

Committee Meeting Best Practices

Ensuring Effective Governance, Fiduciary Compliance and Clear Documentation

Strong retirement plan governance doesn't happen by accident — it requires intentional structure, consistent execution and clear documentation. For plan sponsors, committee meetings are one of the most important venues for fulfilling fiduciary duties, making informed decisions and creating a defensible record of how those decisions were reached.

Structure and Consistency Are Your Foundations for Success

A well-run plan committee starts with a clear charter that defines roles, responsibilities, membership and meeting cadence. Committees should meet on a regular basis (e.g., quarterly) with a defined agenda that covers both investment oversight and administrative issues. Regular fiduciary training is also a best practice to ensure committee members understand their duties and liability exposures under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA). Other structural best practices include:

- Establishing and following an investment policy statement that guides investment selection and monitoring
- Clarifying delegation to service providers while retaining ultimate oversight.
- Ensuring committee composition reflects appropriate expertise and diverse perspectives.

Fiduciary Process: How You Decide Matters

Under ERISA, fiduciaries must act prudently and solely in the interest of plan participants and beneficiaries. That means regularly reviewing investment performance, fees, service agreements and compliance with plan terms. It's not enough to make thoughtful decisions — you need to demonstrate that you followed a prudent, deliberate process each time.

Why Meeting Minutes Are So Important

Meeting minutes are more than just administrative paperwork — they're the evidence of your fiduciary process. Without them, auditors, regulators or plaintiffs may assume your committee didn't meet, consider key issues, or act in a prudent manner. Here are the key things to record (and how much):

- **Basic facts:** date, time, location and attendees
- **Agenda topics and key discussion points:** summarize the gist without transcribing every word
- **Decisions and rationale:** what was decided and why, linking back to plan goals, the investment policy statement or fiduciary standards
- **Action items and owners:** who is responsible for next steps and their deadlines
- **Consultant or advisor input:** note who presented and any pivotal recommendations
- **Dissent or concerns:** a record that all viewpoints were considered.

Plan committees that operate with clear governance practices, disciplined process and accurate documentation are better positioned to manage risk and demonstrate fiduciary care.

