



Creating a Committee Charter

You should create a proposal to the central body, which will be discussed and eventually approved, thereby giving your committee a live charter.

When setting up a committee charter, there are three main areas to address:

1. Committee processes
2. What are you expected to discuss and propose
3. What are you empowered to decide

Committee Processes

This section is aimed at determining how your committee makes decisions. It is important that this is clear before you make decisions.

Much of this structure should be uniform throughout your organization, to aid in the smooth flow of information among committees and between the committees and the central body. For this reason, the first step will be to consult any relevant decisions that have been made by the whole; for example, there may be meeting frequency requirements or expectations about how your activities are communicated. It is important that your committee structure address these expectations, and not conflict with the structure of the organization as a whole.

There are several areas that should be addressed.

Who is your committee coordinator? This person is responsible for keeping track of who is on the committee, and serving as point of contact for the committee (with other committees, prospective committee members, etc.)

Who takes minutes and what happens with them? This may be the responsibility of a committee secretary, or may be rotated. If rotated, the coordinator is responsible for keeping track of who is doing it next, and making sure that it happens even in the event of an absence.

What is your frequency and budget? When and how often do you meet? If you are paid for your meeting times, this will need to be factored into the overall committee budget. But the budget should also address how much money the committee has to spend on its activities, including supplies, outreach, etc.

How are decisions made? This will ideally be determined by the central body, to promote some degree of uniformity and comprehensibility among the committees. But you should at least be clear about what threshold is required for decisions (majority, consensus, etc), as well as how your meetings are run.

Area of Responsibility

It is critical that each committee knows what other committees are doing. Therefore, you should identify areas that are potentially going to be addressed by other committees.

In some cases, the distinctions will require substantial detail. It will not be enough to say that your committee handles “membership.” For example, you may have an outreach committee seeking out new members, an organizational committee that determines how members sign up, and a financial committee that tracks member investments and dues. And your operations committee might also have something to say about volunteer policies.

In some cases you will have to go back to your central meeting one or more times, to refine the boundaries among committee responsibilities.

Committee Powers

Once you have determined your area of responsibility, you can address what decisions can be made by the committee, and what needs to go to the central body.

A decision should be made by the smallest group of people, which still includes everyone affected by that decision. However, it is also crucial to remember that the central body is ultimately responsible for what happens. So caution is necessary as you delegate responsibilities out to the committees.

You may set a purchase size limit, or an itemized budget, so that you can carry out routine activities without seeking approval at every step. Generally speaking, committee powers should include decisions that are narrow in their impact, extensions of existing directions, and minimal in fiscal impact.