The Staff Liaison

What this resource person can do for you.

The staff liaison assigned to your committee plays a valuable part in helping you master your role as chair. Regard this person as a resource to the committee not simply as a recording secretary.

You’re striving for just the right balance when it comes to defining the role for the staff liaison. Too active a staff role reduces the value of the committee and impairs the motivation of volunteers. Yet too passive a staff role often results in the committee drifting aimlessly and operating effectively.

The staff liaison should be thoroughly familiar with all aspects of the committee, including the scope of work, subjects under discussion, and association policies related to the committee’s work. In addition to providing administrative support, he or she should answer questions, offer suggestions, and raise questions – in other words, be an involved player.

Support Functions

Here are some of the key responsibilities the staff liaison has to the committee chair. Orientation responsibilities will be discussed in the section that follows.

- Make early contact with the committee chair.
- Ensure that the chair executes his or her administrative duties.
- Maintain ongoing contact with the chair.
- Provide administrative support to the committee’s work throughout the year. The level of support available should be agreed to by both the chair and the staff liaison during the committee chair’s orientation.
- Assist the chair in preparing meeting agendas and in compiling and distributing reports of committee meetings.
- Provide on-site support for committee meetings.
- Help prepare committee reports to the board.
Providing Orientation

Getting the committee chair up to speed on association and committee policies and procedures is one of the most important responsibilities of the staff liaison. This happens during the orientation phase. Expect your staff liaison to do the following:

- Provide background information, including a committee roster (and perhaps the previous year’s); minutes of previous committee meetings; background on recent committee activities and accomplishments; and a listing of the board of directors, key staff, and other key people with whom the chair is likely to interact.
- Review all ongoing committee projects and programs and the continuing assignments of individual committee members.
- Develop with you a program of work for the year and identify the level of staff assistance available.
- Clarify governance issues. Review and clarify the bounds of the committee’s activity and authority. Review the association’s bylaws and relevant policies, practices, and procedures. Note where the work of other committees may overlap with or affect the committee.
- Clarify your role and duties, and emphasize the importance of this position (see “The Committee Chair’s Role”).
- Clarify his or her role with you.