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## **The Role of Committees in PACs and DPACs**

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## The Role of Committees in PACs and DPACs

Effective committees form the working heart of parent advisory councils.

Effective committees contribute greatly to the success of any volunteer organization. Committees have important advantages over meetings of the entire membership:

- Committees promote sharing of responsibility and allow more members to take an active role. New and less experienced members gain valuable information and find support in other parents. Parents who are hesitant to take on a new volunteer task may be willing to offer time to a committee they are interested in.
- Meetings are smaller, more focused, and less formal. There is more time for discussion, and issues can be handled on short notice. Responsibilities can be broken down into more manageable proportions.
- Many tasks require special skills or interest. Committee members often volunteer or are chosen for their expertise and interest. These members are willing to carry the bulk of the workload on an issue, freeing other members to devote their time to other things.
- Complex or difficult issues can be researched and discussed thoroughly before recommendations are taken to the larger group, allowing for more thoughtful and informed decision-making.

### Creating a Committee

Consider committees whenever there is work to be done!

Committees are appointed under the bylaws by the membership or executive to perform a particular task. There are two types of committees:

#### *Standing committees*

exist every year and are usually described in the bylaws. Examples are policy, budget, nominating, hot lunch, programs, special events, and fundraising.

#### *Ad hoc committees*

are created to do a specific task within a certain time period.

Committees are technically “committees of the executive” and are overseen by the executive. The president is an ex officio member of every committee, meaning a member “by virtue of his or her position”. The president does not have to attend every committee meeting, but is responsible for overseeing the committee to ensure it is working effectively.

### Defining the Committee’s Role ~ Terms of Reference

Effective committees require thought and planning.

To be effective, a committee must have well-defined terms of reference, including

- the committee’s mandate—a clear and limited purpose
- clearly defined tasks
- a committee chairperson, responsible for the committee. Additional volunteers can be invited either by the committee chairperson or the executive.
- a plan and timeline
- direction on reporting—to whom, when, and in what form. Most committees report to the executive which then decides when the committee should report to the general membership.
- direction on filling committee vacancies.

Terms of reference should be specified by the executive or membership at the time the committee is appointed, and written into the minutes or as a separate document attached to the minutes. Sometimes, the committee itself is given authority to create its own terms of reference at its first meeting. These should be reviewed and approved by the body that created the committee.

All committee members should have a copy of the terms of reference. A list of committee members and the terms of reference should be available to any council member who requests them.

On the next page, you will find **Sample Committee Terms of Reference**.

## Sample Committee Terms of Reference

### Great Elementary School PAC Parent Conference Planning Committee

**Mandate:** To plan and organize a Parent Conference on the theme, *Becoming Involved in Your Child's Learning*, to be held at Great Elementary School on Friday, February 29, 20\_\_, from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

**Chair:** Jane Brown

**Committee Members:** Anne White, Gerry Blue, Pat Green, George Black. The Chair may fill vacancies and add members as necessary to carry out the committee's mandate and responsibilities.

**Responsibilities:**

- To propose topics for keynote addresses, panel discussions, and workshops
- To find and book suitable speakers, panel participants, and workshop presenters
- To plan the day's agenda
- To organize the room schedule
- To create and publish advertising to the school and neighbourhood community
- To organize registration
- To organize and photocopy all workshop materials
- To order food and beverages for the day
- To arrange additional volunteers as necessary
- To do such other tasks related to the conference as the executive directs

**Reporting and Timeline:**

The Chair will report to the PAC President once a week, at which time the Chair and President will review all planning to date. The Chair will report in person, if possible, and will make all written materials available to the President on request.

The Chair will report to the Executive at all Executive meetings, and to the membership as the Executive directs.

The Committee will make every effort to meet the following timeline:

- December 15, 20\_\_: Complete planning of topics for keynote addresses, panel discussions, and workshops
- January 10, 20\_\_: Book all speakers and presenters
- January 20, 20\_\_: Complete the day's agenda and room schedule
- January 30, 20\_\_: Complete and distribute advertising
- February 15, 20\_\_: Place order for food and beverages
- February 15, 20\_\_: Review volunteer roster and arrange for additional volunteers
- March 5, 20\_\_: Submit final conference report to the President

**Financial responsibilities:**

The budget for the conference is \$1,500.00. The Chair will:

- keep a running account of all expenditures
- submit invoices and receipts to the PAC Treasurer once a week.

**Final decision:**

Where the Committee and Executive disagree on a matter regarding the conference, the Executive will decide the matter.

### Limits of a Committee's Authority

A committee can do only what it is authorized to do in its terms of reference. In general, committees make recommendations. They may then be given authority to take certain action, but they may not make decisions or take action without approval.

The council executive should take care to ensure that committees are reporting as required and are not taking action beyond their authority.

### Examples of Committees in PACs and DPACs

PAC and DPAC committees may include any of the following:

- constitution and bylaws
- policy
- strategic planning
- budget
- nominating
- programs and special events
- communications, including newsletter, announcements, website, and phoning
- earthquake preparedness
- school safety
- parking patrol
- grounds beautification
- outreach
- sunshine (to send greetings where appropriate, such as thank you, birthday, sympathy)
- hot lunch
- noon-hour games
- Block Parent or Block Watch
- Dry Grad
- hospitality
- fundraising

