

## **Frequently Asked Questions about Programs and Committees**

### **General Questions**

#### ***What is the subject we are talking about here?***

There are essentially three types of supporting “sub-groups” in PTA organizations: standing committees, ad-hoc committees, and programs. There are often some misunderstandings of the role of each of those, and how they compare to each other.

This document proposes to clarify the distinctions between each sub-group type, and offer a clarification of why it’s important to pick the right category for the right purpose. This also extends to how these sub-groups work with an Executive Board.

#### ***Why must we change anything at all? Why can’t it stay the same?***

You may already be doing the right thing. If so, then great. If not, then it is worth learning how you should properly be using these sub-groups to help your PTA succeed.

It is vitally important that a PTA operate correctly within the rules proscribed by their bylaws, standing rules, and Robert’s Rules of Order. Our bylaws are a legally binding document. They were formulated and written by the California State PTA so that all PTA/PTSA organizations would operate similarly, and so there would be no internal conflicts. You are obligated to comply with the rules so that you protect the rights of the minority, while the decisions of the majority are followed.

We must follow our bylaws and standing rules. We are not allowed a choice in this matter. Our bylaws say, in several places, that we must adhere to the rules set forth by the council, district and state. If we act in accordance with the bylaws, we won’t have any problems. If we choose to ignore the bylaws, we could have problems.

#### ***We’ve been doing this for the past X years. What’s the harm?***

If there were ever a conflict, or someone wanted to file a complaint against our PTA because they felt they were treated unfairly, or someone wanted to make a case that you weren’t following proper procedures, then your only legal support would come from the fact that you had “followed the rules.” When or if you have not done so in the past, you have put yourselves at risk of having issues come up that can hurt your organization. By following the rules, you rest assured that you are following proper procedures and you have the legal support of our bylaws and parent organizations.

Think of it this way: we have a law that says you can’t jaywalk across a street. Even if you didn’t know that was the law, you could still be found guilty of doing so. And

even if we don't agree with the law, that doesn't give us the right to do whatever we want just because we don't like it. We are bound by our organizational bylaws, just as the laws of our country, state and city bind us.

We need to follow our bylaws and standing rules – as set forth by CAPTA and child organizations – from now on because that is what we as an organization agreed to do. Also, as members of the PTA, we agreed to follow the rules.

***What if we just don't tell them, and we keep operating the same as we have?***

Certainly, there's nothing to keep us from doing that, except ethics. You could continue to operate as you have in the past, and hope that the council, district or state PTA doesn't get wind of it. In all probability, they likely would never know. But that doesn't make it right, and it's not acting ethically.

### **Organization Groups**

***What is the difference between an ad-hoc committee and a standing committee?***

Standing committees are deemed important enough to an organization that they survive changes in an organization's leadership, and they span time and terms of office. They are, effectively, permanent committees of the organization. They are typically the most important committees in an organization.

Ad-hoc or special committees are created all the time to serve the needs of the organization and Executive Board, but usually for a specific purpose, and generally a less important function overall.

Unlike a standing committee, an ad-hoc committee has a limited duration lifetime. Usually this would be the term of the President, or the operational period of an organization. In a PTA, the usual lifetime of an ad-hoc committee would be the school year (e.g., August-June). Once the ad-hoc committee gives their final report, that committee is dissolved. Generally, when an ad-hoc committee is formed, their purpose or mission is stated, as well as the duration of their existence.

There's nothing to say a committee can't come back year after year, but it does need to be so moved in a business meeting. By default, ad-hoc committees do not automatically renew and come back each year. Thus, to be proper, each new school year, you should create the committees you feel are needed, and appoint the chairmen to each of those committees.

***Who appoints the committee chairman?***

According to our bylaws, and the procedures in Robert's Rules, the President appoints the standing committee chairs and ad-hoc committee chairs. Our bylaws require that action to be ratified (approved) by our Executive Board.

***Can anyone else create committees or appoint chairpersons?***

Yes. Our bylaws offer that the Association itself can vote to create committees if desired. No other officer, role, position or title can appoint committee chairs.

***So what role does our VP of Volunteers play (if we have one)?***

The CAPTA Toolkit provides job descriptions for many roles, including this one. It specifically states "The PTA Volunteer Coordinator oversees the activities of the school volunteers and represents them on the PTA executive board." In the rest of the description, it recommends that this person assess volunteers needed, recruit them for positions, train and prepare them for their position, and track and manage progress and status of their activities. A full job description can be shown if desired.

Typically, the VP of Volunteers is the person who manages programs, while committees are managed by the President and Executive Board. This position could also be called the VP of Programs, or a Program Coordinator, and so on.

***How do Programs differ from Committees?***

Committees have chairs; Programs have Coordinators. The distinction is larger than just the title of the person leading that function, however. Committees (both standing and ad-hoc) are appointed, staffed, and assigned a task by the President.

Programs generally report to a VP of Volunteers or a similar role in your PTA that performs the same function, who then funnels up the reports and information to the rest of the Executive Board. Committees are formal groups that assist the organization, while Programs perform less formal supporting roles.

***How does this affect our Executive Board makeup?***

Standing committee chairs are considered members of the Executive Board in our PTA organizations. Ad-hoc committee chairs are NOT members of the Executive Board (and neither are Programs, of course). Only Executive Board members can make motions, debate, and vote in Executive Board meetings.

***How can we allow new ad-hoc committee chairs make motions, debate and vote?***

You could make all committees ad-hoc committees (**Option 1**), and thus grant them equal weight in decision making. The advantage to this is that all committee chairs are equal. The disadvantage is that their voice may not be heard because they technically aren't allowed to participate in Executive Board meetings.

Another option (**Option 2**) is to make all committees standing committees. This would be fairly easy, but it does increase our quorum requirements, and will require us to apply for new bylaws amendments at the state level. In all fairness, just making all committees as standing committees probably will create more problems than it solves. It will be harder to reach quorum, and our unit will have many more officers that require time for reporting, debating, and so on.

Another option (**Option 3**) is to change a standing rule so that ad-hoc committee chairs can participate in Executive Board meetings, but can still not make motions, debate, or vote. Or, allow them to make motions and debate, but no vote. Either option is fine, but generally ad-hoc committee chairs do not vote.

This may not be the most satisfactory approach for some organizations, but it won't require new bylaws to be adopted since you can achieve it via changing only our standing rules. It's a good compromise option.

***Why do this as standing rule changes instead of bylaws changes?***

It is recommend that you make as many of the **changes in the standing rules** as you can, since it's far easier to adopt those changes. Bylaws changes are invasive, and require approval at the council, district and state level BEFORE you can even adopt them as an Association. Changes to bylaws should be absolutely rule-related, not just operational policies. You normally will have very few of those.

Standing rule changes are far simpler. You can spend the time to define how you expect ad-hoc committees and committee chairs to operate. For example, it's possible that in the past, committee chairs were asked to be present the month before, the month of, and the month after an event. This could be something you write into the standing rules. You still shouldn't allow them to vote (because that's in direction contravention to our bylaws, and likely won't be allowed by the state), but you can ask them to be present and to make a report.

Those kinds of changes can be done in standing rule amendments. And while the district frowns on excessive or very granular, long-winded standing rules, we do have the right to specify how we operate our PTA in those standing rules.