

Working with Nonprofit Organizations in Community Settings: Governance, Committees¹

Muthusami Kumaran²

Introduction

This article is part of a series, *Working with Nonprofit Organizations in Community Settings*, designed to provide basic information on governance, planning, and operational details for community-based nonprofit organizations. Information provided in this series will help the Board of Directors, leaders, staff, and volunteers of nonprofit organizations that provide a variety of services to local communities.

Description of Committees

A committee is a group of people formed around a specific issue or task. A subcommittee is a division of a committee. Nonprofit organizations may use committees to delegate responsibilities and accomplish the work of the organization more quickly. Committees typically have three to seven members.

Types of Committees

- **Standing:** these are committees that exist continuously for the organization (Nominating, Executive, and Financial committees being the most common).
- **Ad hoc:** these are special committees formed to address particular needs (e.g., Curriculum Development); such committees are dissolved when no longer needed.

Four Major Functions

1. **Administrative:** operating and organizational procedures.
2. **Liaison:** promote cooperative relations with other organizations, agencies, or groups.
3. **Study or Problem:** study feasibility of new course of action.
4. **Project:** goal or task to be accomplished (adapted from Connors, 1988).

Relevant Florida Statutes

1. The board of directors may designate from among its members an executive committee and one or more

other committees each of which may exercise all the authority of the board of directors with the following exceptions:

- a. Approval or recommendation to members' actions or proposals required by this act to be approved by all members.
 - b. Filling of vacancies on the board of directors or any committee.
 - c. Adoption, amendment, or repealing the bylaws.
2. Meetings, notice and waiver of notice, and quorum and voting requirements of the board of directors apply to committees and their members as well.
 3. Each committee must have two or more members who serve at the pleasure of the board of directors. The board may designate one or more directors as alternate members of any such committee.
 4. The designation of any committee shall not alone constitute compliance by any member of the board of directors who is not a member of the committee in question with his or her responsibility to act in good faith with the best interests of the corporation (Florida Legislature 2008).

Committee chairs come in all descriptions and a good chair is a great asset to the committee.

The characteristics of a good chair as described below are adapted from the Adult Education Association (AEA, 1957):

1. Has a personal record of being a consistent worker who completes a task.
2. Is enthusiastic and committed to the task.
3. Understands the organization's mission and the purpose of the committee in relation to the mission.
4. Can work with people; is hard working; has a sense of humor.
5. Exhibits confidence in other committee members.
6. Is willing to put the organization's interests before his/her own.
7. Wants to release the energy and potential of the group.

Committees function well if there are clear-cut expectations and criteria for their work. Use the following as a checklist before any committee is selected or committee chair is appointed. Add other criteria to fit the particular task.

1. What is the specific task or outcome to be achieved?
2. Are time lines specified? Is there an expectation that the work will be complete by a given date?
3. Is the proposed committee chair qualified and committed to the task?
4. Are the proposed committee members qualified and committed to the task? Are they able to work collaboratively as a group?
5. Are said chair and members willing to work together to achieve the goal?
6. Are there adequate resources to do the work of said committee?
7. Is the group large enough to do the task but not so large that talents are not used and time is wasted?

References

- Adult Education Association of the USA. 1957. *Better Boards and Committees*. American Education Association of the U.S.A.
- Connors, T.D. 1988. "Committees of the nonprofit organization," in *The Nonprofit Organization Handbook, 2nd Edition* (McGraw Hill), 12.1–12.19.
- Florida Not for Profit Corporation Act, Florida Statutes § 617.01011–617.2103.

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Original article written by Elizabeth B. Bolton, professor emeritus, UF/IFAS Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Gainesville, FL; and Anna Guest-Jelley, former director of Violence Prevention Program, Peaceful Paths Domestic Abuse Network, Gainesville, Florida.

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² Muthusami Kumaran, Ph.D., associate professor, nonprofit management and community organizations, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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