

The Role of a Committee Member

Nearly all voluntary and community organisations have a committee that is responsible for carrying out the day to day running of the organisation. This is known as the governing body.

The committee can be called management committee, executive committee, steering committee, council of management, board of directors, board of Trustees. They all mean the same thing.

The committee is the body that is legally and financially responsible for the organisation as a whole.

Committee members

Committee members are usually elected by the members of the organisation at the Annual General Meeting. If you have a constitution, this will tell you how the election is carried out. The constitution also tells you how long someone can be on the committee (usually between one and three years) and how often the committee should meet.

If your organisation is a Registered Charity (see VODA information sheet 1.4 - Registering as a Charity) all committee members are officially called charity trustees. In registered companies they are called company directors.

In charitable companies (see VODA information sheet 1.3) they are both charity trustees and company directors.

What does the management committee do?

As a member of the management committee you are bringing your skills, knowledge and experience to:

- make sure that the organisation meets the needs it was set up to support
- make sure that the organisation is open equally to everyone and that you do not discriminate against anyone
- make sure that the organisation is accountable to its members and to the community
- make decisions about the organisation's objectives, policies and procedures
- work in partnership with paid and unpaid staff so that they can get on with their jobs
- keep the organisation within the law and provide a safe and healthy place for people to be in
- act in a fair and responsible way to any paid and unpaid staff
- make sure that money is spent properly and reassure any funders that decisions are being made by a number of people
- make sure that the organisation has the right resources - people, equipment, premises, insurances and money - to get on with its work
- monitor how well the organisation is doing its job
- take appropriate action when things are not going well
- represent the organisation at other meetings and forums
- promote the organisation and its work

Charity trustees have some additional legal responsibilities, see www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission.

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How does the committee work?

The committee will meet on a regular basis, depending on the work of the organisation and how easy it is for members to get together. The constitution will probably include the minimum number of meetings that have to be held in the year.

Most committees have a number of officers to help them to run more smoothly:

- **Chairperson**, who plans and runs meetings (see VODA Information sheet 2.4 - Role of a Chair)
- **Secretary**, who helps with the smooth running of meetings, deals with minutes and correspondence, (see VODA Information sheet 2.5 - Role of a Secretary)
- **Treasurer**, who oversees the organisation's finances (see VODA Information sheet 2.6 - Role of a Treasurer)

Your constitution will explain how the officers are elected – at the Annual General Meeting, at the first committee meeting after the AGM or a combination of the two.

Sub-committees

Many organisations have permanent sub-committees and sometimes working groups which make sure that certain areas of work are carried out. These might include fundraising, finance, publicity, events and personnel matters.

Sub-committees can:

- reduce the pressure on the management committee
- make it easier for committee members to contribute as the work is done in small groups
- involve other members of the organisation and staff, if you have them
- carry on work between meetings

Remember that sub-committees should have at least one and preferably two committee members on them.

As the committee has final responsibility for the organisation it needs to be clear what decisions sub-committees can and can't make. Sub-committees should always report back to the main committee.

Do's and Don'ts of being a committee member

As a committee member you should always:

- ✓ attend meetings regularly and arrive on time
- ✓ give apologies if you can't attend and pass on any relevant information to the committee
- ✓ work as part of a team and take an active part in meetings
- ✓ keep to the point in discussions
- ✓ support each other, listen to others and try not to interrupt
- ✓ be prepared to share responsibilities and information
- ✓ ask if you don't understand something or need more information
- ✓ carry out what you have agreed to do

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- ✓ make sure that decisions are made in a democratic way and abide by the decisions made
- ✓ remember, if you are representing the organisation at a meeting or event, that you are speaking on behalf of the committee not yourself
- ✓ be non-discriminatory and promote equal opportunities

You should not:

- ✗ be disruptive or aggressive
- ✗ use bad or offensive language
- ✗ talk too much
- ✗ interrupt or shout
- ✗ keep information to yourself
- ✗ try to dominate the meeting or other committee members
- ✗ make others feel inadequate or stupid

What about rights?

As a committee member you have the right to:

- be properly introduced to the organisation when you join, to meet the relevant people and get the right information including annual reports, copies of the constitution and accounts and minutes of previous meetings
- be provided with the help you need to take a full part in the meeting such as interpreter, translations, child minding, travel and accessible venue
- receive training in the skills you need to be a committee member
- receive the correct and up to date information in good time
- be consulted and have a full say in decision making. Everyone should be encouraged to have their say, so if you think decisions are being made by one or two people or the staff are always deciding what happens, say so.
- take credit for the work you and the organisation have done
- enjoy yourself!

Training

VODA runs a range of training for committees and committee members through its regular training programme - contact us for more information or visit www.voda.org.uk/training.

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