

Volunteering in the 21st Century



Recruitment, Induction and Succession Planning for Committees

The viability and sustainability of any community group depends on its ability to attract new members and be able to recruit and inject new blood into its committee. Whilst great value lies in retaining experienced committee members, there is also a risk that a committee will become stale, that members will become entrenched in their ways and the potential of new committee members will be unrealised. Recruitment, induction and succession planning for new committee members contributes to the long term success and vibrancy of your committee and your community group.

Recruitment

Skills audit

Whilst no specific skills are required to join a committee, it can be useful for your committee to undertake a skills audit to see what skills existing members bring to the committee and what skills may be absent. If vital or desirable skills are missing from your committee, you may choose to pursue new committee members who possess these talents or interests. Desirable skills might include a member with financial experience, knowledge in marketing or a passion for fundraising. A targeted recruitment strategy could then be customised to specifically seek committee members with these skills.

Representation and diversity

Another form of customised recruitment is to consider the make-up of your committee and whether it appropriately reflects the stake-holders in your community and your community group. If you are a sporting group, do you have a youth representative on your committee? Is there an appropriate gender mix? Should a position be made available for a senior member of the community or a person with a disability? Ensuring diversity within the composition of your committee can help to reflect the needs and aspirations of your member base and the broader community.

Sub-committees

Of course, in small rural communities getting ANYONE to join your committee can be a struggle! A good starting point might be to create a sub-committee with a specific goal or task and invite members of your community to assist with a time-specific, outcome focused role. This could be preparing the annual budget, conducting an event, or undertaking a review

of your group's policies. Sub-committees are an ideal way to target community members with specific skills and to give them a "taster" of what it's like to work with your community group. This is usually less daunting than being asked to take on a Committee of Management role and allows both parties to test the water. If their time and role on a sub-committee is successful, these committee members are more likely to step-up and join the management committee.

At the end of the day, remember that when you are recruiting committee members, without passion and commitment even the most desirable professional skills will be useless!

Recruiting from inside v. sourcing outside help

Sometimes the best person for a committee is someone who is already involved with your community group. Inviting an existing member or volunteer to be part of the leadership team will bring a depth of knowledge on how programs are run on the ground and an understanding of the logistical issues. Existing volunteers who have shown commitment, passion and reliability have a good working knowledge of the organisation. However, it is still important to follow proper procedures. All potential committee members should be given an interview, induction and training specifically for their role as a committee member.

New faces from outside the group can bring fresh ideas, new strategies, knowledge and skills. This can be particularly important for committees lacking strategic direction and sustainability. Don't be afraid to scout for new committee members and keep business and local government in mind when considering professional skills required.

Induction

A full induction process should be followed to help new committee members settle into their role and to help them to be fully effective as quickly as possible. Never assume that because someone knows the organisation or has previously been a member of the group, that they know what is expected of them as a committee member. This can lead to a great deal of confusion and blurring between the roles of governance – where the committee helps implement a strategic direction – and the operational role carried out by staff and/or volunteers.

An induction or orientation process can be formal or informal, but should follow a systematic plan that is written down so that nothing is overlooked.

Before their first committee meeting the induction process could include:

- The Committee of Management Handbook / Manual, encompassing:
 - background information about the organisation
 - any official documents, such as the Constitution/Articles of Association, rules, the strategic plan, policies, budgets and an annual report
 - biographical and contact information about current committee members
 - meeting schedule and calendar of upcoming events
 - an introduction to the group's operational and committee structure
 - general information about being on a committee
 - committee members' roles and responsibilities in your organisation
- Personal introductions to the other members
- A mentor system (linking each new member to an existing one)
- Attention to any special needs (disability, gender, race)
- A briefing on current issues and recent meetings

You may need to give new members a bit of time to digest this information before their first meeting!

Succession planning

Community organisations rely heavily on the passion and commitment of those involved, and when the stores of these motivations are run down the committee needs to be ready. Committees need reinvigoration and replenishment just like any organisation. A balance of experienced and new committee members with fresh ideas is desirable.

Planning for succession in your Committee of Management may cover:

- The length of service (eg: two terms or three years)
- The particular skills needed to be filled on the committee (e.g. you may lack someone with a financial background)
- A screening and orientation process for new members
- A mentoring process to share information and skills

You need a systematic method of recruitment for new people and to manage the induction of those new people. You also need to ensure that valuable organisational information is passed on to newer members and those stepping into new positions. Efficient documentation and filing procedures will ensure transparent communication between all members. There is nothing worse than a member leaving still holding all the information about a particular area, necessitating the wheel to be re-invented! Making sure Succession Planning is a part of the general business of the committee means that the wheels stay where they should be, in motion.

