

# Recruitment and retention of committee members for early years settings



**early years**  
the organisation for young children

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# INTRODUCTION

Voluntary management committees are critical to the success of our community and voluntary early years settings. Recent research (Review of Governance in Community and Voluntary Early Years Settings, 2019) carried out by Early Years identified that there more than 7000 parents and other members of the community serving on the management committees of early years settings. Voluntary management committees perform critical roles in the good governance of the settings and just as importantly provide a vital link between the community that children are from and the provision of early childhood care and education.

At the same time the research above identified that recruitment and retention of committee members was a challenge for settings with over 40% of settings surveyed reporting that they frequently had difficulties filling places on their management committee. The report went on to make the following recommendation

***“Recruitment, induction and retention of committee members is a significant challenge to early years settings. Stakeholder agencies should work with settings to explore ways to strengthen recruitment, induction and retention of committee members through the provision of training, advice, coaching, resources as well as exploring non-traditional recruitment methods where appropriate.”***

As a response to this recommendation Early Years has established and implemented a new course called Building Successful Management Committees that now runs as part of its governance training offer. This resource is a further contribution to our support for management committees as they seek to fulfil their critical roles at the heart of our early years' settings.

**Note on terminology:** there are a number of terms that are used to describe the governing structures of community and voluntary organisations and their members. The governing body is variously described as the management committee, the board of directors or the board of trustees. Its members are described as committee members, directors or trustees. For the purposes of this booklet we have used the terms management committee and committee member throughout to represent all these terms.



# BUILDING A STRONG MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Effective recruitment and retention are two critical elements to building a strong sustainable management committee. However, they are not the only elements and in many ways recruitment and retention are co-dependent on other elements such as effective meetings or understanding roles and responsibilities. It is clear for example that a committee that has poor meetings might have difficulty retaining members or that a committee that does not understand its role may have difficulty attracting new members. There are many elements that go into making a successful, sustainable committee including those in the diagram:



Therefore, it is important that committees take time to ensure that they consider their role in the context of an effective setting as this will contribute to recruitment and retention of members.

Further support for committees is available from:

Early Years - Governance advice, training and support from Specialist staff team Keep up to date with this on the Early Years member enews and website [www.early-years.org](http://www.early-years.org)

Resource websites such as [www.nicva.org](http://www.nicva.org) and [www.diycommittee.org](http://www.diycommittee.org).

# RECRUITMENT

## Recruitment considerations

There are a number of considerations that committees need to take into account when recruiting members, these include:

- It is the committee's responsibility to ensure there is strong committee representation. Therefore, the committee should take a lead role in recruitment of new members. Staff very often take on this responsibility, but this is often in the absence of a strong committee who understand their responsibilities.
- Everything you do must be in line with your governing document e.g. constitution. You should check your governing document to make sure that the recruitment strategies you put in place are allowable, for example; if you want to co-opt a new member, you must ensure that this is in keeping with your constitution.
- Remember that if you are a charity then committee members are also charitable trustees and have a legal duty to act in the interest of the charity and its beneficiaries (children, families).
- Be positive and champion the committee. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy to be negative about the committee i.e. if we continually say that parents do not volunteer, or the role is too difficult then that will put people off. The fact is that, although in this booklet we are concentrating on some of the challenges, most of our management committees function well and have good recruitment so it can be done.



# WHAT OBSTACLES ARE THERE TO RECRUITMENT AND HOW MIGHT SETTINGS OVERCOME THEM?

When engaging with community based settings we hear a broad range of reasons that are obstacles to recruitment. The list below are some of the reasons given and a suggestion of some strategies that you might put in place to help overcome these. It is important to note that there is no one way address recruitment challenges and you might come up with both new challenges and different strategies.

## Recruitment Challenge

People are too busy to join the committee  
Lack of understanding of the role of the committee  
Or  
Poorly informed about the role of committee

Fear of responsibility of being a committee member

Parents feel intimidated and/or lack of confidence

Covid is making engagement more difficult

Parents are not interested in joining the committee

Bewildered by the complexity of the regulations and other work that committee deals with

Might be liable for debt/claims

Bad previous experiences of poor committees  
It is not made clear how you join

Perceptions of the management committee as a "clique"

Conflict or difficult issues in the committee

Concerned about relationships with staff as a parent

## Recruitment Strategy

Be clear about the commitment required  
Make sure the work is distributed across the committee.

Make sure information about the committee is included in parent information booklet

Put information in AGM notice and/or take time at AGM to explain the role.

Information should be clear on role and responsibility of the committee  
Offer to talk directly to any prospective committee members regarding their concerns  
Identify if there is a past committee member who can act as a champion.

Ensure that information and meetings are welcoming to new members  
Information emphasises that no special expertise is needed  
Arrange a training for new members to help them overcome concerns.

Emphasise that due to Covid the role of the committee is more important than ever. Use of online platforms to conduct AGMs and committee meetings.

Be careful about assuming this - it may well be other reasons beneath this

In information emphasise the importance of the committee

Make the link between the committee and outcomes for their children.

Ensure good information about committees is supplied

Ask for expert input from Early Years Specialist or even staff to build understanding. Emphasise teamwork i.e. we are all learning together and will support each other to work through this.

Emphasise protections against this e.g. insurance, having reserves, being in control of finances. In the longer term consider becoming a company (this offers very strong protection against any personal liability).

Give a positive professional representation of the committee - show that you know what you are doing.

Clear information about the AGM conveyed to parents in advance

Any other recruitment strategies clearly conveyed.

Information is clear that new members are welcome. Appointments to committee are carried out with proper process. Avoid any activity that may give perception of a clique e.g. meeting in a committee, member's home.

Confidentiality should prevent conflict being discussed outside of committee.

Emphasise the confidentiality agreements in place.

# APPROACH TO RECRUITMENT

People are different and will respond to a request like joining a committee in different ways, therefore when recruiting it is important to use a range of approaches to appeal to a broad spectrum of prospective members. The three approaches we explore below fall into the categories of Education, Advocacy and Support. There may be other elements which you identify in addition to these:



By **advocacy** we mean:

- Why it is important
- Sell the positive experiences
- Succession planning (what about the next committee)

By **education** we mean:

- Understanding of roles
- Understanding of responsibilities
- Understanding of how a committee works together and with their staff

By **support** we mean:

- The training that is available
- Where to go to get advice
- How to arrange peer support

# APPROACH TO RECRUITMENT

So, for example if you were writing a piece for parents inviting them to come to your AGM and stand for committee you might write something like this:

*Dear parent,*

*As you know the children have been settling in well and we know that this is going to be a great year for them, the staff and you as well.....*

The next event we have coming up is our Annual General Meeting on 10th October. The *Ballywhere Playgroup* is run by a committee of parents and other members of the community. The committee is a vital part of the playgroup and without it, the playgroup would not be able to continue. The committee performs important functions such as supporting the staff, managing the finances and raising funds. The committee also works closely with the staff to ensure that the playgroup conforms to all the important health and safety and social services regulations.

The committee is also a vital link between the parents and the children. Serving on the committee gives out parents an opportunity to play a role in the education and care of their children and other children in this community. Although it does carry responsibility it also can be very rewarding and is a great way to meet fellow parents.

All parents are welcome to come to the AGM and we would encourage all of you to consider standing for the committee. Please note that the committee receives support from Early Years and all new members will be helped by current committee members. You do not need special skills or knowledge to be a committee member, only a willingness to help.

➤ **Education** ◀

➤ **Advocacy** ◀

➤ **Support** ◀

## Where to promote the work of the committee?

It is important to take opportunities to promote the committee to your parents and the community. Opportunities to share include:

- Make sure the role of the committee is prominent in all your information and publications.
- If you have an information booklet get the chairperson or another committee member to write the introduction.
- Have a prominent piece on the work of the committee, what it does, why it is important, how do you join in the run up to the AGM in the information booklet.
- Facebook page/social media - communication from the committee, at the very least pictures of the committee at work.
- Chairperson/committee members are the face of the organisation e.g. at events or in reports by local media.
- Parents evenings, parent workshops etc - make sure you use the opportunity of captive audience to emphasise the role of the committee.
- If necessary, write directly to parents to tell them about the committee.

## Election to the committee

Points to consider when arranging your AGM include:

- The AGM is the most common route for the recruitment of committee members but very often it is an afterthought. Place it at the centre of the settings development plan/calendar of events.
- Check it is at the right time of year – to aid recruitment it might be best placed in May/June when new parents are joining.
- Build up to it - send out good information (remember role of the committee, what it does, why it is important, how do you join) in time. Send out a reminder.
- Consider running the AGM alongside the parent information evening so you can ensure good attendance but make sure it does not take second place.
- Use your connections to talk to parents before the meeting – cultivate possible candidates to join even before the AGM meeting.
- Try to ensure current members are present to talk about their role.
- Make sure you understand the AGM process (e.g. as set out in your constitution).

## At the meeting itself

- Ensure that the chairperson or another committee member is present to talk about the role of the committee. You could possibly get an external person to talk to this as well.
- Give people the chance to ask questions.
- Emphasise the support available from Early Years and current committee members. Make sure parents understand that the committee along with the staff are a Team, they work together and support each other.
- Remember to link the work of the committee back to the children – there is research that shows that settings with good community connections e.g. involving parents produce better outcomes for children.
- If you have anyone lined up to join, make sure they are there and speak up. If others see parents already willing to join they will be more likely to volunteer.



Sometimes even with all of the above you still might not fill the committee positions. Don't give up, be prepared to try again at another meeting if you have to.

If you are having real difficulty getting engagement you should let parents know that failure to appoint a committee could eventually lead to the closure of the setting.

Social Services and other regulators expect you to have a functioning management committee and if you do not, they can take action against the setting.



## Other ways to recruit

Most of the ways to recruit we have examined so far have been about recruiting from the pool of parents, but there may be ways that you can recruit beyond this pool. You will need to examine your constitution to make sure that you can use these methods.

You could further explore:

Using local networks and organisations to recruit from. Consider if you can use organisations who have a stake in the success of your setting for example schools, churches, community groups. Many of our early years' settings have successful partnerships with local schools and a school representative on the committee helps both sides in the partnership.

Consider the use of co-option to recruit. Co-option allows committees to recruit members onto the board usually between AGMs. It is especially useful if the committee wants to target particular skills such as people with knowledge of finance, human resources or early years practice.

Some organisations advertise for committee members though this is less likely to be useful to our smaller more local settings. You could advertise through several sources, but one of the most useful would be the free community site [www.communityni.org](http://www.communityni.org)

Consider entering into an agreement with another setting. Some settings have agreed to allow members of their staff to act as committee members for another setting, for example a leader in one setting acts as a committee member for another setting and visa versa. You need to be careful that there is no conflict of interest here for example the two groups shouldn't really be in the same catchment area for children unless they are clear that there is no competition.

Use support organisations such as Volunteer Now <https://www.volunteernow.co.uk/> or Business in the Community <https://www.bitcni.org.uk/> who can sometimes help identify committee members.



# RETENTION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Many of the areas we have explored in recruitment also have a direct impact on retention of committee members, for example, if we make sure that prospective committee members are well informed then they are less likely to leave a new committee because they are surprised by the role or didn't understand the commitment needed. It is equally true that the best contribution to retention is probably made by a committee that is well run and knows what it is doing. Committee members are much more likely to leave a committee that is disorganised or dysfunctional. However, there are also proactive actions that committees can take to help ensure retention of its members.

## Induction

A strong process for introducing new committee members to their roles and responsibilities will pay dividends in the longer term. Committee members are much more likely to stay on the committee if they understand its processes, have access to relevant information and can see that the committee handles its work in an efficient and effective manner. It's unfortunately too common to hear of new committee members who state that they were not well informed about the role or were not given information before joining the committee. If you have been in that position, there is little that can be done about your experience of joining the committee, but you can ensure that the same thing does not happen to the people who come after you.

Induction can be divided into two parts; **information** that new committee members need and **processes** that they need to be aware of.

## Induction information

Committees should gather together all of the important documentation that they need for their work and then this has the added advantage of being easily accessible to new committee members. The documentation can be gathered together in a hardcopy file or electronically. A list of these documents might include:

- The setting's governing document/constitution
- Job descriptions and a copy of main terms and conditions of staff members
- The group's management and staff structure
- Job description for committee members (a sample of these is available on the [www.diycommittee.org](http://www.diycommittee.org) website)
- Policies & procedure documents e.g. safeguarding policy, health and safety policy etc
- Confidentiality agreement
- Copy of the Social Services Minimum Standards
- A brief history and overview of the group
- Outline of annual events and essential dates
- Annual report and accounts for the previous three years
- Insurance provider and renewal dates
- Early Years membership- Early Years Service and link specialist
- Contact details of link social worker
- Current funders or previous applications submitted



Equally it is important that new committee members get a chance to understand the committee processes. An existing or retiring committee member should take time to talk to new members about committee processes such as:

- Committee meetings, when are they, how long are they and what is on the agenda.
- Operation of the bank account(s) particularly if they are to be a signatory.
- Any social media accounts, link to the what's app group.
- Confidentiality agreements and what is the expectations of committee members.
- Conflict of interest procedures.
- Explanation of officer roles if they are taking one on.
- Explanation of committee roles if they are not taking an officer position.

## The first Committee Meeting

It is a good idea to take time out of the normal committee business to give a new committee or new committee members a proper grounding at the first meeting. The committee might consider the following points:

- Proper introductions so that everyone knows who is on the committee and their role.
- Take time to go over the role of the committee again – allow time for questions etc.
- Remind people about collective responsibility and team work with other committee members and with the staff.
- Go over any policies and procedures directly relevant to committee members e.g. confidentiality, conflict of interest.
- Introduce the agenda and outline what is normally discussed at meetings and if there are particular plans underway.
- Make sure new members understand that they can ask questions and how to get further information (maybe buddy up with an existing committee member).



## Ongoing Committee Business

After the initial appointment to the committee and the first meeting, strong committees will make sure that they exhibit good practice with regards to retention of committee members. The following points may help:

- Make sure everyone on the committee has work to do, not just the officers.
- One of the most important roles of the chairperson is to facilitate everyone else carrying out their role i.e. sharing out the tasks and following up their completion. This keeps everyone involved and demonstrates that they have an active role to play.
- The chairperson also has a key role to play at meetings by making sure everyone is able to contribute and making sure they are included.
- Follow up on members who do not attend without a reason. Do not just let them disappear. Check to see if there is a reason why they are not attending and see if you can support them to return.
- Remember to access support from Early Years staff who specialise in these areas and other sources when you need it.

## Committee Change

It is inevitable and indeed important that committees change to ensure new groups of parents/carers are included and the committee is revitalised. However, the changeover itself, if not handled well can be a weak point and committees within the early years sector tend to change more than others because parents/carers may only engage for one year. Therefore, managing change is key to long term success of committees and committees should consider the following points:

- Ensure the election/appointment process including the AGM is well planned and executed.
- Stay on board to ensure a smooth handover - meet the new committee members to brief them on roles and any ongoing issues.
- A good rule of thumb is that the first committee meeting for new members meeting should involve the outgoing committee members.
- Be available for some time to help them with questions about their new role.

Remember that it is the committee's responsibility to ensure a smooth handover.



## Further information

You can get further information and support from Early Years. The Early Years website contains links to resources, current training and contact details for early years staff. [www.early-years.org](http://www.early-years.org)

Other links include

[www.diycommittee.org](http://www.diycommittee.org)

[www.nicva.org](http://www.nicva.org)

[www.volunteernow.co.uk](http://www.volunteernow.co.uk)

[www.bitcni.org.uk](http://www.bitcni.org.uk)

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