

THREE HABITS OF HIGH PERFORMING COMMITTEES

When Boards of Directors form committees, it is important to be clear about the committees' purpose and role, as well as the role of committee members.

In general, the purpose of Board committees is to be an extension of the Board of Directors. They gather information, generate options, and develop reports and recommendations for the full Board of Directors. Unless otherwise specified in bylaws or Board policies, committees do not exercise any final authority, either over resources (i.e. money) or over staff.

Committee *members* also have a role to play in gathering information and providing input and suggestions. On an individual basis, when requested, they can perform tasks that advance the organization's goals and objectives. But their authority is limited to making recommendations.

The following habits of effective committees should be viewed in the context of a separate tool: "The 5 Habits of High Performing Boards":

Habit 1: Board committees focus on advancing the goals and objectives of the organization.

- Board committees have written charters approved by the Board that specify their scope of work and expectations.
- Board committees monitor the performance of the organization and provide regular reports to the Board.
- Board committees develop recommendations for the Board.
- Board committees offer ideas, counsel, and suggestions to staff.
- Board committees engage important stakeholders.

Habit 2: Board committees respect the limits of their authority.

- Board committees draw a clear distinction between the role of committees and the role of individual committee members.
- Board committees and committee members perform specific tasks to advance the organization.
- Board committees and committee members may offer ideas and suggestions to staff – and request information from staff.
- Board committees and committee members do not exercise final authority over staff or resources, unless specified in bylaws or Board policies.

Habit 3: Committee chairs facilitate the work of the committee.

- Committee chairs assure that committee agendas and minutes are prepared.
- Committee chairs facilitate meetings of the committee and keep the meetings on track.
- Committee chairs assure that the actions of their committees and of committee members are consistent with these habits.