

CHAPTER 11: DECIDING WHAT COMMITTEES TO HAVE

A. Evaluation of the Committee Structure

It is important to evaluate periodically the progress of the organization and determine whether the programs being produced by the organization are consistent with the mission statement, by-laws and needs of the membership. The Long Range Plan should be the vehicle to determine what committees a young lawyers section should have.

In most organizations, the committee structure is the structure through which the specific programs and other activities of the organization are produced. In a sense, they are the skeletal, cardiovascular and major organic components of a healthy organization.

In evaluating the basic organizational structure of the affiliate, invariably the board must review the existing committee structure to determine its effectiveness. In contemplating such a review, it is important to assess what existing committees there are, and whether the needs of the membership and the community are being met. You should ask certain questions about all committees:

- (1) Is the goal of the committee clearly defined?
- (2) If the project requires funding, are funding resources available?
- (3) Does the committee chair have the authority to authorize the expenditure of funds to further the program?
- (4) Is the leadership of the committee effective in interacting with related committees on related projects?
- (5) Is the size of the committee large enough to assign tasks adequately and produce a quality product?
- (6) Does the Board of Directors assist the committee financially?
- (7) Does more than one committee have an identical goal?
- (8) How much duplication of effort is involved?
- (9) Can the program be produced more efficiently with one committee? How much overlap is desirable?
- (10) What role does the board of directors play vis-à-vis the committee?
- (11) In terms of committee membership, do the board members constitute the primary source of committee members?
- (12) What role do board members play in appointment of committee members?
- (13) How does the committee determine its goals and procedures?
- (14) What role does the board play in determining the committee's goals and procedures?
- (15) Is the committee fulfilling its role in relation to a specific job description?
- (16) Are the tasks and goals of the committee clearly defined for the members of the committee?
- (17) Are these goals being achieved by committee members?
- (18) Is a lack of funding hindering progress the committee could be expected to be achieving?
- (19) What board support does the committee expect in terms of receiving funding?

- (20) Does the committee leadership have the authority to authorize expenditures of funds independently of a full board of director's vote?
- (21) Is the committee a standing committee, with its longevity assured from year to year? Is the committee more goal oriented and once the goal is achieved does it become phased out?

After evaluating all committees, you may then focus on the three types of committees, each with distinct goals and functions.

1. Membership Support Committees

Membership committees are oriented toward member services. In developing membership committees, the following issues should be addressed:

- (i) Is the leadership effective in communicating its policies and procedures to the membership?
- (ii) Are the members adequately informed as to the programs of the organization and encouraged to participate?
- (iii) Are there avenues available for the membership to inform the leadership of their needs and desires?
- (iv) In advising the board, are there sufficient channels to pass information between the membership and the board and vice versa?
- (v) Does this committee organize membership drives?

2. Public Service Committees

Public service committees are oriented toward development of programs for presentation to the public. These committees are project oriented and function solely to produce these programs. Among the issues that arise, in determining whether a committee should exist to help develop programs, the following issues should be addressed:

- (i) Have the needs of the community been identified?
- (ii) Are the community's needs being met by the committee?
- (iii) Could the committee work with other organizations to achieve its goals?

3. Board Committees

The Board committees are designed to assist in the implementation of policy. Essentially, they consist of committees that assist the governing body in running the organization. An example of this kind of committee would be the long range planning committee and the budget committee. The long range planning committee is charged with the responsibility of attempting to foresee the future direction of membership committees and public service committees, and in implementing and assisting in the development of the organization. A major question in this context is whether administrative planning is being carried out within the present structure.

In addressing these issues, the board of directors and chairs of the committees will subject the entire organization to a valuable analysis. In some cases, committees will be discovered whose usefulness has been outlived, or whose major functions have been transferred to other committees. In this circumstance, the leadership should not hesitate to terminate the committee's existence. A determination must be made that the original goals of that committee have been met or are being met by other committees within the existing structure.

Often, two or three committees may be performing essentially the same tasks. This problem is more often confronted in the larger young lawyer organizations. In the small organizations, with fewer committees, there should be less project overlap.

Where several committees appear to be attempting to achieve the same goals, it is better to consolidate existing committees into one committee. In combining an existing committee, the sensitivities of committee members who may be excluded from the committee must be taken into account.

It should be paramount in the leadership's vision, at all times, that a member's participation in the young lawyer organization is through the work of its committees. Where possible, the resources and assets that are brought to a committee by the volunteers should be accommodated to facilitate that member's further participation within the organization.

A similar view should be considered in deciding whether a particular project should be attempted at all. Often, in the small organizations, the same committee member may be a member of two or three committees working on several projects. A desired goal for any organization is to ensure that the potential of the organization is maximized through the efforts of its membership. The more members that become actively involved in committee work, the healthier the organization, and the more leadership resources that are available to the board in terms of assistance and future leadership of the organization.

This evolutionary process is indicative of a successful program because as more general members become involved at the committee level, the number of contacts in the community of young lawyers is increased exponentially, as each member has contact with other members of the legal community. They then recommend these contacts for committee membership. This ultimately leads to an expanded group of potential leaders.

B. Encourage Committee and Bar Group Cooperation

Cooperation is an important component of a successful young lawyers affiliate. This means cooperation not only between different committees of the same organization but also cooperation between different organizations as well. Often, several small groups, with limited resources individually, but identical service goals, may successfully combine their efforts to produce quality public service projects.

As an example, in an effort to produce a successful community law week program, it may be beneficial for a small young lawyers group, with a limited budget, to persuade the state bar,

the statewide young lawyers organization, minority law groups, and law related education groups to participate in the production of its programming. Greater resources used in the development of the program and greater participation from the public and from the various bar groups ensure the success of the program.

Committees within the board should be encouraged to cooperate with each other in producing programming. The Board of Directors should be working closely with each other to assist in ensuring that the programs of the organization are successfully implemented.

Beyond that, various committees of the local organization will want to work together with committees in the statewide organization whose structure may be somewhat different, but whose goals are similar. In this way, duplication of effort in the locality is decreased and the membership of both the local and statewide organization is increased. More people have an opportunity to have access to the committee structure and become actively involved in the organization of their choice. Obviously, the focus of a statewide organization is to ensure that programs are produced in areas that do not have a young lawyers organization or whose young lawyers organizations do not have the same resources as the statewide organization. In other situations, the local organization has substantially more lawyers in a concentrated area than a statewide organization may have overall. In either event, it is important that these organizations cooperate with each other in competition for the scarce resources available.

In working successfully with other groups, it is important that contact be made early and that there is plenty of lead time with these other groups. The groups should nominate at least one or two other individuals to serve in a joint committee capacity to ensure proper information flow. The more time these inter-organization groups have to work with each other, the more assurances there will be of a successful program.

Definitions as to goals should be made early, to enable each of the members of this joint committee to understand what their respective roles will be and what is expected of the group. In terms of access to the public, and access to a wider degree of membership involvement, it is ultimately beneficial to all concerned to access other groups, whose programs and goals are similar to yours.

In the final analysis, both in terms of member and public service, a cooperative effort is desirable. The valuable programming and the participating organizations have an opportunity to involve their members in specific programs. This will encourage their continued participation in other aspects of the organization. Potential future leaders come to the attention of the organization's current leadership and the future of the organization is assured.