Traits of Effective SETAC North America Committees and Guidance for Developing SOPs

SETAC North America’s standing committees are responsible for much of the business of SETAC NA. They handle recurring activities that support our science, networking, and professional development and put new initiatives into action. Our committees are also vital opportunities for member engagement. Being engaged in meaningful committee work is an excellent way to meet other SETACers, give back to the Society, and get more out of your SETAC membership. While functions and processes are outlined in committee-specific standard operating procedures (SOPs), typical committee responsibilities include 1) working and communicating with SETAC NA staff and the SETAC NA Board of Directors, 2) proposing ideas and initiatives, 3) following through on actions, and 4) communicating with members, other committees and Interest Groups on actions, opportunities to join or assist, and accomplishments.

The standing committees are part of a shared leadership structure. The SETAC NA By-laws give the Board of Directors responsibility for the formation and dissolution of committees, and the SETAC NA President appoints a committee chair (typically based on a committee recommendation) and a liaison to each committee from the SETAC NA Board of Directors. The by-laws do not provide guidance on committee-specific SOP content, so this document provides a universal template. The template outlines components of an SOP, and the following observations will help with content. These are characteristics of well-functioning SETAC NA committees – best practices for leadership and communication for committees to consider as they develop, or from time-to-time revise, their SOPs.

1. Include a clear committee charge and purpose – context on why the committee exists can inspire members and help engender collective responsibility for achieving goals. A summary of the committee’s charge should be provided that includes its purpose, duties and objectives.

2. Define a leadership structure – the committee steering team should be composed of a minimum of three members and a maximum of around twelve members with defined leadership responsibilities.

The model of a leadership team with a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, and Past Chairperson helps with setting the overall tone and agenda, ensuring continuity, managing workload, and planning for leadership transitions. The model of a co-chairperson leadership team has worked well too; a co-chairperson structure can facilitate members’ stepping into leadership roles if they know they will have help with that new responsibility. A team of subcommittee chairs may also work as a steering team, depending on the committee. For example, this model might work well for a committee that has standing subcommittees (e.g., Awards and Fellowships) or stable ad hoc subcommittees (e.g., Career Development).

Leaders should help identify and mentor those who will replace them when they move on to new challenges. How leadership transitions are made should be clear in the SOP. The Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, and Past Chairperson (one year in each position) model noted above works well.
3. **Compose and operate in a manner that reflects and engages the larger membership** –

   + Committee members are expected to be SETAC members of good standing. These best practices make committees more inviting and the work more rewarding:
     a. **Tripartite participation** – To reflect the Society’s membership composition and to balance the interests of academia, business/consulting, and government, committee members should reflect these professional sectors as best possible.
     b. **Inclusion of students** – Committee composition that overtly includes students helps ensure we benefit from their participation, encourages student development and empowerment, and provides mutual networking benefits for professional development and Society membership.
     c. **Diverse Participation** – To reflect the society’s membership in terms of geographical representation, gender variety, and career level balance as well as diversity in expertise.
     d. **Defined terms of service** – A set period of committee service helps prospective members consider their volunteer commitment, respects their other obligations, and offers opportunities for more members to rotate in and out of the work of SETAC. 3-year terms are used by some committees – that keeps good continuity while giving new people opportunities to serve and those rotating off chances to serve SETAC elsewhere. Upper limits are often established to allow room for leadership development and to avoid burnout. Committee steering team terms can be renewed and have no strict limit, but if volunteers are identified to succeed sitting steering committee members, then succession is encouraged.
     e. **Subcommittees and work groups** – If the committee’s charge is extensive, subcommittees and work groups help focus committee resources, facilitate completion of tasks, and provide opportunities to engage more members.

4. **Describe recurring activities and procedures** – Each committee’s work is different. A committee SOP should clearly summarize the activities by subcommittee and work groups, if such organization exists, and establish approaches for achieving the objectives of those groups.

5. **Create an expectation of frequent planned communications** – Regularly scheduled recurring conference calls and meetings, including scheduled face-to-face meetings at SNA annual conferences, increase participation and give new members more opportunities to learn the committee business. Establishing agendas at least 4 to 7-days in advance and distributing post-meeting minutes with action items within a week is important to keep information flowing and should be standard procedure. Maintaining committee websites lets prospective members learn more about the work of our committees (so the committee must work with the SETAC Office to keep websites current).

6. **Make annual work planning a standard operating procedure** – Committees can benefit from producing formal or informal work plans for the year -- the more specific ‘what’ for the year with success criteria as a compliment to the SOP’s ‘who and how’.

This general guidance and the following template should facilitate committee-specific SOP development. At any time, the SETAC NA Board of Directors can recommend existing committee SOPs as good examples for consideration in drafting an SOP.
I. CHARGE – the purpose and scope of the committee, along with objective(s) and a summary of major components / typical tasks.

II. GOVERNANCE

A. Oversight – Identifies the SETAC governing entity that will provide oversight for the committee and, if necessary, will offer guidance to ensure compliance with established policy.

Example: The SETAC NA Board of Directors has oversight for the committee and, if necessary, will offer guidance to ensure compliance with established policy.

B. Rules – Specifies some of the SETAC policies that the committee is expected to adhere to.

Example: The dissemination of committee deliberations adheres to the SETAC Public Outreach Policy. Any material shared by the committee or posted on the committee webpage should adhere to the SETAC Communities Rules of Conduct, SETAC Logo and Trademark Guidelines, SETAC Social Media Guidelines, and SETAC Privacy Policy. Moreover, all committee members should adhere to the SETAC Code of Ethics. These materials are incorporated into this guidance by reference.

C. Budget – Note that most committees do not have an operating budget. In rare instances where a committee needs resources, this section should state that an annual budget be prepared and submitted for inclusion in the overall annual budget for SETAC and that any fundraising activities are coordinated through the SETAC Office.

III. MEMBERSHIP

A. Leadership structure – composition, how chairperson(s) and any other officers are determined, duration of service, and leadership transitions, roles and responsibilities

Example: The Committee Steering Team is led by a tri-chair model consisting of a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, and Past Chairperson, each serving in their capacity for a 1/3 their term (total of three years of service to the committee). Membership in the Committee Steering Team will follow the basic SETAC guidelines and achieve balance with representation from academia, industry, government. Diversity in geography or locale, career level, and gender, and inclusion of students in membership of the Committee Steering Team is recommended to the extent possible. The Committee Steering Team is comprised of no less than three and no more than twelve individuals.

The Committee Steering Team members serve a three-year term. The terms of the Committee Steering Team are tied to calendar years. The Committee Steering Team membership and leadership terms are staggered to insure a turnover of approximately one-third members per year.
In instances where a Committee Steering Team member must leave before completing their term, and when there are more than six months remaining in the term, the Committee Steering Team solicits from for individuals from the departing member’s sector to fulfill the term. Individuals are identified to the Committee Steering Team at least two weeks prior to the appointment of the replacement.

In instances where new Committee Steering Team members cannot be identified even after exhaustive queries to the whole membership, Committee Steering Team members may renew for a subsequent term.

If job changes among Committee Steering Team members lead to a change in sectors during their term, they are allowed to continue throughout their term. If sector balance is significantly altered (i.e., no representation from one sector), then new Committee Steering Team members are sought.

In September of each year, the chair announces the descriptions of the available vacancies in the Committee Steering Team (type of position and preferred sector, locale, place in career path [student, early career, expert], and gender) to the membership at least four (4) months prior to the appointment date (i.e., September announcement for appointment starting January).

Anyone who fits a vacancy description, has institutional or personal support, has expertise or interest in issue, and has a commitment to the mission and operating guidelines of the committee can express their interest in being considered for appointment to the Committee Steering Team.

Nominations are open for one month (i.e., September 1st to September 30th). If there is a competition for any seat, a ballot is organized with assistance from the SETAC Office. Voting is open for one month (i.e., Oct 1st to Oct 31st).

The new Committee Steering Team slate, including chairs, are provided to the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors appoints the chairs of the committees within two months of the announcement of vacancies (i.e., November). This provides a two-month overlap with the out-going committee.

B. Committee composition – Members on Committee Steering Team should be SETAC members in good standing. This section should state how many members are on the full committee, how they are recruited or join, duration of service (number of years, if set terms of service are important to the committee), roles and responsibilities. Committee membership should include tripartite participation among the Society’s industry/consulting, government, and academic sectors. Inclusion of students, variation in career level, and diversity in career-level and expertise, nationality (i.e., Canada, Mexico, and USA) and gender are encouraged.

IV. OPERATING PROCEDURES

A. Structure – existing subcommittees or how they are formed if needed

Example 1: The committee currently includes the following permanent subcommittee: List.
Example 2: The committee currently does not include any ad-hoc or permanent subcommittee.
If subcommittees are necessary, the committee steering team will form them.
B. Decision-making – operational procedures for how the group will function and how it will handle certain situations when they arise.

Example: The committee is a consensus-based group, and uses a consensus-based decision-making process.

C. Recurring Activities and Procedures – how the work gets done; important linkages to other committees, staff; cross reference any relevant SOPs as needed

PLANNING – Outlines the roles and responsibilities of the Committee, including reviewing and updating the SOP and the long-range strategic plan every three years, identifying yearly goals for the committee in consultation with the SETAC NA Board of Directors, and producing high quality annual reports to the SETAC NA Board of Directors.

Example: The yearly goal(s) of the committee are set by the Committee Steering Team during preparation of the annual report in September, updated to incorporate feedback from the SETAC NA Board of Directors prior to the SETAC NA annual meeting, and reinforced/operationalized during the first meeting of the operating year (typically at the SETAC NA annual meeting). Champions or project managers for each goal are identified from the committee membership. They are obligated to determine how best to meet the goals. The champions provide a status update on the goals during the recurring committee meetings. The goals are listed on the committee website and provided to the Board in the annual report.

SPECIFIC COMMITTEE TASKS – the procedures for this specific committee’s work.

V. COMMUNICATIONS

A. Meetings – frequency and location of in person meetings and/or conference calls; sharing meeting minutes

Example: The committee holds one face-to-face business meeting at the SETAC NA annual conference. The chair or designee plans the committee meeting with assistance from the SETAC Office and in coordination with the Committee’s liaison from the SETAC NA Board of Directors.

At each SETAC NA annual meeting, the chair queries the new Committee Steering Team and identifies a recurring committee teleconference meeting time. The SETAC NA office can supply a meeting phone or internet line, if needed. Calls for the year, once scheduled, are announced to the full committee.

The chair prepares a brief agenda and sends it out at least one week and not more than two weeks prior to each committee meeting.

The vice chair or a designated member of the Committee Steering Team takes minutes at the committee meetings, posts them on group page, and sends them in an email to the committee members within one week of meeting.

B. Website – process for ensuring the committee’s internal Your Membership group page and external committee page are current and accurate.
Example: A member of the committee is designated as webpage administrator with help from the SETAC Office. Duties of the webpage administrator include, but are not limited to ensuring that the most up to date committee SOP, current year Committee Steering Team, current year goals, and past year annual report are listed on the webpage.

C. Reports – preparation, review and submittal of annual report (activities of the previous year, tasks initiated and completed, plans for the coming year, membership, succession plan, and finance reports as required). Annual reports should be submitted to the SETAC Office by October 1 and include the previous year’s accomplishments and the next year’s priority goals. This timing builds momentum for a productive face-to-face business meeting in November and affords the SETAC NA Board of Directors and staff time to review reports prior to those face-to-face committee meetings.

Example: The vice chair writes the annual report with assistance from the Committee Steering Team. The annual report will be sent to the SETAC Office and to the committee’s liaison SETAC NA Board of Directors by October 1.

VI. ACTIVITIES CALENDAR – Schedule for regular occurring activities during the year.

VII. GROUND RULES – Sets some ground rules for working within the Committee.

Examples:

Maintain Respect for People

- Listen fully
- Problem solve together
- Be tolerant of each other’s perspective
- Respect confidentiality
- Be mindful of the complexities presented by conference calls
- Work to be inclusive of the full membership

Conduct organized meetings

- Publicize meeting well ahead of time
- Utilize a written agenda (old business, new business, ongoing business)
- Publish agenda a week ahead of meeting
- Start and end meetings on time
- Come to meetings prepared - review pre-meeting reading materials
- Stay focused on the topic
- Publish minutes as soon as possible following meetings
- Add action items and person responsible in minutes

Operate effectively

- Follow the parliamentary procedures for meetings set out in the SETAC NA by-laws
- Assign champions or project managers to goals and action items
- Follow-through on meeting action items