



**Community  
Southwark**

## Running Committees

There are many different types of committees within the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) – Management Committees; Sub-Committees; Member/User Committees; Stakeholder Committees, Advisory Committees, Steering Committees and so on. They will be used for different purposes and have different levels of responsibility and decision-making powers (you may give them different names as well).



This guide looks at what committees could be used for and how to set them up and run them effectively.

### Involving Beneficiaries and Stakeholders

Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations and some statutory bodies like to involve their members and beneficiaries more fully in the running of the organisation.

There are many ways to do this, from co-production to task groups. It is important to think about how beneficiaries can be involved, how this will affect the organisation and what the future is for whichever arrangement is chosen.

For some this means having a number of beneficiaries on the governing body (see our Trustee Handbook about how a governing body should run). There may also be sub-committees of your governing body that concentrate on these issues. For others this means having a separate committee or forum run by and for the beneficiaries.

These committees may be set up to involve beneficiaries in your organisation or in many cases are set up by a statutory body as part of a wider service. They may be set up purely for influence and consultation or they may be given decision-making powers over small pots of money (they may have their own bank account, depending on the type of committee). These committees are also likely to be expected to come up with suggestions for what services they would like the organisation/statutory body to make available.

In some cases, especially when associated with a statutory body, it is expected that these committees will break away and form their own organisation or group: Often with the goal of being able to apply for funding. For example, a statutory run service may have a committee of service users that has a bank account in order to go for funding that will not be available to a statutory body but could enable the beneficiaries to deliver wider activities.

### Sub-Committees

Sub-committees usually refer to committees set up by the management committee/trustees/board/governing body to deal with specific issues.

It is useful to have a clause in the constitution allowing the management committee to appoint subcommittees to deal with specific topics: for example staff, finance or services delivered. You may wish to allow people who are not members of the main management committee.

Voluntary but not amateur

These committees are different from the governing body of an organisation which sets the strategic direction of the organisation and has final decision-making powers and responsibility. However, sub-committees are often used by an organisation to 1. involve beneficiaries and experts etc.; and 2. ease the workload on the governing body.

A sub-committee would normally have at least one member of the governing body on it, but this will depend on the committee; and would have a 'Terms of Reference' explaining what it has responsibility over and what powers it has. Often the sub-committees are responsible for making recommendations to the governing body in specific areas e.g. events; HR issues; use of space etc.

These sub-committees must be clear about what has been delegated to them and how they report back to the board. Under charity law decision-making **cannot** be delegated to sub-committees unless they have the power to do so in the constitution.

## Setting Up

Before setting up any form of committee, it must be clear why it is being set up and what it aims to achieve:

- What will the relationship be between the committee and the organisation/statutory body, i.e. who 'owns' the committee?
- Is it intended purely as a participatory group for the organisation/statutory body or is it intended to become sustainable and separate off to become a group in its own right?
- Is it to provide expert opinions and guidance to the governing body?
- Is it intended to make smaller decisions that don't need to go to the governing body?



This will help to pick the right type of committee and set the roles and responsibilities of the members of that committee.

If your organisation has such a committee, or is thinking of setting one up, it is important to think about what the committee is there to do and why? Establishing this at the very beginning ensures it is clear to all and everyone knows where they stand.

Before getting the committee together, here are ten key questions to discuss:

1. What is the committee for?
2. What does the committee do?
3. How does the committee work?
4. Who can be a part of the committee?
5. Does your governing document allow it? Or if statutory what support is there for it?

6. How much responsibility will the committee have?
7. What decisions can the committee make?
8. What will the terms of reference for the committee be?
9. Do you have role descriptions for those on the committee?
10. How will the committee report back to the governing body/ statutory body?

## Naming your committee

There are no hard and fast rules for what to call committees. You may want to avoid using 'committee' if this will be confused with the governing body.

Alternatives will depend upon what the 'committee' is set up for. It may be called a Task Group, Steering Group, Liaison Group, Forum, Stakeholder Group, or Advisory Group. The list could go on and you may have a name you want to use already.

It is worth thinking about a name that describes the group and won't be confused for other committees or groups associated with your organisation.

## How does the committee work?

This will depend upon how you answered the questions above; however, there are some basics the committee can run by:

- How often will the committee meet?
  - Are there a minimum number of meetings per year?
  - Are there a minimum number of committee members that must be present in order for a meeting to go ahead?
  - What is the minimum number of committee members required for a decision to be made?
  - Will there be meetings with a wider 'forum' as well as committee meetings?
- ❖ If the committee has been set up to make decisions about a small pot of money, then rules need to be in place for how these decisions are reached.
- ❖ If it is set up to advice and inform the governing body, rules will need to be set out for how this is done, what issues are to be considered by the committee and what the expectations are of the committee.

The committee may also decide to have some specific roles to help them to run more smoothly:

- The chairperson, who plans and runs meetings
- The secretary, who helps with the smooth running of meetings, deals with minutes and correspondence, etc.
- The treasurer, who oversees the finances (if any)

You should ensure it is clear, in a policy or 'Terms of Reference', how these roles are selected, how long a person will hold the role for and how they can step down etc.

Writing up a 'Terms of Reference' for the committee will help make sure everyone is clear on what the committee is there to do and what the rules are.

Remember 'Terms of Reference' can be altered as the nature of the committee becomes more established.

## Draft Headings for Terms of Reference

These are a guide only and must be made appropriate to the committee by adding headings, taking inappropriate sentences out etc.

### 1. Aims

*What has the committee been set up to do?*

### 2. Objectives

The purpose of the 'Committee' is to:

- **ENTER PURPOSE HERE**

### 3. Roles and responsibilities

The 'committee' shall undertake the roles and responsibilities of:

- Ensuring...;
- Engaging...;
- Representing...;
- Promoting...;
- Organising...

### 4. Composition

The 'committee' shall be made up of....

### 5. Accountability and Reporting Requirements

The 'committee' will be required to:

- Propose and discuss agenda items
- Keep record of work progress achieved, i.e. take and keep minutes of meetings and decisions reached through other channels
- Circulate minutes of meetings and other relevant information to all members of the 'committee'
- Respect confidentiality rules, where sensitive information are discussed within meetings

???? will support the 'committee' in achieving those requirements.

Depending upon the type of committee you may also want to create a mechanism for ensuring the committee relates to the governing body i.e. a representative who attends both or a way of feeding back information to the governing body – this may fall under duties of the Chair of the committee.

### 6. Meetings

Meetings will be held the *last Thursday of each month*, from 3.00 to 5.00pm at ???, between ???

### 7. Conduct at Meetings

Normal rules of debate will apply:

- The 'committee' will elect a chair and vice chair from amongst its membership. The chair will have overall responsibility for ensuring the conduct of the meeting. All speaking at the meeting will be through the chair. The chair and vice chair will serve for ???.

- Members of the 'committee' will contribute in a positive and objective manner.
- All members of the 'committee' will be expected to be inclusive and respect the views and comments of others.
- Attendees must not bring personal issues to be resolved.
- Any pecuniary, non-pecuniary or conflict of interest, must be declared during the meetings and the appropriate course of action taken
- Agendas will be published and distributed in advance of meeting of the 'committee'. Minutes will be distributed as soon as practicable and will be accessible to all as previously outlined
- ??? will provide support in facilitating good conduct of meetings and ensure follow-on actions are implemented.

## 8. Confidentiality

- Members of the 'committee' can communicate with the press or other media or the public where agreed by the 'committee'. They must be representing the views of the 'committee', rather than their individual views. Proceedings of any closed meeting associated with the 'committee' that are deemed to be confidential by the group must not be communicated.

## 9. Forum Title and Area of Operation

- The 'committee' shall be known as (xxx)
- The geographical remit of the 'committee' will be ...

## 10. Financial

- Identify here any relevant financial regulations if appropriate for the type of committee e.g. delegated authority for cheque signing?

You can add as many sections as necessary to cover the key aspects of the committee and how it should run.

## What are my personal responsibilities?

Firstly, anyone thinking about joining such a committee must ask themselves: How much time, as a volunteer, can I commit to this?

These committees are largely voluntary, with only reasonable expenses being paid to members.

You should also think about your motivations for joining such a committee: be careful not to join to push through personal agendas that may not be best for the organisation/group/the people you represent.

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;
- make sure that decisions are made in a democratic way and abide by the decisions made;

- remember, if you are representing the organisation or committee at a meeting or event, that you are speaking on behalf of the committee not yourself;
- be non-discriminatory and promote equal opportunities;
- use your knowledge, expertise and skills to enhance the committee.

### I 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;
- waste people's time;
- develop conflicts of interest;
- undermine fellow committee members;
- come unprepared to meetings;
- use the committee and/or the organisation to satisfy personal needs.

### When/How do we become more than a 'committee'?

Committees enabling service user participation can be really useful tools for organisations. They can also work well in supporting service users, ensuring their views are heard; influencing decisions; creating opportunities for co-production; and much more.

However, over time these committees can easily take on a life of their own, whether intended or not.

If the 'committee' finds itself applying for funding, making decisions about the long term strategy of the committee and acting in the name of the committee rather than the organisation, then it may be the committee has started to become an organisation in its own right.

Or perhaps the parent organisation (statutory body or voluntary organisation) is slowly withdrawing and putting more responsibilities with the committee whilst providing less support.

It should be decided from the beginning whether or not the group or committee is intended to break out on its own or if it is a part of the wider organisation. But if you find this happening over time, make sure the discussion is had with the right people and decide as a committee what you think your position should be and why.

If the 'committee' is acting more like an organisation, then the committee members may have more responsibilities than they realise, acting as a governing body rather than a committee. This has legal implications, so it is important to bring any issues like this up with the parent body or governing body.

### Resources

- My Committee.com: [Best Practice Advice for Committees](#)
- Governance Pages: [23. Sub-committees](#)
- The Russell-Cooke Voluntary Sector Legal Handbook, Third Edition

- Ruth Hayes and Jacki Reason: 'Voluntary but not Amateur – A guide to the law for the voluntary organisations and community groups': 8<sup>th</sup> Edition: Directory of Social Change (2012).

## Support

If you would like any support with running committees, governance or any other issues facing your organisation, please contact the Development Team at Community Southwark: [development@communitysouthwark.org.uk](mailto:development@communitysouthwark.org.uk) or 020 7358 7020.