

Factsheet

3: Management Committees

Any voluntary organisation should have a committee of people who will organise how the organisation is run. This is to ensure that decisions are made in a democratic way and so all committee members take collective responsibility. The committee should meet at least as often as is stated in the constitution. This would normally be often enough so that the committee knows what is going on with the organisation, but not so often that nothing happens except meetings! (For more about constitutions, see **Factsheet 2: Constitutions**).

If your constitution states that your organisation has a membership (this is usual for voluntary organisations), all or most of your committee members are likely to be elected from amongst the membership. Your constitution should state how committee members get on to the committee, and for how long they serve.

The committee as a whole has a responsibility to:

- Meet! This sounds obvious but if the committee doesn't meet regularly then it can't manage the organisation properly
- Ensure the organisation follows its aims and objectives
- Ensure the organisation operates in accordance with the law
- Ensure the organisation manages its finances properly
- Make decisions in the best interest of the organisation as a whole, rather than in the interests of specific groups or factions. Activities and services can be provided for specific groups, but this has to be in the context of meeting the organisation's overall aims
- Ensure that individual members of the committee and persons connected with them (close family members, business partners etc.) do not benefit from the organisation unless this is allowed by the constitution or, if the organisation is legally charitable, by charity law

If necessary, the committee can organise sub-committees to take on specific tasks such as overseeing finance or organising an event. Sub-committees can only do what is explicitly delegated to them by the committee.

It is important to note that even if an organisation employs staff, the ultimate responsibility for the organisation lies with the management committee.

Having an induction process for new management committee members can help to involve them properly from the start. You could have an introduction pack which includes your constitution, all the organisation's policies and recent annual reports and accounts.

Ensure that new members aren't bombarded with lots of jargon.

If your organisation is legally charitable, it must comply with charity law regardless of whether it is or is not registered with the Charity Commission.

Officially your management committee members are known as charity trustees. The Charity Commission publishes a booklet (CC3) called [Responsibilities of Charity Trustees](#), all charity trustees should be given a copy of this or be asked to read it on the internet. However, if your organisation is not legally charitable, this doesn't mean that you can be irresponsible and mismanage the organisation. Good practice is basically the same for all voluntary organisations; it's just that charities have some additional duties on top of the basic good practice.

1. Honorary officers

Honorary officers might sound rather grand, but essentially it is (usually) three or more people who have specific responsibilities as well as being management committee members. They are not, contrary to popular belief, any more important or powerful than any other committee member(s). They are:

- Chair
- Secretary
- Treasurer

Some organisations choose to have a vice-chair as well, or perhaps have some form of wording in the constitution that covers what happens if a deputy is needed.

The chair

The primary role of the chairperson is to chair the meetings of the management committee, and general meetings of the organisation's members. The chair is often also the spokesperson for the organisation, particularly when an organisation has no paid staff. To chair a meeting means to keep the meeting to order and to make sure that the meeting gets through the agenda. You must make sure that you keep to time, and indeed, keep the peace at times!

Other important points are:

- Clarifying specific points, especially any names and acronyms that might be unclear, especially to new committee members
- Encourage participation by everyone
- Don't allow certain individuals to dominate the discussions
- Keep a check on time wasting, interruptions and any personal attacks
- Summarise issues before calling for a decision; ensure decisions are clearly made including what needs to be done to implement the decision, who will do it and any deadline; and clearly state what has been decided so everyone is clear and it can be accurately minuted
- Remember to thank everyone for their time and effort. Committee members are volunteers and like to be valued

A good chair will be prepared for meetings and will try to be aware of questions that may be raised by the committee. It is important that the chair is supported by the rest of the committee and doesn't take on too much of the work, as this can lead to burn-out.

The secretary

Usually the main job of the secretary is to draw up the agenda for meetings with the chairperson and send them out, and keep minutes (notes) of meetings and distribute them to members. Minutes of general meetings should be distributed to all members of the organisation; minutes of committee meetings should be distributed to committee members, and the constitution may also say they should be distributed or made available to all members of the organisation. Any other roles that the secretary should take on, such as dealing with correspondence, may be set out in the constitution or can be decided by the committee as a whole - with the agreement of the secretary, of course!

The treasurer

The duties of the treasurer can depend on the size of the organisation. In a large organisation with paid staff that undertake the day-to-day finance work, the treasurer has more of a planning and authorising role. In a smaller organisation, the treasurer has this same planning and authorising role, but may also be responsible for:

- Keeping the petty cash book up-to-date
- Authorising expenditure
- Keeping the books
- Keeping the rest of the committee informed about the financial position of the organisation
- Getting cheques signed

2. Some common committee behaviour issues

Power

You need to avoid the danger of having one person wanting to control the organisation and everything it does. This is often the person who first had the idea for the organisation and finds it difficult to let go. Other committee members need to have the confidence to ask questions, discuss issues, disagree with the key person, and offer to do tasks so one person doesn't feel they have to do it all.

Laziness

There will inevitably be someone who does not pull their weight, and will leave everything to someone else. They need to be encouraged to take on responsibilities, even if initially it is only quite small tasks, and their contributions need to be acknowledged and valued.

The quiet one

Being a committee member can be quite daunting for some people. Make sure new members are not overwhelmed by what they've taken on, and are given as much support as possible.

3. Further help

Manchester Community Central – www.manchestercommunitycentral.org contact 0333 321 3021, email: info@mcrcommunitycentral.org

Charity Commission – www.charitycommission.gov.uk contact 0845 3000 218

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