

Dear new CPAG member,

Equity Council operates using a governance process called Policy Governance (PG). This document provides an introduction to basic PG principles, and the CPAG's role in governance, to assist each CPAG to get up and running.

*Allan Teichman, President, 2006 - 2009*

## Policy Governance

In order to understand how the whole governance structure fits together, perhaps we should start with the big picture.

Let's begin with the term "governance." Governance is a generic term for what all boards do: they govern the affairs of a company or association. Equity's board of directors is called "Council" and local Council Policy Advisory Groups (CPAGs) provide advisory support for this body. So, as a CPAG member, you are part of Equity's governance structure.

Although **Council** governs Equity, Councillors are not expected to do all the work required to turn that governance into day-to-day practice. That's the job of the Executive Director. Arden Ryshpan, and her **staff**, who are responsible for the achievement of organizational goals. In short, Council defines the results that need to be achieved, and staff makes these things come to pass.

One of the principle tenets of PG is that Council and staff have different, and clearly defined, responsibilities. Each group makes a commitment to focus on its own work, and not to meddle in the other group's work.

By sticking to this simple divide, Equity avoids all too common organizational confusions such as "I thought you were taking care of that" and "Don't blame me, it was *your* idea." Staff and Council still work together and confer regularly, but each respects the work responsibilities and decision-making authority of the other. In this way, it is never unclear who is going to be responsible for any given task, and just as importantly, who will be accountable for the outcome of each task.

## Goals and objectives

Council's principal job is to set specific goals for the Association, in consultation with the membership, and ensure that these objectives are attained. Outcomes are evaluated through rigorous monitoring of the results produced by staff. We do this assessment at least annually.

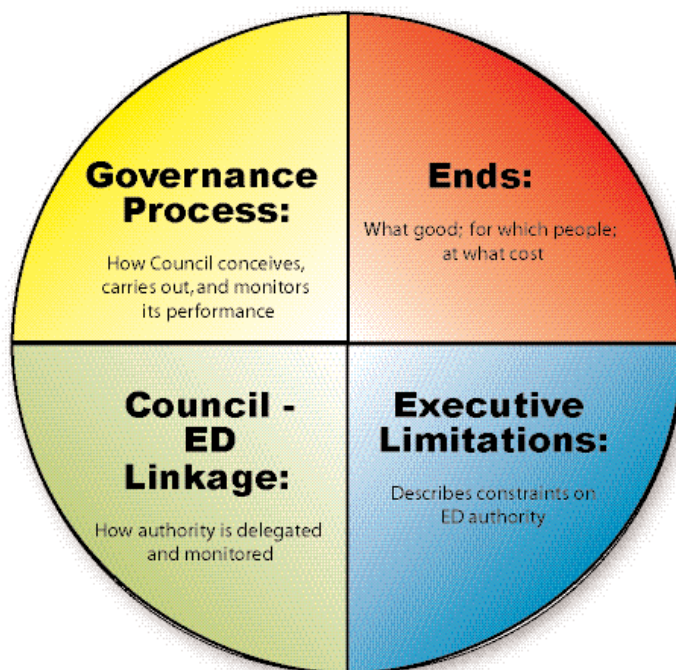
Council is also responsible for proactively declaring limitations on organizational activity in all areas, so that Equity never engages in practices or permits conditions that the owners of Equity (its members) would find unacceptable. Compliance with these limitations are monitored no less than annually as well. Between regularly monitoring Ends results and staff compliance with the limitations we have set, no aspect of the Equity's work ever goes unexamined.

All of this is structured by detailed written rules called **policies** (hence: "Policy Governance"). Both Council and staff make a commitment to abide by these rules. Always.

## Council writes policy in four specific areas:

- **Governance Process** policies describe how Council and the CPAGs conduct their business;
- **Council-Executive (ED) Director Linkage** policies describe how Council assigns work to staff, through the ED, and how it holds the ED accountable for all aspects of staff work;
- **Ends** policies describe the results that the ED is expected to achieve; and
- **Executive Limitation** policies tell the ED what things he/she is not allowed to do while working to achieve the Associations' Ends.

### The four policy areas



Together, these policies represent the "voice" of Council: if something is stated in the PG document, it is an official rule of Council, and *all* rules of Council are in this document.

The policies are collected into a single document called, imaginatively, the **Policy Governance Document**. The PG document is updated regularly, and the most current version is available online in the Document Library section of EQUITYONLINE at www.caea.com. Take a look – you'll see that we have written a lot of policies, but the point is to make sure that we leave no area of importance unaddressed.

Reading through the policies, you'll also notice that none of them direct the ED or her staff on *how* to do their work, and

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# CPAG Policy Governance Primer - cont.

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that is deliberate. This allows staff maximum flexibility to innovate and to approach any problem, while still guarding against activities the membership would find unacceptable. PG refers to the latitude of decision we allow as **reasonable interpretation**, and Council commits to accepting *any* reasonable interpretation of the ED as long as she and her staff produce the results we require, while staying within the boundaries we have set.

Operating through written policy is the ideal combination of “hands-on” and “hands-off” governance. There is no important topic on which Council has not written policy, and it means absolute staff accountability for the choices they make. We hire the expertise needed to get the work done; we give them the authority to make reasonable decisions in how best to do the work; and we hold them responsible for the choices made and the results produced.

Policies fall into two general groups: **Means** and **Ends**. Ends policies are those that specify a benefit for a defined beneficiary at a defined cost or priority (such as: skills development for members at a cost of \$30,000 per year). If a policy does not fulfill these three things, then it is a Means. Of the four policy types listed above, all but one are Means. Means generally refers to the methods and processes employed to achieve Ends, but is more accurately defined as “everything that is not Ends.”

## Owners and customers

Here are two more boldface terms for you to memorize: **Owner** and **customer**. If Equity were a company, these two words would make immediate sense. The “owners” of the company would be the shareholders of the company, and the “customers” would be all the people with whom that company did business.

The distinction is much more difficult to draw in the case of Equity. The ownership of the association is pretty obvious: it is the membership. So who are the customers? They are the people who are the focus of the business of Equity: the members. If the owners and customers are the same, why use two different terms for them?

See if this lends any clarity to the matter. As an owner of Equity, you say “I expect that Equity will ensure safe working conditions for *all* its members (not just me).” Not surprisingly, this is one of our actual Ends. Council hands this requirement over to staff, and they negotiate safe workplace provisions into our contracts, and establish safety standards, and follow up on complaints and such.

Now let’s say that you are working in a circumstance that is unsafe. You phone up the office, lodge a complaint against the engager, and staff take action. At this point, you are acting as a customer, as a *recipient* of the benefit.

Why the distinction? Largely because member-owner concerns such as “What benefits do we want Equity to provide to all members?” are dealt with by Council, and member-customer concerns such as “How do I go about receiving my member benefit?” are dealt with by staff. It will be greatly beneficial if you can recognize the difference, so that issues brought to the attention of the CPAG may be efficiently directed for action by the appropriate group: Council or staff.

## Let’s talk about CPAGs

Remember we said that the membership is the owner of Equity? This also means that, collectively, the membership is Council’s boss. In order for Council to be responsive to member-owner concerns, it needs to have an effective linkage mechanism for connecting with the members. The various CPAGs are a large part of that. We rely on the CPAGs to keep us aware of what is going on in members’ minds everywhere, and to help get the word out to the membership on many topics.

Whereas Council has a broad focus on the entire organization, CPAG members are specialists in their own region or discipline. Specifically, CPAGs are responsible for improving Council awareness of emerging concerns and issues important to the membership as owners, and we count on you to be our eyes and ears across the country. To do that effectively, your CPAG will need to find ways to connect with, and hear from, as much of your regional membership as possible.

CPAGs have also been given a lot of latitude in how they operate, so that their activities may closely suit the constituency they are expected to represent. This, too, is an example of reasonable interpretation at work. National CPAGs that have trouble collecting members in one place, such as the SM CPAG, have traditionally used email and occasional surveys to find out what’s going on in their constituency and to hear back from them on hot topics. Most regional CPAGs hold an annual members’ meeting to connect with the members. Some CPAGs have regular “town hall” or “focus group” sessions to connect on a specific topic they know to be of interest. All of these options, and many more, are fair game.

In order to support this work, Council assigns each CPAG a budget of financial resources, and staff time for support. You will receive information on this in a separate document, along with a list of the support resources available and how to access them.

There is one other item we need to share with you, and it is a particularly important one. Equity’s membership, even within single regions, is deeply diverse. This variety expresses itself not only in terms of ethnicity and heritage, but also in terms of age, experience, physical challenges and diversity of practice. CPAGs are expected to represent all communities within their region, and this requires care on the part of the CPAG to ensure that it is always reaching out to the broadest member community possible, and not only to those people with whom CPAG members most frequently share a green room. There are over 5,000 voices in this association, and we need your help to hear from as many of them as possible.

We hope that this gets you off on the right foot as you begin your work on the CPAG, but don’t be shy about asking questions. Contact information for all elected representatives can be found on the Equity website. In addition, the First Vice-President serves as Advisory Liaison, and he or she will be more than pleased to assist with any queries you may have. And don’t forget your regional Councillor(s), who are also part of your CPAG.