

Committee Authority & Types

Committees receive their authority from the board. Staff members or other individuals may also be given authority to do a job on the board's behalf.

The board delegates power in four degrees:

1. **Limited advisor:** The committee investigates and reports. The board makes the decision.
2. **Active advisor:** The committee investigates and suggests action. The board will probably take the committee's suggestions.
3. **Limited agent:** The committee can take action after the board has agreed to the action.
4. **Active agent:** The committee takes action and reports on the action taken. The board later approves of the action.

A board might say the following to a committee or staff member:

1. **To a limited advisor:** "Look into the matter, give us all the facts, we'll decide what to do."
2. **To an active advisor:** "Look into the matter, let us know what the alternatives are, including the advantages and disadvantages of each, and make recommendations for our action."
3. **To a limited agent:** "Look into the matter, decide on the best course of action, inform us of what you intend to do, then go ahead and do it unless we tell you not to."
4. **To an active agent:** "Look into the matter, decide on the best course of action, take that action, and report back to us on what you did."

When assigning any action plan, strategy or task to others, the board must be clear on the degree of authority which goes along with that assignment. Not knowing just how far to go with the decision-making on a particular issue is guaranteed to throw a committee into at least one extra hour of discussion...probably without any resolution of the question!

When asking people to do a job, be sure they know how they are to take it!

Types of Committees

Standing

A standing committee is the most common and most criticized. The members study problems within an assigned area and provide specialized assistance and advice to the board of directors on a continuing basis. Examples are: executive, membership, personnel, health, finance, fundraising and nominating. A standing committee frequently has extensive authority and responsibility to accomplish its work. The board usually takes all advice and recommendations from a standing committee.

Ad hoc

An ad hoc committee is formed to handle a specific situation or issue that does not fall with the assigned function of an existing standing committee. It is dissolved when the job is completed. Examples are: design a brochure, arrange a conference, prepare a presentation to government, build a playground. Depending on the situation/issue, an ad hoc committee may have extensive authority and responsibility. The board usually takes all advice and recommendations coming from an ad hoc committee.

Advisory

A third type of committee, used occasionally, is advisory. In this capacity, the committee advises the board on any issues the board requests data; e.g. policy, plans, public relations. This type of committee may be standing or ad hoc. What makes an advisory committee stand out from the others is that the board is under no obligation to take the advice or recommendations from such a committee (however, it frequently does so). When an advisory committees set-up, it is often at the request of or on the condition of a funding body.