

8 Common Pitfalls (and how to avoid them!)

Secrets to Success for Hometown Pride Committees

Don't do this

Planning without action

It can be easy to get bogged down in planning, at the expense of taking action.

While it's tempting to "get all your ducks in a row" before you begin, spending too much time in planning mode will cause volunteers to lose interest and momentum.

New groups especially need to find ways to take action after every single meeting.

Do this instead

Take a small step now

As soon as you find an idea that interests your group, identify a first step you can take right away.

Don't talk about an idea for more than one or two meetings without some kind of action – it can be as simple as doing research or talking to a potential partner. At each meeting, find the next small step, to build momentum and confidence as you continue to plan.

Resource links:

- [1-page committee guidelines](#) - Don't spend your first 3 meetings just writing your bylaws! Use these starter guidelines and revise later as your group becomes more complex.
- [How to create a committee action plan in one \(or two\) meeting\(s\)](#)

Don't do this

Turf Wars and Credit Hoarding

As you work toward common goals for the community, it's natural for your work to overlap with the work of other organizations.

This can lead to concerns about "stepping on toes" or awkward feelings about who gets "credit" for success.

Do this instead

Collaborate Early, Share Credit Generously

Collaborate: If you want to work on something related to another group's mission (for example, you want to add a new trail and your town has a "friends of the parks" group) – reach out to them very early in the process to ask for their advice, blessing, & partnership.

Share credit: Publicly acknowledge partnerships and share credit generously (even if you do most of the work...yes, *really!*). Everyone benefits by cultivating a positive relationship between fellow community organizations, and people who get a "pat on the back" will want to help again next time.

Don't do this

One person does it all

When we have one or two superstar volunteers, we may want to let them do everything (or they might insist on doing everything!) And we may think we don't need any new volunteers. But there are lots of downsides to this common trap:

- That person will burn out quickly
- Other volunteers will be disengaged if one person is doing everything. Eventually they'll stop trying to contribute or stop coming at all.
- If you lose that person, you're lost

Don't do this

CAN'T-do attitude

Don't quit before you've even started! You may have some committee members who tend to dwell on all the reasons "this will never work."

Great ideas often feel difficult or even a little "out there" at first glance. The trick is to push past that feeling and get to the problem-solving phase.

Do this instead

Put everyone in charge of something & always be recruiting new people

Hometown Pride works best with a [shared leadership](#) model, where all committee members are empowered to take the lead on something.

Look at your meeting agenda - if you listed who's responsible next to each item, how many names would you see? If the answer isn't "almost everyone," keep delegating.

Resources:

- [9 Tips for Efficient and Engaging Meetings](#)
- [Why leadership styles matter in rural Iowa](#)

Do this instead

Adopt a problem-solving mindset. Think about this checklist:

- ☐ *Is this likely to be a significant roadblock?* If it's unlikely or minor, don't let it stop you from starting.
- ☐ *Do we need a solution now?* All projects have challenges, but many of these can be solved as you go (and may even be *easier* to solve once you have some momentum).
- ☐ *How can we solve it?* Brainstorm and reach out to others for advice. Your coach can connect you to others who've done it before.
- ☐ *Trust yourselves.* When undertaking something big, you need a bit of faith! You're competent people who can address obstacles as they come. While it's good to be realistic, **big dreams often require a dash of overconfidence.**

Don't do this

Ignore the emotional side of the work

We're all human. It's normal for committee members to get irritated with each other, lose motivation, or feel unappreciated. A poorly handled interpersonal conflict can tank an otherwise successful group, but there are ways to prevent that!

Resources:

- [10 ways to boost volunteer retention](#)
- [9 Tips for Efficient and Engaging Meetings](#)

Do this instead

Show appreciation and acknowledge disappointments

- Thank volunteers and motivate them by reminding them of the value of their work.
- Take time to acknowledge a disappointment or setback, then provide a reason to be hopeful and propose a next step.
- Take hurt feelings seriously. Talk with people one-on-one to make sure they feel heard and find a path forward together.
- Handle disagreements with grace: remind people of their common goals, show appreciation for all opinions, and make sure all are heard. If people feel they've been fairly heard, it is easier to deal with not getting their way.

Even with all this, you may have someone who decides to leave the group a result of a disagreement or disappointment. Thank them for everything they've done and offer your apologies that it didn't turn out differently. You may still lose a volunteer, but at least you can avoid making an enemy.

Don't do this

Stalled progress due to lack of community support

More than funding or logistics, a lack of community support is the most common reason that projects fail to succeed.

Do this instead

Cultivate support pro-actively

Before you start, talk to community members, consult existing plans, and engage community groups and influential individuals.

Having trouble getting council on your side? What's something you know they care about? What can you do in service of that goal? Connect what you're doing to the issues they care about – e.g. "We are raising money for a playground to help attract new residents." Help them reach their goals and hopefully they'll return the favor.

Don't do this

Communication chaos (or crickets)

Too many emails, a flurry of texts, and nobody is saying the same thing. Or maybe it's the opposite - you're hearing crickets.

Do this instead

Set communication norms and get a good Secretary

- Ask the group for their preferred form of contact between meetings (email, etc)
- Put one person in charge of communication for each project. They share information with those who need it and field any questions.
- Create subcommittees that make decisions and report back to the group (hopefully avoiding mass emails about small details).
- Get a good committee Secretary, who will: send out the minutes within a few days; include action steps; remind people of upcoming meetings in a timely manner

Don't do this

Chase the wrong goals

No amount of tips will make your group successful if you aren't doing important and interesting work. Some projects simply aren't worth your time, while others may be a good idea but not right for your committee. This is a volunteer group and people won't stick around if the work isn't engaging to them.

Do this instead

Go where the passion is! (within reason)

What are your committee members passionate about? What does the community need? *Find where those two things overlap and do that!* Tapping into volunteer passion will help ensure the work gets done, even when challenges arise or people get busy.

This might mean that you aren't taking on the town's "top issue," but rather the 2nd (or 3rd or 4th). It may mean you have a "great idea" that gets put on the shelf because no one can take the lead right now. It's ok to play to your strengths. Look for the spark of excitement! (Just make sure you have input from the community about what's important so you aren't investing in something that doesn't serve your town.)

Resource: [Creating an action plan](#)