Department of Education
Learners first, connected and inspired

Resources for School Associations
1. **What Does It Mean?**

Some terminology that is used in relation to the activities of decision-making bodies is often misinterpreted.

The following explanations clarify some of this terminology to assist members of School Associations in carrying out their roles.

2. **Conflict of Interest**

A potential conflict of interest situation arises when an individual is in a position to influence decisions of a committee or working group, and the individual has outside organisation, business or personal interests in the issue about which the decision is to be made.

Where individuals are active members of the community, potential conflicts of interest may arise quite frequently, as those individuals may "wear several hats" or the decision may concern business or personal relationships of the individual in addition to the particular interests of the committee in question.

It is important to be aware that conflict of interest relates to the circumstances of an individual in relation to an individual agenda item under discussion and does not reflect on the character or actions of the individual.

Many decision making committees will include members who might often need to declare a conflict of interest. For example, a business owner on a financial planning committee might be involved in the sale of items that are included in a decision about a purchase for the school, or a parent may be on a selection panel where they have a close relationship with a child who may be eligible for selection for some particular award or reward within the school.

Committees generally have a straightforward policy and procedures to deal with potential conflict of interest. This is often as simple as an agenda item at the beginning of each meeting that asks for instances of conflict of interest for that particular meeting, and the requirement that anyone declaring a conflict of interest for any agenda item simply leaves the room during discussion and decision-making on the issue in question.

3. **Accountability of Committees**

The term accountability is often misinterpreted. If a committee is 'accountable', it can explain its decision or actions, and the way those decisions were reached.

Rules and guidelines for committees will often nominate who that committee is accountable to.

This doesn't mean that all those nominated have control over the actions of the committee.

Obviously the community that has elected the committee needs to be able to see that the committee is acting in its best interests.
But there are others who are also acknowledged as having a right to be informed about decisions that could affect them.

Annual reports are a very useful way for organisations to inform interested parties of their activities.

Clear records of meetings, decisions and decision-making processes are another.

These types of documentation allow organisations to be accountable to others.

4. Good Practice

The following are links to information and other resources that will help School Associations and committees perform their tasks as efficiently and effectively as possible.

School Associations - Office Bearers

School Associations – Meetings

There are many links on the web offering help with meeting practices, a useful example being: www.leadershipvictoria.org/resources.htm

(Click on the "SkillBriefs" at the top of the page for some valuable guides to running meetings, preparing agendas and taking minutes.)

School Associations - Avoiding and Resolving Conflict

A good resource to topics associated with conflict resolution is at: www.crnhq.org

Tips for Ensuring Effective School Associations:

Individuals who serve on School Associations donate their time. Yet anyone who has served in similar roles will confirm that they gain a great deal from the experience.

But in a busy world it pays to be proactive in recruiting personnel for membership of the School Association. Don’t just hope that individuals will volunteer themselves with no encouragement. Some will, but others often need a little encouragement to take on such roles.

- Consider the skills and experience that your Association needs. Advertise the fact that people with such skills are needed, but also contact skilled people in the School Community well before nominations close to encourage them to nominate.

- Encourage people from a range of backgrounds, jobs and life experiences to nominate. This ensures that membership of the Association represents the School Community as broadly as possible.

- Clearly describe the role and tasks of Association members so that they know what they are taking on. It can be your worst nightmare to join a committee where you find that jobs are allocated by means of a hopeful president asking for volunteers for every task that arises. It’s far better to divide and allocate the routine tasks of the Association in advance.

5. Incorporation Information

Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading

6. Related Documents

The following documents are available from www.education.tas.gov.au (Search for the Doc ID)

- School Associations - Office Bearers (Doc ID: TASED-4-1971)
- School Associations - Meetings (Doc ID: TASED-4-1967)
- School Associations - Avoiding and Resolving Conflict (Doc ID: TASED-4-1965)

Authorised by: Liz Banks
Position of authorising person: Deputy Secretary, Early Years and Schools
Date authorised: 2010
Developed by: Strategic Policy and Planning
Date of last review: 2010
Date for next review: 2013
This document replace: n/a