



Group Decision Tip

E-mailed every two weeks to help groups make good decisions

Committees

In principle, not every task is best suited to the full group and not every topic is interesting to every group member. When groups establish committees -- sub-groups of people focused on specific activities -- it brings focused attention to issues, draws on the enthusiasm of those most interested, and frees the full group for higher level business.

Committee members often volunteer for service although they may be formally appointed by the full group, chair, or boss. Standing committees have ongoing, often annual, responsibilities such as an organization's finance committee or program committee. Ad hoc committees are established for specific purposes and go out of business once the purpose is achieved. Ad hoc committees are often asked to research something and make recommendations. Committees work best with written mandates and willing participants.

Practical Tip: When tasking a sub-group to do something, write a mandate. What are you asking the committee to do? What is within the scope of work and what is out of bounds? When do you expect to hear from the committee? Don't shy from drafting a committee mandate on the spot in a group meeting for all to see, revise, and finalize.

In high functioning groups, committee membership and leadership is a thoughtful and controlled activity. Publicly calling for volunteer leadership or appointing a person to a committee who is out of the room rarely works well. Be thoughtful and strategic about identifying committee chairs and members; people who understand and believe in the mandate.

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