



COMMITTEES

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INTRODUCTION

As with other large deliberative assemblies, the House of Commons has taken advantage of the greater flexibility available in committees to carry out functions that can be better performed in smaller groups, including the examination of witnesses and detailed consideration of legislation, estimates and technical matters.

Committee work provides detailed information to parliamentarians on issues of concern to the electorate and often provokes important public debate. In addition, because committees interact directly with the public, they provide an immediate and visible conduit between elected representatives and Canadians.

Committees are extensions of the House, created by either standing or special orders, and are limited in their powers by the authority delegated to them.

TYPES OF COMMITTEES

There are several distinct types of committees:

- standing;
- legislative;
- special;
- joint;
- subcommittees; and
- committees of the whole.

Standing committees are provided for in the Standing Orders. Legislative and special committees are appointed by motion on an ad hoc basis to carry out specific tasks. They cease to exist when they have presented their final reports. Joint committees are composed of members from both the House and Senate.

Subcommittees are created for a variety of reasons. They are created by standing committees and may exist for the duration of a Parliament or may cease to exist when their specific purpose has been accomplished.

Committees of the Whole are composed of the entire membership of the House and meet in the House of Commons Chamber. They are formed to deliberate on questions or bills that the House decides should be dealt with in that forum, most often appropriation bills. They function in a manner that is somewhat different from other types of committees.

In addition to the types of committees listed above, there is a further permanent committee called the Liaison Committee, which is made up of the Chairs of all the standing committees and the House Co-Chairs of standing joint committees.

DETAILED ARTICLES

Standing Committees

Legislative Committees [Legislative Process]

Standing Joint Committees

Special and Special Joint Committees

Subcommittees

Liaison Committee

Committees of the Whole [Committees • Legislative Process]

MANDATE

Committees, as creations of the House of Commons, possess only the authority, structure and mandates that have been delegated to them by the House. Although some exceptions may occur, committees are bound to follow the procedures set out in the Standing Orders as well as any specific sessional or special orders that the House has issued to them. Committees are otherwise left free to organize their work. In this sense, committees are said to be “masters of their own proceedings”.

Matters referred to committees by a specific order of the House are called “Orders of Reference”.

DETAILED ARTICLES

Powers of Committees

Orders of Reference

Instructions to a Committee

MEMBERSHIP

Committees are composed of Members of the House of Commons. Members may serve on more than one committee. Parliamentary Secretaries are usually named to the standing committees having a mandate in their area of responsibility.

Only members of a committee (or officially designated substitutes) may move motions, vote and be counted as part of the quorum.

In addition to regular committee members, the Standing Orders also provide for associate members. Associate members are eligible to be named to subcommittees and may be designated to act as substitutes for regular members who are unable to attend committee meetings.

Any Member of the House may attend committee meetings, question witnesses and participate in the committee’s public proceedings, unless the House or the committee orders otherwise. They may only move motions, vote or be part of a quorum, when acting as an officially designated substitute for a permanent committee member.

Joint committees, both standing and special, have memberships proportional to the relative size of both Houses. House membership on special joint committees may either be specified in the order of reference that establishes the committee or may be named later by motion of the House.

The Procedure and House Affairs Committee is responsible for establishing the membership of standing committees and the House membership of standing joint committees. The membership of the Procedure and House Affairs Committee is set by motion of the House. The Procedure and House Affairs Committee is also responsible for naming members to legislative committees and for dealing with changes to the membership of standing committees.

DETAILED ARTICLES

Committee Membership

Associate Members of Committees

Substitutions of Committee Members

CHAIRS AND VICE-CHAIRS

Before a committee can begin to consider its work, it must be properly constituted, that is, its members must have been appointed and a Chair selected. Where the Chair has not been appointed by the House or named by the Speaker, the election of the Chair takes place at a committee's first meeting, called the "organization" meeting. Chairs and Vice-Chairs are elected at the beginning of a session and, as required, during the course of a session. Only a regular member of the committee may be proposed for the position of Chair. When a committee Chair is elected *in absentia*, the clerk, who presides over the election, immediately proceeds to the election of an Acting Chair, who presides over the remainder of the meeting.

The clerk has no authority to hear points of order, to enter into debate or to entertain any motion except that for the election of a Chair, including a motion to establish the manner in which the committee wishes to proceed with that election.

The procedure for the election of Chairs and Vice-Chairs are identical. Each standing committee elects a Chair and two Vice-Chairs, of whom the Chair must be a government member, the first Vice-Chair a member of the Official Opposition and the second Vice-Chair must be a member of an opposition party other than the Official Opposition party.

There are four exceptions to this rule: the Standing Committee on Public Accounts; the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics; the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates; and the Standing Committee on the Status of Women all elect Chairs from the Official Opposition. Similarly the House Joint Chair of the Standing Joint Committee on Scrutiny of Regulations elects its chair from the Official Opposition. These committees all elect a Vice-Chair from the government and a second Vice-Chair from an opposition party other than the Official Opposition.

Where there is more than one nomination for the office of Chair or Vice-Chair, the election proceeds by secret ballot.

In standing joint committees, two Joint Chairs are elected, one from each House.

DETAILED ARTICLES

Election of Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs

Role of Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs

COMMITTEE STAFF

Each committee is assisted by a clerk and at least one research analyst.

The clerk of a committee is the procedural advisor to the Chair and all members of the committee and also acts as its administrative officer.

The Library of Parliament provides research staff to all committees on request. The researchers provide briefing material and other background information to committee members and draft the Committee's reports.

On occasion, committees may engage outside consultants on contract to assist them in a study requiring a particular expertise.

DETAILED ARTICLE

Committee Staff

COMMITTEE BUDGETS

Standing committee budgets are drawn up on a project-by-project basis. Each budget must be adopted by the committee and then submitted to the Liaison Committee for approval.

The budget of joint committees and special joint committees require approval by both the House of Commons and the Senate. Special and legislative committees make their budget requests directly to the Board of Internal Economy.

DETAILED ARTICLE

Committee Budgets

MEETINGS

Committee members are convened, that is, called together for the purpose of meeting, by the Chair, acting either on a decision made by the committee or on his or her own authority. In order to exercise the powers granted to it by the House, a committee is required by the Standing Orders to have a quorum at its meetings.

A quorum is the minimum number of committee members who must be present in order for a committee to make decisions. In the case of standing, legislative or special committees, a quorum is a majority of the members. At its organization meeting a committee will often adopt a motion allowing it to meet to receive evidence, providing that a reduced quorum, the composition of such being the committee's decision, is present.

The minutes of each meeting are taken by the clerk of the committee and record the deliberations and decisions of the committee in a manner similar to the *Journals* of the House. The minutes may also contain the text of rulings given by the Chair with respect to the procedural acceptability of motions proposed during the meeting.

The *Evidence* is the record of what was said at a committee meeting in a manner similar to the *Debates* of the House. It records not only the remarks made by members of the committee but also what was said by witnesses.

Committee meetings are open to the public unless the committee decides to meet *in camera*, which usually means that only committee members and necessary staff may attend.

The audio stream of public meetings is webcast on the parliamentary Web site. In addition, some meetings are televised on the Cable Public Affairs Channel (CPAC), in which case the video stream of the proceedings is also webcast. (Link to [ParlVu](#))

DETAILED ARTICLES

Convening a Committee Meeting

Quorum in Committees

Organization Meetings

***In Camera* Committee Meetings**

Committee Meetings Outside the Parliamentary Precinct

Broadcasting and Webcasting of Committee Proceedings

ROUTINE MOTIONS IN COMMITTEE

As they begin their work, committees usually adopt a series of motions to deal with items of routine business. These motions may deal with matters such as payment of witness expenses, transcripts of *in camera* meetings or notice requirements. There is not a standard list of "routine" motions that every committee must adopt since each committee is free to organize its own work as it wishes, provided that the powers granted by the House are not exceeded.

DETAILED ARTICLES

Notices of Motion in Committee

Routine Motions in Committee

WITNESSES APPEARING BEFORE A COMMITTEE

Committees devote considerable effort to gathering the views of those knowledgeable about or directly affected by the issue before them. Depending on the subject, they may consult a relatively small group of technical experts or the Canadian public at large.

Information and comment are generally gathered in two ways: by the direct testimony of witnesses and by the submission of written briefs.

The power to send for persons and papers, which is accorded to committees by the House, includes not only the power to invite the appearance of witnesses and the filing of briefs, but also to order, by summons, that individuals appear or that certain documents be filed with the committee.

DETAILED ARTICLES

Witnesses Appearing Before a Committee

Testimony Before a Committee and Parliamentary Privilege

Committee Briefs and Other Papers

COMMITTEE STUDIES

The role of committees is to examine selected matters in greater depth than is possible in the House and to report any conclusions of those examinations, including recommendations, to the House.

Committees undertake studies in four general areas:

- the Estimates;
- legislation;
- Order-in-Council appointments; and
- subject matter studies.

DETAILED ARTICLES

Committee Studies

Subject Matter Studies

Power of Committees to Report to the House of Commons

Committee Stage of Bills [Legislative Process]

Committee Consideration of the Estimates

Estimates Documents [Financial Procedures]

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates [Financial Procedures]

Order-in-Council Appointments

REPORTS

Committees make their views and recommendations known to the House by way of reports. The Standing Orders provide standing committees with the power to report from time to time, which enables them to report to the House as often as they see fit.

Subcommittees do not submit their reports directly to the House but rather to their parent committee, which may choose to adopt it, with or without amendments, and then present it to the House.

Where one or several members of a standing committee are in disagreement with the committee's report or wish to make supplementary comments, the committee may decide to append such opinions to the report. Any member of a committee may present dissenting or supplementary opinions, providing that the committee has adopted a motion to that effect.

Once a committee report has been presented in the House, any Member of the House may move concurrence in the report, after 48 hours' notice, during Routine Proceedings.

When a report is presented to the House, a standing or special committee may request that the government table a comprehensive response to it.

DETAILED ARTICLES

Power of Committees to Report to the House of Commons
Presentation of a Committee Report in the House of Commons
Supplementary and Dissenting Opinions to Committee Reports
Concurrence in a Committee Report
Government Response to a Committee Report

MORE INFORMATION—COMMITTEES

[House of Commons Procedure and Practice](#), Second Edition, 2009

Chapter 20, Committees

Chapter 19, Committees of the Whole House

Chapter 16, The Legislative Process

Chapter 24, The Parliamentary Record

[Standing Orders of the House of Commons](#),

Chapter XIII, Committees

Chapter XII, Committees of the Whole

Chapter IX, Public Bills

[Committees—Practical Guide](#), Committees Directorate

[Guide for Witnesses appearing before committees of the House of Commons](#), Committees Directorate

[Guide for the submission of briefs to a House of Commons Committee](#), Committees Directorate

Find this and other articles on House of Commons procedure by visiting the *Compendium of Procedure* Web site at www.parl.gc.ca/compendium-e.

For further information about the procedures of the House of Commons, please contact the Table Research Branch at (613) 996-3611 or by e-mail at trbdrb@parl.gc.ca.

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