Fact Sheet 3: Roles and Responsibilities of Sub-committees

Why have sub-committees?
Sub-committees are formed by an Association to undertake specific planning and/or management tasks on behalf of the Association. Sub-committees which are formed to acquit specific tasks - like a Centenary Committee - cease to exist after these tasks have been carried out. These sub-committees are known as ad hoc sub-committees. Sub-committees which have an ongoing role - like a Canteen Committee - are elected annually at, or confirmed by, the Association's Annual General Meeting. These sub-committees are known as standing sub-committees.

What is the relationship between sub-committees and the Association?
Sub-committees have delegated authority and are fully accountable to the Association. Each sub-committee must operate within the terms of reference or rules set for it by the Association. Sometimes a sub-committee may write its own rules but these must be properly endorsed by the Association before the sub-committee begins its work.

A proper sub-committee must:

- be elected by the Association
- conform to the rules of operation drawn up or endorsed by the Association
- report regularly to the Association
- hand over any profits which may have resulted from the sub-committee's activities, after all operational costs have been met.

A sub-committee does not have a constitution separate from the Association's, nor a separate set of office bearers. The head of the sub-committee is known as the convenor or chairperson.

Can sub-committees hold and operate separate bank accounts?
Yes but each sub-committee's books must be submitted for audit when the Association itself undergoes its annual audit. Further, a sub-committee has no discretion to commit funds, beyond meeting operational costs, for the purchase of school resources.

Are sub-committees covered by P&C Association insurance?
All P&C Association Insurance, purchased from Federation, extends to subcommittees provided the four points listed in answer two above are strictly followed. This is essential to limit an Association's overall exposure to risk.

It is necessary to pay a special fee to extend cover for sub-committees which have a higher than usual exposure to risk. Currently these sub-committees are Before and After School Care sub-committees, After School Classes sub-committees, School Watch sub-committees and Safety House Program sub-committees.

Are Parents or Infants Clubs subcommittees of the P&C Association?
No. Under the Education Act 1990 a Parents or Infants Club is known as "a kindred association" and as such is an autonomous organisation with its own constitution, office-bearers and membership. It has the same status and autonomy as a P&C Association.

Are joint sub-committees a good idea?
A P&C Association and "a kindred association", where both exist in a single school, are free to establish joint subcommittees but as these sub-committees are equally accountable to the two separate Associations they can unfortunately become the source of much confusion and inter-Association dispute.
These problems will be avoided if one Association forms a sub-committee and confers on that sub-committee powers to co-opt (i.e. enlist) members from the other parent Association. No sub-committee may co-opt members unless given express permission to do so by the Association which established it and to which it is accountable.

**What is the role of the school principal on sub-committees?**
The principal is ex officio a member of the Association and its sub-committees. Ex officio members do not have a right of veto or the right to gag Association or sub-committee discussions. However, it is incumbent on the principal to highlight disparities between Association/subcommittee discussions and Department of Education and Training policies. Ex officio members must be given notice of every Association and sub-committee meeting but their inability to attend is not adequate grounds to postpone or cancel any Association/sub-committee meeting.

**Isn't it unfair that a fundraising subcommittee is the principal source of an Association's income yet expenditure of sub-committee profits is at the exclusive discretion of the Association?**
It is a requirement of the Department of Education and Training that all school parent organisation monies be expended with the endorsement of a majority vote at a general or special meeting of the Association itself. It is certainly reasonable for a fundraising sub-committee, when handing over its profits to the Association, to suggest how part or all of these profits may be spent. The Association, of course, is not obliged to adopt these suggestions but sustained disregard from the Association could serve to discourage and embitter active fundraisers.