



AAEP Volunteer Handbook

Oct 24, 2023

Guidelines for the Board, Committees, and Staff

Adapted from the ASAE publication "Enhancing Committee Effectiveness" by Jack Schlegel.

The AAEP Committee

Appointment Process

Each year the association's officers appoint the leadership and members for any vacancies in AAEP's committee system. These appointments are based on recommendations made by the Member Engagement Committee and provided to the officers prior to their annual retreat. The Member Engagement Committee (MEC) develops its list of recommendations based on several factors: a member's expressed interest on the AAEP Volunteer Interest Form and input from the current chair on a particular need the committee might have. Another important consideration is diversity in the makeup of committees, taking into consideration age, gender, geography, and ethnicity, as well as making certain that there is good representation of the various segments of the membership.

The term of service for a committee member is three years and begins and ends with the cycle of the Annual Convention. When applicable, the chair is generally selected from the previous year's committee membership and generally serves in this leadership position for three years.

Purpose of Committees

Associations are built on a system of committee actions, linking the association with the attitudes, expectations and needs in the real world of its members. Committees represent, involve, and serve members. They also provide an important training ground for future leaders. Committees are an effective workforce for the association – they ensure group participation in problem-solving and provide a critical forum for the many interests within the AAEP.

Committee Administration

The chair, Board, and staff liaisons. The committee chair and staff liaison, *working in partnership*, are responsible for facilitating the work of the committee, providing oversight, and ensuring timely communications within the committee and between the committee and other components of the association. *The staff liaison also provides logistical support for the committee's work.* Additionally, the AAEP has a Board member serve on every committee as that committee's liaison to the Board of Directors. This person is a resource to the Board regarding the committee's activities, while also serving as a resource to the committee on the views of the board. Board liaisons, however, need to be careful not to overly influence committees, since the association is looking for the committee to provide fresh, new perspectives and thinking.

As such, Board liaisons do not vote on committee recommendations at the committee level, since they will be voting with the board. *The Board liaison should focus on being primarily a communication link between board and committee; however, should often have frequent and timely “check-ins” with the chair to ensure a smooth workflow.*

Committee reports. The committee chair and staff are responsible for keeping leadership and appropriate staff fully informed of the committee activities. A written report of goals and achievements to the board of directors are requested twice a year (mid-year and end of year).

Committee charge. In addition to the general committee charge, which outlines the committee’s scope of activity, the Board of Directors, through the board liaison, may charge the committee with specific work. The committee chair and staff liaison are responsible for keeping the work of the committee focused on the charge and aligned with the association’s strategic plan. At the conclusion of each year, the chair, Board, and staff liaisons are expected to make recommendations to the board regarding future work of the committee.

Committee responsibilities. Committees are directly responsible to the Board of Directors through the Board liaison. Committees may not commit to expenditure of funds and may not express opinions or represent positions in the name of the association unless specifically authorized by the Board. If proposing a program or activity that may involve expenditure of funds, committees must submit a program description and budget to the Board before undertaking the program or activity.

Meetings. To economize on the financial and personal time cost of meetings, most AAEP committees meet at the Annual Convention. These meetings, however, are set for two hours and are likely not sufficient for a particular committee to conduct all of their work; therefore, Zoom meetings should be conducted on an as needed basis during the year. Additionally, every committee has a listserv and all members will be subscribed to the list when their term begins. There are some committees that may simply need more in-person time in a given year depending upon their current workload. Committees wishing to have an in-person meeting outside of the Annual Convention should make this request to the Board via their Board liaison, as this requires an additional expenditure and needs to be budgeted.

Meeting responsibilities. Members are expected to fully participate in committee activities by attending meetings and conducting business by telephone, Zoom and email communications. Members are expected to:

- Act in good faith and in the best interest of the association, not on behalf of their own personal interest or even that of a constituency group of which they feel a part.
- Take on responsibilities and commit to fulfilling them in a timely manner.
- Disclose real or perceived conflicts of interest, and refrain from voting in these instances.
- Refrain from discussions or activities that may violate antitrust laws.
- Again, participation, not only at meetings, but on committee email communications as well is critical. If personal or professional circumstances have changed such that participation has become difficult, please discuss with the committee chair.

Position Descriptions

The Committee Chair

Basic Function

Consistent with the association's policy and strategic plan, the committee chair guides the committee in its work as outlined by the scope of work and charge from the Board of Directors.

Responsibilities

- With staff, develop a work plan that will allow the committee to effectively and efficiently discharge its responsibilities for the year. Consider establishing specific deadlines for action items to keep work moving efficiently throughout the year. The use of subcommittees to tackle individual projects (and then sharing results with the larger committee for feedback) can be more efficient than involving the entire committee in the details of all projects.
- With staff, develop agendas and conduct committee meetings.
- Approve reports of committee meetings before their distribution.
- Work with staff to ensure that the work of the committee is carried out between meetings.
- Approve reports on committee activities, including requests to the board of directors for action.
- Report to the committee on decisions of the Board of Directors that affect the committee's work or activities.

- Where appropriate, guide the committee in proposing products and services that will further the goals and objectives of the association.
- Where appropriate, make policy recommendations to the Board of Directors.
- Exercise leadership within and outside the committee.
- Be sufficiently informed to interact knowledgeably with other committee members, staff, and others outside the committee.
- Move members toward active participation, decision making, and achieving consensus.
- Continually evaluate committee efforts and communicate accomplishments to the committee, association leadership, and the membership.
- Provide feedback to the Member Engagement Committee by identifying member attributes and areas of expertise that would benefit the committee and its work when the MEC considers committee recommendations. For example, if a committee requires expertise in a particular area and a committee member who will be rotating off the committee possesses this expertise, make sure the MEC is aware that this expertise needs to be represented on the committee.

Making Early Contact with Committee Members

- The AAEP office will send letters of invitation to incoming members of all committees, upon approval by the officers. The invitation will include the charge of the committee, roster, and a conflict-of-interest form to be signed and returned. Additionally, the AAEP volunteer handbook will be provided.
- Prior to the Annual Convention, confirmed new members will be added to the committee's listserv and invited to attend the committee meeting at the upcoming Annual Convention. Technically, the new members' term of service begins at the *conclusion* of that Annual Convention.
- New member orientation: At some point early in the process, the chair, board liaison, and staff liaison should conduct a brief orientation via Zoom with incoming committee members. The orientation should consist of a review of the committee's charge, recent accomplishments of the committee, and any planned work. Ideally, this orientation occurs prior to the Annual Convention; however, some committees prefer to conduct this orientation immediately following the convention based on other circumstances.
- Some chairs may wish to solicit agenda items. If this is done, remember that the first requirement of a committee is to fulfill the charge provided to it by the association.

Developing and Structuring the Meeting Agenda

- Never hold a meeting without an agenda sent out in advance. You cannot expect responsible participation when people do not have time to prepare.
- Work closely with the staff liaison in developing the agenda for the meeting.

- Provide an agenda sheet that lists all the agenda items to be taken up, but also the following basic information: start and ending times; meeting room location/name/number; and list of committee members (those expected to attend and those expected to be absent).
- Sequence agenda items thoughtfully. Committee meetings are like any team sport. The group needs to “warm up” together before tackling the tougher work. Therefore, start the meeting with agenda topics that will unify the committee; this sets the stage for working together. Early in the meeting, when people are fresh, is a good time to discuss topics that require mental energy, creativity, and clear thinking. Do not put difficult or controversial items at the end of the meeting, when people are tired and less likely to tolerate difficult discussions.
- Provide at least minimal written background information for each agenda item.
- Identify the person who is presenting each agenda item and consider including a suggested amount of time for each item.

Being an Effective Facilitator of Discussions

- Be a facilitator of meetings; don’t “hold court.” The committee belongs to the association, not to the chair.
- Guide, mediate, probe, draw people in and stimulate discussions. Committees are not formed to simply validate the thinking of the chair or staff, so it is the responsibility of the chair to encourage broad participation to bring new ideas, thoughts and solutions into the discussion.
- Encourage a clash of ideas, but not of personalities. Good decisions result when a committee examines all sides of an issue. Don’t let members personalize the debate and don’t let one or two members dominate the discussion.
- Prevent one-sided discussions. As chair you are responsible for making sure that discussions are balanced, no matter what your personal beliefs.
- Deal with people who are difficult. Don’t let a person who is blocking constructive discussion ruin the committee meeting for everyone else. If necessary, call for a break and talk privately with the person causing difficulty, calling attention to how this is counterproductive to constructive discussion. Perhaps suggest an alternate way in which the person can make his/her point.
- Keep discussions on track; periodically summarize and refocus the discussion, reminding people of the goal of the discussion.
- Keep meetings on time. You may need to table an agenda item in order get through the rest of the agenda. If important issues arise during the meeting that cannot be adequately addressed during the time allotted, it may require another meeting.
- Monitor participants, control talkative members and draw silent members into the discussion. There is no point in people attending a meeting and yet not participating in discussions.

- Be sensitive to the feelings of members. Look for visual and verbal cues to determine if a member is not happy with the discussion, and then deal with his or her discomfort during a break if possible.
- Keep the group focused on the central question and moving toward a decision. Call on the least senior members first to express their views; discussions tend to “close down” after senior members express strong views.
- Meetings should not just validate the thinking of the chair, staff, or one or two dominant people.
- Seek consensus – a decision that all members will support even though they may not agree with every little detail. Committees do not need unanimous agreement. Sometimes a good idea is badly compromised by trying to get every last person to completely agree.
- Close the meeting by
 - Noting achievements and focusing on positive outcomes of the meeting.
 - Confirming assignments and due dates.
 - Confirming understanding of next steps on major issues.
 - Reinforcing the importance of wide participation in committee deliberations.
 - Saying “thanks.”

The Committee Member

Basic Function

Actively participate in the work of the committee, provide thoughtful input to the deliberations of the committee, focus on the best interests of the association and the committee rather than on personal or constituent interests, and work toward fulfilling the committee’s goals.

Responsibilities

- Review all relevant material before committee meetings. Make contributions and voice objective opinions on issues.
- Attend committee meetings be they in-person or virtual.
- Carry out individual assignments made by the committee chair.
- Work as part of the committee and staff team to ensure that the committee proposes policies and/or develops products and services that help association members.
- Represent the committee in meetings of other association groups as needed.
- Promote clarity within the committee on the committee’s role and how it supports and fits within the association.

A note about participation: If you find that during the course of your service, you are no longer interested in the work of the committee or circumstances have arisen which will not allow you to fully participate, please contact the chair. Life happens and circumstances change. It's far better to communicate with the chair or staff liaison than to just not show up. Members that do not participate on the committee listserv or have several unexcused absences at committee meetings or zooms in a given year may be replaced or have their term of service shortened. Communication is key.

The Board Liaison

Basic Function

The Board liaison serves as a resource to the chair and members of the committee as well as to the Board on behalf of the committee. As mentioned above, their primary role is to facilitate communication between the board and the committee. Board liaisons work with the chair to ensure that the committee work is consistent with the prevailing strategic plan of the AAEP and/or the committee's expressed charge. As the Board liaison, you should plan to attend all meetings of the committee.

The Role of Board Liaisons to Committees

- First and foremost, your job is to represent the AAEP: the whole, the big picture
- Board liaisons should observe, advise diplomatically, and speak fairly little. As a key AAEP leader, your comments have significant "gravitas" and could skew a committee's deliberations. Only if you feel a committee is making a serious mistake should you interject strong opinion. Always remember, your role is to speak on behalf of the Board, our strategic/business plan, and existing policies.
- Board liaisons are "ex-officio" members of the committee. You should read the pre-meeting materials, consult with the chair and staff liaison as needed (or when asked), and advise the committee, but not take on homework assignments, etc. You also do not vote at the committee level, since you will be voting at the Board level.
- You may need to be a traffic cop. If the committee steers off their charges, you shouldn't hesitate to gently steer them back onto their agenda. Understanding how the committee charge fits in to the AAEP strategic plan can be a helpful guide if committees stray from their mission.
- You may be called upon to have a candid conversation with the chair or a member who may need some redirection.

- You will deliver issues to the Board that require Board discussion or decision, but you are not required to be the committee's advocate at the Board meeting. You should be objective, keeping in mind the big picture and the best interests of the AAEP.
- You should plan to communicate regularly with the chair regarding progress and/or any problems with work plan activity.

The Staff Liaison

Basic Function

Serve as an informed resource person to the chair and members of the committee. Assist the chair in facilitating committee discussions and activities that address the committee's charge. Work with the chair to ensure that all committee work is consistent with the association's goals and objectives.

Roles & Responsibilities

- Along with the Board liaison, provide thorough orientation for each new committee chair and assist the chair in providing orientation for new and continuing committee members each year.
- Work with the chair to develop a plan of work that will allow the committee to discharge its responsibilities effectively and efficiently for the year.
- Work with the chair to develop agendas and conduct effective meetings.
- Provide administrative support for planning and execution of all committee meetings.
- Draft reports of committee meetings for review and approval by the committee chair.
- Work with the chair, other committee members, and association staff to ensure that the work of the committee is carried forth between meetings.
- Facilitate communication of committee activities, including requests for action and/or proposed policies, to the Executive Director for submission to the Board of directors.
- Where appropriate, assist the committee in proposing products and services that will further the goals and objectives of the association.
- Be a valuable resource to the committee, not simply a recording secretary. *Note that too large a staff role reduces the value of the committee and reduces the motivation of volunteers. Too small a staff role often results in the committee's drifting aimlessly and operating ineffectively.*

- Be thoroughly familiar with all aspects of the committee's work, including the scope of work, subjects under discussion, and association policies related to the committee's work.
- Answer questions, offer suggestions, and raise questions, but always do so by working through the chair.
- Provide administrative support to facilitate the work of the chair and committee members.
- Provide on-site support for committee meetings.
- Help prepare committee reports to the Board.