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Management Committees

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Any voluntary organisation needs a committee of people who will organise how the group is run. This is to ensure that decisions are made in a democratic way and ensures 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 exactly what is going on with the organisation, but not so often that nothing happens except meetings! (For more about constitutions, see the factsheet on *Constitutions*). If your constitution states that your organisation has a membership (this is usual for voluntary organisations), then your committee members will usually come from amongst the membership. Your constitution should state how committee members are voted on to the committee by the members, 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 works towards its aims in accordance with the law
- Ensure the organisation manages its finances properly
- Ensure that activities carried out and decisions made are in the best interest of the organisation and not any individual member of the committee

If necessary, the committee can organise sub-committees to take on specific tasks such as finance or organising an event.

The management committee looks at the overall direction of the organisation, and the paid staff deal with the operations (or the day to day management and tasks). The management committee reports to the membership at General Meetings and through annual reports and presenting accounts etc. 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 accounts. Ensure that new members aren't bombarded with lots of jargon.

If your organisation is a registered charity, then your organisation must abide by charity law. Officially your management committee members are known as charity trustees. The Charity Commission publishes a leaflet (CC3) called *The Essential Trustee: What you need to know*. However, if you are not a registered charity it doesn't mean that you can be irresponsible and mismanage the organisation. Following charity law is good practice for all organisations with charitable objectives.

1: Honorary Officers

Honorary officers might sound rather grand, but essentially they are (usually) three 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 Chair is often the spokesperson for the organisation, particularly when an organisation has no paid staff. They also chair the meetings of the Management Committee. To chair a meeting just means to keep the meeting to order and to make sure that the committee 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 any one person to dominate the discussions
- Keep a check on time wasting, interruptions and any personal attacks

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 keep minutes (notes) of meetings and to distribute them to management committee members. Any other roles that the secretary should take on can be decided by the management 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 who undertake the day-to-day finance work, the treasurer has more of a planning and authorising role.

In a smaller organisation, the treasurer is responsible for:

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

2: *Liabilities of Management Committee Members*

As a member of a management committee, you may be personally liable if your organisation cannot fulfill a contract it has signed or if the committee did not act within the law or within its constitution. You need to take precautions to minimise the risk of liability. When you take decisions, make sure they are well documented and that you take professional advice when needed. Ensure that you have effective financial controls, adequate employment procedures and safe working conditions (you can contact the Pay and Employment Rights Service – details below – for advice on good practice in employing staff).

3: *Further Help*

Voluntary Action Leeds

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www.val.org.uk

Charity Commission

0845 300 0218

www.charitycommission.gov.uk – where you can download publications.

PERS (Pay and Employment Rights Service)

01924 428 030 (Advice Line)

admin@pers.org.uk

www.pers.org.uk

NCVO

0800 2798 798

www.askNCVO.org.uk - see the section on trustees and governance.

4. Further Reading

Charity Commission Publication CC3 – The Essential Trustee: what you need to know

Charity Commission Publication RS1 – Trustee Recruitment, Selection and Induction

Mike Eastwood – The Charity Trustee's Handbook (2001)

NCVO – The Good Trustee Guide (2008)

Voluntary Action Leeds

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