Terms of Reference Builder

Andrea Bodkin, Health Nexus
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Having a Terms of Reference (ToR) is an essential component of working in groups. An up-to-date, comprehensive ToR will give your group an opportunity to manage expectations by determining the scope of the group's work, along with the responsibility of each individual member, right from the beginning. This *Terms of Reference Builder* is intended as a place to start when developing your Terms of Reference. While some categories may not be applicable, most are essential. The group should determine the content of the ToR together; though you may choose to have two or three people actually write/wordsmith the ToR and present it back to the group for approval.

Official Name

Official name of the team or working group

Purpose/Mandate/Mission of the group

Clearly stated mandate or purpose/goal statement of what the group is aiming to achieve by working together.

Description of the Group

How, why and when was the committee formed? Mention any key events or dates.

Goals

What are the goals of the group? Include the time frame if different from the time frame of the ToR.

Activities/Responsibilities

Identify specific outputs required/requested from the group.
Note that it may be more appropriate to include a role or scope (what the group is responsible for) rather than goals and deliverables: it depends on the mandate of your group.

Members/Composition

Identify various organizations/individuals that will be represented in the group. If there are any particular roles for individual members, they should be stated here e.g.: chairs/co-chairs, meeting organizers, media/spokesperson, etc.

Term of Membership

If there are specific roles in the group (such as chairs or co-chairs), it may be necessary to define a term for that position (e.g. two year term). Some groups prefer to have membership rotating fairly frequently to ensure fresh energy and ideas. It's recommended to overlap these positions so that you do not have a brand-new group every two years!

Meetings

Describe how often the group is to meet, and any particular standards around meetings such as location, length of time, etc. You may want to capture an attendance policy, such as if a group member is unable to attend should they send a delegate, etc. Many groups include how far in advance agendas will be circulated, when minutes will be circulated etc.

Jurisdiction/Scope

What are the bounds of responsibility and authority of the group? What do they need to address and what is outside their area of concern? What can they decide on and what needs senior leader input? What is within their scope of authority and what is considered outside their scope of authority?

Resources and Budget

Identify the resources required to meet the various objectives of the team – people, equipment, materials, rooms, funds, skills.

Decision-Making

In this section, describe the group's decision making model (consensus, 2/3 majority or 50% +1 vote). What is considered a quorum? You may need to include relationships of authority within the group and with the greater organization and if the group reports to anyone (or another group).

Communications

How do members communicate within the group: by phone, meetings, email, mailing lists, etc.? How quickly should people respond? How is reporting back conducted? How does the team communicate with stakeholders, the media, etc.?

Reporting

Does the group have any reporting requirements (such as to funders or a higher authority)?
Relationships to other groups
Is this committee dependent or related to other committees, working groups or board members?

Related Policies/bylaws

Make linkages to any specific corporate policy and/or government initiative that pertain to this team. For example; Employee Recognition Policy, Corporate Human Resource Plan, Performance Management Policy, Employee Survey Results Report, Department Business Plan, Healthy Workplace Policy

Approval of Terms of Reference

What is the term of this ToR? Will it be reviewed annually, bi-annually etc? Is there an approval process required either by the group itself, or by a higher authority that the group reports to?

References

Template from Nova Scotia Public Service Commission's Employee Centre
http://novascotia.ca/psc/pdf/employeeCentre/recognition/toolkit/step2/Terms_of_Reference_Template.pdf
At a Glance: Models and Elements of Collaborative Governance
http://www.hclinkontario.ca/images/Uploaded_files/2010/09/ataglanceGoverningForPartnershipSuccess_Autumn2010.pdf

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