

## **What Does a Committee Member Do on a Nonprofit Board?**

Board meetings become unproductive when there's not enough time to thoroughly discuss issues in order to make good decisions for a nonprofit organization. Board directors find themselves rushing through the agenda, making decisions in haste along the way. Forming committees is a good solution to packed board agendas.

Committee work divides the board's work into manageable tasks. Committees are smaller groups with a tight focus on a particular issue. Having too many committees can bog down the work of the board. To get the best value from committees, boards should form as few committees as they need to address critical issues. Committees should be clear in their directives and scope of work.

### **Writing Job Descriptions for Board Committees**

Board committees need to be clear on what the board expects the committee to accomplish. Boards often write a charter for committees that specifically outlines the description and purpose of the committee. A written committee description will suffice in the absence of a charter.

The committee chair may work with committee members to outline a timeframe of what they hope to accomplish at the very first meeting to keep everyone focused and on track. If it looks like there's not enough work for the committee to do, committee chairs may suggest combining one or more committees. For example, boards can easily combine the work of governance committees with those of personnel or nominating committees.

### **Forming a Nonprofit Committee**

The board chair usually has a pretty good idea of who the best person is to chair a particular committee and which members have the best qualifications and interest in serving on it. Some nonprofit boards allow non-board directors or other experts to serve on committees to provide guidance and advice on the subject matter of the committee's work.

### **How Many Committees Should a Nonprofit Board Have?**

How many committees should a nonprofit board have? The answer is "as many as they need." There's a new trend in the role of committees that less is more.

Fewer committee meetings mean that each member only has to serve on one committee. A smaller number of meetings means less work, and everyone likes that. Fewer committee meetings also means that the board gives greater accountability to a smaller number of individuals.

A new philosophy of committee work is emerging that includes four distinct committees — internal affairs, external affairs, governance and an executive committee.

The Internal Affairs Committee handles all internal and operational issues, including finance, human resources and facilities.

An External Affairs Committee manages all external issues, including fundraising, communications and marketing efforts.

A Governance Committee oversees director recruitment, orientation and board performance.

An Executive Committee acts as a steering committee to prioritize the greater issues of the board. This committee also typically handles urgent matters that arise between board meetings.

### **Role and Responsibilities of Board Committees**

- The main purpose of board committees is to place a greater amount of time and focus on a particular area of board business. Committees spend less time in performing routine matters, which gives them more dedicated time to thoroughly research and vet an issue before making recommendations to the full board.
- Committees provide an opportunity to call in the special skills and abilities of each board member and put their talents to work. Nonprofit boards allow committee members the proper time to research an issue in depth, analyze it and provide documentation to the full board to support their findings. Committee members should know how to work collaboratively to locate and evaluate data and investigate all avenues and alternatives.
- Committee members may also invite the input and experience of seasoned experts on a topic.
- An effective board committee is aware of their charge and limit of authority. Working together, they establish a reasonable timeline for the completion of the committee's work. They will also know when their work is complete and when it's an appropriate time to make final recommendations to the rest of the board.

### **Common Nonprofit Board Committees**

Most nonprofit organizations have a few standing committees that meet all year long. When certain issues arise that don't fall into the purpose of one of the standing committees, nonprofits usually form an ad hoc committee.

Ad hoc committees form to handle issues that are typically short-term and specialized in nature. A few examples of issues that could trigger the formation of an ad hoc committee are special events, an executive director search, strategic planning, a task force or any other situation that's special or unique.

Depending on the needs of the organization, companies may form one or more standing committees.

### ***Executive Committee***

An executive committee is sometimes made up of officers and committee chairs or some other demographic described by the bylaws. The executive committee usually acts as a steering committee that prioritizes the agenda of the board meetings. Executive committee members also sometimes manage urgent matters between board meetings.

### ***Fundraising Committee***

The primary duty of nonprofit organizations is to serve the public. Fundraising is one of their main activities, so most nonprofit organizations have fundraising committees that oversee efforts for fundraising events, securing grants and thanking donors.

### ***Finance Committee***

The finance committee is responsible for making sure financial reports are accurate. They also oversee the organization's budget and perform other duties like establishing reserve funds, lines of credit and investments.

### ***Governance and Nominating Committees***

The governance and nominating committees establish priorities for board composition, plan for board director recruitment and succession, oversee board development and take the lead in performing board evaluations.

### ***Communications and Public Relations Committees***

A communications committee handles all matters that relate to communicating with donors, stakeholders and others. This committee oversees newsletters, official communications, social media platforms, online presence and contact with the media.

### ***Audit Committee***

The audit committee oversees the organization's finances and is responsible for internal controls like performing the annual audit. Smaller nonprofits sometimes combine the audit committee and the finance committee.

What a committee member does on a nonprofit board depends upon the type of committee on which they serve. The committee's description or charter outlines the committee's purpose. It's less important how many committees a nonprofit has than it is for board members to fulfill all of the needs of the organization responsibly. Board directors can fill those needs either by serving on a committee or by fulfilling their duties and responsibilities as an appointed board member.