

Executive Committees Guide

For community and voluntary groups

1. Purpose of this Guide

This guide explains what an Executive Committee is, when it may be useful, and how it should operate.

It is designed to help groups decide whether they need an Executive Committee and, if so, how to use it effectively.

For most community and voluntary groups, a simple Committee structure is sufficient. An Executive Committee is optional and should only be used where there is a clear need.

2. What is an Executive Committee

An Executive Committee is a smaller group formed from the main Committee.

It is usually made up of:

- Chair / Facilitator
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- (In some cases) one or two additional members

The Executive Committee supports the work of the main Committee by dealing with matters that arise between meetings.

3. When might you need an Executive Committee

An Executive Committee may be useful where:

1. The Committee is large
2. Meetings are not frequent enough to manage ongoing work
3. Decisions are needed between meetings
4. There is a high level of activity or workload

For smaller groups or groups that meet regularly, an Executive Committee is often not necessary.

4. What does an Executive Committee do

The Executive Committee supports the day-to-day running of the organisation.

This may include:

- Progressing actions agreed by the Committee
- Managing routine or administrative matters
- Responding to urgent issues
- Preparing items for Committee discussion

The role is to support and progress work, not to take over decision-making.

5. What an Executive Committee should not do

It is important to clearly define the limits of an Executive Committee.

An Executive Committee should not:

- Replace the main Committee
- Make major or strategic decisions
- Commit the organisation to significant spending
- Change policies or direction
- Act outside of what has been agreed by the Committee

All significant decisions should remain with the full Committee.

6. Relationship with the Committee

The Executive Committee is accountable to the main Committee.

This means:

- It reports back on all decisions and actions
- It operates within agreed limits
- It supports, rather than replaces, the Committee

In simple terms:

- The Committee sets direction. The Executive Committee supports delivery.

7. How an Executive Committee should operate

If a group decides to establish an Executive Committee, it is important to keep arrangements clear and simple.

Good practice includes:

- Agreeing what the Executive Committee can and cannot do
- Keeping a clear record of decisions
- Reporting regularly to the Committee
- Ensuring transparency in how decisions are made

Clear communication helps maintain trust and accountability.

8. Benefits and risks

Benefits

Supports ongoing work between meetings

Allows timely responses to urgent issues

Helps keep work progressing

Risks

Decisions being made by too few people

Reduced involvement of the wider Committee

Lack of transparency

These risks can be managed by keeping roles clear and ensuring regular reporting.

9. Do you need an Executive Committee

Before setting one up, it can be helpful to consider:

- Do you need decisions to be made between meetings
- Is work being delayed due to infrequent meetings

- Is the workload difficult to manage at Committee level

If the answer is no, a single Committee structure is likely to work best.

10. Key message

An Executive Committee can support the work of a Committee, but it is not essential.

Keeping structures simple, clear and proportionate will support stronger and more sustainable organisations.