

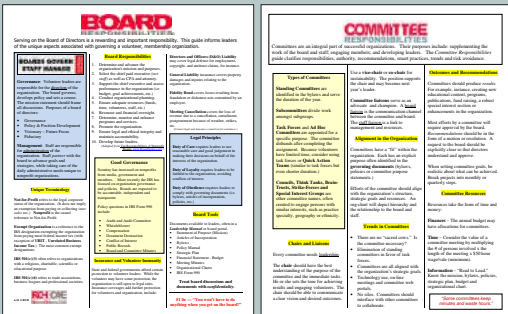
# COMMITTEE MANAGEMENT WORKBOOK





**Bob Harris, CAE**

Bob Harris, CAE, provides free governance tips and templates at [www.nonprofitcenter.com](http://www.nonprofitcenter.com). He helps organizations around the globe to achieve results, specializing in board development, strategic planning and operational excellence. The purpose of the *Committee Orientation Workbook* is to instill confidence in the committee volunteers. Understanding unique roles, structure and strategy are critical.



The laminated Guide to *Board Responsibilities*© and *Committee Responsibilities* is available for \$10 each, minimum quantity of 10, by emailing [bob@rchcae.com](mailto:bob@rchcae.com)



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**Are you interested in a customized Committee or Board Workbook?**

If so, contact Carol Duran, who is an experienced, personalized design consultant. You can reach her at [cdassociates55@gmail.com](mailto:cdassociates55@gmail.com). Carol has over 30 years of experience in communication and design and would love to speak with you about your workbook or any other project you might need for your business.

## The Role of Committees

Committees supplement the work of the board of directors. They provide knowledge, time, and resources that the board and staff may not have.

Some of the most successful nonprofits rely on committees to develop educational programs, research, fundraising, and more.

Committees are a way to engage members and increase their understanding of the organization while developing leadership skills.

## Committees and their Position in the Organization

Committees get their authority from the governing documents and their assignments from the board of directors.

They are linked to the organization



through channels of communication.

An organization chart depicts the relationship of committees to the board of directors and staff.

Though they have a relationship with the board, many organizations maintain a policy that committees do **NOT** have the authority to contract or speak for the board without a specific mandate.

## Precautions

While committees are an asset, there are some concerns with unwieldy committee management.

- Too many committees.
- Poor committee leadership.
- Committees that exist but have minimal value.
- Lack of alignment between committees and the strategic plan.
- Disconnect between the board and committees.
- Exceeding their authority.
- Board rehashing committee results at the board table.
- Keeping committees only because they've always existed.
- Working in silos

## Types of Committees

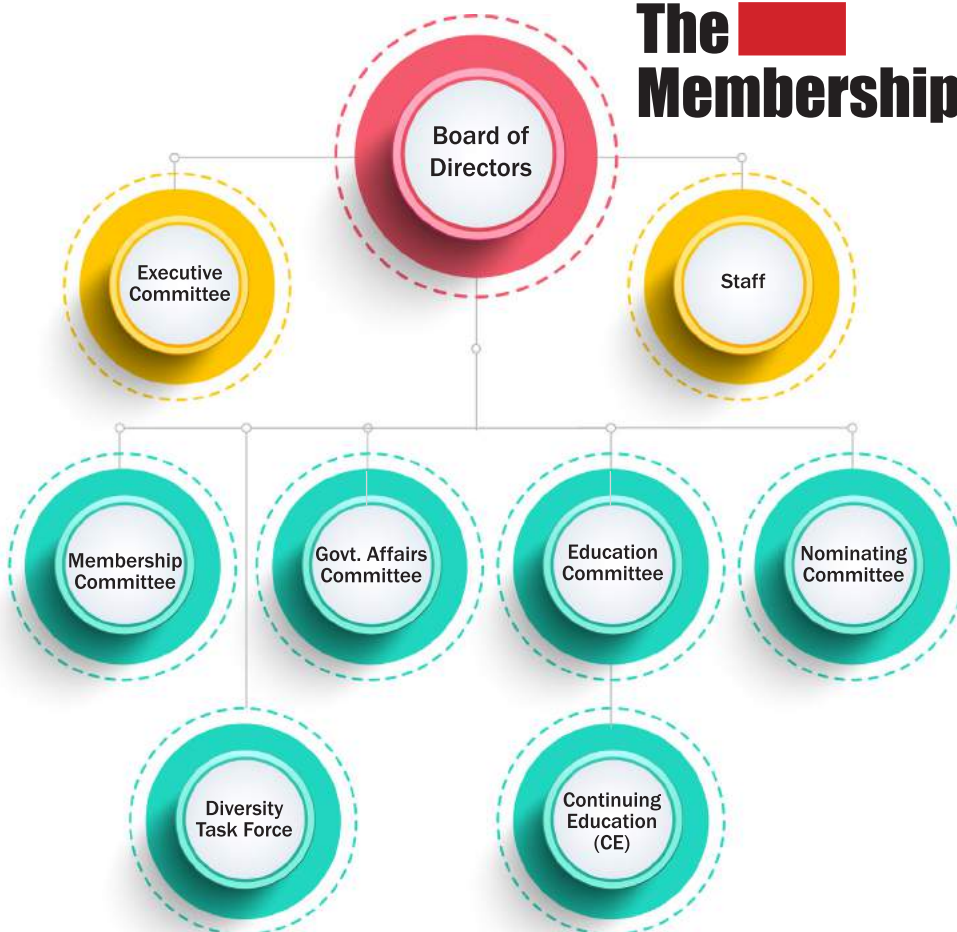
Different kinds of committees serve varied purposes.

**Standing Committees** are named in the bylaws and serve the duration of the term of the chief elected officer. They are assumed to function continuously.

**Task Forces or Ad Hoc Committees** are appointed for a specific purpose and disband when the work is done. To accommodate busy volunteers, many organizations prefer task forces over standing committees.

Other committee-like entities include subcommittees used to break up tasks into smaller workgroups. Councils and special interest groups (SIGs) are often composed of members sharing interests, such as ethnicity, practice setting, or specialty. Be creative with names like **Quick Action Teams, Project Teams, Brain Trusts, Strike Forces, and Micro-Tasks.**

## The Membership



## Analyze the Committee Structure

Periodically review the committee structure to determine if changes are warranted, possibly eliminating or merging committees that have outlived their usefulness. This is often done under the process of:

- A comprehensive “governance review”.
- By the incoming chief elected officer.
- Immediately following strategic planning.

## Composition

Committee composition should reflect the organization’s membership; striving for diversity. Committees are a good way to engage members and thus should avoid being composed exclusively of board members.

It may be that the board appoints the committee members. Or, the board only appoints the committee chair — and he or she, in turn, invites persons to join the committee. A call for committee volunteers is a way to promote and identify member interest (sample provided in the appendix).

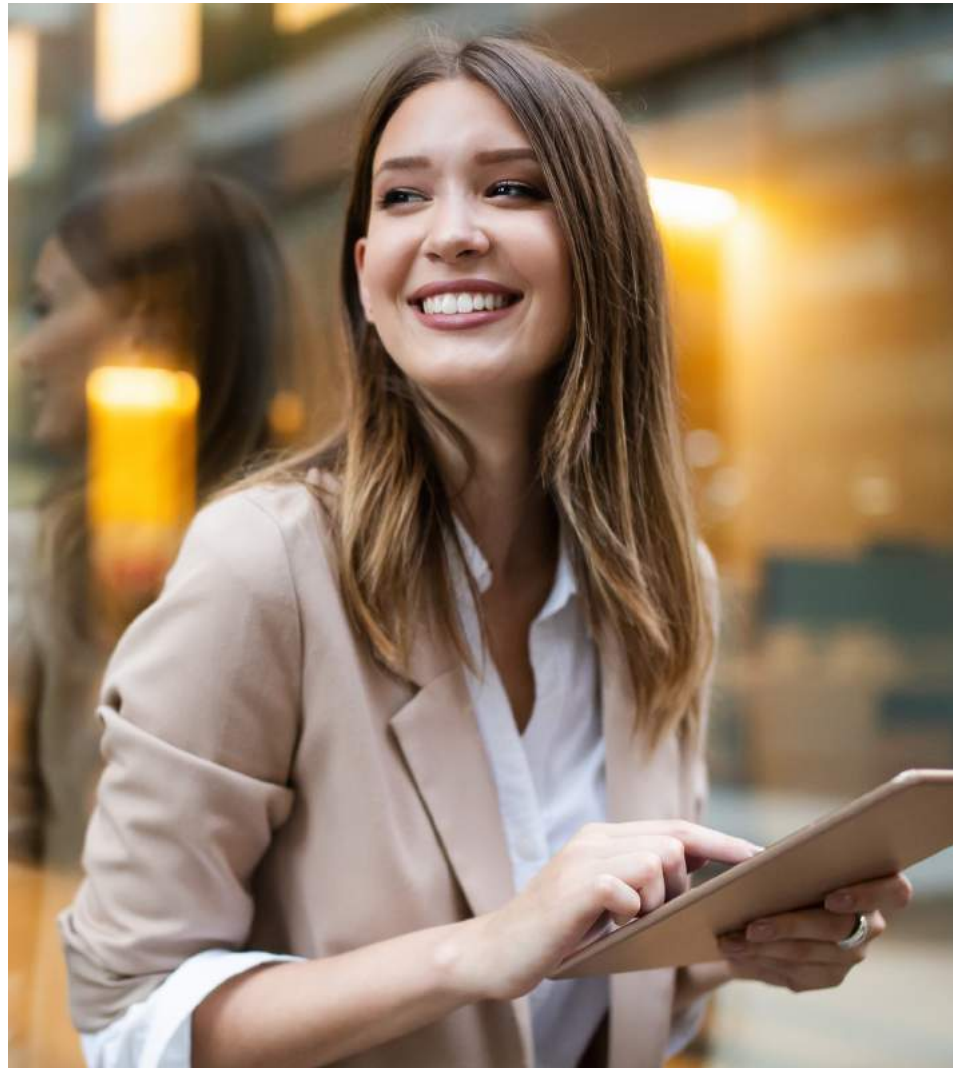
## Purpose Statements and Assignments

Each committee should have a clear, concise purpose statement or mission. Purpose statements are likely to remain unchanged from year to year.

After the appointment of the committee chairs comes an assignment of tasks or

## Sample committee charge for 12 months:

Committee	Mission/Purpose Statement	Tasks
Membership	<p>The mission is to recruit new members by developing a sustainable growth plan and, at the same time, monitor retention.</p> <p>The committee should monitor member needs and the value of membership; recommending adjustments to benefits and services accordingly.</p>	<p><b>1st quarter</b> – focus on student members and increase by 10%.</p> <p><b>2nd quarter</b> – create a campaign where board members can approach prospects.</p> <p><b>Overall</b> – ensure that retention remains above 85%.</p>



current year charges.

It is the committee’s responsibility to advance its mission and complete its assignments.

In some cases, if the work of the

committee is not completed in a year, it may roll over to the ensuing year. (Well drafted reports and minutes will allow next year’s committee chair to sustain momentum).



leaders at a single meeting at the start of the year. They do an orientation and encourage collaboration. Convening the leaders adds momentum, unveils initiatives, and allows for corrections if assignments are unclear.

## Rules of Order and Agendas

Committee meetings should rely on an agenda. Members will appreciate that an agenda was crafted to guide the discussions and achieve results. It is the committee chair’s responsibility, assisted by staff or committee liaisons, to draft or approve an agenda.

Rules of order help to manage discussions. While they do not have to be cumbersome, it is expected that motions will be made, seconded, and recorded.

## Meeting Parameters

The committee chair may want to develop guidelines, so that committee members

know what to expect. For example:

- An **agenda** will be distributed well in advance; it will frame our discussions; helping to avoid meeting distractions and sidebar conversations.
- Prepare for meetings by reviewing **advance materials**.
- Meetings will start and end on **time**.
- Turn off **digital distractions**.
- If you **arrive late**, please refrain from voting until the next agenda item so as not to interrupt the flow of discussion of those who arrived on time.
- **Minutes** will document decisions and actions of the committee.
- **Decisions** of the committee shall stand; expressing dissenting opinions after the meeting is inappropriate.
- **Respect** new ideas and new people on the committee.

## Better Meeting Practices

There is a rhythm to committee meetings during the year.

### PREPARE

- Read governing documents that define duties.
- Prepare for meetings by reading advance reports (“consent agenda”).
- RSVP to ensure a quorum will be present.
- Contact the board chair or CEO in advance with clarifying questions.
- Avoid “rump sessions” before or after the meeting.

### ENGAGE

- Arrive on time and stay engaged until adjournment.
- Respect the chair’s role and the meeting agenda.
- Be accountable for commitments.

# How an Idea flows from the Strategic Plan to Committee to Implementation





## Frequently Asked Questions

### Will we have a budget?

While financial resources are not automatically assigned to committees, the board may fund projects that fit within the mission and goals.

It is hoped that committee projects will generate income.

### Do I have access to the governing documents?

Yes, the bylaws, budget, and strategic plan are tools that will benefit the committee's work and frame discussions.

### How many members are on a committee?

The board may appoint or suggest committee members, or the committee chairman may be asked to invite members to serve. A **large** committee is an opportunity to maximize input and resources. A **small** committee finds it easy to meet with fewer people to invite or make up a quorum, though input is limited.

### Do we know what last year's committee did?

Every committee keeps a record (either working notebook or online) of their work, including minutes, projects, contacts, and resources. The current year committee should review the prior year's work and build upon it.

### Can we meet on-line between our face-to-face meetings?

There are collaboration tools available that facilitate the online meetings and document editing. Online meetings may supplement face-to-face meetings, not replace them.

### How long is my term on the committee?

Committees serve at the request of the current year's board. While committee members may be asked to remain on a committee for continuity, it is the preference of the board to rotate members to varying committees to benefit from their expertise.

### How do we communicate with the board?

Most committees are assigned a staff member or board liaison. The liaison serves as a resource and advocate for the committee to the board of directors. If no liaison exists, it is important that the committee chair communicates with the board's chief elected officer to provide reports, calls for action, and time on the agenda.

### Committee "Acid Test"

During committee meetings, many good ideas will be offered. How is it decided what should come before the committee?

The phrase "acid test" got its name from the historical use of acid to test metals for gold. If acid was applied to metal and didn't corrode it, that meant it was genuine gold.

The committee must be guided by the organizations governing documents and values.

**Mission Statement:** Does the discussion advance the committees and the organization's mission?

**Guide Principles:** If the organization has values, such as diversity, integrity, and transparency, the committee must respect the values.

**Budget:** Do the committee recommendations generate income or

create costs for the organization?

**Strategic Plan:** Which aspect of the organization's strategic plan is being addressed by the committee?

## Preparing Recommendations

Committees make recommendations to the board, requiring board approval in most cases. Because the board acts on "motions," it is suggested that committees make "recommendations."

After a committee reaches a consensus, they will vote upon a recommendation to be presented to the board. Most often, this is communicated by the committee's board or staff liaison.

The recommendation should be clear and concise for the board and executive director to understand. Anticipate that questions will arise, so consider providing background information such as how the recommendation relates to the strategic plan, the economic impact, and how it will measure success.

To avoid the board sending back the recommendation with their questions, be thorough in providing background information. The board's actions might be approved as is, amendments to the idea, or denial of the recommendation, placing the recommendation in the "parking lot" for future consideration.







# Appoint a Committee to Review Committees

“We need a task force to review our committee structure,” board members quipped. The issue in this association is the existence of 75 committees. They built up over decades without a review of purpose and effectiveness.

Committees have important roles; engaging members, developing leaders, and producing results to support the board and staff. Board members explained, “Committee chairs have held their positions for years and will not secede.” “We tried to reduce the number of committees, but nobody wanted to give up their turf.” “It’s too political to touch.”

Committees that are not aligned with an association’s goals can drain time and energy from the important work of staff and volunteers. Conversely, committees that have a clear purpose can play a vital role in helping an association fulfill its mission.

## Sunset Process

Governments use a “sunset process” to regularly review agencies and laws.

The private sector does similar when a product or service is no longer sufficiently profitable or when a company changes its focus.

Non-profits should review the committee structure periodically. The task is to analyze committees to identify those that add value from unneeded, ineffective, or liability. Check the alignment by creating a chart with the main goals listed at the top of each column. Under each goal, list the committees that fit. A goal without any committees is problematic.

## Committees Principles

These principles apply to nearly every nonprofit organization.

- Committees are a great way to engage members. Conversely, they can repel volunteers who find the meetings a waste of their time.
- Committees get their authority from the board, bylaws, and policies. They do not have the authority to speak for the organization or contract on its behalf.

■ Committees are meant to supplement the board’s work and staff. A committee should not be a drain on resources.

■ Committees advance the mission and goals. Seldom should a committee sit down to ask, “What do you want to do this year?” They are charged with strategies from the strategic plan.

## Review Process

In reviewing the committees, be sure to remove personalities. It is not about a person; it’s about the rationale and returns on investment. Ironically, it may require a task force to review and sunset committees. The task is to analyze structure, efficiency, outcomes, costs, information flow, etc., to make recommendations to retain, revamp, merge, or eliminate.

No matter the number of committees, a review of their structure and effectiveness is prudent. If there is a recommendation to eliminate some committees, be ready to grieve.



# Analysis Paralysis

**H**ave you sat in a meeting knowing a decision had to be made while you watched the clock tick? So many ideas and objections are presented that the likelihood of reaching a consensus dwindles.

The situation is described as “analysis paralysis.” The phrase describes individuals or groups that over-analyze and over-think a situation. Decision-making becomes “paralyzed,” with individuals unable to reach consensus or recommend a course of action.

The syndrome causes frustration, failure to complete a task, misunderstanding, wasted time, and resignation. Over analyzing can derail the most well-intentioned group.

## Recognizing Paralysis

By recognizing the symptoms, corrective actions can avoid paralysis.

Individuals, or the group, might over-think the assignment. Frequently, they want to solve the entire problem and decide how it will be managed, who will do the work and deadlines. They should focus on the recommendation and not on the “how-to” to carry out the decision. Recommendations usually go to a committee or staff for the implementation process.

Watch out for deep dives. For instance, an assignment to make a recommendation about the conference ends in discussing the name badges. It seems easier to address low-level issues than to be brave enough to offer solutions.

Group discussion and decision-making can be daunting for individuals. They may lack experience working in a group or the courage to state an opinion or make a recommendation.

Encourage everybody to join in the conversation. Sometimes the loudest person is not always the most valuable

voice in the room. Be wary of those who speak twice as much as they listen. Respect people and ideas.

Decision-making is avoided by offering a glut of ideas. At some point, the ideas must end, and closure reached.

Also listen for the devil’s advocate with a pattern of disagreeing. Hear them out or call them out. Recommendations are meant to offer solutions, not to expand the problem.

Be alert to time wasters. As the clock ticks, the opportunity for consensus diminishes.

Finally, the culture of an organization may be seen as a rejection rather than acceptance. If a board of directors is known to reject or micromanage recommendations, the group isn’t likely to work as hard on solutions.

## Reaching Failure

When finding yourself in these situations, the outcomes are predictable.

The decision is rushed with *groupthink* taking over — people agreeing because it looks like others agree. Anxiety drives the meeting with people watching the time elapse.

Equally alarming is the group that missed the mark. They will state, “We didn’t have enough time, or “we had a great conversation but didn’t reach a conclusion.”

You want a group leader who can avoid a “hung jury.” It is disappointing when the group says, “Among us, we could not reach an agreement.”

## Cures for Analysis Paralysis

Agree upon guidelines to avoid paralysis.

■ **Set the tone.** Restate the assignment at the start. Quite often, the precise charge was uncertain, or participants don’t give it much thought. It’s critical to understand the task.

■ **Appoint a facilitator.** Decisions

eventually must be communicated. A designated spokesperson will monitor time and engage everybody with statements like, “have we heard from everyone?” and “have we reached an agreement yet?”

■ **Keep notes.** Ask someone to be a scribe. The only way to ensure the group agrees is to read the final recommendation accurately. If the notetaker is not accurate, almost immediately, the group fails, and their report becomes, “we also talked about but didn’t write it down.” As is often said, an idea without writing it down is just a dream.

■ **Rely on facts.** Without data, any decision might sound reasonable. Ask for clarification and metrics. For example, “How did the program perform in the past? What is the potential for growth?”

■ **Respect time.** Know how much time is allocated for the process. If the group is assigned three tasks in one hour, they should give about 15 minutes per task and the final minutes for a recap. Most groups work under the stress of time, but if a 5-minute break is needed to stretch and refocus, take the break.

■ **Summarize.** Encourage the statement, “thus far I think we’ve agreed upon...” Recap understandings often. Before adjourning, restate the final recommendation.

■ **Be brief.** To ensure the recommendations are understood, keep them brief. Listeners and readers prefer bullets and examples rather than verbose paragraphs.

It is rare to find a person who enjoys meeting “just to meet.” Stay laser-focused on the task, deadline, and expectation. Avoid the temptation to overanalyze so that paralysis doesn’t take over.

# Committee Descriptions – Samples

By maintaining a consistent mission statement for each committee, the incoming chair and members understand how their work fits within the association's mission.

These are provided as examples common to associations.

## **Budget Committee**

The mission is to prepare the annual budget, monitor the budget, and ensure that reports are presented to the board and reflected in the meeting minutes. The treasurer most often chairs the committee. Their concerns may expand as the organization seeks to diversify income sources.

## **Conference Committee**

The mission is to plan, organize and conduct the annual conference. The committee reviews prior conference strengths and weaknesses and makes recommendations for educational tracks and speakers. The committee does not select the site nor plan the details or logistics.

## **Education Committee**

The mission is to determine the continuing and practical education needs of members and the profession and develop or plan courses, content, and

speakers accordingly. Offerings should produce revenue or at least break even.

## **Ethics Committee**

The mission is to encourage ethical conduct of the members by providing informal, non-binding ethics opinions and to recommend and/or review proposed changes to the Code of Standards.

## **Executive Committee**

The mission is to conduct necessary business on matters of urgency in between meetings of the board of directors.

## **Government Affairs Committee**

The mission is to ensure adequate monitoring, lobbying, and oversight on legislative and regulatory issues that could affect the association and the members. And make recommendations to the board on official positions.

## **Membership Committee**

The mission is to recruit new members by developing a sustainable growth plan and, at the same time monitor retention. The committee should monitor member needs and the value of membership; recommending adjustments to benefits and services accordingly.

## **Nominating Committee**

The mission is to develop a process

by which the organization may identify and vet candidates and make recommendations to the board in a timely and prescribed format. Additional duties may be assigned related to planning board orientation and board performance evaluation. Sometimes the nomination committee takes on broader year-long responsibilities at the Board Development Committee.

## **Past Chairs Council**

The mission is to undertake special assignments suggested by the chief elected officer or board. The Council's projects are often special tasks and fund-raising projects not in the purview of other committees.

## **Program Committee**

The mission is to develop and ensure the highest quality of events and education offered to members and non-members. They may work with other committees such as Conference and Publicity. They should strive to be aware of industry trends and members' needs continually.

## **Publicity Committee**

The mission is to improve understanding of the profession and the association through a variety of public outreach efforts, marketing, and public relations.



# Charging the Committees – Samples

Sample Mission/Purpose Statement	Sample Assignments / Tasks
<p><b>Government Affairs Committee</b> – The mission is to ensure that there is adequate monitoring, lobbying and oversight on legislative and regulatory issues that could affect the association and members. And make recommendations to the board on official positions.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Monitor the state or federal legislature for issues impacting the profession and report to the board.</li> <li>2. Identify groups with which to collaborate or join forces to increase clout.</li> <li>3. Develop position papers on issues identified by the board.</li> <li>4. Plan and promote attendance at the annual Day on the Hill.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Budget Committee</b> – The mission is to prepare the annual budget, monitor the budget and ensure that reports are presented to the board and reflected in the meeting minutes. The committee is most often chaired by the Treasurer. Their concerns may expand as the organization seeks to diversify income sources.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create the annual budget and present it to the board at least 90 days prior to the start of the fiscal year.</li> <li>2. Ensure the financial reports are presented according to Generally Accepted Accounting Principles.</li> <li>3. Research and recommend non-dues income sources that can supplement income by at least 5 percent this fiscal year.</li> <li>4. Develop a policy for reserve funds and savings.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Program Committee</b> - The mission is to develop and ensure the highest quality of events and education offered to members and non-members. They may work with other committees such as Conference and Publicity. They should strive to continually be aware of industry trends and members' needs.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Realizing the current benchmark for our market share of potential members is X%, it is our aim to increase it to 5%.</li> <li>2. Survey members' needs and satisfaction in a professional manner.</li> <li>3. Reach out to college faculty and students to build a pipeline of future members.</li> <li>4. Maintain a retention rate of at least 85%.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Membership Committee</b> - The mission is to recruit new members by developing a sustainable growth plan, and at the same time monitor retention. The committee should monitor member needs and the value of membership; recommending adjustments to benefits and services accordingly.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review the prior year of programs related to return on investment and member value, making recommendations for the year ahead.</li> <li>2. Develop one signature program incorporating a nationally recognized speaker and an opportunity to draw from other professions.</li> <li>3. Collaborate with publicity committee to improve member awareness of programs.</li> <li>4. Develop a master calendar of programs and events.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Nominations Committee</b> – The mission is to develop a process by which the organization may identify and vet candidates, and make recommendations to the board in a timely and prescribed format. Additional duties related to planning board orientation and board performance evaluation may be assigned, also known as the Board Development Committee.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review the strengths and weaknesses of our current board.</li> <li>2. Follow the bylaws in announcing nominations, making recommendations to the board of directors, and preparing the slate of nominees.</li> <li>3. Vet candidates by discussing our conflict of interest statement and board duties.</li> <li>4. Assist with the board orientation process.</li> </ol>

# Volunteer Form - Sample

If you are interested in serving on a committee, please complete this form. Generally, committee appointments are one year in duration in accordance with the bylaws. Some committees may be shorter ad hoc and task forces. It is recommended that committee members, in accepting appointments, commit themselves to attend the mid-year and annual meetings since many meetings are normally held at these times.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Preferences (Please rank areas of interest with "1" being top preference.)

- Awards and Scholarships
- Membership – Recruitment and Retention
- Member Benefits and Services
- Government Relations
- Nominations and Leadership Development
- Technology
- Professional Development and Education
- Finance Committee

Can you attend the Midyear and/or Annual Conference? Yes  No

Do you have computer access to meet, collaborate or work on-line? Yes  No

Numbers of years you have been a member? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you check e-mail daily? Yes  No  Access to Internet? Yes  No

List any committees on which you have served on in our organization: \_\_\_\_\_

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List relevant background experience for committee assignment: \_\_\_\_\_

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Do you believe you have any conflicts of interest? \_\_\_\_\_

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Are you interested in advancing to a leadership role?  Yes  No

**Thank you for your willingness to serve on a committee.**

# Committee Agenda – Sample

## Mission Statement

(Insert mission statement at top or bottom of the agenda: i.e., “The mission is to determine the continuing and practical education needs of members and the profession and develop or plan courses, content, and speakers to fulfill the needs. Programs should produce revenue or at least break even.”)

Chair: \_\_\_\_\_ Vice-Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Meeting Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting Location: \_\_\_\_\_

**Committee Members Present:**  Sign-in Sheet attached or listed on back

✓	Welcome
✓	Reminders (conflicts of interest, confidentiality)
	Review Prior Meeting Minutes
	Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes
	Business of the of the Committee Meeting
	Assignment #1
	Assignment #2
	Assignment #3
	Assignment #4
	Old or New Business
	Next Steps
	Adjournment and Thank You

Person Completing This Form: \_\_\_\_\_ Submission Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Rate the Meeting

Add a rating scale from 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 at the bottom of meeting agendas (include it in the footer.) Before adjournment, the chair should ask, “How do you think we did at today’s meeting? Please circle 1 to 5 with five being the best.” Take a moment to discuss why anybody thought the meeting result was less than a five and how to make improvements.

# Committee Evaluation Tool - Sample

## Self-Evaluation and Meeting Feedback

(NOTE: Insert committee name and mission on the form before distribution to members for feedback.)

Feedback and Input to Improve Governance and Board Meetings	Outstanding	Very Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Not Sure N/A
1. Meeting agendas and room setups are conducive to doing work					
Comments					
2. Committee focuses on goals that advance the mission statement					
Comments					
3. Chairman encourages and respects diverse viewpoints and ideas					
Comments					
4. Lines of authority and responsibility are clear between the committee, board, and staff (the staff are respected)					
Comments					
5. Outcomes are relevant to members and stakeholders					
Comments					
6. Discussions focus on future solutions rather than problems of the past					
Comments					









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