Take professional advice where necessary.

Committee Roles and Responsibilities

Chair Person's role

- Takes the leadership role in the group:
- Ensuring the group makes clear policies and priorities and keeps to them
- Acts as its main spokesperson
- Takes urgent decisions or actions between meeting
- Chairs the meetings
- Planning and running of meetings, preparing the agenda with the secretary
- Ensuring enough information is provided and that there is a chance to discuss the business and make clear, informed decisions that are recorded and carried out.

A Good Chair should:

- Be well prepared before the meeting and be given prior notice of any possible controversial or delicate items on the agenda
- Appreciate that their position means that they have less opportunity to voice their own opinions at meetings
- Know all committee members well and be able to recognise their strengths and weaknesses
- Put new members at ease at their first meeting
- Know the goals for each meeting and will not allow time to be wasted
- Recognise when a discussion is no longer productive and bring it to a meaningful end
- Prevent people from speaking for too long
- Sum up discussion and propose the decision board has arrived at.

Secretary's role

- Records the decisions of the Committee
- Ensures minutes and papers are sent out in advance of meetings and that rooms are booked and prepared
- Deals with any correspondence on behalf of the group

NB. A Company Secretary has a legal role and responsibilities to Companies House ensuring that all returns are made on time and keeping a record of the members and changes in directors.

Treasurer's role

- Ensures that a proper record is kept of income and expenditure
- Provides regular reports about the association's financial status to the Committee
- Advise on actions that need to be taken to ensure the group is solvent

and that it can afford to carry out the planned activities

- Ensure that its monies are spent in accordance with the groups objectives and the funders intentions.
- Ensure that are audits carried out if required by the constitution or charity commission and annual accounts are prepared and a report given to the members at the AGM.

A Committee Member should:

- Knows his/her role and responsibilities
- Attend meetings and be punctual
- Put forward items for agendas at meeting
- Read minutes and other relevant papers before meetings
- Take part in discussions at meetings and be interested in the association's progress
- Keep to the point at meetings
- Make constructive suggestions at meetings
- Keep up to date of what is happening in the association
- Volunteer to take on tasks
- Make sure that the committee follows the association's Constitution
- Act in the interests of the association and not for personal benefit
- Promote the association to public

Resources

The Resource Centre Information Leaflets
http://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/committee_members/index.asp

National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NVCO) www.ncvo-vol.org.uk

Charity Commission for England & Wales
www.charity-commission.gov.uk

What Management Committees Need to Know
<http://www.bradfordcvs.org.uk/documents/WhatManagementCommitteesNeedToKnow.pdf>