

Roles and responsibilities of the committee/board

In children's services, the role of the committee/board is to:

- determine the service's mission and purpose
- set the strategic directions of the organisation, that is, develop the service's strategic plan
- appoint and monitor the performance of the director, the nominated supervisor, responsible person and the educational leader (they may be the same person)
- ensure there are sufficient certified supervisors to cover the opening hours of the service every day
- ensure staff are employed in accordance with industrial obligations
- ensure compliance with legal obligations
- ensure the on-going financial viability of the service
- ensure the development of a service philosophy (statement of principles)
- monitor and evaluate the service's performance against the strategic plan (including the committee/board's own performance)
- enhance the profile of the service in the community
- recruit and orient new committee/board members.
- collaborate with the director as the "expert in the field".

Individual roles of committee/board members

In addition to understanding the role of the committee/board as a whole, each member needs to be aware of their individual role on the committee/board (particularly if they are an office bearer). Following is an outline of individual roles of the office bearers and the ordinary members of the committee/board. This is a guide which should be adapted to meet the needs of your service. Some tasks may be delegated to paid staff.

President or Chairperson

The president/chairperson's role encompasses three broad areas:

- leadership of the committee/board
- liaison with director
- public relations.

To be effective in these areas, it is important that the president/chairperson has an awareness and understanding of the needs of children and families and the role of the service within the community.

The president/chairperson's responsibilities include:

- understanding the organisation's governing rules/constitution
- developing the committee/board meeting agenda, in consultation with the director and other committee/board members.

A primary responsibility of the president is chairing meetings. This includes:

- working through the agenda, prioritising items if time is limited
- ensuring discussion remains relevant
- keeping discussions to appropriate time
- allowing everyone to have an opportunity to express their views and opinions
- acting as final decision maker when voting is tied

The president/chairperson must also:

- sign the minutes after they have been confirmed
- prepare and deliver a report at the organisation's Annual General Meeting as well as any other reports as required
- communicate regularly with other members of the committee/board and director
- keep track of tasks that have been allocated to other committee/board members or sub-committees
- speak on behalf of the service and represent it within the broader community.

While the role of the president tends to be an all-encompassing one, the help and support of fellow committee/board members can be enlisted in any area. The president should delegate and co-ordinate tasks to make sure action is taken.

Vice-President or Vice-Chairperson

The vice-president/vice-chairperson supports the president/chairperson, and fills the role of president/chairperson when required (for instance,

chairing the meeting or representing the service if the president/chairperson is absent)

This role tends not to be too arduous so individual services should consider how best to utilise the skills of the person in this role by assigning particular tasks.

Secretary

The secretary is responsible for the records of the service (other than financial records).

Secretarial responsibilities include:

- keeping a current list of members of the organisation, including addresses and contact numbers
- consulting with the president/chairperson on preparation of the agenda
- distributing the agenda for meetings, keeping in mind any requirements under your association rules/constitution
- keeping accurate records of meetings
- distributing copies of minutes at or before the next meeting, in accordance with governing rules/constitution
- presenting applications for new membership to the committee/board for approval in accordance with governing rules/constitution
- collecting, reporting and responding to relevant correspondence as directed
- keeping the committee/board's files in order and up-to-date.

Treasurer

The extent of the work of the treasurer needs to be assessed in conjunction with current practices within your service. Most services will have delegated some or all of the day to day financial administration of the service to the director who may in turn supervise the work of a bookkeeper/clerical/admin assistant.

Even if such delegations are in place, the role of the treasurer is to ensure:

- preparation of the annual budget (with other key people eg. Director)
- effective monitoring of income and expenditure (profit/loss) against the budget
- accurate books and financial records representing the current financial situation of the service are kept, and documents lodged as required
- correct accounting procedures including associated documentation (invoices, receipts, bank statements, etc)
- presentation of financial reports (eg profit and loss statements).

The treasurer plays a key role in reporting on the financial position of the organisation to the committee/board, including:

- tabling financial reports (e.g. profit and loss statements against the budget and the balance sheet)
- presenting annual financial statements and the auditor's report at the AGM.

The treasurer plays a key role in reporting on the financial position of the organisation to the board/committee. However, the whole board/committee is responsible for ensuring the financial viability of the service.

Ordinary committee/board members

In addition to the roles of the office bearers, the committee/board will also have a number of other members who may or may not have delegated responsibilities.

General committee members:

- support office bearers by participating actively and constructively in meetings
- participate in discussions and decisions of the management committee
- volunteer to support organisational activities as time allows
- represent the organisation at community events.

What makes an effective committee/board member?

It is important to remember that the key to being an effective committee/board member is the attitude and values that you bring to the position. Here are a few suggested principles to help you be an effective committee/board member:

- attend committee/board meetings regularly and take an active part in meetings
- be aware of and keep up to date with what the organisation is doing (for example, you should read the service's current business plan and, for services funded by Education and Communities Office of Education, its Service Specifications and Funding Agreement.
- find out how any proposed action will affect the organisation – by asking the director or another relevant person to provide information
- work as a team with your committee/board to make joint decisions and work towards shared goals, whilst making sure you act independently and not at the bidding of other people, such as the director/co-ordinator or president/chairperson
- always put the organisation's interests above your own personal interests
- declare any interest to the president/chairperson in any matter that could affect your income or other activities and be prepared to stand aside for votes or discussion when there is a direct or indirect conflict of interest
- use any information gained through the position properly – that is, in the best interests of the organisation
- maintain the confidentiality of children, families and the committee/board at all times
- take individual responsibility for ensuring the organisation has appropriate records of its financial transactions and its financial position and that it does not incur expenditure it cannot meet
- take personally responsibility for ensuring the organisation meets its legal requirements.

An effective committee/board member must also be prepared to:

- ask reasonable questions to help make informed decisions
- show respect to fellow committee/board members and listen to their point of view
- assist the director and staff whilst maintaining objectivity

- have a sense of humour and enjoy committee/board meetings.

An effective committee/board member is someone who can work as part of the team but be independent in their views and voting. They will actively support decisions of the committee/board as a whole.

Adapted from "Governance: What makes an effective management committee?" *Community Management*, vol 1, no 2, May 1999. pp. 14-15.