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| **DOCUMENT TITLE** | General overview - committees |
| **LAST UPDATED** | October 2022 |
| **PURPOSE** | To outline and explain the purpose of committees within the governance structure of a not-for-profit organization. |
| **HOW TO USE** | This document has been created as a guide for understanding the different types of committees that can be formed by an organization.The role of a committee can vary greatly between organizations. Please review and add/remove anything that you think would be beneficial in your organization’s context. This document could be used as-is, or key messages can be carried through to promotional information (e.g., call out for nominations in emails, on websites, etc.) |
| **ADDITIONAL NOTES / CONSIDERATIONS**This document can be used to determine what types of committees an organization may choose to from. Templates for terms of references are available as part of the viaSport governance toolkit. This document can also be used as a communication template and can be modified as required. NOTE: This document can also act like a “Frequently Asked Questions” document related to committees and can evolve over time as questions arise.It is important to note that even if the board lawfully delegates responsibility for a decision to an individual or committee, the accountability the board assumes can never be delegated. The board is ultimately responsible for all its decisions (made collectively, by a committee or as a single individual on the board), thus including those made through delegation. Considering this, the board would be prudent to ensure that any committee has the appropriate experience, delegations, and reporting lines.  This document does not constitute legal advice and should not be relied upon as such. Expert counsel is recommended if there are any issues requiring clarification. |

# General overview - committees

## What is a committee?

A committee within the governance structure of a not-for-profit organization is a mechanism that enables an in-depth examination of various governance areas, functions and/or key topics that may require external expertise (e.g., Athlete Safety).

In British Columbia, the B.C. Societies Act [Schedule B Bylaws] states that all not-for-profits must operate with three (3) committees:

* Nominations Committee
* Governance & Ethics Committee
* Audit & Finance Committee

According to the B.C. Societies Act, “(1) The directors may delegate any, but not all, of their powers to committees consisting of the director or directors as they think fit. (2) A committee so formed in the exercise of the powers so delegated must conform to any rules imposed on it by the directors, and must report every act or thing done in exercise of those powers to the earliest meeting of the directors held after the act or thing has been done.”

## How are committees established?

Typically, the capacity of a sport association or club’s board to establish a committee is specified in the organization’s bylaws. The board may have “general authority” to organize committees as required, or specific committees may be officially mentioned as a board committee in the bylaws.

Organizations typically have core ‘standing’ (permanently established) committees such as Nominations, Governance & Ethics, and Audit & Finance. Other committees may be established by the board as it considers needed. Other than specific standing committees named in an organization’s bylaws, there are many additional committees, subcommittees, task forces or working groups that may be established:

* Ad hoc or task force committees – There are times when boards of directors must focus extra attention on a particular challenge or project (e.g., Safe Sport). In these situations, the board could set up an ad hoc working group to address the problem on a short-term basis. The sole objective of these committees or working groups is to address an issue. They can be established for a fixed period of time or for an indeterminant amount of time. These teams frequently work on projects based on hot topics, operational anomalies, or special events or initiatives.
* Advisory committees – When circumstances call for an outside viewpoint, boards will often confer with an advisory committee. Since these groups lack any governance and are relied upon more for their expert opinion, it’s wise to build them with former board members. Also, it’s worth considering prospective board members, subject matter experts, and individuals with lived experience with the topic for the role.
* Steering committees – An expert group that guides a project from beginning to end, usually collaborating collectively to control, prioritize, and define the scope of initiatives. Generally, steering committees are an amalgamation of board directors, key stakeholders and decision makers, subject experts, executives, and industry partners.
* Executive committee - Administering rules and managing the operations of a board of directors falls to an executive committee. The language used in the bylaws determines just how much control an executive committee has, and it varies from organization to organization. These groups typically include the board President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary. However, other Subcommittee Chairs may be included. NOTE: Most sport organizations in B.C. do not distinguish between their board of directors and executive committee, unless the board of directors is larger than five (5) to seven (7) people.

The size of a committee brings different pros and cons. A large committee may find it challenging to address significant issues and reach a decision, or have difficulty involving its members in meaningful discussion. A small committee may have insufficient external perspectives to contribute meaningfully to organizational strategy, not offer enough capacity to carry out committee-defined activities, or not allow the group to reach vital networks for advocacy and collaboration objectives.

## What are “Terms of Reference”?

A committee cannot be formally established as part of a sport organization’s governance structure unless the “Terms of Reference” or a “Committee Charter” is created to govern its operations. Terms of Reference articulate matters such as:

* Membership – Who is on the committee?
* Meeting frequency – How often the committee will meet?
* Reporting – How does it report to the board?
* Purpose – What is it charged with dealing with, and the limits of its scope?
* Duration/Term – What is the proposed duration of the committee?

There’s no one size fits all approach to committee structure, but there are some general principles to keep in mind when thinking about size and structure.