

November 2020
bob@rchcae.com

Committee Linkage to the Strategic Plan

Bob Harris, CAE

Committees seldom initiate their own plan of work. You won't hear the committee chair ask at the first meeting, "What do you want to do this year?"

Committees receive assignments and authority from the board of directors and bylaws. Their efforts should be framed by the organization's mission and strategic plan.

Policies indicate committees don't have authority to speak for the organization, expend unbudgeted funds, or enter into contracts.

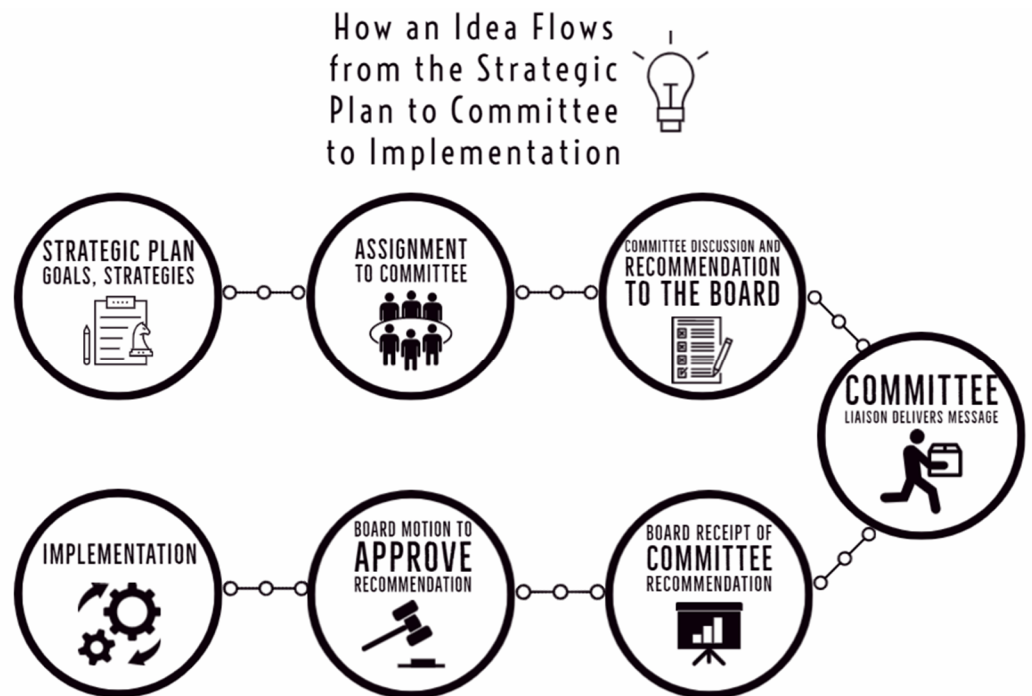
Relationships

The board, bylaws and strategic plan are closely linked to committees, though the relationships are sometimes vague. A flowchart depicts the process and lines of authority.

In high school I worked as a messenger during Florida's Legislative Session. The Capitol Sargent at Arms provided a simple guide, "How an Idea Becomes a Law."

It described 13-steps starting with citizen concerns, all the way to reaching the Governor's Desk. The chart demystified a confusing process often conducted behind closed doors.

The Florida chart dispelled the phrase, "Making laws is a lot like making sausage, you never know what goes into it." Transparency and understanding are important for committee success.



Process

A seven-step process clarifies how an idea flows from the organization's strategic plan, through the committees, to be adopted by the board and implemented by the staff.

Ideas – The multi-year strategic plan is the source of committee assignments. When the board sets a vision and priorities, committees are aligned to create a volunteer workforce. For instance, the goal of “Professional Development” may require committees for continuing education, conference planning, and college relations.

Assignments – Elements in the strategic plan are assigned to committees. For example, the plan may suggest feasibility of a regional trade show. The board doesn't do the planning, that is a committee effort. Committee assignments should also include expected performance metrics and deadlines.

Recommendation – The committee vets the assignment, using its best ingenuity and available resources. Eventually the committee has a plan to proceed, drafting a recommendation for the board's consideration. To avoid confusion, I suggest that committees make “recommendations” while the board passes “motions.”

Liaison – A liaison is assigned from the board or the staff to champion the committee's work. If the committee chair is not available to present and describe the recommendation, the liaison will ensure board understanding and answer questions. The liaison should not usurp the responsibilities of a committee chair.

Board Review – The board of director's agenda will include the committee's recommendation for review. If the board needs clarification, directors should avoid doing committee work at the board table, rather they may send it back for further development.

Approval – The board transforms the recommendation into a motion to be approved, amended, or killed. The news will travel back to the committee and the staff to be aware of the results.

Implementation – Tactics, resources and deadlines are set *after* board action. Staff will work closely with the committee, detailing a program of work and performance expectations.

Committees may be called task forces, quick action teams, and special interest groups. Busy volunteers seldom have time to serve on a year-long standing committee required in the bylaws. The flow chart clarifies process, lines of communication and authority.

#

Note: Bob Harris, CAE, provides free governance tips and tools at www.nonprofitcenter.com.